

WRITTEN QUESTION E-1126/09

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to the Commission

Subject: Use of chemicals against demonstrators

Over the past year the police have made extensive use of chemicals, in particular tear gas and asphyxiating gases, against crowds of demonstrating pupils, students and trade unionists in urban centres in Greece. They have used both hand grenades and close range sprays as delivery systems. As a direct result of the use of these chemicals not only demonstrators, but ordinary citizens, inhabitants and workers in the areas affected have suffered bodily injuries, mainly breathing and skin complaints, such as dyspnoea, lachrymation and skin rashes. It has been reported that the Greek police has been using a new generation of high-toxicity chemical substances which are banned internationally and are exceptionally harmful for the health both of citizens and of the police themselves.

In view of the above will the Commission say:

Is this thoughtless use of chemical substances compatible with European public health policy, one of the basic priorities of which is to establish a high level of human health protection and to avert sources of danger to physical and mental health (Article 168 ECT)? How in the above cases is the Community principle of proportionality between the desired objective and the methods used being applied in determining the dividing line between the need to impose and uphold the law and the violation of fundamental human rights, such as the preservation of health and freedom of expression? A report on this matter by the European Parliament's STOA stresses the lack of epidemiological research on the use of the substance in question under real conditions, although toxicological studies have established (through inhalation) that exposure to relatively high concentrations of CS gas causes lung disease and oedema. Is the Commission aware of other studies on the immediate and long-term repercussions for health of exposure to the chemical substances used by police forces, such as, for example, the chemical substance CS and others? Is it considering the possibility of conducting epidemiological research into the use of this substance under real conditions? Does it envisage a blanket ban on the use by Member States of such substances in residential areas or public venues such as sports stadia?