

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0046/03

pursuant to Rule 42 of the Rules of Procedure

by Elmar Brok, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy
to the Council

Subject: EU-Cuba relations

The Commission suspended the evaluation report which was to be forwarded to the Member States so that they might take a decision on whether to accept the Cuban Government's application to accede to the Cotonou Agreement because of the numerous arrests in that country, where more than 70 human rights activists and other dissidents have been imprisoned since 18 March 2003, accused of collaboration with US efforts to overthrow the Cuban regime. Trials of these citizens were summary in the extreme and resulted in extremely severe sentences, ranging from 20 years to life. Moreover, the death penalty has been already carried out in three cases of ferryboat kidnapping with violence. Recently, the Cuban Government again withdrew its application for accession to the Cotonou Agreement.

1. What is the Council's view and assessment of the impact of these facts on EU-Cuba relations?
2. Is the Council closely following the current situation of the political prisoners arrested by the Castro regime and did it make an approach seeking the immediate release of those prisoners? Is the Council monitoring the issue of political prisoners in Cuban jails? What information does it have about the conditions of their detention?
3. Does the Council consider that the launching of a new policy towards Cuba would suffice, or would it rather maintain the existing framework? In the latter case, what should be the consequences of its strict application to the present case?
4. What is the Council view of the recent decision of the Cuban Government to withdraw for the second time its application for accession to the Cotonou Agreement?
5. Does the Council envisage new initiatives or proposals with a view to encouraging internal democratic political reform in Cuba? What could be done to encourage both the authorities and the internal democratic opposition to work together on this objective, obviously as soon as the political prisoners are released? How can the HR dialogue with Cuba be stepped up?

Tabled: 03.06.2003

Forwarded: 04.06.2003

Deadline for reply: 25.06.2003