

ORAL QUESTION H-0633/05

for Question Time at the part-session in September I 2005

pursuant to Rule 109 of the Rules of Procedure

by Inés Ayala Sender

to the Commission

Subject: International lorry drivers imprisoned after illegal materials or substances are found amongst the cargo

I have received various requests for help from members of the public and professional associations who are most concerned about professional international lorry drivers from Spain who are imprisoned in appalling conditions – notably in Morocco – for being used without their knowledge as mules for smuggling goods and/or trafficking illegal substances or materials. The fact is that lorry drivers currently do not have the means to check the goods in their holds. They are arrested at borders and charged as though they alone bear the responsibility for transporting the material in question. Once the drivers are imprisoned and the lorries are impounded, most companies keep quiet and end up abandoning the drivers, who have to deal with the situation alone.

Is the Commission aware of this? Does the Commission know whether the situation has occurred or is occurring at other external EU borders, what the extent of it is and whether other drivers are affected? How does the Commission think that drivers' rights and the presumption of innocence can be guaranteed? What practical steps – i.e. sealed cargo, the validation of road freight convention documents, or voluntary checks – could be taken to prevent illegal freight transport? How might the assistance provided by EU delegations to drivers imprisoned abroad be improved and made more effective?

Tabled: 14.07.2005

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