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ORAL QUESTION (0-56/76)

with debate, pursuant to Rule 47 of the Rules of Procedure
by Mr BERTRAND, Mr BERSANI, Mr NOE', Mr LIGIOS,
Mr GIRARDIN and Mr VERNASCHI,
on behalf of the Christian-Democratic Group
to the Commission of the European Communities

Subject: Poisonous clouds and their consequences

The escape of toxic gases containing dioxin at the ICMESA factory, belonging to a non-Italian-owned company, in the region of Seveso (near Milan) has had extremely serious consequences for the whole population of one of the most highly-populated industrial areas. It has necessitated a total evacuation of the population, put a stop to all human activity in the area and caused dramatic health problems. It is still not known whether it will be possible to decontaminate the area sufficiently to enable human life and production to resume in what is one of the most highly developed areas of our continent.

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This event has brought to light similar dangers to the public and to the environment from the numerous factories in Europe whose manufacturing processes involve highly toxic substances for which existing safety measures are probably inadequate and which in any case, when gas leaks or unforeseen accidents do occur, as happened with dioxin, raise problems to which science does not yet seem to have adequate answers.

In the framework of both its social policy and its environmental protection policy can the Commission answer the following questions:

1. What practical lessons does it believe should be drawn from Seveso as regards improving its own policies and making a practical contribution to ensuring that this kind of thing does not happen again?
2. Does it not think, in particular, that its rules on the production of highly toxic substances should be reviewed?
3. In what way does it feel it can participate in current research on Seveso with a view to drawing as much useful information as possible from developments there, and in any event to contributing as fully as possible to the present efforts to mitigate and eliminate the consequences?
4. Does it not feel that the existing scientific framework, starting with the Joint Research Centre at Ispra, should be used to carry out systematic studies into this sector which is of such importance to the public and the industrial environment?