

ORAL QUESTION WITH DEBATE O-0047/03

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 Commission

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 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 Commission's view and assessment of these facts? Is it monitoring the growth of the internal opposition, which is gaining ground?
2. Is the Commission closely following the current situation of the political prisoners arrested by the Castro regime and has it made an approach seeking the immediate release of those prisoners? Is the Commission monitoring the issue of political prisoners in Cuban jails? Does it have additional information about the conditions of their detention, with particular regard to medical treatment, access to lawyers, contact with their families, and other basic rights?
3. What should be the input of these facts on EU-Cuba relations? Does the Commission consider that the launching of a new policy towards Cuba would suffice, or would it prefer to maintain the existing framework?
4. What is the Commission's assessment of the recent decision by the Cuban Government to withdraw for the second time its application for accession to the Cotonou Agreement?
5. Does the Commission recommend any new initiatives or proposals with a view to encouraging democratic political reform in Cuba?
6. What is the Commission's assessment of the operation of its recently opened office in Havana?
7. What are the direct consequences for the ongoing projects financed by the EU and for the granting of new subsidies, with particular regard to the European Initiative on Human Rights and Democracy?

Tabled: 03.06.2003

Forwarded: 05.06.2003

Deadline for reply: 12.06.2003