

WRITTEN QUESTION P-2262/03
by Mario Mastella (PPE-DE)
to the Commission

Subject: Serious political, social and economic crisis in Venezuela

The political crisis in Venezuela is dragging that country into a very serious economic and social crisis. On top of a two-month old general strike, imports to a country reliant on the outside world for almost all types of goods have been paralysed for over 130 days now, and the government has adopted exchange rate control as a political weapon to punish everyone participating in the strike. Thousands of companies have closed down and unemployment has increased to 26%, to add to a rate of 56% employment in the hidden economy.

As from 19 August 2003, it will be possible for a recall referendum to be held, on the basis of the Venezuelan constitution and the agreement signed between the government and the Democratic Coordination, and with mediation by the OAS, to end the President's term of office. The Venezuelan Government is contriving to delay and delegitimize this by every means possible.

Moreover, with a view to forthcoming elections, the government is granting citizenship to Cubans, Chinese, and Colombians.

Venezuela is home to millions of EU citizens and their descendants, who are the lifeblood of the SME sector that has been throttled by economic measures and whose safety is endangered by the increase in violence that has resulted in 50 deaths during demonstrations and in 25 murders a day owing to the general chaos and absence of the rule of law.

In the light of the above, could the Commission indicate:

1. what action it will take to protect European citizens in Venezuela and to avert their potential return migration;
2. whether it is considering any form of action to address the unconstitutional measures and human rights violations of which the present Venezuelan Government stands accused;
3. whether the European Union plans to send international observers to Venezuela to ensure that the referendum is conducted lawfully and reflects the opinions of the inhabitants of that country?