

Thursday, 16 September 2004 - Strasbourg

ASEM Summit (Asia-Europe Meeting)

Gomes (PSE). - Mr President, at the end of 2002 I was travelling in Burma and saw that Burma was a police state. The Burmese authorities have not cooperated with the UN special envoys, and the latest attack on Aung San Su Kyi and the NDL is a further setback. The world must not forget about the rest of the country, which is suffering from serious oppression. Discrimination against different ethnic groups, the confiscation of property, and the existence of political prisoners, forced labour, political rape and child soldiers have been well documented, as well as the burning down of villages. Fifty per cent of the national budget goes to the military. Money comes from foreign business and investment. The brutal military dictatorship is the root cause of the problems ravaging Burma.

Sanctions that would bite have never been strictly applied. Burma has not met any of the three criteria set by the EU in April. All members of the Committee on Development who have spoken in the debate feel strongly that the EU should not participate in the ASEM Summit in Hanoi with Burma. Instead, the EU should increase and toughen sanctions against the regime leaders and should impose sanctions on the European corporations that do business with the Burmese regime, and specifically the French oil company Total. The EU should urge countries such as the USA, Australia and Japan to do likewise. EU members should ask the United Nations Security Council to impose marked targeted sanctions against the Burmese military regime, since it massively violates human rights, sends refugees into neighbouring countries, and sponsors the production of drugs and crime. It would be a shame if at the ASEM Summit the EU allowed Burma to be dismissed as a minor issue in its overall relations with Asia.