

Thursday, 16 September 2004 - Strasbourg

Dutch boat belonging to the 'Women on Waves' association

Gomes (PSE). - (PT) Mr President, the fight against terrorism and organized crime must be a priority at the moment for any European government. Prioritizing means mobilizing all available resources - police, investigation and intelligence resources - and ensuring that the legal system is ready and able to take quick and effective action.

The Commission recommends that Member States strengthen all resources for this fight. Nonetheless, in spite of notoriously scant resources, Portugal has been diverting important investigation and legal resources into a different objective: punishing illegal abortion. The Portuguese police have been bugging the telephones of law-abiding citizens and of their family members or of medical professionals whom they suspect may be involved. They have spent years observing them and hounding them; legal professionals have spent years of working time - in an already overloaded, understaffed and poorly equipped system - putting women accused of abortion on trial. Taxpayers' money is spent on criminal investigations into medical operations that Portuguese women can go to Spain to have, perfectly safely and legally. Women who have the wherewithal to pay can have these operations in Portuguese private hospitals disguised as other kinds of surgery. The many women who do not have the wherewithal have no choice but to have back-street abortions, where they risk their lives, and risk being arrested, taken by the police to hospitals, forced to have gynecological tests and then put on humiliating trial.

The hypocrisy has now, however, reached new levels of insanity, with the ban on entry into Portugal of the ship belonging to the 'Women on Waves' organization. The Portuguese Government, the one that Mr Barroso has left, has sought to stifle information and debate on family planning, in clear breach of human rights, international law and Community law. It has done this by using totally disproportionate methods, police and even military resources, without hesitating to use warships. Resources have thus been diverted, once again, from important activities, such as the fight against international terrorism and organized crime, and observing vessels used in drug-trafficking that use Portuguese waters as a point of entry into the rest of Europe.

As Commissioner Wallström - whom I welcome here today - has stated, the Commission is to seek explanations from the Portuguese Government. I should like to ask the Commissioner, in addition to the points that she mentioned, not to ignore the unjustified, excessive and almost obsessive use by the Portuguese Government of criminal, legal and even military resources in the fight against abortion and against providing family planning information. In so doing, they have removed the resources and the efforts that Portugal ought to be putting into EU crime prevention policies in the joint fight against international terrorism and organized crime.