

WRITTEN QUESTION E-2243/09
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to the Commission

Subject: Commission's reaction to the Pope's statements on combating AIDS

On his recent official visit to Cameroon and Angola, Pope Benedict XVI reiterated the position of the Catholic church and the main lines of its commitment to combating the terrible scourge of AIDS. The Pope stated that 'one cannot overcome the problem [of AIDS] only with advertising slogans and the distribution of condoms', advocating, rather, a 'humanisation of sexuality' and a 'human and spiritual renewal'.

The Commission reacted critically to the Pope's statements: John Clancy, spokesman for Louis Michel, the Commissioner for development and humanitarian aid, said that condoms are 'one of the essential elements in the fight against AIDS' and that the Commission supports their distribution and correct use. Mr Clancy added that the Commission had contributed EUR 622 m over the period 2002-2007, to which should be added a further EUR 300 m for the period 2008-2010, to the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

These statements, following in the wake of the controversial reactions of certain Member States, have given the impression that the EU itself is opposed to the Pope's declarations.

In fact, Pope Benedict XVI has, in the act of carrying out his duties, called for the need to meet the complex phenomenon that is AIDS with 'education toward sexual responsibility', rather than merely with 'advertising slogans and the distribution of condoms'. Given this, can the Commission explain why it has added its voice to a controversy in which the Pope's positions are opposed by only a few - indeed, a small minority - of the EU's Member States, when it would surely have been preferable to leave the evaluation of the papal comments to the individual Member States.

At all events, if, as the Commission spokesman John Clancy states, the Union is spending such large sums on remedies of dubious effectiveness, will the Commission not undertake an assessment of the desirability of spending equal or greater amounts on other remedies and solutions considered by scientists to be less empirical and arbitrary than condom use?