

TUESDAY, 19 JANUARY 2010

IN THE CHAIR: MR MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ

Vice-President

1. Opening of the sitting

(The sitting was opened at 15.00)

2. Approval of the minutes of the previous sitting: see Minutes

3. Debates on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law (announcement of motions for resolutions tabled): see Minutes

4. Recent earthquake in Haiti (debate)

President. – The next item is the statement on the earthquake in Haiti by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and Vice-President of the Commission, Baroness Ashton.

We will also hear from Commissioner De Gucht, but the first to take the floor will be Baroness Ashton. It gives me much pleasure to welcome her because I have worked extensively with her elsewhere, and I wish her all the best in her new position.

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission. – Mr President, thank you very much indeed for your kind words. Honourable Members, I asked for this debate to be able to update this House on the situation in Haiti following the terrible earthquake of 12 January. The losses are devastating and the damage is enormous. Up to three million people have been affected by the tragedy, and the death toll continues to mount.

This is a massive humanitarian and political disaster. Our immediate focus is on working with the United Nations and the Haitian leadership to ease the suffering of the Haitian people. Our commitment to rebuilding Haiti is long term. Many European citizens have also lost their lives, and around 1 000 are still unaccounted for.

The EU has responded quickly, not seeking headlines but with a total focus on getting help to the people in need. On advice from the United Nations, we resisted the urge to travel to Haiti immediately. That would only have diverted attention and scarce resources away from the relief effort. We will, of course, travel to Haiti as soon as it is appropriate, and I have agreed with Commissioner De Gucht that he will travel to Haiti this week to extend the EU's condolences and underline our commitment to the people. He will also take the opportunity to review our aid efforts so far and discuss with the United Nations and our people on the ground the most pressing needs for the weeks and months to come.

In the meantime, we continue to work flat out on all tracks: humanitarian, political and security. Over the past days, I have been in constant contact with Secretary of State Clinton, with the United Nations leadership, with EU Foreign Ministers and with Canada, which is leading the 'Friends of Haiti' group: all this with a view to ensuring an effective and coordinated international response. I will travel to the United States this week to follow up on this and other issues with the United States Administration, and with the UN Secretary-General and others in New York.

The UN has asked for urgent financial aid – USD 575 million – as well as logistical assistance to transport humanitarian aid. Yesterday, the United Nations Secretary-General asked for police and military reinforcements of the UN peacekeeping mission as well.

To help mobilise and coordinate our response, I asked the Spanish EU Presidency to call an extraordinary Foreign Affairs Council yesterday. For the first time since the Lisbon Treaty entered into effect, we are now pulling together the efforts of the Commission and the Council Secretariat, and the Member States, in a comprehensive approach, under my overall coordination. This is ground breaking.

We had a productive Council meeting yesterday. Everyone agreed on the need for a rapid response and close coordination with the United Nations. In terms of financial assistance, the Council reached the following conclusions. It welcomed the Commission's preliminary commitment for immediate humanitarian assistance of EUR 30 million, in addition to EUR 92 million in preliminary commitments by Member States.

It welcomed the Commission's preliminary commitment of EUR 100 million for early non-humanitarian assistance, for instance, in rehabilitation and reconstruction, and it took note of the Commission's preliminary indication that EUR 200 million would be available for longer-term responses.

It called for, in due course and after post-emergency needs have been fully assessed, an international conference on Haiti.

In total, this is a big response in a short time. Assistance will be targeted, too, to the Dominican Republic. Finding enough money is going to be less of a problem at the moment than getting it out to the people who need it. We must ensure that it is properly targeted towards sustainable political and physical reconstruction. Following the UN Secretary-General's request for help with transport of humanitarian aid and for additional police units, the Council invited me to identify EU Member State contributions and make proposals for this mobilisation. I am working on this.

We convened a Political and Security Committee meeting immediately after the Council meeting to follow up. Early indications of Member State contributions are already now available, including possible contributions through the European Gendarmerie Force. Work will continue in the Council preparatory groups during the coming days with a view to a rapid, targeted response.

The Foreign Affairs Council will meet again next Monday. We will follow up on Haiti and consider further actions.

This is a major test of EU foreign policy in the new world of the Lisbon Treaty. The people of Haiti – and our own people – expect a swift, effective and coordinated response. This is what we believe we are delivering.

I look forward to working with Parliament on this and am pleased to be here today to give you this information and to hear your views.

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, let me start by underlining the unprecedented nature of this disaster – in terms of humanitarian impact, but also in terms of the impact on the country as a whole.

Haiti is one of the poorest countries in the world. It is a country in a chronically fragile situation whose existing basic functions and capacities have been very seriously disrupted. Also, the international community has been hard hit. Staff of the United Nations and NGOs and our own Commission staff are still missing, and this also explains the difficulties of organising aid on the spot. People have to understand that it is not out of a lack of competence, but because the aid community has itself been hit. Relief operations are not flowing as speedily as one would wish, although one sees that this is getting better by the hour.

In other words, this is not only about saving human lives. We have, in fact, to save the country as a whole. That is why the High Representative, Cathy Ashton, called for this extraordinary Council meeting, which was a very useful tool in addressing the problem. Let me just very briefly focus on four main challenges.

First, we have, of course, to address humanitarian needs. These are enormous and concern chiefly emergency medical care for the injured, water and sanitation – because there is risk of cholera, for example – food and shelter. What is lacking most is surgery, primary health care and drugs, water treatment kits, food assistance, emergency shelter and logistics support. What is in enough supply is search-and-rescue capacity.

The organisational coordinating effort's priorities are to complete the needs assessment, to have a better picture of the detailed needs and to organise the transport logistics. That will also be addressed within the framework of the EU institutions.

Lastly, we have to organise the coordination of international relief efforts. That is always very difficult in these kinds of circumstances. Let me stress that, only hours after the earthquake, European ECHO and MIC teams were deployed on the spot. They have been working there ever since to contribute to needs assessment and aid coordination. We are working with teams from OCHA, a United Nations organisation, and are in constant contact with John Holmes, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator.

The second point is to build, or rebuild, the basic state capacity. This is very important. This country has to function again, not only physically – most of the buildings have disappeared – but with a lot of high officials having gone missing and state structures having been severely disrupted.

The Council welcomes the fact that we will urgently send a team of EU experts with the specific task of assessing the most critical needs of the Haitian state and civil administration in order to provide technical assistance. Our diplomatic and cooperation staff on the ground are, of course, best placed to do that, but their capacity is overstretched. This is something that will become more and more important in the coming days. As the European Union and the European Commission, together with the Council, we could play a leadership role in re-establishing state institutions physically, and also in terms of people.

Third is, of course, the plan to reconstruct the country, where we have to look beyond the immediate relief phase. In a few weeks, many emergency teams and means deployed at the present time will have left and there is a risk – very typical of this kind of disaster – of a second-wave disaster if we do not sustain our assistance and support.

We must immediately set up massive, coordinated medium- and long-term common EU response plans for the crisis. Our services are working on this. This should be designed to ensure a proper division of labour among EU institutions and Member States and to ensure a linked relief rehabilitation and development approach, with a sustained and seamless transition between immediate relief and post-emergency response.

We have been calling on all the Member States to fully engage in these efforts, and to turn into actions all our commitments for coordination and aid effectiveness. This is a time when the strength of our commitments will be tested and must come out strong if we are to succeed.

Lastly, the financial response. As the High Representative has already outlined, the European Commission will make a major contribution, first of all in terms of humanitarian aid – EUR 30 million, of which the largest part – EUR 22 million to be exact – is completely fresh money that comes on top of the already existing humanitarian engagements we have with Haiti. The early recovery assistance – which is not humanitarian assistance, and what I just said about the state institutions of course comes under this umbrella – amounting to EUR 100 million, with a 50-50 balance between money redirected and fresh money, and then the longer-term reconstruction assistance, where there is now an initial amount of EUR 200 million.

Then we will have to see where we stand. Now one is hearing figures in the region of USD 10 billion. That seems a lot to me and, in any case, cannot be matched by the Commission budget. We will have to see with the Pledging conference and with the Member States how exactly we are going to eventually participate in higher sums. That is the EU-wide package that has now been prepared on top of all the contributions that are already being made and will be made by the Member States.

As the High Representative said, I will be going to the region – Haiti and also the Dominican Republic – tomorrow morning to have discussions with the authorities, including on the efforts to try to rebuild the state institutions. The President and major NGOs are on the spot. I will also go to the Dominican Republic. It is important that we also see those authorities, because they are the neighbours. You can already see that the situation might eventually create some overstretching at the border, so I will also see the Dominican authorities.

That is all I have to say at the moment. On my return, I will report back to the Development Committee, on the Monday afternoon.

Gay Mitchell, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – Mr President, I am sure the House would like to remember the missing UN and EU staff and all of those who are missing and suffering in Haiti at this time.

I am also glad that Commissioner De Gucht is going there and that he will report to the Committee on Development when he returns on Monday. That is a very welcome development. To use his own terms, the nature of the impact is unprecedented, and I think that that is a fair point to make in a country of this kind, which is why – and I mention this just in passing – I really do think that the European Union has to be more visible.

Now that we have a High Representative who is a Vice-President of the Commission, that person must be more visible on issues of this kind.

The European Union is the biggest aid donor in the world, donating 60% of aid, and we are probably the biggest donor of humanitarian aid as well. But, while one sees the US hospital ships there, all we see from

the EU is Member States going in from Belgium and Ireland and Britain or wherever. There should be some visible EU presence. Why not battle groups? Why not some standing groups, on a rotating basis, who would be ready to go into the area when these sort of things occur?

The last thing I want to say is that what has happened in Haiti is grounded in poverty, and, when this terrible tragedy eases and it goes off the screens, let us not forget Haiti. It is time to tackle the underlying poverty situation in Haiti once and for all.

Linda McAvan, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – Mr President, our thoughts today are with the people of Haiti in their tragedy, and I am sure all Members will want to send their condolences to the people of Haiti. It is a tragedy but, as Gay Mitchell has said, it is a tragedy in a country where 75% of people already live below the poverty line. As we look to the future, that is something we really need to be looking at.

The public has responded magnificently to the challenge of helping Haiti. In the UK alone, GBP 30 million has been raised in just a few days – from the public, during the financial crisis – so we know that the public is behind us in our efforts to raise funds for Haiti.

High Representative, I want to thank you for the work you have done in pulling together a quick EU response on this matter. We learned at the time of the tsunami that, in fact, good coordination is as important as the actual funds we put on the ground. It is not about which flag goes on the aid, it is about getting the aid out there, working with the United Nations to get it delivered.

Looking to the longer term, I am pleased that there will be an international conference on Haiti. I think we need to look at the whole issue of Haiti, about its outstanding debt, and I hope the debt problems of Haiti will be on the agenda at the international conference. Haiti owes USD 890 million to the international creditors and a large part of that is to the IMF. The IMF has given Haiti a USD 100 million loan. Can we convert that into a grant? There is no point impoverishing this country for another 100 years. So I hope you will put that on the agenda of the IMF meeting.

I hope as well that we will address other issues, and I think you are right that the issue of the border with the Dominican Republic is equally important. So, thank you once again for your efforts, and I hope the whole House will work hard to find a good coordinated effort.

Liam Aylward, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, can I begin by wishing the High Representative, Baroness Ashton, well in the many challenges that she faces during her mandate. As she knows well, and as the United Nations has stated, the situation in Haiti is the worst humanitarian disaster in decades, as the numbers of missing people, victims and deaths continue to rise.

The human cost of this tragedy is immeasurable. While relief aid is beginning to arrive, we are all aware of the significant problems that aid workers are facing in trying to get assistance to those that need it most.

Increasing security, logistical and bureaucracy problems have been identified by the NGOs on the ground as hampering aid and making a disastrous situation worse. These are the problems that are swaying the balance between life and death for Haitians.

In all the frayed work to alleviate the suffering and chaos, clear leadership and coordinated assistance are needed. NGOs, government bodies, international organisations and local authorities must work together to deliver multisector emergency assistance to those in need.

It is clear that the country needs massive international support immediately. The response from European citizens and their record generosity and solidarity have been immense. Yesterday's announcement of over EUR 420 million in European Union humanitarian aid for Haiti shows leadership and commitment, but its delivery must be coordinated and effective.

The European Union's stated aim is to consolidate and strengthen the global relief effort. I hope that you, Mrs Ashton, and Commissioner De Gucht, work strongly towards this aim in the respective visits to the United States, Haiti and elsewhere later this week.

The long-term development of the poorest nation in the western hemisphere must become a priority. The allocation of EUR 200 million in European Union aid to help Haiti rebuild in the long term is a positive start, but, when the cameras have left and the world's attention is turned elsewhere, the European Union, as a global leader, must act and live up to its responsibility.

Eva Joly, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, High Representative, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, this new humanitarian crisis that Haiti is enduring is perhaps on a greater scale than all previous ones, so much so that I doubt that it is possible to find the right words to talk about the victims, to speak to the survivors and to reach out to families in order to tell them how much we share their pain and are aware of our responsibility.

However violent the earthquake was, it alone does not explain the extent of the damage. The latter is also linked to the chronic poverty that Haiti has endured for many years. Until now, the international community has been incapable of changing anything there. Worse, by imposing policies on Haiti that we now know did not work, international institutions, Europe and its partners have exacerbated the fragility of its social fabric, its economy and its institutions.

In the 1970s, Haiti was almost self-sufficient where food was concerned. It used to produce 90% of its agricultural needs. Today, it imports more than half. This must surely have had a detrimental effect on local production. Before this earthquake, Haiti was a country without resources because it was deprived of the resources to which it was entitled.

We must therefore firstly provide Haiti with as much support as possible in order to deal with emergencies. From this point of view, we cannot but lament the fact that international aid has been very difficult to put into place. In future, we must improve our procedures. However, we must, above all, be aware that long-term development aid will not be effective if we impose what we consider to be the right priorities while everyone on the ground is telling us that we are wrong. We must proceed by calling our own methods into question, and that will not work unless we increase the funds that we are putting aside for development policies in the long term. The European Union has announced the amount of aid that it will release for Haiti, and the Member States have done the same. We are talking about EUR 130 million in the short term, and EUR 200 million for long-term needs.

I would like to compare these figures to other figures, to the USD 155 billion that the banks of the City and Wall Street are getting ready to pay to a few thousand people who work in the banks. That raises the question of the development model that we want to promote at global level.

Urgent humanitarian aid is necessary, but it alone is not enough. It must not, under any circumstances, supplant development aid, which itself must not be experienced by the countries that are supposed to benefit from it as a veritable diktat. The first way of assisting countries in great difficulty is to continue to respect them, to allow them to benefit from their own resources. We must cancel Haiti's debt and pay off our debt to that country.

Mr President, High Representative, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, it is our duty to the victims of Haiti to help them rebuild a country that was devastated even before a natural disaster turned it completely on its head.

(Applause)

Nirj Deva, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, our hearts and minds go out to the people of Haiti in their hour of suffering. I commend Baroness Ashton and Karel De Gucht for what they have already said has happened and is being done. There is no question that there will be funds coming. I was present at the tsunami which hit Sri Lanka and then later Indonesia. I have witnessed earthquakes in Turkey. I watched what happened in China. Every time one of these things happens, we are caught short, not with water purification tablets or tents or clean water but with infrastructure. We say, oh, the infrastructure is destroyed. Of course it is destroyed. We need to be able to supply very rapidly an emergency infrastructure.

How can this happen? What about an aircraft carrier? It has electricity, it has nuclear power, it has generators for water purification and it has helicopters. Could we set up a global rescue operation, ready to go at a moment's notice, that can provide makeshift harbours, temporary shelters and all the infrastructure that gets destroyed? We need to think afresh as to how to save lives immediately afterwards.

Patrick Le Hyaric, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Vice-President and High Representative, Commissioner, I would like to say, once again, that we have been deeply distressed by what the Haitian people, the children of Haiti are having to endure.

For seven days now, they have been living, surviving in an absolute hell. The surge of global solidarity warms the heart, but it still has to be consolidated and better coordinated for the sole purpose of helping the Haitian

people, who are thirsty, starving, homeless and deprived of the most elementary medical care. We salute all those men and women who are involved in this.

The European Union has decided to release some initial funds. However, we cannot leave it there. European Union aid must be increased considerably, and the global banking system must become involved. European food surpluses must be shipped out to the Haitian people as a matter of urgency.

Let us be frank. Our continent is truly indebted to Haiti and has a duty to make amends for so many years of domination and plundering. Lessons must be learned from the way this island, the pearl of the Caribbean, has been controlled by international financial institutions that have stifled it with appalling debt and the equally appalling interest linked to that debt.

Our Parliament should declare itself in favour of the immediate and unconditional cancellation of this entire debt. Our group would like the conference that will soon take place in Montreal to make effective preparations for an international conference on the repair, reconstruction and sustainable development of Haiti with the people of Haiti.

This reconstruction must be placed under the auspices of the United Nations, so that the Haitian people can recover their economic and political sovereignty. Haiti must not be the prize in a battle for domination between big powers. Thus, while we commend the United States' support efforts, we must be on guard and refuse to allow the North American leaders to use this terrible disaster as a pretext to occupy the island, to run it and to establish military bases there.

Europe must lead by example. It must have only one objective, one sole concern: the people, the children of Haiti.

Fiorello Provera, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to express my deep solidarity with all those who have been hit by this natural disaster.

In situations like this, with the large-scale destruction of buildings and infrastructure and with thousands of deaths, it is almost impossible to deliver aid effectively without having minimum conditions of public order and security. Any aid efforts are difficult without close coordination in collecting the necessary items and ordered distribution of aid. It is essential to understand what is needed, by whom and when.

Another point to think about is that on too many occasions, the generosity of public and private donors has been betrayed and huge amounts of money have not gone to those who really needed them. It is therefore necessary to have a strict system of controls to prevent money being squandered or stolen, particularly in fragile countries with high levels of corruption and low levels of governance. Europe ought to demonstrate its own efficiency. I hope it is successful.

Nick Griffin (NI). – Mr President, the horror of Haiti is shocking. It is only human to feel compassion for the innocent victims of the natural disaster there.

All of us here are well paid and can afford to give. I will give my attendance allowance for today if every British MEP will do the same. However, with their taxes, our constituents cannot afford your generosity.

Globalism has destroyed our industries. The banks have ruined our economies. EU red tape is strangling our entrepreneurs and the carbon-tax scam is plunging millions into deadly fuel poverty.

The death toll in Haiti is shocking, but this winter, more than 50 000 pensioners in Britain alone will die premature deaths because of the cold and the cost of heating.

Across Europe, the death toll will run into hundreds of thousands, but, because this truth shames the political elite and because it highlights the inconvenient truth of global cooling, this scandal will be buried as quietly as are our elderly dead.

Hundreds of thousands of our own people are dying because of government neglect and EU cold taxes, yet you insist on throwing other people's money at a disaster in somebody else's back yard. That is not compassion: that is stinking hypocrisy.

I know this place is uneasy with our Christian heritage, but as always, our Bible reveals an eternal truth that most here would rather ignore – first book of Timothy, 5:8: 'but if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.'

Michèle Striffler (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, High Representative, as was said earlier, the disaster was on an extreme scale due to the violence of the earthquake, doubtless one of the most serious in history, and we therefore fear a terrifying human death toll.

I am nevertheless pleased with the rapid reaction of the European Commission and the Member States and with the commitment they have made to earmark a massive aid package of EUR 429 million for the emergency humanitarian aid effort and the reconstruction of Haiti. However, it is regrettable that the Europeans have acted in an uncoordinated manner and that the actions of the European Union are not visible enough, something that contrasts sharply with the efficiency of the US aid machine and makes us forget that the European Union is the world's biggest donor of humanitarian aid and development aid.

The European Commission has also activated the Community Civil Protection Mechanism, which coordinates offers of assistance from the Member States and currently represents the crux of our crisis response system. Recent events confirm the need to improve the European Union's response to crises. A real organisation with civil protection capacities is essential, and for this reason, I would remind you of Mr Barnier's proposal, which dates from 2006 and proposes the creation of a European civil protection force; it is ready and just has to be applied.

Moreover, the President of the European Council, Mr Van Rompuy, today spoke in favour of a rapid reaction force. Within a matter of days, the United States has assumed a dominant role in rescue and coordination matters. It is essential to recall the role of central and global coordination played by OCHA, the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, which is best placed to carry out this coordination.

Do not be mistaken, this is not about waging a war of flags. However, good organisation means saving time and money, and I think that European citizens have the right to know what the European Union is doing.

Patrice Tirolien (S&D). – (FR) Mr President, is Haiti condemned to misfortune?

Since its independence, natural disasters have given way to political catastrophes there, and here we are today faced with a tragedy of historic proportions. There are dead, injured, countless destroyed buildings and the ruin of national political structures and cooperation structures.

We must beat fate. The European Union must participate in this twin emergency and reconstruction effort. We owe it to our numerous ties with Haiti, ties that are, first and foremost, historic: a former colony, Haiti was the most prosperous of them all; secondly, diplomatic: the Cotonou Agreement makes the island a privileged partner; and, finally, geographical, since Haiti is a neighbour of the European Union thanks to the outermost regions.

Moreover, the crisis in Haiti represents the first test of the new European External Action Service, which you head up, Mrs Ashton. That has been conclusive up to now. This disaster also underlines the challenges and the improvements that we must make to this structure, since the solidarity movement of our continent aside, the US reaction raises questions about our mobilisation capacity.

Thus, the remarkable efforts in favour of European coordination, the Member States' contributions, must not conceal the difficulty of the discussions concerning the deployment of the European Gendarmerie Force. While it is crucial for the European Union's expenditure to be guided by the United Nations, these difficulties lead to the conclusion that the European Union must equip itself with an autonomous, integrated structure with the means to deal with tasks as complex as a humanitarian emergency.

Finally, the reconstruction phase represents an immense challenge. There is no shortage of tasks: political, administrative, economic, social and environmental. We are perhaps at year zero of a new era for Haiti. This is a major political challenge for a Europe that must assert itself as a visible leader in this process.

Charles Goerens (ALDE). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, every evening, the 8 o'clock news reminds us of the unspeakable suffering in Haiti.

The suffering is perhaps matched only by the near worldwide compassion that surrounds it. This compassion is certainly spontaneous and sincere, but it is short-lived. The moment of truth will come in a fortnight, once the media have chosen to focus on other events. If someone does not pick up the baton, then Haitians will once again risk finding themselves alone, abandoned to their own fate.

In a country in which everything remains to be done, starting with rehabilitation and reconstruction, it is important to act so that the different sequences lead to genuine development. As for the European Union, it has an extensive range of tools and solid experience in this area. This is why the challenges faced by Haitian society, which is desperately poor, also represent a moment of truth for the European Union.

It is in the coming days and months that we will have to act in an effective and determined manner. This is the most important aspect from the point of view of recovery once we have restored conditions of security and public order, which are essential for any coordinated action in a country in which everything has been damaged by the earthquake, including its institutional structures.

I therefore feel it is wise to stress one essential aspect: the recovery, the reconstruction of the Haitian state, must be the work of the Haitians themselves. It is their development that we are talking about. We can help them in a spirit of partnership. Europe would do well to confirm this in the international conferences planned on this subject.

Yes to partnership, no to paternalism and neo-colonialism!

Edvard Kožušník (ECR). – (CS) All of us will certainly agree that this is one of the greatest disasters in that region in the last 200 years. And speaking on behalf of my colleagues in the European Conservatives faction, and on behalf of my fellow citizens in the Czech Republic, I would like to express sympathy and compassion for all the victims and those who are suffering. Nevertheless, regardless of this tragedy, there are signs that even after the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, the European Union is still uncoordinated and incapable of prompt action. It distantly reminds me of a four-headed dragon. We have a President, Prime Minister of the presiding country, President of the Commission, and Commissioner-designate. Ladies and gentlemen, I personally believe that in this particular case, we have to recognise that the European Union has been caught flat-footed. Those who have not been caught napping are the citizens in the individual Member States who have been providing material as well as financial aid day after day.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Mr President, we join with the rest of the world in expressing our sympathy and regret at the tragedy that has befallen the people of Haiti, and wish to show them complete solidarity, but we must highlight certain issues that we believe to be crucial.

We should begin by denouncing anyone or any country that seeks to profit from this catastrophe by returning to neo-colonialism. Such an attitude seems to be behind the deployment of thousands of armed North American troops, despite the fact that the majority of the population live in poverty and remain victims of exploitation by multinational companies and the interference of external bodies, particularly the United States.

This is a time for all the humanitarian aid, cooperation and support for reconstruction that the people of Haiti deserve, through their dignity and courage. We should remember that Haiti was the place where 400 000 Africans, enslaved and trafficked by Europeans, revolted against slavery and brought about the first great social revolution on the American continent.

Coordinated aid should be sent as a matter of urgency, but it should be done without giving in to neo-colonialist temptations.

Roberta Angelilli (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, an enormous tragedy is taking place in Haiti, caused by nature, but also by the lack of a State worthy of the name, unable to manage even to a minimal extent the disaster and the humanitarian emergency, unable to manage aid for the civilian population which is now prey to unscrupulous people.

The Red Cross has issued a warning call. At the Montreal conference to be held on 25 January, the EU must speak with one voice and request single, coordinated management of the humanitarian action; otherwise, we risk chaos and the aid going to waste, including these enormous and valuable amounts mentioned today by the Commission, and the aid from the Member States.

Baroness Ashton, an exceptional effort should be made for the children, above all the orphans, who deserve priority assistance, including in terms of psychological support; otherwise, they will be condemned to poverty and exploitation. We should also ensure that the international community is not merely prepared to simplify adoption procedures. That would lead only to a form of legalised deportation of children, which is not what Haiti needs.

Mr Frattini, the Italian Minister for Foreign Affairs, is right to propose constructing buildings and care homes so that they can grow up with dignity in their own country and facilitating temporary trips abroad for holidays and, chiefly, for education. I will finish with a question: are we prepared, internationally, to reduce or cancel Haiti's debt?

Corina Crețu (S&D). – (RO) The whole world is indeed at this moment showing solidarity and compassion to the victims of the catastrophic earthquake in Haiti, highlighting once again the need to act promptly and in a coordinated manner in such situations. Loss limitation now depends on how effective intervention is and, as has already been mentioned here, the way in which international agencies and organisations, along with the EU's Department for Humanitarian Aid, have acted is exemplary, not forgetting the individual gestures by Member States.

I believe that a European Union rapid intervention operational force must be created because the situation in Haiti demonstrates to us the need to maintain public order and ensure the population's safety, in addition to the assistance required by the survivors. We are certainly in a situation at the moment where many voices are protesting and making accusations that the alleged intention is to carry out a military occupation under the guise of humanitarian assistance. However, in a situation where UN forces are insufficient or have been overtaken by events, the European Union should take further involvement, especially as it enjoys a large amount of credibility in the region.

I believe that, as a European Union, we must face up to a wide-ranging process of reconstruction in Haiti, while, at the same time, boosting the stability of the state's structures. It is, of course, very important to show compassion to the country's inhabitants going through this difficult ordeal, which includes finding specific solutions to facilitate the procedures for adopting children who have been left orphaned after this disaster and offering concrete assistance to the population which has been so sorely tried.

Paweł Robert Kowal (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, Mrs Ashton, we are listening to voices from different parts of the House, but they have one matter, one theme, in common: the reaction of the European Union, the political reaction, was not sufficient, and it was not coordinated well. I think we should thank the charities that they so spontaneously and, as always, without fail, took responsibility for the need.

In addition, we should think about what could be done better. In fact, I have just one question for Mrs Ashton: this is the first such situation you have been faced with in your new position. What is your main conclusion from this event, and from the mistakes which we are all talking about here? More importantly, what can be changed in future? I think this is the most important thing we should think about, and it is, to a great extent, our role to do so.

Philippe Juvin (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, Mrs Ashton, that is enough! That is enough. It is the same with every disaster, the French send a plane and assistance, the Belgians, the Italians, the Germans, everyone does the same thing, and every time they do it alone; it is the same story every time. On the ground, the result is always the same: there is no coordination, missed opportunities for the victims and a lack of organisation.

When is this going to end? When is the Commission finally going to act? Do not come and tell us that this is complicated, because the projects are ready. We just need to use them. In 2006, Mr Barnier proposed the creation of a European civil protection force, with Member States contributing on a voluntary basis, without having to wait for hypothetical unanimity from the 27, by pooling existing national civil protection units, by training them together with joint rescue techniques, joint communication methods and a joint headquarters.

It is easy, Mrs Ashton: do this with those who want to do it! As for the others, they will join us when they realise that this is the future. Commitments were entered into after the tsunami and yet, today, nothing has been done.

I do not say this lightly; the Commission's inaction is criminal. Mrs Ashton, why is Europe doomed to repeat its mistakes? Mrs Ashton, no one questions your goodwill, but announce here, today, the creation of this European coordination force. Parliament will follow you. If you need support, we are there to help you. But for pity's sake, stop talking to us about coordination; make this coordination happen! Do not wait for the next disaster!

Michael Cashman (S&D). – Mr President, I have to say there are people who do, and there are people who talk. I therefore want to congratulate the Council, the Commission and the High Representative on the action that they have taken. None of this was foreseeable. We are looking at something that was unimaginable.

I have sat here and listened to cheap political points being made against the High Representative, against the Member States and against the Commission via the notion that somehow, because it is an American hand rescuing someone from the rubble and saving a life, that you should brush that hand away and say 'no neo-colonialism' and that somehow, by attacking Haiti itself, you make the lives of the people who are suffering there better. Shame on you.

Let us make sure that we coordinate. Give the coordination over to the Americans – if it saves lives, it saves lives. Forget the political rhetoric.

Congratulations on committing this amount of money. Congratulations, Baroness Ashton, on not playing to the audience and using up air space to get into Haiti just to go there and show that you are there. What does that do? It does absolutely nothing. Therefore, angry on behalf of those people who want rescuing, let us coordinate with the Americans. Let us kick the butt of the United Nations so that it delivers aid, and let us stop making cheap political points.

(Applause)

Róza, Gräfin von Thun Und Hohenstein (PPE). – *(PL)* Mr President, I would like to add my voice to that of Mr Juvin – the humanitarian aid is poorly coordinated. I do not want to talk only about humanitarian aid, but about what is called technical, structural or development aid. The catastrophe was not foreseeable, but we did know what a terrible state Haiti is in, and to make matters worse, it has been struck by this misfortune. We have known for a long time what a bad condition Haiti is in, and how badly its structures function. We know, too, that if they had been functioning better, and if, before the earthquake, we had organised aid and technical cooperation with Haiti in a better way, those structures would have been working better and, as a result, it would have enabled better use of our aid now and would have saved many thousands of people – but that did not happen.

Does Mrs Ashton, as High Representative and a Member of the Council, intend to take specific action, with specific dates, to coordinate the technical cooperation of various European countries so that the third countries to which we give aid really use that aid well? Are we going to use any kind of exchange of best practices between countries which have a lot of experience, where technical cooperation functions very well, and countries which are only beginning to use that technical cooperation? Will a good, common, strong European policy come into being, which third countries will really make use of, so that we will not give humanitarian aid in the dark and in haste when, unexpectedly, hundreds of thousands of people find themselves in a tragic situation?

David-Maria Sassoli (S&D). – *(IT)* Mr President, High Representative, ladies and gentlemen, the enormous tragedy that has struck Haiti requires an immediate response and many aid and rescue activities are under way, carried out by individual Member States, even if there is a good deal of competition between European countries.

The new Europe with its High Representative ought to be capable of providing its own aid to the people who are suffering. The earthquake, moreover, has struck the poorest country in the western hemisphere, where 80% of the population live below the poverty line and 54% live in absolute poverty.

Within this emergency, however, there is another: the emergency involving the children, the weakest sector of the population, who have been left with no family, no protection and no State. I would therefore like to call upon the High Representative for Foreign Affairs to examine actions intended to allow Haitian children up to the age of 10 to be taken in and looked after by European countries.

Lady Ashton, Europe can take them in and offer them adequate living conditions; I mean for a limited period, until the conditions are adequate for them to return to their own country. All this could be organised, all this could be easy for the European countries, and it would be a fair way to respond to the need for solidarity, but also to avoid speculative and illegal actions being taken at the expense of children. We are talking about children, the most precious resource that we should protect in Haiti.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE). – Mr President, in recent days, there have been a number of complaints about the ineffectiveness and slowness of the response to the Haitian crisis.

Many point to the increasing insecurity, the growing despair among those who survived the quake, and the appalling lack of food and clothing.

It is true that these problems exist and we need to solve them as soon as possible. However, we should applaud the engagement of various international actors, ranging from governments to civil society organisations and to individuals worldwide.

The European Union is certainly among those who have expressed their wholehearted solidarity with the Haitian people. Again, many have criticised the supposedly slow reaction of the EU to the crisis even today, but the EU is not only about decisions made in Brussels. National governments have already sent thousands of men and women to help the Haitians and have allocated millions of euros in aid.

The role of the EU should be concentrated more on medium- and long-term aid and aimed at the reconstruction of Haitian towns and villages, of their infrastructure, schools and hospitals.

The EU can certainly be the forum, the umbrella under which Europe's medium- and long-term aid can be distributed and coordinated.

The pledge recently made by the Commission and the Member States to earmark almost EUR 500 million is certainly a big and significant step in this direction, and we should all stand behind it.

Enrique Guerrero Salom (S&D). – (ES) Firstly, I would like to extend my condolences and solidarity to the people of Haiti, who have been so hard hit by this catastrophe.

We in the European Union are not a military power, and neither do we wish to be one. Yet we are a force in the world due to our social model. We are also a power to be reckoned with for our development cooperation and humanitarian assistance, and we are proud of that.

Today, Haiti, or at least the catastrophe that has hit this country, poses a challenge to the new institutions created by the Lisbon Treaty. Now is the time for humanitarian aid, but very soon the time will come to rebuild, promote development and offer assistance to governability and institutionality. And we must respond to the expectations of the people of Haiti with one voice. We must respond by combining the functions of the High Representative with the functions of the Commissioners for Development and Humanitarian Aid.

Why? Why should we all act together? To coordinate the aid from countries more effectively, to ensure our aid is more efficient, to speak with a European voice that is identifiable in the world and to live up to the world's expectations of us at such times: to support this humanitarian crisis and promote development. What is happening today in Haiti could be another catastrophe tomorrow and could affect every part of the world the day after tomorrow.

Jim Higgins (PPE). – Mr President, one of the poorest countries in the world ravaged in just 15 seconds, the victim of bad government, the victim of dictatorship and corruption. Fifty thousand people dead, thousands still missing and three million homeless.

The United States' response has been commendable, the United Nations' slightly less so, but I have to agree with everything that has been said. We are not being political in this, Mr Cashman: our response has been less than adequate. We have been left in the slipstream of the United States.

The logistical difficulties will be overcome – clean water, medication, food and shelter – these will all happen in due course. But what Haiti needs to emerge from this disaster is a fully functioning democracy with an economy that can sustain its people. Its recovery must be measured over the years, and not just in the weeks and the months after this crisis.

As has been said time and time again, it will disappear from the television sets. It will go from item one over the next two or three weeks to item three, and then it will be gone. But that is where the real challenge is, because in 2008, Haiti was hit by two devastating hurricanes. Poverty and desolation were left in their wake. The world leaders at that stage promised EUR 600 million. Only EUR 40 million was actually delivered.

What we need is the rebirth, the resurgence, the re-emergence and the redevelopment of Haiti. It must be led and it must be managed in a proper fashion but, above all else, it must set down a clear and deliverable strategy to make Haiti the proud, independent and democratic entity that it should be, but which it is not and has not been up to now, thus leading to the present catastrophe.

Roberto Gualtieri (S&D). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the unprecedented humanitarian disaster in Haiti affects us deeply and the European Union has a duty to contribute as best it can to the efforts by the international community, using all the tools at its disposal.

As far as financial resources are concerned, significant progress has been made in recent days and hours. What deserves more thought is the other aspects of Europe's response to the crisis, but we should avoid worrying about our image and concentrate instead on the substance, as the High Representative rightly said.

The central role of the MINUSTAH mission has now emerged clearly, in terms of both civil protection and security, ruling out an autonomous CSDP mission, but the EU's coordination role in support of the UN mission remains key.

On this point, I would like to remind Mr Juvin that this coordination exists, and that the Monitoring and Information Centre is performing it in the area of civil protection, and the Situation Centre is performing it in the area of security, and it is to be hoped that this work will result in deployment of the European Gendarmerie Force, as has been expressly requested by the United Nations.

What it is useful to understand from the High Representative and from the Commission is how the MIC and the Situation Centre are responding, in practice, in the face of such onerous tasks and tests, how their coordination is working, and whether their instruments and resources are adequate.

This will also help us at a later date when we will have to consider the adequacy of these instruments and the capacity of consular protection, but now is not the time for these debates. Now is the time for action and commitment, and we fully support the action being taken by the High Representative.

IN THE CHAIR: MR LAMBRINIDIS

Vice-President

Milan Zver (PPE). – (SL) I, too, would like to express my sympathy for the events in Haiti, as well as congratulate the European Commission and European institutions for their relatively appropriate response.

Nevertheless, like some of my fellow Members, I, too, wonder whether our response has been rapid enough. It might perhaps be a good idea if Mrs Ashton, Vice-President of the Commission, personally visited the scene of the tragic event, as that could prove important for several reasons.

I disagree with those of you who argue that the presence of soldiers and other law enforcement personnel might herald the beginning of a colonial approach on our part towards Haiti. In my opinion, such talk is neither fair nor appropriate.

What is important, however, is that, at the next International conference on Haiti, we adopt long-term measures for the re-establishment of state institutions, to enable them to work again. Here I refer, in particular, to health and education policies. Only policies of this kind, and only development in these areas and institutions, can shape Haiti into a more stable country than it has been to date.

María Muñoz De Urquiza (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, I wish to emphasise the importance of the European Union providing leadership: not merely immediate emergency humanitarian aid but also long-term cooperation for rebuilding the country. We must work with the local authorities and with the government of Haiti, as the country is already fragile enough without us making it even weaker by having the international organisations stand in for its authorities. We must also work alongside local non-governmental organisations.

I would like to acknowledge the fast response of the Spanish Presidency, both in terms of coordinating aid and making available to the European Union the aid resources Spain already had in the country and the region, since it is the foremost European aid donor, not only in Latin America but also specifically in Haiti.

Marielle De Sarnez (ALDE). – (FR) Mr President, Mrs Ashton, politics is, first and foremost, about symbols, and that is why I think you should not be here, but in Haiti; that is why I think you should not be travelling to the United States, but to Haiti.

I feel – and I say this with a great deal of sadness – that you have not gauged the magnitude of the event, of this terrible tragedy, and, deep down, when we consider all this, Europe has never been so absent. We are the biggest donors, and yet we do not exist.

My second feeling is that the more we nominate, the more we create functions and titles, the less we exist, and this should prompt us to ask ourselves some questions. How many disasters must there be before the leaders of the European Union finally measure up to their responsibilities? Mr Barnier's report has been on the table since 2006. What are we waiting for to adopt it? What are we waiting for to apply it?

James Nicholson (ECR). – Mr President, I think all our thoughts have been expressed and they have to go out to those who have lost their lives: the people of the United Nations, the people of Haiti itself and the people who are suffering although they are still alive.

What we need is a good, strong coordinated effort and nothing – but nothing – should get in the way of that. Can I say that I welcome the commitment that we have made in Europe to the people of Haiti. I hope we follow that through because I was touched – and it is quite right – what happens in two weeks' time when they cease to be part of the media and they cease to be part of the news? What are these people going to do then?

Yes, there is a clear need to rebuild Haiti, both in the short and long term, but most important now is to get the aid distributed to the suffering people on the ground, the people who are hurting. I have to say that I agree totally with the comments of Mr Cashman earlier on. This is too important to score cheap political points.

Luis Yáñez-Barnuevo García (S&D). – (ES) Please allow me a few seconds to begin by congratulating the High Representative, the Council, the Commission and the rotating Presidency of the European Union for the speed, coordination and effort they have shown from the outset.

Perhaps they did not enjoy the great media attention prompted by 10 000 US marines arriving on the island, but everything took place very quickly and effectively in my opinion, and I have plenty of experience. I would just like to mention one thing, which has not come up throughout the debate: 50% of the survivors recovered from the rubble during the first 78 hours were saved by teams from Europe and the Member States.

Frédérique Ries (ALDE). – (FR) Mr President, as Mrs Joly has already said, there are circumstances in which words and figures lose all meaning and become ludicrous: two million refugees – as we have heard – perhaps more, more than 200 000 deaths, a country that has been laid waste, a capital that has been almost erased from the map.

The urgency now is to dig out the last survivors – if there are any left – to bury the dead, to feed the living, to distribute water, to treat, to operate and to rebuild. Every country departed quickly, very quickly, with its resources, its equipment, its dogs, its people and its generosity. It is an immense, magnificent effort, but it is a national effort.

Europe absolutely must now gather momentum and give substance to this idea that some of us, many of us, have been defending here in the European Parliament and elsewhere for several years, namely the implementation of a European civil intervention body, green helmets or white helmets – the colour is of little importance – people, resources and common strategies.

EU-FAST, the initiative launched by Mr Verhofstadt in 2003, or EuropeAid, launched by Mr Barnier in 2006 – the paternity ultimately does not matter – the idea is to be able to act quickly, to be ready together.

Liisa Jaakonsaari (S&D). – (FI) Mr President, I find it odd that people here have spoken of visibility and have doubted the motives of the United States of America, because right now help is needed. I think that it is especially tragic that among the ruins at the moment, there are people who could still be rescued. Everything that can be done to improve the situation should be done.

When, a while ago, the crisis management forces were established to bolster the European's foreign and security policy, including its defence policy, the reason I was given for this, at least in Finland, was that these forces were also there in the event of natural disasters, and that they could help when such catastrophes struck anywhere in the world, including Europe of course. Now, however, crisis management forces actually have nothing to do in the different parts of Europe in which they are stationed. They have nothing to do. Fortunately, there are no crises in Europe, and so they have nothing to do. What is stopping these crisis management forces from being used for crises like this if help is being requested?

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D). – (LT) Today, after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, we are probably dealing with the biggest tragedy that has ever taken place and we need to understand the position of the High Representative when, at the very beginning of their term, they have to solve a rather complicated task which, I would even say, they have never had to deal with before. Yes, it is true, today we see some shortcomings and in future, we need better prepared European Union joint forces, who could take part in rescue operations. I think that the greatest contribution today would be for that money that was mentioned today to be sent to the Republic of Haiti, to be put to use as soon as possible and spent on the rebuilding of infrastructure, as

the President of Haiti mentioned, and it can perhaps be put towards removing some of those collapsed homes that are lying in the streets today.

Catherine Ashton, *High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission*. – Mr President, as I began, I wanted to come to this House to hear the views. I take on board and understand the frustration that honourable Members feel, that there are issues which could be handled better.

Members asked questions about visibility and coordination. There is no question that, because America is closer, because it has the capacity to mobilise as quickly as it did, then the pictures you will see on your television screens will be of them. The fact that we worked so closely and collaboratively with the United States is also an important part of what we do now and in the future.

And there is also no question that, as I was woken in the night to be told of the earthquake, we mobilised our people as quickly as we possibly could. Twenty-one Member States were mobilised to respond. We had work done, with the Council and Commission side coming together for the very first time, and may I just say, it is only eight days since I was before you in my hearing here.

Twenty-one Member States with 11 search-and-rescue teams, five field hospitals, six advance medical posts, 40 medical teams, six water-purification units; we despatched these as quickly as we could and I pay tribute to the Member States for the work they do. I also pay tribute to the officials who worked and have continued to work day and night to pull this effort together.

I put the question very early to the United Nations on the ground, and to Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, where best my efforts could be. There was no doubt that I had nothing to contribute on the ground other than to take up valuable space when planes were circling the airfield unable to land because of the state of the airfield at the present time. I am not a doctor. I am not a fire-fighter. My place was to bring together the coordination, to be talking to the Friends of Haiti Group, to be coordinating with the United States to make sure that we put in the maximum effort on the ground.

I also pay tribute, as honourable Members have done, to the NGOs and to the people on the ground. The devastation that happened on the ground had enormous impact on the United Nations, which has lost many members of their senior staff, and on NGOs, which have been unable to respond as quickly as they would simply because people of theirs have died.

That has made it very difficult, as you have watched and we have watched people desperate for help, wondering where the help is. Getting the help out in these circumstances has been incredibly difficult, and again people have worked tirelessly to provide it. Now things are getting easier, the help is getting out, but do not underestimate for one moment how difficult the circumstances have been on the ground.

Did it work well? Yes. Am I satisfied? No. As I start my first weeks in this job, I say to you very clearly: I hear what you say. I hear the frustration. I understand it. And you are right to criticise me that it is not as good as it can be in the future. You are right. It should, and must, get better and better.

What I have to do is take what happened and learn the lessons of it now in order to make sure that we do more in the future to pull together, but I take nothing away from the tremendous work that was done and is being done hour by hour and day by day.

For the long term, honourable Members are absolutely right. When the cameras have gone, we need to be there. We need to be there physically, we need to be there in terms of the support we can give. I agree that debt issues need to be a part of the discussions that take place. I agree that what is done must be done in partnership with the Haitian people with due respect for them. I agree on the importance of rebuilding the infrastructure, and I agree that we have to ensure that the role of the United Nations is recognised and make sure that they are able to fulfil it well.

That is why I am going not only to the United States to see Secretary of State Clinton but also to the United Nations to talk with the Secretary-General and the key people about what we can now do to pull together for the future because that, as you say, will be of enormous importance.

Let me finish on the reality of the situation. As honourable Members have said, this is a country where over 70% of people were already living below the poverty line. It is very important, as honourable Members have said, that the children, the orphan children especially, are cared for properly, and the devastation will require support in the years ahead.

Let me just tell you a little bit about the infrastructure at the moment. Hospitals, electricity, communications, water supply, seaports and airports have been badly damaged. The main official buildings, the Presidential Palace, the Parliament, Ministries of Treasury, Justice, Planning, Health and Interior are completely destroyed. Many of the high government officials are missing. The capacities of the Haitian Government are not functioning. It is, as you said, already one of the poorest countries in the world, and because we need to rebuild that infrastructure, I share your commitment to make sure that we do.

(Applause)

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, first of all, I would like to tell Mr Le Hyaric, who is calling for food surpluses to be shipped to Haiti, that this is not the European Union's approach, for the simple reason that the Commission prefers to purchase these products in the region. We will begin by seeing whether we can purchase them in the region rather than transport our surpluses to Haiti.

Secondly, concerning the whole matter of coordination and civil protection and so on, let me just say three things.

First, civil protection is a competence of the Member States, and all coordination initiatives must be built on this basis. This was also proposed by the Barnier report but, up to now, we have not reached a conclusion. It is a competence of the Member States and not of the Commission as such.

Secondly, as far as civil protection and its coordination is concerned, since the 2004 tsunami, EU civil protection coordination has grown stronger and much more efficient. Virtual exercises can, of course, never test enough the effectiveness of our cooperation as much as natural disasters do, sadly enough. In this crisis, non-EU Member States are calling the MIC to see how they can contribute to the relief effort with EU facilities.

Thirdly, let us not forget that, in the second Barroso Commission, humanitarian relief and civil protection have been combined under one Commissioner, which is, I think, a very valuable effort. In addition we also now have a High Representative, who will have a double hat. What we have seen in the past about coordination is that it is not lacking inside the Commission for example – I will come back to that in a minute – but it is sometimes between the European institutions and the Member States and between the European Commission and Council. The whole idea behind this double-hatting was precisely that the Council and Commission could work better together, and I think it has been demonstrated in this crisis that this has, in fact, been quite an advance.

Lastly, I would also like to say that I am a little bit sad about what some speakers have said. Of course as a Commissioner, I cannot be sad, I just have to take notice of it, but it does not pay enough tribute to all our people who have been working, on the spot and in Brussels, from hour one, day and night, during the weekend, without any complaint, without asking for any compensation. They have been working very hard and within hours they were also active on the spot, although their facilities were also hit hard.

So please consider that this is the kind of massive disaster that is not foreseeable, that you can only respond to when it occurs, and for which you have to demonstrate that you can organise a response in a very short period of time. I think the Commission has been demonstrating this. I think that the Member States immediately and massively supported our action and I think we should also be a little bit less critical about those services.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place during the February part-session.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I would like to express my solidarity with the people of Haiti affected by the earthquake that hit the country on 12 January, and I welcome the aid commitments made by the EU. The European Union is the world's largest provider of humanitarian and development aid. A few hours after the catastrophe, the EU provided EUR 3 million of aid for the initial relief operations. A sum of EUR 134 million was released for early rehabilitation and reconstruction efforts. EUR 200 million has been set aside for rehabilitation in the longer term, adding to the EUR 92 million that has been given by different EU countries. These amounts, totalling EUR 429 million, may be further increased, depending on the needs assessment. I would like to congratulate the European Commission on their coordination of the aid, but I am disappointed that the European Union has not been visible enough on the ground. This is detrimental to the image of the EU in international public opinion, and is in contrast with the image of the

US, which contributed EUR 91.6 million. During this crisis, there has been a clear need for medical care, so I am calling for an increase in the quota of doctors and health technicians, along with greater logistical support.

Gaston Franco (PPE), in writing. – (FR) I am surprised by the absence of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy from the scene of the natural disaster in Haiti. In spite of the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Union still has difficulty in showing its face on the international stage, and that is most regrettable. It seems to me that the European crisis response system is too fragmented, too complex and not successful enough. In terms of the rehabilitation of Haiti (for which EUR 100 million are earmarked) and the reconstruction of the country (EUR 200 million), what exactly will the EDF and the Stability Instrument fund? Furthermore, to respond to the UN request in terms of logistical and security support, the European Union must, in my view, be in a position to use all the instruments provided by the Treaty of Lisbon, including military response. I call for the rapid establishment of a European civil protection force as devised by Mr Barnier in 2006 with the aim of arriving at a European response that is planned, genuinely coordinated and effective. The recent statements by Mr Van Rompuy are along the right lines. He advocated the creation of a humanitarian rapid reaction force. What will be the exact nature of this project and when will it see the light of day?

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE), in writing. – (PL) Ladies and gentlemen, the reports reaching us from Haiti are shocking. It is one of the most horrifying catastrophes we have heard of. However, we can already draw certain conclusions which may be useful in future. It can be clearly seen that the mechanisms which coordinate humanitarian aid are not the best. Aid for the Haitians could have been more effective if the donors of humanitarian aid had been able to use better means of coordinating their work. Improving cooperation is not a matter just for the European Union, because progress in this area requires constructive analysis and action on the part of all substantial donors. In situations such as the one in Haiti today, what is important is speed, adequacy and elasticity. Today is not the right time to deliberate, for example, about who should control the airport in the capital of Haiti. That is, of course, important, but decisions on the use of specific solutions should be made at another time. Now, we must do everything possible to concentrate on the most important objective – saving human lives.

Alan Kelly (S&D), in writing. – The recent earthquake in Haiti demonstrates to us all how fragile living on this earth can be. We have all been moved by the pictures and stories coming from the media in recent days. The response of the global community to this natural disaster has been amazing and I commend all of those who are helping with the relief effort or funding the relief effort from home. It will take generations for the people of Haiti to fully recover from what will hopefully be a once in a lifetime event. It is important that this House shows solidarity to those people. It would be my hope that the European Union could play a leading role in giving those people hope of a better future. Emergency aid in the short term must be backed up with longer-term aid to help the future generations recover from this most horrific ordeal. The way Members of this House, across all political groups, have responded to date has been extremely heartening. I look forward to working with my colleagues to do what I can for the people of Haiti. The EU must aim to be an example of the well off always willing to give a hand-up to those less advantaged than ourselves.

Joanna Katarzyna Skrzydlewska (PPE), in writing. – (PL) Mr President, tragic information about the disastrous earthquake in Haiti reaches us every day. From this news, it is absolutely clear that Haiti, plunged into total chaos and left without support, is not coping with the effects of that terrible tragedy. The entire international community, including the European Union, is obliged to give humanitarian aid to the victims of this disaster, who are completely bereft of basic necessities. Therefore, I would like to appeal strongly for the appropriate European Union structures to take immediate and effective action in order to send, as quickly as possible, essential aid and support for the fight with the results of the earthquake in Haiti.

5. Situation in Iran (debate)

President. – The next item is the statement by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission on the situation in Iran.

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission. – Mr President, honourable Members, this is an important opportunity to raise the situation in Iran.

The European Union wants normal relations with Iran, and our efforts on the nuclear issue are part of that. In this context, I will continue, in my capacity as High Representative, the role of my predecessor, Javier Solana, in the international talks with Iran.

Iran is an important country with a deep history and rich culture, and a remarkably talented population. The films and books coming out of Iran are impressive, the level of education of women is high, there is a capacity for public debate and the young population is vibrant and active. In many ways, Iranian society has the hallmarks and the capacity of a free society. The threat to the society has been reflected in the turmoil that followed what many in Iran saw as a fraudulent election last year. That, of course, is a matter for the Iranians. Our concern is that international norms and standards on civil and political rights must be respected.

In this respect, I am deeply concerned over the reports of violent suppression of demonstrations and arbitrary detentions in Tehran and other Iranian cities during the recent Ashura commemorations at the end of December. The use of violence against demonstrators seeking to exercise their freedom of expression and rights of assembly is not acceptable. These are universal human rights that must be respected and those detained for peacefully exercising those rights should be released.

I also note with deep concern that many arrests seem to have targeted human rights defenders and journalists, and that many detained are denied access to legal representation and contact with their families. Iran must live up to its international obligations and treat detained persons in accordance with international human rights standards.

Another recent issue is the detention of another 12 members of the Baha'i religious community. These people must be assured a just, open and fair trial in accordance with international standards.

The EU has spared no opportunity to ask the Iranian Government to respect those international obligations which they freely and voluntarily adhered to. We issue public statements and use other diplomatic means. We work through the United Nations: the General Assembly adopted a resolution condemning the situation only last month. We will make full use of the upcoming review of Iran which will be held at the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva in early February.

On the nuclear issue, we regret that Tehran has not followed up on the last meeting between Javier Solana and Jalili, the chief negotiator, on 1 October in Geneva. We all assessed that the meeting was positive. But, in effect, Iran has now rejected a draft agreement proposed by the IAEA and has been refusing to pursue talks on the nuclear issue.

The EU and its negotiating partners are all committed to finding a diplomatic solution to the Iranian nuclear issue, and to that end, we must continue to implement the dual-track approach. We need a serious engagement in meaningful talks from Tehran's side.

Our objective remains to build confidence that the nuclear programme is exclusively for peaceful purposes. The confidence deficit was further increased by the revelation that Iran has been building another enrichment facility without informing the IAEA in due time. In addition, Iran continues not to cooperate fully with the IAEA and not to respect its international obligations.

It is vital that the EU and the international community stand united behind the negotiating effort, including by supporting that effort through appropriate measures. The widest possible unity is key if we are to achieve our objective.

If Iran sets out on a more constructive course on the nuclear issue and on regional stability in general, it could play an important role in the Middle East and Gulf region, which would reflect its rightful place and proud history.

In conclusion, the challenges posed by Iran weigh very heavy in my portfolio. This is a country which has enormous potential – and our readiness to engage with Iran constructively has been made over and over. I shall continue to make that case. I sincerely hope that, during the time of my mandate, I will return to this House with a more positive picture of relations with Iran.

José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (ES) Baroness Ashton, you are quite right to be concerned, because the situation in Afghanistan is extremely severe, particularly from the viewpoint of human rights. I refer particularly to civil rights and political freedoms, where we are seeing a truly incredible breakdown: the arbitrary exercise of violence, mass imprisonment of opposition members, murders,

executions, non-governmental organisations prevented from doing their work, and the impossibility of exercising press freedom. A European Parliament delegation was even banned from entering.

Mr President, in view of the present circumstances, I wonder whether it is worth visiting the country at this time.

Your remarks on the nuclear front, Baroness Ashton, were very clear and also very forthright: Iran continues to produce enriched uranium despite warnings from the international community. It rejected the outstretched hand proffered to it by President Obama and rejected the latest plan suggested by the Six, which involved Russia and France.

My question, Baroness Ashton, is very simple: Do you believe that we have exhausted our patience with this country yet? Do you think we should now move on to adopt more hard-hitting measures or do you instead consider that a softly-softly approach is the best way of negotiating with the Iranian regime?

I should like to tell you that I sincerely welcome your statement in favour of defending human rights in that country. The breaches are extremely severe and I believe, Mr President, that Parliament must condemn the human rights situation in the country without pulling its punches. I hope that it will be able to do this by approving the resolution on this topic. It must continue to hold firm, very firm, in its tireless defence of freedom.

Roberto Gualtieri, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in view of the developments in the situation in Iran, one cannot help but express serious concern. These concerns relate to the increasing infringements of political and civil rights, which we strongly condemn, and concern over the failure to perform the duties resulting from Iran's membership of the Non-Proliferation Agreement, upon which even the country itself states it does not want to cast any doubt.

We do not question Iran's right to the peaceful development of nuclear energy, nor do we intend to underestimate the important role that Iran can play on a regional level, its legitimate security requirements, or the need to create a credible system of regional security that involves all the nuclear powers in the area. It is precisely because of this, though, that we do not understand the reasons for the failure to comply with the request by the International Atomic Energy Agency for the uranium to be enriched abroad, and we regret this decision.

Faced with this situation, it falls to the Security Council to determine the international community's response and the possibility of new sanctions, which should be focused on non-proliferation and designed to be an instrument to support the path of difficult but unavoidable dialogue, and not designed and used to beat down the regime.

With regard to this course of action, the European Union should play its part by giving thought, at the appropriate time and in the appropriate form, to possible technical measures to complement the UN sanctions and, at the same time, by confirming its readiness for debate and dialogue, which should never be lost, even at difficult times.

We will fully support action by the European Union and the High Representative in line with the approach that was set out clearly in the High Representative's speech.

Marietje Schaake, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, last summer, I got elected to the European Parliament by voicing criticism against my own government. A young woman in Iran, having done the same, would have likely been killed, imprisoned, tortured and raped since.

Thanks to new media, we have all seen the clips of the brutal way the Iranian regime cracks down on citizens who speak out peacefully for democracy and freedom. Recent arrests of human rights reporters by the intelligence office of the Revolutionary Guard show that the Iranian regime takes an increased interest in closing off the country. Their reports were heavily relied upon by international journalists.

Yesterday was Martin Luther King Day. We commemorate a man who, too, marched the streets peacefully and said: 'a time comes when silence is betrayal'. High Representative, this time has long arrived.

President Barack Obama broke off his holidays over Christmas to speak out against yet more brutal attacks on citizens after Ashura. In the proposed two-track approach to Iran, balancing the nuclear question and human rights, the United States is increasingly emphasising human rights. Europe should take a stronger leadership position here, not only when it is politically safe to do so.

The disaster in Haiti is a terrible tragedy, and I am glad you are taking action. However, the man-made disaster that is ongoing in Iran has not been met with leadership and coordination from the European side thus far. Last month, a delegation of this Parliament was supposed to visit Iran, but the regime did not want us to see with our own eyes its own weakness and division. It is high time that Europe takes one stance regarding Iran, and the world is waiting.

Is Iran's current regime, which has lost its legitimacy and is divided internally, a credible actor in negotiations? What measures do you propose in the nuclear question that will target the government without harming the population? Are you willing to call an emergency talk in Europe on Iran?

To ensure that human rights will remain Europe's priority, how will you use the EU instrument for human rights? I believe we need to support citizens, civil society and journalists. The 'Shelter City' programme, proposed by the Czech Presidency, might be a useful tool to support Iranians under threat in Europe.

In the hearings with Commissioner Kroes, I asked her whether she is willing to work with you to make free speech on the Internet an integrated part of Europe's foreign policy. I ask you the same.

Barbara Lochbihler, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Baroness Ashton, the European Parliament has paid close attention to the internal and foreign policy developments in Iran. The Iran delegation has been engaged in dialogue with representatives of the government and of civil society and had made preparations for a delegation trip to Iran at the start of the month, although, unfortunately, this was cancelled at short notice.

The very dissatisfaction with the fraudulent elections and the constant increase in state repression and violence had caused the representatives of Iranian civil society to turn to the European Parliament. In their courageous move, they are seeking our support for the upholding of democratic freedoms and they are calling on us to take our own fundamental values seriously. The protests are many and they are still going on. The Iranian Government is being called on to give political answers to these unsolved questions, yet instead, we see an increase in the worst violations of human rights, such as torture and the assault of detainees, and we hear of the deaths of demonstrators, while unfair trials take place.

Many Iranians expect us to not only keep an eye on foreign policy and the nuclear programme, but also to see and to take action on the political situation within Iran. It is to be welcomed that countries such as Spain and Ireland are prepared to issue visas in an unbureaucratic way to the persecuted defenders of human rights, thus helping them out of acute danger. Other Member States should follow this example, and we also ask the Commission to provide rapid help to the politically persecuted.

From the outside, what we can do is limited. The crucial changes must come from within the country itself. We must, however, keep the communication channels to the outside world open. In that context, we must be highly critical of foreign companies such as Siemens and Nokia, whose technology is helping to make censorship possible and even more effective.

As no agreement has been reached in the negotiations on the nuclear issue, there is more and more talk of imposing sanctions. It is not clear, however, what sanctions would have the desired influence on the political leadership. If the sanctions lead to a worsening of living standards for many people, an example being sanctions on petrol, they will not achieve their objective and will give the regime the opportunity to blame what it would call the hostile outside world for the deteriorating economic situation.

It is, therefore, very important to develop targeted and intelligent sanctions, including against individuals. Thus, for example, the Council can blacklist individuals responsible for the repressive measures of recent months. In the EU's policy on Iran, what is crucial is that we create, and stick to, a dual-track policy. Despite the rebuffs, we need to seek political dialogue. Isolating Iran would help neither its people nor its neighbours in the region.

Charles Tannock, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, President Ahmadinejad's ruthless ambition to develop nuclear weapons represents, in my view, the gravest threat to world peace today.

Only through a united and coordinated approach will the EU's diplomacy eventually succeed. Renewed sanctions must now be targeted and must be extremely damaging to the regime in Tehran. But, equally, we should recognise that Iran's people and the Iranian regime are not the same thing.

Since Ahmadinejad stole the presidential election last year, we have seen many dissidents and brave young protestors take to the streets. These people need our support because they identify with our values of freedom,

democracy and the rule of law. Indeed, such is the desperation in Iran that opposition leader Mir Hossain Musavi, hardly known to be a democrat in the past, has said he is prepared to sacrifice his own life for the future good of his own country. Meanwhile, outrageous human rights abuses continue unabated as juveniles and homosexuals are executed routinely.

We MEPs in this House long to see a democratic and free Iran, which no longer exports terrorism via Hamas and Hezbollah, and takes its rightful place in the international community. The EU should redouble its efforts to expedite that process in every way possible.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (NL) Mr President, the media presented me with an awkward proposition last week: Israel, they say, is going to attack its arch-enemy Iran sooner or later. While this debate was going on in Europe, the media in Iran was also intensively discussing the military option against Tehran's controversial nuclear project. All Zionist lies and exaggerations, was the conservative newspaper Kayhan's verdict on the purported nuclear threat. Meanwhile, there is no doubt that the Islamic Republic's nuclear programme represents a serious security threat – for Israel, first and foremost, but for the wider region, too. I still hope, therefore, that the international community will no longer just recognise this, but will actually take action in this regard. In my view, all options must be on the table in this connection. An effective sanctions regime, which the German Chancellor, Mrs Merkel, was still calling for yesterday, will mean, at all events, that the Jewish state will absolutely not have to take unilateral action.

That brings me to a crucial question for the Council, for you, High Representative. Is there, in fact, a European basis for the rigorous tightening-up of the sanctions against the Iranian regime? Close commercial links between a number of prominent EU Member States – I need not name any names as you, too, must be aware of who they are – and the Islamic Republic could always pose major obstacles to seriously tackling the nuclear issue. Over recent weeks, the newspaper *The Wall Street Journal* has written a number of cutting opinion pieces about this that practically constituted charge sheets against Europe. In brief, Baroness Ashton, is there a basis for tightening up effective sanctions against the Islamic Republic of Iran? I await your answer.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, the most recent events, in particular, have made clear that the handling of civil liberties in Iran has clear failings, from the European point of view. The death sentence handed down to the recently sentenced protesters is a sign of how differently fundamental rights and their observance are handled in that country. It is also important to stress, however, that the EU's external policy must not be lopsided, as we often gladly turn a blind eye to such things in the case of economically and geostrategically important partners – such as China or, perhaps, Saudi Arabia – despite the fact that serious deviations from our European ideas of democracy and the rule of law take place in these countries, too.

As a member of the Iran delegation, it is a particular concern of mine that the delayed trip to Iran be reinstated as soon as possible in order to improve bilateral communications with the EU and, in so doing, possibly also make a contribution, through the dialogue, to defusing the dramatic situation in Iran.

Lena Kolarska-Bobińska (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, Baroness Ashton, Iran's internal situation is worsening dramatically from day to day and from week to week. Human rights are being brutally violated before our eyes, and we are seeing terror of a kind we have not had to deal with for decades. An unprecedented wave of state repression is trying to silence those who are fighting for democratic reforms in Iran. In the fight against its citizens, the government is also using the specially trained, armed young people of the Basij militia.

The European Parliament must condemn the government's excessive use of force and increasing breaches of human rights. It is also unacceptable to use the death penalty against the opposition, including under the pretext of the crime of 'moharebeh', offending God. Therefore, the European Union needs a new approach to the situation in Iran. The European Union's High Representative, Catherine Ashton, should send a strong and clear message to the citizens of Iran, confirming our desire to defend human rights.

The question of a nuclear weapon is extremely important. However, we should not stop defending fundamental values simply to gain a tactical advantage in negotiations. In talks with Iran, we must not marginalise the rule of law, freedom of speech or the right to information. These values must not be treated as of less significance.

I come from Poland where, over 20 years ago, in 1989, tyranny gave place to democracy. This came about thanks to the non-violent action of the opposition Solidarity movement and peaceful dialogue between the government and the people. I do not now see a better way forward for the residents of Iran.

Ana Gomes (S&D). – (PT) The Iranian question is one of the most important issues in modern international politics. Everything must be done to prevent the Iranian regime, which has been so detrimental to peace and security in the Middle East, from gaining access to nuclear weapons.

However, the role of the European Union in its relations with Iran must not be wasted on the nuclear question. Since the rigged elections in June, we have witnessed a popular movement against the repressive, obscurantist and anti-democratic nature of the Iranian regime.

Europe must be consistent in promoting the universal value of human rights, for which many people are risking their lives on the streets of Tehran. Without questioning the people's sovereign right to decide their own destiny, it is imperative that the European Union takes steps to encourage those who are fighting for liberty and democracy in Iran. There is nothing more effective than free and alternative channels of information for combating censorship, which is the preserve of all oppressive regimes.

In view of this, we expect the Farsi television channel, awarded to Euronews by the European Commission, to be up and running very soon.

We also expect that Baroness Ashton, as the new High Representative, will push ahead with creative initiatives that will contribute to greater political transparency in Iran, and taking on board the recommendations made by all those who have been struggling for a free Iran, including exiled Iranians.

Moreover, this concern with the political future of Iran should guide any new sanctions that are decided upon within the context of the nuclear question. As the Iranian intellectual, Akbar Ganji, explained here in Parliament, it is imperative that we avoid economic sanctions that weaken the people, and especially the Iranian middle class, which makes up the rank and file of the opposition.

Nothing can do more for security in the Middle East, Europe and the world than an Iranian democracy that has been built by Iranians. The European Union must make this one of its objectives.

Frédérique Ries (ALDE). – (FR) Mr President, Iran is undoubtedly going through the most serious crisis in its history since 1979 because of this regime, which is impervious to any kind of change and which has increased the number of targeted assassinations of opponents, of raids and of imprisonments of peaceful demonstrators, as well as journalists, since the electoral farce of 12 June 2009.

At the start of the debate, Mrs Ashton mentioned the NGO reports, disastrous reports in this regard, without even talking about the parody of justice meted out to the French woman, Clotilde Reiss, and to the Baha'i minority – seven of whom have been on trial in Tehran since last Monday. They risk life imprisonment or worse, simply because their religion is different from that of the ruling power.

The report is harsh, the presidential elections have changed nothing, or rather they have: they have radicalised the Iranian regime even more, if that were possible; there is also radicalisation with regard to the outside world, with the volte-face of the Iranian authorities on the draft nuclear agreement negotiated in October 2009 in Vienna.

When are we going to consider mentioning – I say mentioning here – intelligent and targeted sanctions, such as those referred to by Mrs Lochbihler; sanctions, therefore, against this regime, which is openly anti-Western and anti-Semitic? I know that this is a narrow window of opportunity, Mrs Ashton, but do you not think that we must do more and do better here, that we must help Iran's young people, who are proclaiming their outrage on the Internet, that we must denounce the recurring calls for the destruction of the State of Israel and, above all, that we must support this civil society and the opposition, this democratic movement which is defying this vote-robbing president and his militias?

We must avoid an escalation, I am very conscious of this, but we must also avoid evasion and not repeat the error that we made in Afghanistan where Europe was unable to protect Commander Massoud. It is our duty to support the leaders of the Iranian opposition so that they avoid a similar fate.

Fiorello Provera (EFD). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the situation inside Iran is continuing to deteriorate.

At least eight people have been killed recently, the regime has stepped up arrests of women – female journalists, trade unionists and intellectuals – 30 mothers who were demanding news of their disappeared children have been arrested, and the grave of the young martyr for freedom, Neda Agha-Soltan, has been repeatedly

desecrated by firearms bullets. It is clear that the regime intends to increase repression and establish a climate of terror.

In addition to this domestic situation, Iran demonstrates a lack of international cooperation, refusing the International Atomic Energy Agency access to Iranian sites for uranium enrichment. This clearly shows the real intentions of the Iranian atomic programme; if they were solely peaceful, there would be no need to hide them.

Europe should therefore forcefully voice its concerns because a military, nuclear power could jeopardise the continent's security and have significant political consequences for all the countries in the region.

Martin Ehrenhauser (NI). – (DE) Mr President, even if the conflict in Iran often appears to be a power struggle between the old and the new establishment, it is still very clear to see that this very closed social system has very clear cracks. The situation in Iran is certainly proof of the significance of democracy, namely the ability of every single citizen to give expression to his or her political will.

Those with political responsibility in Iran are currently responding to this legitimate will of society with repression by the State extending as far as the death penalty. These assaults on the citizens must be stopped immediately, as State repression will certainly not bring an end to this will of society. On the contrary, Iran's long history shows us this.

On the subject of the planned trip of the European Parliament's delegation to Tehran that was cancelled by the Iranian Government at short notice, I would just like to say that, at this point in time, this trip was really important in order, above all, to lead to talks and dialogues with everyone, including, and in particular, with the local citizens and civil society.

Philippe Juvin (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, the Iranians stated that they were ready for a gradual exchange of low-enriched uranium for fuel. This kind of production has been rejected by the Group of Six, even though it was not actually all that different from the proposal that this same group had drawn up shortly beforehand.

I do not at all underestimate the Iranians' negotiating qualities, in particular, with regard to the definition of the gradual nature of the exchange they were proposing, but given the stakes, Mrs Ashton, do you not think that this refusal by the Group of Six could perhaps have been the subject of a precise European Union common position? Why did we not seize this opportunity?

I would like you to voice your thoughts on this matter to us. I do admit to being very puzzled by Europe's discretion in this debate. We have legitimacy, Europe has legitimacy. Let us use it to help reach an agreement.

María Muñoz De Urquiza (S&D). – (ES) My first speech in Parliament, in June last year, was on the subject of Iran, in the wake of the latest wave of executions. At that time, I called for the European Union to bring all the instruments at its disposal to bear in order to protect human rights.

Now we find that the repression is still continuing against the Baha'i religious minority, against homosexuals – and I particularly call for the release of imprisoned homosexuals, who are sentenced to death in some cases – against the opposition – with more than 2 500 of the opposition imprisoned – against press freedom – only this Monday we saw the newspaper *Farhang-e-Ashti* closed down for publishing a statement by Mr Mousavi, the opposition leader – and against the Kurdish minority.

Iran remains a great challenge on the European agenda, and not merely because of the nuclear threat: the international community is already taking action against this. The challenge is that Iran possesses a great ability to influence practically all the areas where efforts are being made to find a peaceful and diplomatic solution in the Near East, and also in Iraq and in Afghanistan.

Through its repressive actions, Iran is destroying any opportunity of normalising its foreign relations, so that it can be accepted by the community of nations and play a constructive role in international relations.

That is the situation we socialists desire, but it can only be achieved if Iran meets its international commitments, beginning with the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. According to the terms of this covenant, Iran must recognise political parties, trade unions, non-governmental organisations, the right to association, freedom of expression, etc.

The support and solidarity of the European Union, which I now call for on behalf of those who demand more rights and for those repressed by the regime, must not be mistaken for any type of Western interference.

Instead, it represents a wish for Iran to meet the minimum requirements necessary to enable it to negotiate with the rest of the world.

Marco Scurria (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in European Union publications and on EU websites, we often say that human rights are the heart of the process of European integration and the key element of its external relations.

The countries that have entered into political or trade agreements with the European Union are bound to respect these rights. Baroness Ashton, we ought to ask ourselves whether these requirements still exist in our relations with Iran and whether it really makes sense for us to send a delegation to Tehran without agreeing a programme with the Iranian Government which both sides endorse, one which will allow us to listen to the arguments and voices of the opposition, too.

With regard to what we can do, we must, however, be careful even about talking of sanctions, because history shows that economic and trade sanctions have often strengthened regimes instead of weakening them, and that they have, in fact, weakened the people and, above all, the poorest of them. When we listened to certain people as a delegation, and heard testimony regarding the rights of women and minorities in Iran, they told us that perhaps it would be better to impose symbolic sanctions, such as cultural sanctions.

In recent days, many representatives and intellectuals throughout Europe have been writing to call for UNESCO not to hold World Philosophy Day in Tehran. I think that this could be a commitment taken on by this Parliament too, remembering that Neda Agha-Soltan was a student with a degree in philosophy, and that this symbol could unite the European Parliament as it calls upon UNESCO to take this action.

Sergio Gaetano Cofferati (S&D). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, over recent weeks, we have seen the Iranian Government, or the Iranian regime, commit serious violations of human rights and the most basic democratic freedoms.

So, for this Parliament and for Europe, the issue is no longer simply that of relations with a country which is thinking about a nuclear policy outside the accepted rules and the specific control elements which, as a rule, are laid down by the international community for these matters. There is something new, or something old is becoming more acute, relating to an even more worrying issue: human rights.

I am convinced that Iran could potentially have a much more important role in the region in which it is located. However, this fresh wave of infringements of rights must, I believe, constitute a priority for us and for the High Representative. The clamp-down by the government has not subdued the voices of democratic dissent. Now it is appropriate for the international community to play an active role and to provide assistance to those who oppose the regime and believe that their fundamental rights must be respected.

We should therefore have a permanent presence there. The European Parliament's delegation can, by identifying very precise objectives, go to Iran to show its solidarity with the Iranian democrats, and certainly not to back, even involuntarily, the clamp-down by the Iranian Government. I think that we should discuss all this further and achieve our aim.

Monica Luisa Macovei (PPE). – I have decided to use most of my time for this intervention to highlight the names of people who, reportedly, are in detention in Iran, some convicted to death, for criticising the political regime or for defending civil rights.

Ali Mehrnia, Parviz Varmazyari, Majid Rezaei, Alireza Nabavi, Ali Massoumi and Shirin Alavi Holi are reportedly being detained and subject to the death penalty for 'Mohareb', which means enmity against God.

Thirty-three women belonging to the Mourning Mothers of Iran, whose children have been killed, disappeared or detained in post-election violence, are being harassed.

Other women activists and their families are detained: Atefeh Nabavi, Shabnam Madadzadeh, Mahsa Naderi, Fatemeh Ziaee Azad and Nazila Dashti.

Eight activists from the Committee of Human Rights Reporters are detained: Saeed Kalanaki, Saeed Jalalifar, Shiva Nazar-Ahari, Kouhyar Goudarzi, Saeed Haeri, Parisa Kakayi and Mehrdad Rahimi. Four others went into hiding after being summoned to the Ministry of Intelligence: Hesam Misaghi, Saeed Habibi, Navid Khanjani and Sepeher Atefi.

Others from the Liberal Student and Alumni Association are detained: Mehrdad Bozorg, Ehsan Dolatshah and Sina Shokohi.

What these people have in common is to have reported on, or voiced, their concerns about the situation in Iran.

What is the Commission or the Council going to do for the release of those imprisoned for political purposes? What funding does the Commission provide to human rights NGOs working in Iran?

George Sabin Cutaş (S&D). – (RO) I personally believe that there is great potential for close economic, cultural and political ties between Iran and the European Union. However, this potential remains untapped. Relations between Iran and the European Union encounter major difficulties when sensitive subjects are touched on, such as Iran's nuclear programme or human rights.

I think that the Iranian side needs to respond to the desire for dialogue expressed by the European Union. Its refusal to engage in dialogue can only limit the transfer of ideas and knowledge on subjects of mutual interest. I must remind you that the European Union is Iran's number one trade partner and, given that Iran's objective is to join the World Trade Organisation, a closer commercial partnership with the European Union would help Iran in its attempt to comply with the organisation's standards.

However, as long as the Iranians display a lack of openness towards cooperation, constructive dialogue between Iran and the European Union will not be possible.

Salvatore Tatarella (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, Baroness Ashton, ladies and gentlemen, you, Baroness, have drawn a dramatic picture of the situation in this great country which has a great history, a great culture, and a great civilisation.

There is the suppression of dissent and of the opposition, there are very serious restrictions on civil rights, there are infringements of freedoms, there is a worrying nuclear programme and there is a threat relating to Israel and peace.

Unfortunately, I have not understood which initiatives Europe intends to implement in order to put an end to this situation, to defend peace, freedom and civil rights. I hope that in the debate's conclusions, you can list some facts and some initiatives, some positions to be taken, and perhaps also reply to the suggestion made by Mr Scurria.

Mr President, as for Parliament, I am part of a delegation which struggled to obtain permission from the Iranian Government to go to Iran, which, when it had to cancel the trip as a protest, was not able to do so, and which also suffered the shame of being forbidden by Iran from visiting.

I am in favour of dialogue with Iran, but the Italian Parliament and the delegation must forcefully set out our position regarding the defence of freedom and the rights which are under threat.

Sari Essayah (PPE). – (FI) Mr President, Commissioner, Iran's current administration blatantly violates human rights and tramples on the fundamental rights of its citizens. The most recent evidence of this is the slaying of eight people in connection with the Ashura event and the fact that five members of the opposition are currently awaiting the death sentence.

Iran's current regime is the biggest threat to world peace. It is quite incomprehensible that the international community should be watching from a distance while the Iranian Government has been allowed calmly to develop a military nuclear programme and to disregard the views of the International Atomic Energy Agency. The country's current leadership is allowed publicly to threaten to destroy another Member State of the United Nations, Israel. It also supports the Hezbollah terrorist group, which is active in Lebanon and Syria.

In a way, these events recall moments from 60 years ago. We do not need to think about what we might have done differently to be able to prevent the hatred. Today, however, if we take effective action, we can prevent the same thing from happening.

We have to start to impose economic sanctions against the Iranian administration as soon as possible. The situation being as it is, it would be better if the EU's Iran delegation were prevented from going, as the trip would only be exploited by the Mullahs for the purposes of propaganda. Let us remember: the problem in this case is not so much that there is so much bad – it is more the case that the good keep silent.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, the end of last year saw the biggest opposition protests in Iran since the demonstrations which followed the presidential election in June, when the serving president was announced victor. In clashes with security forces, eight people died, hundreds were injured and hundreds were detained. Students supporting the opposition were attacked on the university campus, which brought

a reaction from 88 of the university's professors in the form of an appeal to Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to stop using force against the demonstrators.

The situation in Iran is causing rising alarm, and this is also true at international level. Imposition of sanctions against the government in Tehran is being considered by the Germans, whose Chancellor, Mrs Merkel, has said that Iran has not replied to the West's proposal of cooperation on ending its nuclear programme. Israel's Prime Minister has also appealed for the introduction of severe international sanctions against Iran. In his opinion, a regime which tyrannises its own people may soon become a threat to the entire world.

While respecting the sovereignty of Iran, we should strongly stress the responsibility resting on the country's authorities to respect human, political and citizens' rights, and we should also stress the fact that in exercising its right to develop its own nuclear programme, Iran must not, at the same time, pose a threat to international security. The patience which the international community has shown in conducting dialogue with Tehran is now coming to an end. The world must not be held hostage by the aggressive and provocative policy of the current political leadership in Iran. The Spanish Presidency and the head of diplomacy, Mrs Ashton, should initiate talks on this matter with Russia, to include Moscow in a common policy of pressure on Iran.

Arnaud Danjean (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, Mrs Ashton, the events on Ashura Day and the bloody repression of the recent demonstrations in Iran have shown that it was a total mistake to make a very artificial distinction between the hardening of the regime internally and the inflexible policy that it pursues externally, in particular, on the Iranian nuclear issue.

Consequently, the prospect of additional sanctions seems inevitable, or even desirable. I would like to know your point of view on the timetable and the nature of possible sanctions precisely so that we can make a clear link between the internal events in Iran and the nuclear issue.

Potito Salatto (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I do not want to carry on listing the reasons for our disagreement with the Iranian Government.

Since it has not been referred to here, I will only emphasise one of the most serious violations of civil rights, which relates to young people. The Iranian Government, having signed the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, nonetheless continues to impose capital punishment on minors.

After this debate, I would like, firstly, Baroness Ashton, to take on the task of setting out a common approach for Europe as a whole and the European Parliament as a whole on events in Iran and, secondly, the inter-parliamentary delegation for relations with Iran to note that it must change its line.

I, together with my friends Mr Scurria and Mr Tatarella, protested to the delegation: in an official statement, it stated that it wanted to visit Iran in any case, even though it had made a peremptory request to have the opportunity to meet and talk to the opposition. From now on, I would like the delegation to start singing from a new hymn sheet and to sustain relations of assistance, support and debate with the exiled representatives of the opposition, not least Mrs Myriam Rajavi, who typifies this situation. This is what the European Union should be doing, rather than imposing sanctions.

Tunne Kelam (PPE). – Mr President, I have to say to Mrs Ashton that our hopes of convincing the Iranian regime of our concerns will, I am afraid, be in vain.

In fact, we are dealing with a dictatorship of yesterday and what is needed now is to concentrate on the opportunity for change. The regime is coming apart at the seams, and the Iranian people have courageously shown, since last June, that they do not trust and do not support this deceitful and aggressive dictatorship. Why should we continue to do so?

We need seriously to support civil society and the democratic opposition, including the Council of National Resistance, which is the only organisation that has come out with a very clear democratic programme for a nuclear-free Iran.

Alexander Alvaro (ALDE). – (DE) Mr President, the German newspaper, *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, reported today that yesterday, Monday, the office of public prosecution in Tehran demanded the death penalty for five opposition figures. According to Amnesty International, these five opposition figures are 17-year old Ali Mehrnia, 54-year old Parviz Varmazyari, plus Majid Rezaei, Alireza Mabavi and Ali Massoumi. If a regime like the one in Tehran, which is not only anachronistic but also cracks down on its own population with the death penalty, stonings and other methods, and we, the European Union, do not take the necessary steps, we make ourselves culpable, above all, towards those who would build a reasonable society there, towards

the children who grow up under conditions that are anything but those which we – in agreement with my fellow Member, who is, unfortunately, no longer present – would wish for a future society. I would like to hear firm and clear words from the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy here, and I would like to see us not only call for sanctions against Iran but also to implement such sanctions.

Ulrike Lunacek (Verts/ALE). – Mr President, I think it is clear to all of us here that the Iranian regime is a dictatorial and criminal regime. The question is: how to deal with it?

I would like to state very clearly my support for the delegation that would have gone to Iran from this Parliament. The delegation would have met, for one whole day, members of the opposition and dissidents. It would have strengthened them. They wanted that. So I really feel very sorry that this delegation visit could not take place.

I have one very concrete question to you, Baroness Ashton. Several Members here have talked about sanctions. From the experience I have as a member of the national parliament and talking with many people for a long time, I would really be in favour of smart sanctions – targeted, for example, at specific members of the Revolutionary Guard, putting them on a veto list for visits, or at other specific persons.

I am very much against imposing sanctions on the whole country as that would probably strengthen the government, because then poverty would increase – they would not have access, for example, to petrol – and that would help to support the regime instead of weakening it.

Struan Stevenson (ECR). – Mr President, I want to agree with Tunne Kelam and Mr Alvaro. The day of dialogue and engagement with Iran has long since passed.

People are dying in the streets almost every day in protests against this fascist regime. Only yesterday, as you have heard, a kangaroo court in Tehran called for the death penalty against five protesters arrested during the Ashura riots on 27 December.

Enough is enough. No more talk; no more appeasement. We need tough sanctions. That is the only way that we will show the ordinary people of Iran that we back their protests.

Niki Tzavela (EFD). – (EL) Baroness Ashton, I was delighted to observe your sober stance, informed by respect for a country with the history and pride of Iran. Iran is a special case and I am delighted that you are applying the diplomatic approach known as ‘smart power’, namely sanctions on the one hand and dialogue on the other. I would urge you to continue with the dialogue.

Usually, countries which condemn such countries are very far-removed from the culture and mentality of the countries of Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan. I would suggest that you expand the group which you have set up in order to continue with open dialogue with Iran by adding countries that traditionally have good relations with Iran, such as my country, Greece, especially now with its present socialist government. The region will not be able to withstand another war. I convey here the anxiety, not only of Israel, but also of the Emirates, about Iran’s nuclear programme. Continue with the dialogue and I think that we shall get somewhere.

Krisztina Morvai (NI). – (HU) Three short questions. First, the leading Iranian nuclear scientist was recently murdered in a brutal terrorist attack. What is the European Union’s view about this case? Curiously, there was no mention of it today. I deplore that fact very much. Secondly, just why is the Iranian nuclear potential a greater problem, more of a danger to peace than, let us say, Israel’s? Why is the EU not dealing with that too? Thirdly, in 2006, the socialist liberal government of Hungary of the time ordered shots to be fired into crowds of peaceful demonstrators. 14 people suffered eye injuries, among others. Many of them were blinded. Despite our repeated requests, the EU refused then, and refuses still, to deal with this event. What is the difference? Similarly, they do not deal with the hundreds of political prisoners that have spent time in jail in Hungary. Even today, there are dozens of political prisoners in jail in Hungary. Thank you very much, and I look forward to the answer.

Mariya Nedelcheva (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, Mrs Ashton, the death and disappearance of the body of Seyed Ali Mousavi, the nephew of the leader of the Iranian opposition, is one of many tragic examples that show the current malaise of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The legitimacy of the Iranian regime following the very dubious elections last June is questionable to say the least. Thus, our task is to support Iranian civil society as far as possible in its resistance movement. Mrs Ashton, you can be sure of the full support that our Parliament will give you in order to reject this type of behaviour.

I want to stress that by continuing to deny the role of the opposition, the Iranian regime will be unable to convince us of its will to work for the good of the Iranian people. The opposition's right to exist and its right to free competition among parties, allowing the plurality of opinions in Iranian society to be represented, are positive signs that we have long been waiting for. However, we are far from seeing that in Iran.

Certainly, at present, many believe that it is entirely up to the Iranian regime to heed the demonstrators' calls and the wishes of the international community in order to carry out a democratic transition. Europe must be the main witness to what is the rule of law.

Piotr Borys (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, Mrs Ashton, Iran is a key country, affecting the stabilisation of peace worldwide and in part of the Middle East. Of course, it is beyond dispute that we must defend human rights and resolutely express our concern about the violations of the rights of the opposition which have been going on for several months. However, I want to say that the European Union should, above all, actively implement an antinuclear programme, because Iran with a nuclear weapon would be a huge threat to a whole part of the Middle East.

In addition, we know that the instigation of revolution in Yemen and support for Hamas in the Gaza Strip and for al-Qaeda in Afghanistan are probably also the inspiration behind part of Iranian policy. In relation to this, what is needed here more than anything is a certain balance, and I think Saudi Arabia should also have an important role to play. I think we should see very active dialogue and engagement in this matter on the part of Mrs Ashton.

Paul Rübzig (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, in this context, as always, I would like to point out that we here in Europe actually only recognise individual liability and reject blanket suspicion on principle. I am sure that, as a Briton, Baroness Ashton might well have great sympathy for the idea of targeting the guilty parties in situations like this with a blockade, but not an entire people, who have found themselves in this situation more or less innocently. We should seek talks. My question is as follows. Do you see possible contacts for dialogue in Iran with whom you could make contact in order to hold a serious and objective discussion in proper political form?

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – I hold no brief for the regime of the Ayatollahs in Iran or for its anti-democratic stances. But I would say two things: one is that there is repression of non-violent freedom of speech even in Europe and even among EU members. Furthermore, the activities in Iran and the events in Iran are being used quite cynically by the United States and its allies to foment a war movement against Iran, and I think that response would be entirely disproportionate.

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission. – Mr President, I think this has been an extremely important and timely debate, first of all, because we have reiterated the commitment that we have in the European Union to the importance of the values of human rights.

And indeed, in our dialogue with Iran, we ask nothing more than that they live up to the international agreements which they have willingly and voluntarily signed, and that is a fundamental part of the way in which we have to approach these questions, and Members have, both by naming individuals and by describing events in Iran, highlighted the issues which are of the greatest concern to us.

Members, too, have made the point that in the end, as you said, Mr Gualtieri, the dialogue must be inevitable. It is very important that we continue to offer the approach that says 'meaningful dialogue'. But I do so recognising that my predecessor, Javier Solana, spent six years in dialogue, six years offering to continue that debate; so, dialogue, but not as an excuse for inaction on behalf of Iran, but rather as a means of making sure that we develop the strength of that relationship and that we achieve what we believe to be important.

And as part of that, the talks on World Trade Organisation membership, which have been going nowhere for a long time, could be a way in which we could find the kind of debate and discussion and support to enable the regime to move forward.

Many Members have talked about the importance of sanctions, but I think particularly – intelligent, smart sanctions: the critical importance to all of us of ensuring, as we begin to think about what next, and, if we do, and as we do, consider the possibility of sanctions, that we do so recognising that they must be aimed and targeted specifically to achieve what we wish and that no one in this House wishes to see ordinary people in Iran suffer as a consequence of that.

That makes that debate very important, but also requires us to invest energy and time within it. The E3+3 senior officials met in New York on Saturday and we were able to have the dialogue, including, of course, with Russia, on that issue.

There is no doubt, as I have said, that, though we wish to take forward the meaningful relationship with Iran through dialogue, ultimately, if Iran rejects this, then, under the dual-track policy that we have, the question of sanctions arises and, indeed, as a consequence of that meeting, consideration of the appropriate further measures has already begun.

This, too, will be an item for discussion at the Foreign Affairs Council on Monday, and that is partly why I was so keen to hear honourable Members' views as I prepare for those discussions too.

In terms of the delegation going to the country, Mrs Lochbihler, you are indeed the chair of the delegation. It is very important that it has not yet officially been cancelled. I think it would be important to consider whether we should pursue that. I hope that meeting can take place soon, again in the spirit of trying to keep the dialogue open.

We do, as a result specifically of the action of this Parliament, have Euronews beginning its broadcasts in Farsi in the middle of 2010. That is important, too, in terms of communication and looking at how we use communication and technology effectively.

It is difficult to think about blocking access if, at the same time, we block the access to the information that people wish to get, and that, I think, is something we have to be mindful of.

And in terms of looking at what we do for the future, honourable Members have made it clear what they wish us to consider. As I have said, the E3+3 is already considering these options. We have the Foreign Affairs Council. I have indicated we want to look at smart, intelligent sanctions as we consider this dual track. I have made it clear, and I continue to make it clear, that I am open and ready to have the dialogue – and I described in my opening remarks the potential of this great country – but we do so in the certain knowledge that we cannot continue to use dialogue as a way of preventing action.

I have to end by saying I was very struck by the phrase that President Obama used in his Nobel Prize reception speech when he said that, when we look at the value of continuing with engagement, 'engagement with repressive regimes lacks the satisfying purity of indignation. But [...] no repressive regime can move down a new path unless it has the choice of an open door'.

The door is open for that meaningful dialogue in order to move forward but, in saying that, I am absolutely committed to recognising the twin track that my predecessors laid out and to pursuing that as necessary.

President. – Dear colleagues, these discussions last from 15.00 to 20.00, which is five hours. I suggest that we take a five-minute break in order for the High Representative and everybody else who has been in the Chamber, and will continue in the Chamber, to catch their breath, and that we resume at 17.35: five minutes from now.

Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR). – Mr President, before we break, I would just like to give a point of information. Baroness Ashton, you were talking about the Iran delegation. The delegation was due to go to Iran from 8-10 January, but that delegation visit was cancelled. In fact, it was cancelled by the Iranian authorities.

Many of us pressed for the delegation visit to be cancelled earlier than that – though, in fact, the chair of the delegation took no notice of us – in the light of the testing of long-range missiles, the shooting of demonstrators and all the other disturbances that took place over the Christmas period. As a point of information, therefore, that delegation visit has been cancelled, and that action should actually have been taken earlier in Parliament to cancel it.

President. – I was unaware that there was a 'point of information' procedure. Mr Van Orden. I allowed you to go on, but in all fairness to everyone else, this was not a point of order.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place during the February I part-session in Strasbourg.

(The sitting was suspended at 17.30 and resumed at 17.35)

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ANGELILLI*Vice-President***6. Situation in Yemen (debate)**

President. – The sitting is resumed.

The next item is the statement by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission on the situation in Yemen.

Catherine Ashton, *High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission.* – Madam President, we know the reason why Yemen is on our agenda today. We traced the Detroit bomber's trail from the United States to Europe, to Africa and Yemen. Thus, we were reminded, once again, that our own security is at risk if we do not help countries like Yemen, who are struggling to meet multiple challenges at the same time.

Terrorism is the immediate focus but is only one of an interlinked set of challenges. There is instability in the north, fuelled by armed conflict with the Houthi rebels. There is conflict over land and water rights and longstanding tensions with the southern region, which has felt marginalised since unification in 1991. The government has so far been able to maintain overall stability but, as oil revenues have dwindled, the state is struggling to maintain control over parts of the national territory.

To this we can add piracy in the Gulf of Aden, smuggling, migration and people-trafficking from the Horn of Africa and, now, a rise in jihadist terrorism. Yemen has substantial population growth and an increasingly discontented young population. An inclusive internal political consensus on the way forward remains elusive.

Amidst all this, one thing is clear: none of us can afford a zone of near-lawlessness stretching from the Horn of Africa to Afghanistan. We would pay the price ourselves.

Over the last 18 months, the European Union has highlighted Yemen as a priority case in its counter-terrorism strategy and its comprehensive approach to state-building and development. The Council adopted extensive conclusions on Yemen in October. We are now seeking to rally all our key players around the strategy. The UK initiative to organise a high-level meeting with and on Yemen next week could, therefore, not be more timely.

A key focus of the meeting will be security. A significant package is now being prepared to help boost government efforts: training and equipment for law enforcement, a better legal framework and criminal justice system, work on anti-radicalisation and conflict prevention. This will come on top of EUR 11 million allocated, in the Commission's development programme, to police training and juvenile justice in the last two years.

The establishment of al-Qaeda in Yemen is a symptom of deeper problems. The linkage between economic, political, social and security challenges are crucial. This is why we need a comprehensive approach. It is also vital that the Yemeni state boosts its capacity to meet the needs of people throughout the country. The EU will propose to increase by one third its development funds foreseen for the period 2011-13. Humanitarian aid from ECHO will continue in 2010. We continuously raise with the government the problems of access to the many displaced people.

No amount of aid, however, can substitute for commitment and action by the government itself. President Saleh's stated commitment to national dialogue amongst all relevant actors has the potential to build a new national consensus, if all actors are included and their interests are taken into account. The international community should lend sustained support to this dialogue. It is the only sustainable way forward.

Last, but certainly not least, key regional players need to be engaged in the common effort to work with Yemen – chief amongst these is Saudi Arabia. The London meeting offers an invaluable chance to include the Saudis, the United States and others in a meaningful international dialogue on, and with, Yemen. I look forward to our debates.

José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (ES) After the formidable stunt that the Taliban pulled off yesterday in Afghanistan, where, lest we forget, we have 100 000 troops fighting for freedom, and the failed terrorist attack in Detroit this Christmas, I believe, Baroness Ashton, that it is legitimate

to wonder whether terrorism is stronger now than when freedom was attacked by the barbarous toppling of the twin towers in New York.

We have just had a debate on Iran, we can see what is going on in Afghanistan, in Pakistan, in the Middle East, in Somalia and even events in the heart of our own continent with the attacks in Madrid and London. The question we must ask ourselves – for we must all try to draw conclusions from these events – is whether we are doing well.

It is true that there is a new factor, Madam President, which is that now we have armies with no apparent enemies and enemies who do not have armies. Yet President Obama quickly went into action after the failed attack in Detroit and General Petraeus made his third visit to Yemen within a very short space of time. We can see that the United States has mobilised a significant economic aid package and has developed a policy that is producing results.

You have just spoken to us, Baroness Ashton, of the concrete measures that the European Union is thinking of implementing and you have told us about sums in addition to the EUR 11 million. The amount spent by the United States increased from USD 67 million in 2009 to USD 167 million in 2010.

For this reason, Baroness Ashton, my question is this: do you believe that, when we are faced with terrorism, notions of foreign policy, security, defence, development cooperation and aid, trade – and I would even include culture or civilisation – all merge together and we have to realise that, when faced with dangers and threats that affect us all equally, the response should also be shared by us all equally?

You have talked about coordination with the United States. Could you tell us the terms on which this cooperation, which is so important and so necessary, is taking place?

David-Maria Sassoli, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (IT) Madam President, High Representative, ladies and gentlemen, our group is very worried by the situation in Yemen because there is a global threat there: the failed attempt to blow up a US aircraft, the threats directed towards foreign embassies and the intensification of attacks by al-Qaeda, the most recent being in Afghanistan, must be taken very seriously.

Unfortunately, Yemen's domestic situation does not help, and we should bear in mind the fact that it is one of the poorest countries in the world, with serious water shortages, high unemployment and an economy heavily dependent on revenue from oil and gas, which it is estimated will be exhausted within the next 10 years.

I therefore believe action by the European Union is vital, in the shape of close collaboration between the European Commission, on humanitarian aid and development aspects, and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs, in relation to common security, collaboration with police forces and border control.

I must also mention our concern over the clamp-down on representatives of the political opposition in that country, journalists and human rights defenders, which the humanitarian organisations operating in Yemen have been speaking about for a long time. Baroness Ashton, I therefore consider it a priority to ensure that humanitarian organisations can enter Yemeni territory and work in complete security.

I also hope for an effort by the European Union to ensure that Yemen abides by the commitments made in 2006 at the international donors' conference, namely to step up the process of political and economic reforms, to increase democracy and people's living standards.

Since the September 11 attack, we have realised that making at-risk areas secure depends on how much we are prepared to gamble on better living conditions. Baroness Ashton, democracy starts from here, from the ability to close the gaps between the rich countries and the poorest countries.

Holger Krahmer, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, it seems to me to be a little symptomatic for the EU in general, but also for Parliament in particular, that we should have knee-jerk debates about situations in certain countries that are in no way new. Unfortunately, it is very often the case that overnight events lead to us here in Parliament spouting out waves of political demands that I sometimes find somewhat dubious. I think that it does not give a good impression of us if a failed bomb attack on an aeroplane only leads us to a general debate on Yemen. We should be clear that it would be fitting to consider a strategy for how to deal with this situation.

I also think that the situation in Yemen requires a precise analysis, specifically with regard to the fact that this is a failed state in which the government does not have control of large parts of the country. We should

analyse for ourselves what risks this involves for Europe. The risks appear to be that terrorists are trained there and the risks also appear to relate to the Yemeni coast, where piracy is clearly taking place. We – and perhaps Baroness Ashton, also – must consider what we can do to counter these risks. As I see it, the main question might well be: how can we bolster the Yemeni Government so that it can regain control of the country and thus contain these risks? All the other debates about the long-term building-up of the country also need to be held, of course, but I do not think that there is really any point in us putting forward a catalogue of demands clean across all political areas – from the freedom of the media to women's rights – here in Parliament at this point, or that we will be taken seriously if we do so. Doing so will not achieve our goal in Yemen, so instead, we should concentrate on what tangible assistance we can provide in the current situation in order to solve an urgent problem.

Franziska Katharina Brantner, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – I will continue a bit on what the previous speaker said. Yemen is certainly not a new crisis: it has been deteriorating for decades, and the worsening political situation was clearly stated in the Commission's mid-term review.

I think we really need to focus on the political context: the longstanding conflict in the north between the government and the Houthis, the unrest in the south, you mentioned these – and now the northern conflict is spreading in the region and concerning Saudi Arabia and Iran.

So the question is: what, precisely, to do. I have heard calls just now for the stability instrument for a CSDP mission to pour money into training more people, but I think that this is not sufficient as an approach – at least it is not a crisis response, unless we accept the concept of permanent crisis.

I think we should push for greater involvement by the Gulf Cooperation Council in Yemen, not just Saudi Arabia. We need this organisation to bring together the various Yemeni parties, the government, the opposition, southern secessionists, Houthis and regional actors in some kind of peace-like process, and I think that should be supported and financed by the Stability Instrument for example; that is what I think the stability instrument should be for.

If we have another CSDP mission and another round of Stability Instrument training without a political process leading somewhere, I do not think it will help us. I really urge you to use the Stability Instrument more as an early-warning political instrument to move on a political process, and to support and finance that. I think that that would be, from my perspective, something worthwhile.

I would like to add another point: gender equality has been mentioned, and you raised that, and I think we really should invest heavily in that. Population growth is one of the main concerns in those countries, and, as we all know, we will not solve that issue until we have family planning, and that means women's rights.

I know that you will not push for major women's rights, but I think gender equality and especially family planning is crucial if we are now considering what to do in order to help Yemeni society.

Adam Bielan, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) Madam President, the eyes of the whole world were on Yemen recently, after al-Qaeda activists there claimed responsibility for what was, fortunately, an unsuccessful attempt to blow up an American airliner at Christmas. However, we have known for a long time that the deteriorating state of security in the country is allowing terrorist groups to find refuge from where they can plan and organise further operations. Terrorism had been spreading in the region for many years before 9/11, a day we all remember. We need only recall the al-Qaeda attack on the American warship, the USS Cole, on 12 October 2000.

Yemen is an extremely significant country, in particular, because of its geographical location. We must remember that 3.5 million barrels of crude oil, which is 4% of world production, are transported every day through the 26.5-kilometre Bab-el-Mandeb Strait between Yemen and Djibouti. At the same time, it is a country with a very complicated internal situation. Apart from al-Qaeda, which is thriving there, there is also a serious Shi'ite rebellion in Saada Province in the north of the country and an outbreak of violence from secessionist movements in the south. If we add to this the negative effects of the world food crisis of two years ago, the recent financial crisis, the country's dwindling reserves of crude oil, which account for three-quarters of its income, and finally an increasingly serious water shortage, we have a picture of a country on its knees, the ideal target for al-Qaeda, which, in view of its problems in Afghanistan, is looking for a new base.

Therefore, apart from military action which, in one form or another, would appear to be unavoidable in view of the passivity and helplessness of the local authorities, the international community, including the

European Union – and here I appeal to Mrs Ashton – must, above all, be very active in the process of rebuilding state institutions.

Sabine Lösing, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (DE) Madam President, the media are already mobilising the populace for a third front in the war on terror. At this point in time, however, the strategic options for the US and the Member States of the EU in Yemen and the Horn of Africa region are not really open. The fact is that the ruling elites surrounding President Saleh brutally discriminate against and suppress the Shi'ite population in the north of the country and are waging a war against the separatist movement in the south, in the area of the former People's Democratic Republic of Yemen, that is causing a great deal of suffering to the population there. There is no real provable connection to speak of between the Shi'ite population and al-Qaeda and this idea thus merely serves the corrupt and *de facto* autocratic government as a smoke-screen behind which to obtain massive military aid.

Supporting this government to build up security forces should be avoided – doing so merely pours further oil on the fire. Any aid provided must benefit all the regions, irrespective of their religious, ethnic or political orientation. A reconciliation process including the UN and all local players, including in the neighbouring states – such as Iran – must be initiated and promoted. We must not provide one-sided support of the government against the rebels. Operation Atalanta should not be continued and expanded, and absolutely not onto the territory of the Yemeni mainland, because this would only serve the geostrategic interests of Western industrialised nations.

We should focus all our efforts on ensuring that the EU does not go along with the US's completely erroneous strategy of escalation in Yemen, too.

Fiorello Provera, *on behalf of the EFD Group.* – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, rather than being a new frontier of terrorism, as someone dubbed it, Yemen is a country of precarious stability.

The central government's lack of control over the territory and the permeability of the borders are allowing illegal trafficking, unchecked migration, piracy and terrorist activities to grow. The response to the new challenges of al-Qaeda in Yemen should not, however, just consist of military pressure, but also of helping the local authorities to gain better control over the territory. I repeat: the local authorities, and not just the government.

Yemen's stability should, however, be brought about with a view to national and regional ownership, without imposing external or pre-prepared solutions which are often at odds with the situation on the ground and are doomed to failure. This would facilitate greater commitment by the Gulf Cooperation Council, whose financial participation in local projects would be crucial. The European Union should work together with its partners – Yemen, the G8 and Gulf countries – with financial and development contributions backed by the Yemeni Government.

To conclude, policies which, although excellent, are long-term ones, should be accompanied by immediate strong support for security and control over the territory, without which we risk the failure of the Yemeni State and a huge growth in terrorism in the area.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Madam President, it is well known that Yemen is currently a hotbed of Islamic extremists, a poverty-stricken country with ineffective security and a high density of weapons that is convulsed with conflicts and suffers from an acute water shortage. It is a country in which the government appears not even to have the capital completely under control.

Yemen has thus found itself in the spotlight of the fight against terrorism and is therefore another country in which the presence of radical Islamists is an unfortunate consequence of past US policy failings. That should be very consciously borne in mind in the debate, along with the CIA's overflights, the secret prisons and the disastrous consequences of the US campaigns thus far in the Middle East.

In my opinion, it would be naive to equate terrorism with poverty, just as it would be irresponsible to allow ourselves to be dictated to by US policy and to trustingly believe that only increasing military aid to Yemen could solve the problems there. The dictatorial president is quite happy to collect the West's military millions, but in the past he has time and again fallen back on Islamists in order to permanently silence opponents of the regime.

Of course, we cannot stand idly by and watch as this country is transformed from a retreat area of the Jihadists, which it has been so far, into their operations and training base. There is also a clear need to discuss how to improve development aid, even if only to take a proportion of the Jihadist recruits out of the equation.

Finally, the EU must not allow itself to be forced into the role of the US paymaster. Instead, the Union must assume the role of an impartial broker in order to bring about a dialogue and pave the way for a long-term political solution.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE). – Madam President, I have a short comment and two questions to put to Baroness Ashton. It seems that the EU is now faced with a dilemma. On the one hand, we need to support more robust action against terrorists who directly pose a danger to the security of European citizens. Various Islamist extremist groups in Yemen have been more active than ever before, and al-Qaeda sees Yemen as one of its most important areas to plan attacks on Western targets and to train militia and potential suicide bombers.

The failed operation against the Northwest Airlines plane is the most recent example of the threat we face. On the other hand, one should know that the Yemeni authorities have more than once been accused by various human rights organisations of torture, inhumane treatment and extrajudicial executions. Arbitrary arrests of citizens and searches of homes are widespread, and the need to fight terrorism has been cited as the main excuse for such unlawful actions.

In this context, Baroness Ashton, referring to the Council conclusions on Yemen, what kind of support has the EU to offer to Yemen in terms of fighting terrorism? In addition, the EU considers that there is no military solution for the crisis in the area. At the same time, Washington has signed the agreement with the Yemeni authorities on closer military cooperation. So, I would appreciate your opinion and the position of the European Union on the decision by the Americans to engage more actively in Yemen to fight terrorists, especially by signing the agreement on military intelligence and training.

Richard Howitt (S&D). – Madam President, I welcome today's debate in advance of next week's Foreign Affairs Council and the London conference called by Gordon Brown.

Our attention may have been generated by the attempted airline bomber. Today I also appeal for international attention to address efforts to free the British engineer, Anthony S., and five other European hostages, who worked at a local hospital in Yemen and who remain kidnapped since last June.

But our future work should recognise internal, not just external, needs in relation to Yemen. To combat levels of malnutrition that exceed some sub-Saharan African countries, such as Niger, and violations of human rights, as Mrs Andrikiienė has just said, in a country which inflicts the 11th highest number of executions in the world, including children. So that, as an international community, we do not wait for the terrorists to move in before we begin to address issues of capacity, governance and development in fragile states in our world.

I welcome the High Representative's announcement today on aid and ask her to ensure that next week's meetings address actual commitments of aid money to Yemen, from all participants, at a time when the UN's consolidated appeal for the country has generated less than 1% of the funds needed. Like Mrs Brantner, that the meetings pursue a ceasefire, and perhaps a peace conference, on the latest round of fighting with the Houthis in the north and to ensure humanitarian access to the region. To ensure the country's oil revenue should be invested in economic and social development for the country's people. That Europe should cooperate in finding lasting solutions for Yemeni prisoners, the largest contingent left in Guantánamo Bay.

But I do hope the High Representative will explore the potential for a joint EU-Gulf Cooperation Council CSDP project on security sector training in Yemen, in which our efforts are critically important in so many countries.

Finally, the Bin Ladens may come from the village of Al-Rubat in Yemen, but it is the absence of international engagement which has allowed too many of the country's young people to be radicalised in his name. It is international engagement which now must take place.

Charles Goerens (ALDE). – (FR) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, an attempted attack is enough to remove any sense of triviality from the affirmation of the right to security of our fellow citizens. The protection of our societies obliges us moreover to permanently look for a balance between security and freedom.

The right to protection, in particular from a terrorist attack, is laid down by Article 188R of the Treaty of Lisbon, and more precisely in its Article 4, which empowers the European Union and its Member States to act in an effective manner. The same paragraph makes clear that the European Council must conduct a regular evaluation of the threats faced by the European Union. I would like to ask Mrs Ashton to clarify to

me whether, and to what extent, the European Union and its Member States have acted in line with this clause.

From her point of view, can cooperation within the European Union allow her to maintain that failings by the US intelligence service, which came to light in the case of the recent attempted attack on flight 253 from Amsterdam to Detroit, could not have happened in the European Union?

One question is absolutely central to this debate: was the name of the suspected terrorist known to European intelligence services, to all the European intelligence services? If not, what conclusions does she expect to draw? Does she consider, at present, that the level of coordination and exchange of information between the intelligence services is good enough to rule out this type of failing in the European Union?

Does the High Representative consider as sufficient the capacity of Member States' intelligence services to cooperate in the spirit of solidarity set out in Article 188R?

Indeed, citizens have the right to demand faultless monitoring of the terrorist threat. They would find it hard to understand how, on the one hand, the European Union continues to send more and more SWIFT-type personal data to the United States and how, on the other, the same European Union has shortcomings in the area of prevention and intelligence.

Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR). – Madam President, unfortunately, Yemen long ago developed the characteristics of a terrorist incubator and not enough attention has been paid to this over the years. Conflict, lawlessness and corruption are deeply embedded.

It is worth recalling, by the way, that the reason that British troops intervened in Yemen in the early 19th century was to put an end to piracy in the Gulf of Aden and they were very successful for over a century. In more recent years, of course, Yemen has both developed as a terrorist incubator, where terrorist acts have taken place, and exported terrorism to other countries. Terrorist groups are adept at exploiting the possibilities provided by failed states. We need to help counter this.

At the moment, the UK is disproportionately providing assistance. I hope that the London conference will encourage other countries to do more, including the European Union, and, I agree, other regional states.

Of course, we cannot hope to snuff out terrorism wherever it breeds, and that means we must improve the security of our own countries and have more effective controls on our own borders. I doubt that the EU is motivated properly on this, so each of our own countries needs to put its house in order.

Charalampos Angourakis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Madam President, the people of Yemen are the victims of imperialist conflict and intervention. The imperialist powers are, I believe, fomenting ethnic, racial and religious infighting in this country. For years, they have frequently resorted to military force. They are undermining the peaceful resolution of differences so that they can control energy reserves and the energy transmission channels in the area.

Developments in this country have always been the result of the imperialist choices of NATO policy and the policy of supporting the deeply reactionary and anti-grassroots regime in this country. With the huge increase in financial and military aid from the United States on the pretext of fighting al-Qaeda, together with the classification of Yemen as a country which conceals terrorists, the bombing of areas of the country by Saudi forces, with the assistance of the USA, and the presence of foreign troops, it is possible that open military imperialist intervention will escalate. That is clear from the new breakout of hysteria following the attempted terrorist attack on the Delta aircraft. I believe that the peoples will respond by stepping up the fight against the repressive measures and imperialist interventions against them.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – Madam President, as the fictional Lady Bracknell might have said, to make one major mistake in the Muslim world is unfortunate, but to make two sounds like carelessness.

To make three or more is an indication of stupidity, insanity or deliberate mischief-making. Yemen is now being called the new Afghanistan. US troops are already being deployed there as advisers. How long before they and their allies, including Britain, are deploying ground troops there against al-Qaeda?

What should the West in fact be doing to prevent the threat? First of all, it should stop wars in Muslim countries that are killing Western troops, killing civilians and radicalising young Muslims at home and abroad. It should bring the troops home to work on homeland security to protect our populations and infrastructures.

It should adopt a genuinely neutral policy towards the Middle East and abandon the partisan policy of the US, and it should stop immigration from Muslim countries and encourage radical Muslims in the West to see that they would be much happier living among their own coreligionists.

Angelika Niebler (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, Baroness Ashton, ladies and gentlemen, over recent months, the conditions for the people, as well as the overall political and economic situation, have dramatically deteriorated in Yemen. We Europeans must therefore do everything we can to finally stabilise the country.

High Representative, might I ask you to please prevent Yemen from becoming a second Afghanistan. We must do everything in our power to fight international terrorism. We will only be able to achieve that, however, if we also support a peace process in Yemen. We need to achieve peace in the region and we need to support the peace efforts of the government there. The Yemeni Government could also be reminded, once again, that it needs to ensure that there is no discrimination in Yemen – only then can there be peace. Peace requires democratic structures that uphold the rights of minorities. That is our European path, and it may differ from other paths. I ask you, in your new role, to spare no efforts to walk this European path with us.

Without political stability, Yemen has no chance. With political stability, the local economy can recover, then an economy can be built up and people can be given future prospects. I ask you to work hard for this. I also ask you to make your influence count to ensure that the auxiliary troops there can provide humanitarian assistance. There are over 1 30 000 refugees from Somalia in Yemen. The situation on the ground is dreadful. I put all my hopes on you, Baroness Ashton, in the expectation that you will use your influence here. Please also stand up for the six hostages, for the European citizens – one Briton and five Germans – who are being held as hostages in Yemen. Maybe you can also help to get them freed. Many thanks.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D). – (LT) I agree with the Commission and my fellow Members who have said that the situation in Yemen is tense. The country is exhausted and impoverished by endless partisan wars and separatist fighting and people are suffering from extreme poverty. Such economic and political instability has already caused concern in neighbouring countries of the Arabian peninsula and threatens not just regional but global security. News about the recent intensification of the activities of terrorist groups is worrying. Let us also remember the failed attempt to blow up a plane flying to the USA, as well as threats against embassies in Yemen. The USA has already announced that it will devote special attention to the situation in this country. Therefore, while implementing a common foreign policy, I think that it is the duty of the European Parliament, the European Commission and other institutions, particularly following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, to take joint and coordinated action together with the international community.

Ivo Vajgl (ALDE). – (SL) I will speak in Slovene, so please listen to the interpretation. Yemen is a country troubled by religious and tribal conflicts and by mistakes made by past colonial and US policies. As some of our fellow Members have said, we are dealing here firstly, with the Near and Middle East, an unstable region and one riddled with unresolved problems, and secondly, of course, with the mother of all conflicts, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Yemen is representative of all these problems and we should not delude ourselves into thinking that we are dealing with a local problem. Yemen is struggling with a civil war, al-Qaeda strongholds, a weak state, poor intelligence services, inefficient security and armed military forces. What may we expect from the London conference?

Madam High Representative, in my view, the hardest thing of all will be to formulate a holistic approach, but that is precisely what we need to do. That alone will solve Yemen's problems. We need an economic and developmental approach and we need to offer Yemen the kind of assistance that will help it build its state and administrative capacities.

However, I am of the opinion that the second report, which I would like you, Mrs Ashton, to present, is about us not deluding ourselves into thinking – let no one delude themselves into thinking – that this is merely another issue or another problem that can be resolved by military means. I fear that there are many indications, especially in the world media, to the effect that we are preparing for a new frontline, for a new armed conflict. That would be the worst thing that could happen in Yemen and something that would probably poison relations in the entire region even more. We have drawn enough lessons from the military adventures we have witnessed, from the Near and Middle East to Afghanistan and a few other places.

Struan Stevenson (ECR). – Madam President, we debated earlier the deteriorating human rights situation and brutal fascist regime in Iran. We heard in that debate how the mullahs have exported terrorism to Palestine and Lebanon, and how now they are exporting their vile brand of terror to Yemen.

In late October, Yemeni officials reported that they had intercepted a vessel laden with weapons from Iran. They arrested five Iranian instructors. The weapons and the instructors were destined for the Houthi rebels.

Iran is a past master at fighting wars by proxy; it did so in both Palestine and Lebanon. Now it wishes to foment a proxy regional conflict with Sunni-dominated Saudi Arabia. I would say to Baroness Ashton that if she deals decisively with Iran, she will cut out much of the malignant cancer that threatens the Middle East.

Cristiana Muscardini (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, High Representative, ladies and gentlemen, the serious political, economic and social crisis in Yemen is linked to the operational presence of al-Qaeda on its territory and the jihadist vision that motivates it.

Yemen is one of the poorest countries in the world and the management of internal conflicts bristles with difficulties because of the religious origins of the conflict between the Shi'ite and Sunni minorities. As the motion for a resolution stresses, aid, cooperation and support for the implementation of social assistance programmes are vital. We should, however, stress the risks that the West also runs if the security problems are not tackled clearly and with determination.

The reasons that drive terrorists to acquire military training and train in acts of martyrdom are the product of jihadist ideology, which is becoming increasingly widespread and entrenched on the African continent too, partly because of the indifference and superficiality with which the international community has dealt, or rather has not dealt, with al-Qaeda and its cells in Somalia and Sudan, as well as in Yemen.

We should remember the cause and effect relationship between the terrorist presence in Yemen and the number of acts carried out to destabilise Somalia, which is a pawn controlled by al-Qaeda forces in Yemen. These in turn are dependent not so much on the Wahhabis of Saudi Arabia as on the Iranian ayatollahs, from whom they receive weapons and money. Support for Yemen cannot be divorced from the issue of security.

Arnaud Danjean (PPE). – (FR) Madam President, Mrs Ashton, you were right to stress that the important thing in Yemen in terms of security priority is to end the internal conflicts that exist in that country. We must not confuse the causes and the consequences, and without playing down the terrorist risk, the main reason for the instability in Yemen is not terrorism. Terrorism develops because there is instability due to internal conflicts. From this point of view, the priority of the European Union should be to encourage and to support the efforts currently being made to start a national dialogue in Yemen with President Saleh.

At regional level, there are – as we have just been reminded – links with the Somalian crisis and the crisis in the Horn of Africa. There are very sizeable migratory flows, but also arms trafficking and movement of jihadist fighters between Yemen and Somalia. In this respect, I would like to know where the European Union stands as regards the strengthening of maritime surveillance capacities, which also concern Yemen.

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE). – (PL) Madam President, Yemen is the poorest country of the Arab world. I was in Yemen not long ago and saw this with my own eyes. There is no doubt that poverty is the source, or at least a factor, which intensifies some of the many problems the country faces.

Unfortunately, in the global world, Yemen's problems are also becoming our problems. The internal conflicts referred to in the draft resolution and during this debate should be resolved by political means, and the sides in the conflicts should respect human rights and international humanitarian law. The European Union should make efforts to prevent escalation of the present crisis. The development aid which we give, if it is effective and if it is sensibly spent, can be of help in bringing about political, economic and social stabilisation.

However, a catastrophe is not far away. The water deficit has been mentioned, as have the dwindling reserves of crude oil, but there is also the problem of the abuse by 90% of Yemenis of qat, a hallucinogenic narcotic, which is displacing other crops. For example, Yemen used to export coffee, but now it cannot do this, because this narcotic is being grown instead.

The government in Yemen and the international community must not just take stop-gap measures, because they are faced with structural problems, and even if we can stop al-Qaeda in Yemen, the problems will return if we do not eliminate the causes.

Marietta Giannakou (PPE). – (EL) Madam President, as we have already heard and as we all realise, the situation in Yemen is drastic from a social and economic point of view and from the point of view of social cohesion. The country has no water, oil reserves are running out and the inhabitants are growing drug crops.

It is exactly what Afghanistan was 26 years ago when, in this Chamber – I mean in the old Chamber of the European Parliament – we made provision during the debate of the report on narcotics for the future of Afghanistan. If there is no development-type intervention right now, and if the UN is not allowed to have a constant presence at all levels, Yemen will certainly find itself in the same situation as Afghanistan is today, with unresolved problems.

There are not many ways to combat terrorism and the way in which the West is going about it is certainly not one of them. The only way to help this country not to become an al-Qaeda outpost is for it to come to agreement with all the Arab countries, not just Saudi Arabia and, of course, we need to make efforts to help this nation move away from a tribal philosophy and civil conflict and to seek democratic rights.

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE). – (RO) The failed bomb attempt on 25 December on board the Amsterdam-Detroit flight actually only served to reveal an important fact. It focused the international community's attention on the seriousness of the situation in Yemen because, as is well known, there are not one, but three conflicts going on in this country. Apart from the battle involving the separatist movement in the south, the conflict in Saada province in the north has been reignited by the offensive launched approximately six months ago by government forces against the al-Huthi Shi'ite rebels, and air strikes have been carried out against al-Qaeda bases.

The humanitarian situation, as was also mentioned by the Secretary-General of the United Nations on 5 January, is deeply concerning and is at risk of deteriorating even further if none of these conflicts end. Looking ahead to the international conference being held next week in London, I believe that the European Union must encourage a coordinated response in order to ensure this country's stability, which could also contribute to international security.

The path to a united, stable and democratic Yemen lies, in my view, through drafting a consistent plan for boosting both military and economic support and for combating terrorism, which needs to be backed up by specific measures supporting this country's economic development. Thank you.

Alf Svensson (PPE). – (SV) Yemen is not just a safe haven for al-Qaeda. That has been made clear in the debate here. The country could very well develop into a battlefield between two of the major powers of the region: Saudi Arabia and Iran. The Yemeni Government has repeatedly accused Iran of supporting the Shi'ite rebellion movement. This is repudiated by Iran, but such accusations have, in fact, also been made in the Saudi media.

The evidence cited for this includes the statement by the Yemeni Government that it stopped an Iranian delivery of arms to the rebel movement in October 2009 and the fact that in recent months, the Iranian state media has been covering the struggle of the Shia rebel movement more intensively and benevolently than previously. Eighty-two Saudi soldiers have died in the conflict with the rebels in Yemen since Saudi Arabia began its offensive on 4 November 2009.

As has been pointed out, Yemen is the poorest country in the Arab world – but it has also found itself squeezed between the major powers of the region, Iran and Saudi Arabia. I wonder whether Mrs Ashton can confirm this and also carry out an analysis of the situation?

Janusz Władysław Zemke (S&D). – (PL) Madam President, I would like to agree with the evaluation of the situation presented by Mrs Ashton. You are right, Mrs Ashton, that if we want to change the situation in Yemen, we need both humanitarian and, perhaps, military action. If this range of measures is to be a broad one, it also requires coordination, because it is not only the European Union which is responsible for improving the situation in Yemen. There are many such institutions. In relation to this, I would like to ask the following question: do you not think the work of the UN and the European Union on humanitarian issues should be better coordinated? In the area of military matters and reconnaissance, we also need better cooperation with NATO and intelligence services – I am thinking specifically about the intelligence services of particular countries. For these measures must be coordinated, because they would then be significantly more effective.

Paul Rübzig (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, Baroness Ashton, my question relates to the forms of cooperation, in your view, that we, the European Union, should develop in Yemen, for example, in the area of small and medium-sized enterprises, or perhaps in the area of the provision of energy and water supplies, as communication and building up connections could play a special role in future. Which programmes would have priority here, for you, High Representative?

Marek Siwiec (S&D). – (PL) Madam President, the President of the European Parliament nearly had to express condolences to the families of almost 300 victims, who were in an airliner flying from Amsterdam to Detroit. He would have done this yesterday. This did not happen by accident. This dramatic incident was necessary for the world to discover the problem of Yemen – a new source of terrorism.

We stand helpless, faced by a situation like we once faced in Afghanistan. We stand helpless, faced by what is happening today in Yemen, and Europe and this building are full of the misguided voices of the human rights defenders who felt sorry for the prisoners of Guantánamo. Those prisoners were released, and are now organising attacks again. Once again, people are going to die, and we are going to say we are powerless.

I want to endorse in full what was said by Mr Zemke – without military cooperation, without cooperation on intelligence and without the cooperation of institutions whose role it is to pursue terrorism, we are going to put the health and lives of our citizens at risk.

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission. – Madam President, once again, an important and wide-ranging debate on an area of the world where we have, for some years, had a focus. I was reflecting on the fact that, over the period 2007-2010, EUR 100 million have been spent by the Commission in support and a similar amount will be spent in the future but nonetheless, an area where we have reflected again on the importance of sustainable and coordinated effort, as many Members have pointed out.

I think that Mrs Salafranca's comments at the beginning have been picked up and reflected again in a number of contributions about how we can make sure that our coordination is effective in terms of security, in terms of the political and economic coming together to address the concerns that this nation faces. Mrs Giannakou raised the question of dwindling water and dwindling oil; I think Yemen is the first country that is expected to run out of water by about 2015, something which we have to see as a real and significant challenge.

In order to address this, we have to look at an integrated approach; a number of Members raised the question of what is the strategy which we should pursue. Let me try and outline a few of the key elements of that: first of all, the issues of security and counterterrorism. As we approach the London meeting, we need to collaborate effectively on this, a point raised by a number of Members: we need to get the package of assistance together and focus on the work that we are already undertaking, for example, in the Atalanta mission off the coast and the importance of that.

The issue of improving maritime surveillance is being looked at right now; it was the subject of a discussion I had recently with the Spanish Defence Minister to see what more can be done in order to coordinate better and more effectively to deal with maritime security, bearing in mind the length of coast and the amount of space that have to be covered.

I think, too, that we have described this comprehensive approach of how to link together the different elements and engage the neighbours of Yemen. Mrs Brantner, you raised particularly the Gulf Cooperation Council. I agree: a very significant part of how we try and address this area is to work collaboratively with the neighbours around the region and again the London meeting will, I hope, bring together the key Member States from around the area who can help us.

The London meeting is that opportunity, of course, to pull together our thinking and to do so with the United States and with others. We are engaging with the United States. It is not true to say that their approach is confined to counterterrorism: they also support and are fully on board with what we describe as our 'root causes' approach, again the mixture of things which we need to do to ensure that we support this country.

To answer the specific point on security, the EU Home Affairs informal meeting is taking place in Spain this weekend. I understand the American counterpart will be there in order to have discussions on the points which Members have raised.

I agree with the comment that this is not a Christmas tree or wish list. We have to be very selective about what we believe we can do to make a difference; helping Yemen to have the type of dialogue it needs to have internally in order to support the people and to try and resolve some of the conflicts which occur in that country is going to be just as significant in my view as anything else we do.

Asked about finding the right kind of support, the stability instruments too, can be used appropriately, I think, to provide the level of support, but this is no substitute, and could never substitute, for trying to support the government to have the internal dialogue that only they can have. Partners have to engage in Yemen to be able to address the problems which are of greatest significance for that.

So for me, this has been a very useful debate, I am very grateful, because again it helps me in my mind to set the agenda of the issues that I will take to the Foreign Affairs Council as we debate this and then on to London engaging, as I have indicated, with the government on all the elements where we can provide continuing support to develop the country economically, to deal with counter terrorism, to deal with the issues of support from the neighbourhood, too.

I think a final point is to recognise the plight of the hostages which has been raised a number of times: six hostages, one British, five German including some very young children with the German family who have been taken hostage. I know that Minister Westerwelle, the German Foreign Minister, was recently in Yemen. He and I spoke about it this week, and our thoughts will always go to the hostages who are suffering at the present time. We will take all of these issues into the meeting in London and I am very grateful again to honourable Members for raising these important matters.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place during the first part-session in February.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) We have long seen the convergence of powerful geo-strategic interests in the vast area encompassing the Middle and Near East, Central Asia and Northern Africa, including the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden, where Yemen has a strategic position (next to Somalia). These interests are increasingly being defended by military means, and with ever greater aggressiveness. The current situation in Yemen and the terrible suffering to which its people are being subjected should be analysed in the light of this situation. The growing military involvement of the US and the EU in the region must be understood and denounced accordingly. A brutal and disgusting manifestation of this, which we strongly condemn, was the US cruise missile bombardment of what was alleged to be an al-Qaeda terrorist base, but which is said to have resulted in dozens of civilian casualties. The real solution to the complex problems and dangers that menace the people of the region has to come about through demilitarisation, respect for national laws and the sovereignty of the people, and genuine cooperation that aims at the resolution of the profound social problems that they are facing.

Bogdan Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (PPE), in writing. – (PL) Madam President, regarding the problem of security and economic and political stabilisation in Yemen, a problem which has manifested itself fairly often recently, I would like, as a member of the European Parliament Delegation for relations with the Arab Peninsula, to express my concern. Yemen, which is the poorest country in the Arab world, has become an object of the special interest of terrorist groups, which, taking advantage of its weakness, have turned it into a base for terrorist attacks far beyond its borders. According to observers, Yemen is at risk of breaking up as a result of the Shi'ite rebellion in the north, the separatist movement in the south and the terrorist activity of al-Qaeda.

Therefore, I appeal for a strengthening of bilateral relations with Yemen and for drawing up plans for the most effective methods of improving security and the political situation, especially in connection with the special meeting on this subject being organised by Gordon Brown for 28 January in London.

7. Situation in Iraq (debate)

President. – The next item is the statement by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission on the situation in Iraq.

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission. – Madam President, when we look at Iraq today, we see real progress, though the country still faces a multitude of challenges. But I want to focus today on the present and the future of Iraq, as a country with great potential and notable achievements over the past months.

Violence today is at its lowest since 2003. Although we have seen terrible attacks targeting government institutions, the total number of civilian deaths in 2009 was less than half of the level of 2008. Inter-sectarian violence, a major problem in 2006 and 2007, has been significantly reduced.

Iraq has a new constitution and has conducted several elections with high participation at great risk. Thanks to the courage of the Iraqi people, democratic institutions have taken root. Provincial elections last year went fairly smoothly all over Iraq. Crucially, the next general elections, due on 7 March 2010, can be another big step towards consolidating the Iraqi democracy.

For our part, this means our work to support Iraq must continue, and move into new areas as the situation improves.

The European Union has provided more than EUR 1 billion in assistance to Iraq since 2003. It has gone towards basic services, human development, refugees, good governance, political process and capacity building – all in accordance with Iraqi priorities. Our Integrated Rule of Law Mission, EUJUST LEX, has been extended several times at Iraqi request and is now also training inside Iraq.

The EU has been playing a leading role in electoral assistance, and we will continue to assist Iraq in this and other areas until Iraqi institutions can assume full responsibility themselves. As there is good progress, we are focusing more and more on Iraqi ownership and long-term sustainability.

We are also developing our relations with Iraq. We have just signed a Memorandum of Understanding on Energy Cooperation, and we will soon sign a partnership and cooperation agreement, the first contractual relationship between the EU and Iraq. It will cover issues from political dialogue to trade and regulatory cooperation and development assistance.

We want a broader and deeper political dialogue with Iraq, which should also cover human rights. Parliament has taken a keen interest in Iraq, and we expect to see even more cooperation between the European Parliament and the Iraqi Council of Representatives in the future.

Clearly, Iraq must deal with the many challenges. The upcoming general elections will be crucial, and should be free and fair. With our international partners, we will be following them very closely. The EU will be deploying an Election Assessment Team to Iraq to assess the election and make targeted recommendations.

Honourable Members, Iraq is on a positive trajectory. I am confident it will use its new institutions to find the compromises necessary for national reconciliation. For our part, we will continue to stand by Iraq and continue our support together with the UN and the rest of the international community.

I look forward to our debate.

Esther de Lange, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (NL) Madam President, I, too, would like to thank the High Representative for her words, which struck the necessary note of optimism. There are, indeed, positive signs. Amongst other things, you made reference to the lower number of deaths resulting from attacks, and the forthcoming elections. Yet, Baroness Ashton, even successful elections do not make a democracy, nor do they make a state under the rule of law. To quote a great German, Schiller, in your native English, Baroness, ‘The voice of the majority is no proof of justice’. A mature democracy also recognises the rights of minorities. I do have serious concerns in that area. I find it disappointing that the word ‘minorities’ did not come up in what you had to say to the House.

Why am I worried? Human Rights Watch continues to report that non-Muslim minorities are being persecuted. Since 2004, there have been attacks on 65 churches. Local militias continue to drive Christians from their homes. The day before yesterday, a 52-year old greengrocer, a father of two daughters, was shot dead in the middle of the street in Mosul. This, of course, leads to the ongoing flight of Christian minorities from Iraq. In 1991, they still numbered 850 000; after the Gulf War they numbered 550 000, while after the US invasion this number was down to 385 000, 100 000 of whom are internally displaced people. The European Union cannot continue to stand idly by in this situation. Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union refers to human rights, including the rights of minorities, as literally one of the core values of the European Union. We require respect for minorities of our 27 Member States and it is your job, Baroness Ashton, to command that respect at the international level, too.

Thus far, the Commission’s approach – and you said so yourself – has been heavily focussed on general support for infrastructure and building up democracy, via the UN or otherwise. You say that we act in accordance with Iraq’s priorities. I would like you to tell us how you will be ensuring that the European Union’s Iraq policy and its Iraq budget give greater consideration to vulnerable minorities. That is perhaps not Iraq’s top priority, but it is ours. I would appreciate a response from you.

Silvia Costa, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner Ashton, ladies and gentlemen, I think it is very important for the European Parliament to take the opportunity offered by this debate with a view to the March elections in Iraq.

The Iraqi political process has shown itself to be important – even if, as you were saying, interesting – but still very fragile. It is thus even more important to do everything possible to consolidate and strengthen the

country's new institutions and the political equilibrium which sustains them. We believe this to be a vital objective if we wish the first substantial withdrawal of US troops to occur in August without it having serious consequences on the country's internal situation.

The coexistence of Shi'ites, Sunnis and Kurds which is today embodied in the federal structures should be guaranteed by new laws, as well as by a political consensus involving all these parties. On this point, concerns are being aroused – and we would also like your view on this – by the electoral commission's recent decision to bar many candidates and parties with close links to Sunnis or Christians, thus running the risk of weakening the already fragile democratic process in Iraq.

Through the measures undertaken, the European Union must follow this electoral process, as you have said, but also be more ambitious in the development of relations with Iraq. The Union's EUJUST LEX programme directly involves us in the process of improving Iraqi legislation and democratic institutions, and we, the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, consider it a positive sign that the Council has decided to extend the mission until 30 August 2010.

The EU should continue to maintain strong support for Iraq through its cooperation programmes, with the aim of participating in the process to stabilise and develop the country, and after the elections, it should strengthen relations between the parliaments. It should be remembered that many Member States are working with Iraq, including Italy, with the important cultural cooperation programme.

Iraq's political equilibrium is essential not only for the country but also in terms of the role that Iraq can play in the region strategically, with the aim of overcoming existing conflicts and securing peace. In this sense, the improvement of relations with Turkey by the regional government of Kurdistan constitutes a positive step in that direction.

However, as we know, Iraq remains a country with very serious problems in relation to security, respect for democracy and human rights, as well as economic insecurity. It is the most vulnerable groups, such as refugees – forming 10% of the population – ethnic minorities, women, religious minorities and children who are suffering the negative impact of this situation.

We must therefore play a still more incisive role in this area – I am just finishing – partly through support for local and European NGOs working in Iraq and, in this regard, women can also be involved as strategic figures to overcome some of the population's difficulties.

Johannes Cornelis van Baalen, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Madam President, the fact is that Iraq is not secure. That is a fact.

If we look at Iran, Iran is trying to get much more influence than necessary in Iraq in the south – throughout the whole south, via the Shia minority. I did not hear the High Representative mention the position of Iran. Iran is threatening Iraq. How does she see the role of the European Union in keeping Iran where it should be – in Iran and not in Iraq?

Regarding the north, we see that there is a big problem between Turkey and Iraq concerning Kurdistan. Of course, there can be legitimacy in fighting guerrillas in the north of Iraq which threaten Turkey, but that is the point. The autonomous region in the north of Iraq – Kurdistan – should have its own development.

Regarding the energy memorandum of understanding, this is very important, but Iraq is not a unitary state. So is the memorandum also being discussed with the Kurdish autonomous government? Because there is a discussion in progress on Kirkuk, on who owns the oil fields, etc. Is this being taken into consideration?

I would also like to draw your attention to the fact that the Iraqi security forces are still not well-trained, and are still not functioning well. So we should not only support the rule of law but, if asked, we should also be prepared to help them by assisting their security forces. There needs to be an integrated approach concerning energy, the economy and stability. There needs to be an integrated approach concerning the states neighbouring Iraq. Please would you give a clue about that integrated approach? Thank you on behalf of the ALDE Group.

Jill Evans, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Madam President, can I thank the High Representative, Baroness Ashton, for her statement.

I do think it is relevant to mention that the debate we are having tonight is taking place against the backdrop of the Chilcot inquiry in the UK into the illegal war on Iraq and what lessons should be learned from that,

and a lot of information is coming to light which confirms what many of us believed at the time of the invasion: that the reason for the war was regime change and control of resources and not the threat of weapons of mass destruction. And, in terms of long-term planning for a post-war Iraq, words like 'dire', 'deeply flawed' and 'woefully thin' are being used by senior diplomats and military officers in their evidence to the inquiry, so it is little wonder that we are now seeing severe consequences of the action.

Baroness Ashton said that some progress has been made, and of course it has, but there are severe problems still. There is no legislation to protect minorities in Iraq. There is a continuing major refugee problem. Trade unionists, journalists, women politicians and human rights activists have disappeared or have been killed. Suicide attacks continue. With elections due on 7 March, the Iraqi Election Commission last week, as my colleague mentioned, barred almost 500 candidates, mainly Sunni politicians, from standing. They are already under-represented in the Iraqi Parliament and this is certain to lead to more tension and instability.

Last November, the EU Presidency urged the government of Iraq to suspend the death penalty and abolish it altogether, but 900 people are still on death row in Iraq and death sentences are handed out often following unfair trials, some lasting only a few minutes.

The EU has a responsibility to help build democracy and ensure respect for human rights, and the framework for engagement with Iraq sets out three priorities to help build basic services like health and education, to enhance the rule of law and to support the Human Rights Commission.

The partnership and cooperation agreement will be the basis for future work, but we must demand immediate action on issues like the abolition of the death penalty, on protecting vulnerable and targeted groups and on strengthening democracy and human rights.

Struan Stevenson, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Madam President, Baroness Ashton, the elections will not be free and fair in Iraq. Ten days ago, the Justice and Accountability Commission decided to ban Saleh al-Mutlaq, leader of the parliamentary National Dialogue Front and a member of the Iraqi Parliament for the past four years. He has been banned from participating in the forthcoming elections. I think it was no coincidence that this outrageous ban, together with the banning of over 500 further secular Iraqi politicians, was announced on the very day Manouchehr Mottaki, Iran's odious Foreign Minister, was visiting Baghdad. Saleh al-Mutlaq has been an outspoken critic of Iranian meddling in Iraq, and now the mullahs have insisted on his removal from the election.

I am relieved that US Vice-President, Joe Biden, has already protested about this ban, and I hope, Baroness Ashton, that you will do likewise. Unless Dr al-Mutlaq and the others are reinstated, we must not, and cannot, recognise the legitimacy of this election.

Willy Meyer, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (ES) Baroness Ashton, I am sorry but I do not share your optimism. It is good to be optimistic, but we cannot be optimistic about Iraq as things stand at the moment.

As proof of this, the Commission has decided not to send observers because it cannot guarantee their safety. I believe this decision speaks for itself. It clearly shows that as far as Iraq is concerned – and I know that you do not want to talk about the past, but we have no option but to talk about the past – we are faced with a country that has been devastated, with more than 1 million people dead and 4 million homeless as a result of an illegal, unfair war based on lies. Neither were there any weapons of mass destruction nor any connection between Saddam Hussein and al-Qaeda. That is the plain truth of it. The only thing that was true was the interest of the North American oil industry in gaining control of crude oil in Iraq.

That is the plain truth. Moreover, that truth cannot reasonably continue with the presence of the occupying forces, which is distorting everything. I would not be surprised, at the moment, if the decision that has been taken to ban the opposition parties were to result in a genuine civil confrontation. Some European embassies do not currently rule out the eventuality of a military coup, an actual military coup in Iraq. The picture is therefore very gloomy.

I call on you to work quickly to withdraw the occupying forces as soon as possible. This is the factor that is distorting the true situation in Iraq. The United Nations should therefore assume control and allow a transition that will ensure a return to normality for something that should never have been forsaken, in other words, international law.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (NL) Madam President, High Representative, on Christmas night, 2009 – while we were on our Christmas recess, in other words – a number of churches in Iraq, Mesopotamia, were closed. Threats of bombings led to this sad situation, just as they had last year. In any

case, the churches often remain empty, with or without such threats, as more and more Christians are leaving the country. The violence against them just goes on increasing, despite their shrinking numbers. Before Christmas, there were three deadly attacks in Mosul. Moreover, the Christians in the previously relatively safe city of Kirkuk, too, have, for several months, faced a simply unrelenting series of kidnappings and killings, resulting in the flight of hundreds of Christian families.

While there were around 1.5 million Christians in Iraq in 2003, more than half of them have now sought safety from religious cleansing in flight, religious cleansing that is being performed by Islamic extremists. Is the European Council, are the 27 Member States of the European Union, just watching on meekly as this Afghanisation of Iraq takes place, an Iraqi Christian has asked. I would appreciate hearing your position on this, High Representative. Whatever it may be, a Mesopotamia without its ancient Christian community will not face a more tolerant future, nor will that be good for Europe's security in the long term.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). – (RO) The preparations for the legislative and presidential elections on 7 March have generated a frenzy of activity involving the formation of new coalitions and alliances. Some of the Iraqi Prime Minister's opponents want to re-establish old alliances, such as the Iraqi United Coalition. On the other hand, the prime minister is attempting to attract secular groups or independent candidates to join the Rule of Law Coalition.

However, we must not forget that, after these legislative and presidential elections, the government will have to organise the referendum on Kirkuk. There is a strong possibility that the security situation in Iraq will deteriorate in the event that these elections are disputed by some Iraqi groups or in the case of internal conflicts.

The main problems facing the authorities in Baghdad are the postponement of the referendum on the SOFA agreement signed with the United States and of the finalisation of the oil and gas law, the drop in oil price, the large number of executions – there are currently 900 people who have received the death sentence – and the use of torture to obtain confessions. The general deterioration in the human rights situation is causing the EU deep disquiet. Last but not least, there is the rise in the level of corruption. One example I would like to give you of this is the arrest of the former Iraqi trade minister.

In terms of its relations with Iraq, Romania is aiming to switch from making a contribution to military security to the area of civilian security. My country has shown that it keeps its commitments to its partners by retaining its military presence in Iraq until the mission is accomplished.

Ana Gomes (S&D). – (PT) The democratic achievements of the Iraqi people still need to be consolidated and furthered, as does the security situation. In recent months, there has been an encouraging reconfiguration of alliances, which has done much to overcome the ethnic-religious splits that have marked Iraqi politics in recent years. The success of the new Kurdish 'Change' party is an example of the normalisation of political life in Iraq. However, the Election Commission's recent statement that around 500 Sunni politicians would be barred from standing is not conducive to national reconciliation, may jeopardise the electoral process and could reignite conflicts. The news about the application of the death penalty is also disheartening. Baroness Ashton, European leaders should strive to convince the Iraqi authorities to abolish it. The strengthening of the EULEX is also important in this regard.

One and a half million Iraqis still live in neighbouring countries. Many will never be able to return. The European countries that participated in the invasion in 2003 have a particular responsibility, and should welcome more of these refugees. In this respect, as in the cases of support for internally displaced persons, human rights issues in general and women's rights in particular, and the fight against corruption, it is vital that the Iraqi Government rectifies the NGO law, so that society can organise itself freely. It is imperative that the European Union encourages interaction between Iraqi and European NGOs. A society that is civil, free and dynamic is a prerequisite for the consolidation of democracy in Iraq.

Tomasz Piotr Poręba (ECR). – (PL) Madam President, Mrs Ashton, despite the huge commitment of international forces and hundreds of victims among the international coalition, including 23 Polish soldiers, the situation in Iraq is still bad. It is a country in which we have to deal with terrorist attacks and persecution of religious minorities, including the Christian minority, and, of course, in comparison with what the situation was like several years ago, some progress has been made. However, we still receive news of terrorist attacks which are destabilising not only Iraq but the whole of the Middle East. The objective of the terrorists and the sponsors of international terrorism is the destabilisation of Iraq. Much evidence points to the fact that Iran is responsible for sponsoring terrorism.

What is your opinion, Mrs Ashton, as the European Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, concerning the role of Iran in interfering in the affairs of Iraq? I would like to encourage you to adopt a more assertive stance and to cooperate with the United States in order to achieve solutions which will influence and put pressure on Iran to stop interfering in Iraq's internal affairs. In my opinion, only then will the possibility exist of bringing about a relative degree of stability in the region.

Jean-Luc Mélenchon (GUE/NGL). – (FR) Madam President, High Representative, we do not share your optimism either on the situation in Iraq or on the benefits of the Coalition, as it borders on blindness. Iraq was invaded and occupied on the basis of deliberately deceptive information concerning the presence of weapons of mass destruction.

As a result, 17 of the 27 EU Member States were dragged into the attack and occupation of Iraq. The country lies in ruin, its heritage plundered, its population deeply divided. Religious fanaticism there is recruiting numerous reserves of fighters. Iranian tyranny intervenes there freely. Elections take place in a deplorable and unfair manner.

What do you and what do we intend to do to call to account those countries which lied and which could start again tomorrow with Yemen or any other nation? What measures do you intend to take to condemn the occupiers for resorting to non-conventional chemical and radiological weapons and depleted uranium shells, the consequences of which on future generations are well known? How can we ensure that these arms will not be used in Afghanistan because we turned a blind eye to the situation in Iraq?

Fiorello Provera (EFD). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, we sincerely welcome the forthcoming elections in Iraq because they represent a further step towards democracy. They will not be free and fair, but we must settle for one small step after another.

Rebuilding Iraq in economic, trade, cultural and financial terms, and guaranteeing its security, are essential conditions for the development of democracy, but we must also promote the strengthening of the country's institutions. The peaceful coexistence of the various ethnic and religious groups present in Iraq can be brought about through a renewal of the institutions, with the implementation of a federal formula – federalism – which allows broad autonomy for the various regions within the framework of a unitary State. The experience of Iraqi Kurdistan could be a useful reference point.

I would therefore like to know the opinion of Baroness Ashton, the High Representative, on this institutional aspect of the country.

Alf Svensson (PPE). – (SV) Naturally, there is a lot of talk of violence and terrible horrors when Iraq is discussed, but it is indisputable that a democratisation process is taking place in the country.

I would like to remind you that 3 912 women stood quite openly in the local elections in Iraq last year. That is roughly ten women standing for each seat. That must be seen as a positive thing, particularly in an Arab country. It also provided us with some hope ahead of this year's parliamentary elections on 7 March, particularly since the Sunnis participated in the local elections. As has already been stated, however, two weeks ago, a government commission refused 14 Sunni parties and several hundreds of people permission to participate in the elections. Among those affected are defence minister Abdul-Qadir al-Obaidi and Saleh al-Mutlaq, the head of the Sunni-led Iraqi Front for National Dialogue.

The Iraqi parliamentary elections are, of course, crucial to the future of the country and for the future democratisation of Iraq, particularly as regards Iraq's ethnic and religious cohesion. I would also like to underline that we must speak plainly as regards the treatment of ethnic and religious minorities in Iraq. As I mentioned, the Iraqi parliamentary elections will be decisive for how we regard Iraq in the immediate future. What does the EU's High Representative, Baroness Ashton, believe that the EU can do to make the forthcoming parliamentary elections in Iraq inclusive and more democratic?

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D). – (LT) In recent years, the European Union has greatly strengthened its relations and influence in the countries of the Near East. The European Union has always paid much attention to Iraq and, together with the international community, has participated both in the reconstruction of Iraq and in peacekeeping and security missions. Different groups are still struggling for power in the country, which hinders the implementation of reforms begun in the country in various areas. The fact that 14 parties are banned from participating in the elections that are taking place is also cause for concern. Iraq has chosen the road to democracy and therefore, both the European Union and other states must demand and, if necessary, help ensure that the international commitments entered into are observed and human rights and freedoms

are respected. I believe that Iraq really is ready for close cooperation with the European Union. The Memorandum of Understanding between the EU and Iraq in the area of energy cooperation which was signed on Monday demonstrates its commitment to develop a long-term relationship that is mutually beneficial. From an energy point of view, Iraq is very important to the European Union, but safeguarding security of energy supply is inevitably linked to economic and political stability in the country, which has been lacking in recent times. Clearly, this is a long-term process, but I believe that the European Union, the High Representative and the international community must offer means and solutions to make the principles of human rights and the rule of law become the fundamental pillars of future politics in Iraq.

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – (PL) Madam President, Mrs Ashton, I would like to say that if I wanted to summarise Mrs Ashton's speech in one sentence, I would say it was official optimism. However, I think Europe and our voters expect something more specific, and they expect the truth. Politicians show who they are not only by what they say, but also by what they do not say, and I did not hear in your speech, Mrs Ashton, anything about some matters which have shocked a significant part of European public opinion, including public opinion in my country. I am thinking, for example, of the regular persecution of minorities in Iraq, including, and I stress this, of Christians. This is a reality of which we can be certain.

I think my colleague, Mr Poręba, was right in what he said a moment ago about Iranian interference in Iraq. Is the same not true of the Iraqi authorities and their scandalous intervention in Camp Ashraf, which houses Iranian refugees? Are the Iraqi authorities not doing just this? It seems to me this should be stressed very strongly, especially because the Iraqi authorities are receiving financial aid from the European Union, which they then often use in a highly improper way, for example, in the intervention in Camp Ashraf.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE). – (PL) Madam President, I think Iraq can serve as an example of how sometimes, to break the back of a dictatorship which destroys its opponents in their thousands using chemical weapons, it is necessary to use force. These decisions are difficult. Therefore, I would like us, today, while speaking about Iraq, to remember the thousands of soldiers from the United States, Italy, Poland and other countries who have fallen in Iraq, and to remember their families. They went there believing they were going to serve in a good cause, and, as we are hearing here, Iraq is, today, on the way to building a democracy.

I know that, today, we are all calling for you to be more active, Mrs Ashton, but we want the European Union to be active. Please go to Iraq and present an evaluation of the situation, so that the aid which the European Union is sending will be used with the same conditions attached as have been mentioned here and, in particular, with regard to the protection of minorities.

Janusz Władysław Zemke (S&D). – (PL) Madam President, it so happens that only Poles are speaking at the moment, but we do have experience of the involvement of Poland and Polish soldiers in restoring security in Iraq.

I share your opinion, Mrs Ashton, that, fortunately, the situation in Iraq is a little better than it was, but it is still in a rather fragile state. Alongside the diverse measures which the Union is taking, I would like to propose two specific measures, because it seems to me they are missing. The first matter concerns something which has not been mentioned today: I think it is exceedingly important for the development and stabilisation of Iraq to adopt a programme for the education of young Iraqis in Europe, because in Iraq, there is still a shortage of doctors, engineers and irrigation specialists. I think we could help Iraq greatly in this area. The second matter concerns protection of the cultural treasures which are to be found in Iraq. I think the EU should, in particular, help with the rebuilding of Babylon. This is a treasure which everyone in the world should take care to protect.

Paul Rübig (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, Baroness Ashton, my question relates to the memorandum of understanding that has been signed in the energy sector. Do you think it is possible to achieve further development together with either Mr Oettinger or Mr De Gucht? In my opinion, economic reconstruction would be the very thing to bring more stability to Iraq. If we were to improve relations in the energy sector, particularly through greater provision of European equipment to make better use of the energy reserves that are present there, with us buying energy there to compensate, we would have a win-win situation for both sides. An initiative in the next few weeks would make great sense in this regard.

Catherine Ashton, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission. – Thank you all again for an important and interesting debate. I will just try and capture some of the clear issues that honourable Members were most concerned about.

I would begin by recognising the importance that Members attach to the issue of minorities. As Members will know, one of the fundamental parts of our work in the partnership and cooperation agreements is indeed to make sure that human rights is at the heart of our agreements. We hope to be able to initial this agreement with Iraq soon, and I do accept and undertake to make sure that, within what we do, the issues of minorities are understood. That is clearly of great significance.

I share, too, the objective raised by a number of honourable Members on the question of capital punishment. Our objective is indeed to get this abolished, for all the reasons that honourable Members have quite rightly indicated.

I agree, too, that we have to consolidate and strengthen the political processes, which is going to be of great significance in everything we do, and to make sure particularly that we have, with the forthcoming elections, an understanding of what it is we want to achieve. I understand the points raised by a number of honourable Members, including Mr Costa and Mr Stevenson, about the issues concerning the Committee decision on the barring of candidates.

The review of candidates was always part of the pre-electoral process. There is an appeals procedure, which I trust will be allowed to run its proper course. I should also say that we do plan to send our EU mission next week, which is six weeks ahead of election day, and that will enable us to follow first-hand and closely the pre-election process, which is of great interest. We trust and hope that the Iraqi authorities will ensure an inclusive electoral process, for all the reasons that honourable Members have made absolutely clear in what they have said.

A number of Members also raised the issue of the memorandum of understanding on energy and its importance and significance. We are very clear in doing this that Iraq is a unitary state and that all our cooperation is with the government of all of Iraq. We fully support Iraq remaining a unified and sovereign state. Within this area, it will be important to enhance cooperation – and I heard what was said, in particular, by Mr Rübig, who described the need to think further about enhancing that cooperation. I will feed that back to the Commissioners-designate.

I am also aware, when I say that there is an issue around the security question, that the issue of Kirkuk is a very important one, as well as other disputed boundaries. I described that as one of the major challenges which Iraq faces at the present time. I feel very strongly that Iraq has to solve these issues for itself. It is for Iraq to deal with. However, I am very keen to support the United Nations Assistance Mission in Iraq, which has made significant efforts to try and begin a dialogue and a process. To be cautious, though, I do not expect dialogue to be of any significant level pre the elections, at this particular stage.

Just a little bit more about energy cooperation too. We see this as being part of developing a comprehensive and integrated energy policy for Iraq. This is about the supply and security of supply between Iraq and the European Union and should, of course, include the development of renewable energy, particularly solar and wind energy, and to also enhance energy efficiency measures within Iraq. I hope, too, that we will see technological, scientific and industrial cooperation as well over the coming months and years. That point was well made.

Moving to the issue of the recent cancellation of the delegation, Mr Meyer raised the issue of future security concerns. We do want to see an improvement in the environment, as I have indicated, to allow the deployment of the election observation mission with the participation of MEPs. This will clearly be of enormous significance for honourable Members in the coming electoral process and, as I have indicated, we will be sending people out very shortly.

Honourable Members raised the question of the withdrawal of forces. President Obama has, of course, announced the withdrawal of all combat troops by August 2010 which, in practice, means that the withdrawal will begin soon after the national elections. That, again, is of significance and importance. I have indicated that we are sending the election assessment team shortly, which I hope will help us deal with the issues that honourable Members have raised in that context.

In terms of Camp Ashraf, we have consistently and repeatedly reminded Iraq that this complex issue must be managed in full accordance with international law, and indeed without any violence.

Going back to where we began, I am optimistic about Iraq. There are significant challenges, and honourable Members are right to remind us of those significant challenges. However, we can see, with the coming elections and with the opportunity for greater cooperation – an opportunity for the European Union, with its value system and the things we are particularly concerned about: human rights, the rights of minorities,

the issues of capital punishment, developing strong cooperation on energy security and supply and working more closely with the government, while being clear about the expectations we have – a future for Iraq that will be peaceful and democratic. We must ensure that we work consistently towards that end.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place during the next February part-session in Strasbourg.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Jaromír Kohlíček (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (CS) I know of only a few countries relatively close to Europe which have managed to put their 'democratisation' process off for several decades. Iraq, where units from EU countries have also unfortunately left a negative mark, is definitely one of them. At present, one of the most secular states in the Islamic world has been left in ruins, with three of its communities constantly at loggerheads. What has survived from the past are just memories of the country's relatively good education and health care systems, and a comparatively advanced infrastructure. This is the only country in the region where the Kurdish minority was autonomous, even though no ideal democratic regime ruled in the country. By and large, the question is which country of the region can we describe as having a truly democratic regime? The fact that, following the invasion by the US Army, the Iraqi state has been totally disrupted marks, together with the partial liquidation of the infrastructure of its social, health care, and educational systems, a giant step backwards. The cloak of so-called democratic elections can by no means cover that up. The ongoing efforts aimed at distracting attention from current problems by stage-managed trials of prominent figures of Saddam Hussein's regime are naive. Only a person absolutely unacquainted with the situation could believe that it can be improved in this way. The only positive aspect of the recent period is that both the US administration and the Iraqi Government have realised that there will be no improvement without good relations with Iran.

Artur Zasada (PPE), in writing. – (PL) I am pleased at the optimistic tone of Mrs Ashton's speech, but I would rather maintain a certain caution in my assessment of the situation in Iraq. Despite many appearances, the country is still internally unstable, and democracy most certainly cannot be said to have 'taken root'. We cannot speak of stabilisation in a country within whose borders 1.8-1.9 million residents have been displaced, while a further million have left the country altogether, and the conditions under which the refugees are living are extremely poor.

It is essential to review the methods currently being used to supply foreign aid to refugees in Syria and Jordan and displaced people inside Iraq. This aid needs to be supplied for a sufficiently long period of time. How long? This we still do not know. However, just as a doctor does not stop treatment at the first signs of improvement, we, too, must not allow ourselves to be misled by over-optimistic prognoses.

(The sitting was suspended at 19.25 and resumed at 21.00)

IN THE CHAIR: MR McMILLAN-SCOTT

Vice-President

8. Second revision of the ACP-EU Partnership agreement (Cotonou agreement) (debate)

President. – The next item is the report by Eva Joly, on behalf of the Committee on Development, on the second revision of the ACP-EU Partnership Agreement (Cotonou Agreement) (2009/2165(INI)) (A7-0086/2009).

Eva Joly, rapporteur. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the revision of the Cotonou Agreement gives us an opportunity to learn lessons from the crises that we face: the economic and financial crisis, the social or food crisis, climate change, energy challenges and the persistence of extreme poverty.

The dominant economic model that is the unbridled free market, and our lifestyles, have not just shown their limitations, but have actually caused these unprecedented multidimensional crises. We must therefore carry out a radical overhaul of all our policies.

The report submitted to you today and adopted unanimously by the members of the Committee on Development seems to me to represent a first step towards this necessary revision.

The main imperative to respect is consistency. European Union trade policy, fisheries and agriculture must be designed consistently and in such a way as to ensure sustainable development, to fight poverty and guarantee a decent standard of living and income for everyone.

I am sorry to tell you that this is not the case today. By making trade an end in itself, and not a means to serve its development policy, the European Union is sacrificing the populations of developing countries for the benefit of its multinationals. Therefore, negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreements are quite rightly causing controversy amongst the governments of the ACP, unions and civil society, which see them as a threat to their economies.

Agriculture is one of the most problematic issues and remains tragically neglected in cooperation between the European Union and the ACP countries. Although rural areas and this sector represent more than 60% of the population and their jobs, their share of the European funds for ACP countries is virtually non-existent.

This must change. How can we eradicate poverty without making food sovereignty a priority? Agriculture must be at the heart of the European Union's development policies. Helping developing countries together with local farmers to ensure they have food sovereignty is quite simply essential, all the more so because, today, food sovereignty, like the democratic legitimacy of these countries' governments, is threatened by a new and particularly worrying phenomenon, the acquisition of arable land by foreign investors following the rise in food prices in 2007.

China, Saudi Arabia and even Qatar now own thousands of hectares in developing countries. The European Union and the ACP countries must tackle this matter, which is likely to create violent conflicts and hunger riots, in particular, by making access to natural resources such as land and water a fundamental and inalienable right of local populations.

Another matter that is close to my heart is that of tax havens. The repercussions of these are bad enough for developed countries, but are even worse for the economies and the political institutions of developing countries. The illicit financial flows that they allow are thought to account for as much as ten times the amount of official development assistance.

Stopping this haemorrhage is a question of consistency and credibility. A first step could be the signing of a binding agreement, requiring multinationals to automatically declare their profits and the taxes paid in every country in which they operate, thus limiting the abuses and the losses sustained by developing countries.

Finally, I would like to use this debate to stress once more the democratic deficit of this revision, which our parliaments were not consulted on. The role of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly must, however, be strengthened.

Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I hope that the negotiators will seize the opportunity they are being given to make the necessary amendments to this partnership and to make it a success of which the principal beneficiaries will be the populations of the ACP countries.

Vital Moreira, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on International Trade*. – (PT) Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the Committee on International Trade, over which I have the honour of presiding, has decided to take a stand on the ongoing revision of the Cotonou Agreement for two reasons.

Firstly, trade is an essential part of the relations between the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries and the European Union. Secondly, the Cotonou Agreement has brought with it the new Economic Partnership Agreements, which are essentially trade agreements.

For these reasons, we have decided to participate by providing a report, for which I am the rapporteur.

In this report, we are concerned with two things: firstly, respecting the details of the Economic Partnership Agreements and the parliamentary monitoring institutions which they have established, such as the Cariforum, and, secondly, making use of synergies while respecting the autonomy of both institutions. Respecting the synergies, in other words, within the Joint Parliamentary Assembly, which acts between the European Union and the ACP countries and the new inter-parliamentary institutions for the Economic Partnership Agreements.

Karel De Gucht, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I appreciate very much the interest that you take in the second revision of the Cotonou Agreement. It is also with great interest that I read the report of the Development Committee, which provides a shrewd analysis on the matters at stake. Throughout the whole process, it is a priority for us to keep Parliament informed, as we have done over the last months.

The negotiations have gained momentum and are now entering into the final phase, and the next joint ambassadorial meeting will prove the value of these discussions. We will be heading for an extraordinary joint ministerial meeting to conclude the negotiations in March, as foreseen by the Cotonou Agreement.

Let me now share with you some observations on the report. Above all, the report has already proven helpful in upholding certain positions of the EU. Just to name some of them: your position on strengthening national ACP parliaments, on the International Criminal Court and on other human rights issues confirmed our negotiation position. Likewise, the importance that you attach to climate change and food security is shared by us and will be reflected in the final outcome.

I would like to focus on four items, starting with the importance of the parliamentary dimension as embodied in the Joint Parliamentary Assembly, to which the report attaches great importance. The Commission is committed to strengthening the parliamentary dimension in the Cotonou Agreement. Therefore, our intention is not to weaken the JPA. On the contrary, the Commission proposal must be seen in the broader context of growing parliamentary oversight functions, in particular, with a view to existing and future Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) and EDF programmes. We should ensure maximum synergy between EPA and Cotonou institutions, including between regional JPA meetings and the EPA parliamentary bodies. In this emerging setting, a reduction in plenary JPA meetings would make sense. The Commission accepts, however, that this matter needs to be agreed with those who are most concerned, and is therefore open to reconsidering its position. At the same time, we would be interested to learn more from Parliament how it sees the JPA's role and functioning in a changing political and institutional environment.

The establishment of EPAs does not only call for the need to ensure synergy between them and the Cotonou institutions, but also requires an update of the Cotonou trade provisions, since the Cotonou trade regime has become obsolete. We have agreed with ACP partners that we will continue the negotiations towards regional European Partnership Agreements. In this context, as Development Commissioner, I would stress that it is neither politically desirable nor legally feasible to incorporate EU unilateral trade regimes such as GSP or GSP+ in Cotonou, as suggested in the draft report, since these depend on autonomous EU schemes. By contrast, the Commission welcomes the call for Cotonou to give more attention to the trade and development issues in general, and to aid for trade in particular.

In your report, you express the concern that the conclusion of EPAs and increased regionalisation might undermine the coherence of the ACP Group. The Commission believes that regional differentiation within the framework of Cotonou is more an opportunity than a threat. Regional integration is crucial for the development of ACP countries and we need to integrate this reality into Cotonou to better support their own efforts towards this objective. This by no means signifies disrupting the ACP Group, and our ACP partners largely share this approach.

Let me now briefly comment on sectoral policies which you are stressing in your report. We fully share the importance of climate change and renewable energies which are already included in the present revision exercise. Likewise, we will address food security in the regional dimension.

You also stress the importance of good governance in tax matters and in the fiscal area. Good governance is a fundamental principle of the Cotonou Agreement. Building on Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement, the Commission is currently preparing a new policy on good governance in tax matters in the context of development cooperation. We are also seeking to address these aspects in the ongoing revision exercise. Therefore, I can confirm that we share the same objective with you, which is to create fair, effective and growth-enhancing tax systems and effective tax administrations, as well as to strengthen the participation of developing countries in international tax processes.

Finally, I take note that you deplore that the Commission has not consulted a wider variety of actors before launching the revision process – paragraphs 2 and 8 – and I fully agree that, for the future of the ACP-EU relations post-2020, a comprehensive consultation process is needed, possibly in the form of a green paper. We will have to assess the results of the present revision exercise as a basis for this as a form of lessons learnt.

Cristian Dan Preda, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (RO) I would first of all like to congratulate Mrs Joly for compiling this report. The subject areas touched on in it are extremely important in terms of ensuring that the Cotonou Agreement remains the basis for a solid partnership with the ACP countries, as well as a relevant instrument against the backdrop of the new challenges which these countries are facing.

The negotiations are taking place in a climate which, as we all know, is difficult and complex. On the one hand, the ACP countries are deeply affected not only by the economic and financial crisis, but also by the

lack of food security and the consequences of climate change. On the other hand, there is an institutional challenge facing all the parties in the negotiations, which involves reflecting in an appropriate manner on the trends towards a regionalisation of relations between ACP countries and the European Union. We must ensure from now on that the revised text contains all the elements required for a cooperation promoting effective development, capable of contributing to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in the ACP countries.

I also wish to emphasise that I introduced five amendments on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats). I believe that these will offer a more finely nuanced reading of some of the proposals contained in the report. For example, it is important in paragraph 29 for us to insist on the concept of ownership in connection with arable land.

In addition, on the subject of creating a mechanism where transnational companies are obliged to declare the profits they have made, I believe that this must be set up at international level. In paragraph 25, it is important to make a clear reference to dealing with the issue of food security in a consistent manner as part of the EU's development policy. Finally, in paragraph 31, the position expressed on readmission agreements with third countries does not reflect the PPE Group's vision on this matter.

Harlem Désir, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would also like to congratulate Mrs Joly on her work, on the report and also on taking into account the contributions of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, and, although we have again tabled some amendments, we see our contribution in the resolution that she has presented.

For our group, the partnership between the European Union and the ACP countries is part of an historic commitment, which must retain all its specific characteristics, which must not be watered down, even by the need to comply with certain rules, such as those of the WTO. We are most concerned that this partnership should preserve, in particular, the consistency of all European Union policies – trade policy, budgetary policy – with objectives in the area of development, but also in relation to the promotion of peace, security and democracy and human rights in ACP countries.

It is not a question of imposing a model, but of working with these countries to ensure their development, which must be sustainable development. From this point of view, it is very important for this revision to enable us to take into account new elements of the last five years: the fight against climate change, technology transfers, renewable energy development aid, the fight against food crises, and therefore greater emphasis in our cooperation on agriculture, on food sovereignty, the fight against financial deregulation, good fiscal governance and the fight against tax havens. We see our contribution in all of that.

I would like to stress two points. Trade: with the implementation of the Economic Partnership Agreements, certain provisions of the Cotonou Agreement will become obsolete, but we are concerned that this agreement should still mention that the trade clauses and the trade regimes from which the ACP countries benefit must not be less favourable than those from which they benefited previously. It seems to us that we should integrate the GSP, the interim EPAs and all these provisions in the revision of the Cotonou Agreement.

Finally, on emigration – our colleagues in the group will emphasise this – we are concerned that it should actually be said that the migration agreements preserve the rights of migrants and that we cannot accept transit regimes to countries that do not guarantee respect for human rights.

Louis Michel, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, I would also like to congratulate Mrs Joly on the accuracy and the rigour of her report, and on the very appropriate analysis that it contains.

The second revision of the Cotonou Agreement must enhance the Lomé *acquis* while consolidating unity, cohesion and solidarity between the ACP States. This agreement must, of course, guarantee that these countries will be able to take control of their development policy.

The programming, re-examination and monitoring of the agreement should consequently also be a prerogative for the parliaments of our partner countries. I know that this is obviously a huge challenge, but I think that we must make a special effort to encourage these parliaments. It is an expectation that we must also express very openly to the authorities of our partner countries. Certain governments, as you know, are reluctant to encourage parliamentary debate in their countries.

I also call in particular for the democratic scrutiny and the role of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly to be strengthened, notably via the insertion in the Cotonou Agreement of clauses that would allow the JPA

to receive national and regional strategy documents in order to debate them. In future, the national and regional parliaments must also, I believe, be consulted much more systematically on the process of drafting regional and national strategy documents.

I would like to say a few words on the organisation of the work of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly: I believe that we must keep two sessions. Reducing these to one session would send out an extremely negative message to our partners. Regional meetings should perhaps be organised more closely together; on 25 January, I will make some concrete proposals in this regard to the Bureau of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

For the sake of consistency and effectiveness, I insist that the parliamentary bodies in charge of monitoring the EPAs are made up of members of the JPA in order to better guarantee their development dimension. Furthermore, I welcome your comments, Commissioner, since you were quite clear on this declaration as the next Trade Commissioner. I do not, for one minute, doubt your sincerity when you say that you want to endow these Economic Partnership Agreements with this development dimension.

Finally, the revision of the Cotonou Agreement should provide for an increase in aid and funding for ACP countries in order to help them take the measures necessary to combat climate change.

Nirj Deva, on behalf of the ECR Group. – Mr President, we go on and on and on. We keep talking about alleviating poverty. This is the 10th EDF. We have pumped about EUR 350 billion into so-called alleviating poverty when we know that poverty has increased.

Why is it that we have policies and programmes in our ACP countries that we never had in our own European history? The provinces of Brussels or Brabant did not get richer and eliminate poverty by creating what we are trying to do in the ACP countries. We created wealth in Europe by creating wealth. How do we create wealth in the ACP countries?

Mrs Joly has very interestingly identified that there is a flight of capital. She says that eight times what we put into those countries goes out. Why is that capital not employed in those countries? Why are we not creating the conditions for that capital to stay at home to create jobs and make wealth? Until we answer these questions, we are wasting our taxpayers' money without actually eliminating one person from being poor.

Gabriele Zimmer, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (DE) Mr President, my group supports Mrs Joly's report. We call for the following problems, amongst others, to be taken into consideration: the incorporation of the consequences of climate change and of the necessary adaptation measures for the ACP countries; the concern of the ACP countries that the EU's regional negotiations with groups of ACP countries will undermine solidarity within the ACP community; and the possibility of supporting necessary investments in the field of public services and public infrastructure with IB credits on the basis of the Cotonou Agreement. At the same time, we oppose the inclusion of quotas for the return of migrants from the EU to the ACP countries as part of these negotiations.

The first revision of the Cotonou Agreement took up the political dimension. Now, it is about the parliamentary dimension, for which reason we see the idea of cutting the sittings of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly to once a year as incomprehensible.

Krisztina Morvai (NI). – (HU) I was shocked when, during a food conference, I saw a sign in the hand of the African delegation saying: Do not feed Africa. We would do better to realise that what Africa needs is not aid but food self-determination. Interestingly, the African population and farmers have the same interest as Eastern Europe's post-communist farmers and population, or even, carried to the extreme, the French farmers and population, namely the need for local farmers to decide what they wish to produce, how to produce it and sell it on the local marketplace. And the local population's interest is to be able to eat locally produced healthy and good quality food. The ideas of a liberalised global free market, on the one hand, and food self-determination, on the other, belong to two different systems of logic. Here, we should take the side of food self-determination more decisively.

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, the second revision of the Cotonou Agreement comes at a very interesting time, because it allows analysis of the provisions of the agreement in the light of a rapidly changing reality. Much has happened since the previous review in 2005: crises in the areas of economics, food, energy and finance and the changes resulting from climate negotiations and their effects on developing countries.

However, something which must interest MEPs is the role of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly and possible attempts at restricting its frequency and role. I am greatly pleased by the Commissioner's declaration that

the European Commission has no such intentions. This is important, because neither the European Parliament, nor the Joint Parliamentary Assembly, nor the parliaments of the ACP countries, took part in the decision process which has produced the changes to the agreement.

Another important matter is the regionalisation of European Union-ACP relations and, in particular, the nature of this regionalisation. I am not against regionalisation, but I am convinced that regional meetings of the Joint Assembly must not replace plenary sessions. Incidentally, it would probably be more natural if decisions about the structures and principles of work of the Joint Assembly were made by the Assembly itself, and not the parties to the agreement.

I endorse the desire expressed in the report to strengthen national parliaments. Mr Michel spoke about this. In future, we would like all representatives of the ACP countries who take part in the work of the Joint Assembly to be Members of their own parliaments, and not representatives of their governments.

It is equally important that the national parliaments of the ACP countries be given the opportunity to play a significant role in cooperation on development, in preparation and implementation of programmes and in monitoring and evaluation of action taken. This explains the necessity of access to strategic documents. In addition, I agree, of course, that functions should not be duplicated and that complementarity and synergy between Economic Partnership Agreements and the Joint Parliamentary Assembly is very important.

Véronique De Keyser (S&D). – (FR) Mr President, Article 13 of the Cotonou Agreement has not been revised since 2000. It concerns a sensitive subject: the dialogue between the European Union and the ACP countries on immigration, fair treatment of immigrants, the principles of non-refoulement, the underlying causes of immigration and, finally, the fight against illegal immigration and readmission, and it is these two aspects that the European Union has mostly concentrated on.

The cruel absence of a common immigration policy that is worthy of the values that Europe claims to uphold risks strengthening, in the planned revision of Article 13, the aspect of repression and the hunting down of illegal immigrants. The tragic example of the bilateral agreement between Italy and Libya, which has led to intolerable humanitarian situations, does not seem to have discouraged the zeal of those who want to toughen up Article 13 in order to strengthen the section on the fight against illegal immigration.

Furthermore, in some regions – I am thinking of Calabria – illegal immigrants are now being hunted down openly and unceremoniously. Instead of acting on the basis of the fears aroused by the current crisis, we must point out the synergy that must be established between immigration and development.

If the ACP countries need aid in order to take off economically, we ourselves will need immigration to face the crisis affecting us. We should therefore concentrate on legal immigration and mobility. These are the only safeguards against the hateful climate surreptitiously taking root in our own countries.

Niccolò Rinaldi (ALDE). – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, as liberal democrats, we want to take advantage of the revision of the Cotonou Agreement to affirm an idea of modernity that is backed by the ACP countries too, and when I speak of modernity I mean, above all, the assertion of policies that can stress and allow greater freedom.

This freedom should be, first and foremost, freedom from bureaucracy, which is becoming more and more excessive in the ACP countries and is constantly an obstacle to economic growth. This freedom should be the possibility, above all, for students to go to study abroad, and I believe that we should take the opportunity afforded by this revision to launch an ambitious programme of study grants. This freedom should be through the dissemination of new IT technologies so that the Internet, in particular, can become an asset that is as widely accessible as possible.

Finally, it should allow the free movement of workers in such a way as to resolve the serious cases of interference to which Mrs De Keyser referred when she talked about bilateral treaties. Cotonou, which is the direct descendant of Lomé and Yaoundé, has a long history; at one time, it led the way, and if it is able to tackle new challenges, it will again succeed in playing a major role.

Mariya Nedelcheva (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, I would firstly like to congratulate Mrs Joly on the quality of her report.

Indeed, the revision of the Cotonou Agreement must be an opportunity to finally take stock and to propose, on the basis of the lessons learned, solutions to improve its implementation, its operation and its impact. In this regard, the clear identification of priorities is extremely important.

I would like to stress three points. First of all, we need to make the contents of the political dialogue clearer. We must not lose sight of the consolidation of peace, the prevention and the settling of conflicts, but making existing instruments operational and adding references to the fight against the traffic in small arms and against drugs are challenges which, once conquered, will have a positive impact politically, economically and socially.

Secondly, the conclusion of flexible and balanced Economic Partnership Agreements that have due regard for regional development is extremely important. The key sectors, such as agriculture, renewable energy and the employment of young people, should be better taken into account. Regular dialogue with local populations will enable a realistic adjustment to be made.

Finally, the institutional framework is vital. To ensure better cohesion between the different pillars of the agreement is absolutely essential. Strengthening the power of the JPA and of the national parliaments will automatically lead to better democratic scrutiny and, above all, to far greater transparency.

To conclude, any instrument, whether new or overhauled, must preserve the fundamental principles and spirit of the agreement and, above all, we must not lose sight of the central objective, which is the eradication of poverty, while contributing to sustainable development and the progressive integration of the ACP countries into the global economy.

Michael Cashman (S&D). – Mr President, brevity is the source of wit. Congratulations, Madame Joly; congratulations, Commissioner. Parliament puts at its heart in these negotiations reinforcing the principle of non-negotiable human rights clauses and sanctions for failure to respect such clauses, inter alia, with regard to discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, sexual orientation, and towards people living with AIDS and HIV.

I am told, Commissioner, that some Member States do not want this amendment, but for Parliament it is vital. Human rights, as you well know, are often far too eroded, and this erosion is primarily for party political advantage. The defence of fundamental rights is at the heart of the European Union, and so it should therefore be at the heart and the centre of our relations with all ACP countries.

Commissioner, this is probably the last time you will appear before us in your present portfolio, so can I please say a warm thank you on behalf of Parliament. You have been a staunch defender of human rights and the values of the EU, and I wish you well in your new portfolio. Thank you.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE). – (PT) This revised version of the Cotonou Agreement introduces key issues for sustainable development and the gradual integration of ACP countries into the global economy. Issues such as climate change, energy security, training and education are essential for development in these countries.

At the same time, global warming may present an opportunity. The costs of renewable energy that these countries have at their disposal are essential for their economic and social development, and allow them to move towards a state of independence in terms of energy, so that they can face up to the global crisis.

Investment in education and training is equally important in combating poverty, unemployment, emigration and the brain drain, and will help to build the economy in these countries.

To conclude, I would like to make special mention of the small island countries that are particularly vulnerable and fragile. In view of this, the implementation of the Cotonou Agreement should take account of the Mauritius Strategy and the Barbados Action Plan, which identify a number of measures to assist developing island countries in bringing about sustainable development.

Diogo Feio (PPE). – (PT) Mr President, Parliament has been convened at this precise moment in order to decide on the second revision of the Cotonou Agreement.

Please allow me, however, to point out the difficulties that Haiti is facing at present. This situation calls for international solidarity, action and attention. Of course, my thoughts go out to those who have lost their lives and those who are living through a really desperate situation.

In terms of the topic in question here, we know that Cotonou aims to create a framework for cooperation that will constitute a joint ACP-EU response to globalisation, contribute to peace and security, and foster a democratic political atmosphere.

The 2005 revision took a few steps in the right direction. However, much remains to be done. The global economic and financial crisis, climate issues and the increased cost of food and energy are the reasons behind a new revised version.

I will no longer vote for the European Union to maintain – and, wherever possible, to increase – the levels of aid given to ACP countries. I agree with the argument that the national parliaments of those countries need to be involved in the process of revising the agreement both now and in the future, and I reiterate the need for them to be invited to do so.

Mario Mauro (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, one objective that the second revision of the partnership agreement should have is definitely to promote a culture of responsibility. It will be very difficult to achieve this without the help of civil society organisations, non-State entities, and also without the parliaments. In fact, I do not believe that it is possible to have policies that fully meet the real needs of the communities involved.

A second key aspect is humanitarian aid. The USD 300 billion of aid that has been granted over the past 40 years has had no effect, if we consider that the growth of the African continent over that period has been less than 0.2% per year.

This is an apocalyptic scenario which the international community must start to understand. It must, at last, tackle the issue of developing countries as a problem that is truly ours, as a problem that concerns us, the day-to-day lives of our communities, to be tackled day by day together with the local institutions which are on an endless quest for a glimmer of legitimacy.

Finally, allow me to stress that investing in human capital means trying to understand that the greatest resource for recovery is the very people who are living through difficult situations. It is they who bear the responsibility for pulling the continent out of the abyss, and it is for us to pay attention to the problems of those countries with a clear purpose: that common good which is an interest not only of the ACP countries but also our own, and the future of our citizens.

We should look to people instead of to money, to substance instead of to advertisements. This will allow us to utilise our strategies to the best effect.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE). – (CS) Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I have repeatedly criticised the fact that the national parliaments and the non-governmental organisations in developing countries are not involved in decision making regarding development aid, and that they do not have access to strategic documents. This must be rectified during the new revision of the Cotonou Agreement. The new agreement should also incorporate commitments by individual governments and parliaments to build functioning tax systems in their countries. This is important for both contracting parties. The ACP countries finally need their own standard fiscal administration, i.e., planned tax revenues for their own development objectives. This, in turn, will help the Union in its struggle against the abuse of tax havens, against tax evasion, and against the illegal flight of capital.

As deputy chair responsible for human rights, I demand that international treaties also contain human rights clauses, and not only for African, Caribbean and Pacific countries. I am sorry to note that the report by Mrs Joly, a good report in other respects, does not contain such a requirement. I urge the Commission and the Spanish Presidency to rectify this.

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE). – (RO) The report we have debated today refers to many problems linked to food security in ACP countries. I believe that we cannot talk about this subject without also taking into account some of the realities of European agriculture.

The European Union can and even should play the role of regulator on the global markets. If Europe reduced its agricultural output, the rise in food imports would contribute significantly to the global rise in food prices. This is why the European Union's food production must be maintained at constant levels for the benefit of Europeans, as well as for the benefit of the citizens from the ACP and other states.

Therefore, I believe that these aspects linked to the poorer countries' food security are also closely linked to the future of the European common agricultural policy.

Isabelle Durant (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, I would also like to express my support for the very good report by my colleague, Mrs Joly. The ACP-EU Partnership is more necessary than ever, and the tragedy

taking place in Haiti demonstrates the extent to which the ACP-EU Partnership is indispensable and definitely must be strengthened.

It is unusual to speak about all of this to a Commissioner who today is in charge of development but tomorrow will be in charge of trade and, precisely for this reason, I would like to give you three suggestions.

Firstly, as others before me have said, when it comes to parliamentary control and the Assembly, we should continue to hold two annual meetings and not reduce these to one.

Secondly, why not subject the Economic Partnership Agreements to parliamentary control in the case of the ACPs, rather than to a strictly commercial logic, so that, here too, parliaments can be involved and made responsible for controlling the repercussions for the populations of the Economic Partnership Agreements and the defence of their interests in this framework?

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the revision of the Cotonou agreements should promote a shift in the European Union's policy of cooperation and development aid. This policy should be aimed at genuine cooperation and solidarity, and should help to promote autonomous and sovereign development in ACP countries.

There are myriad mechanisms that currently ensure that many of these countries remain subject to domination and subjugation. Suffocating foreign debt, paid several times over, yet always rising, plays a key role in establishing these kind of relations.

Pressure from the European Union to implement Economic Partnership Agreements – essentially free trade agreements – has come to reflect the current priorities of the European Development Fund, which needs to be revisited, and is indicative of the path that is now being followed. This is a path that seeks to force these countries to submit to new relationships based on dependence and to the interests of multinationals, which leads to the overuse of their resources so as to serve interests that are not shared by their citizens.

Development aid must not be conditional on the implementation of Economic Partnership Agreements. The concerns and objections of the ACP countries must be respected, along with the priorities that they set down.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, I will come straight out and say this: I think there is little sense in paragraph 31 of the present proposal for a second revision of the agreement. I, too, am opposed to the kind of relay race that the various readmission agreements for migrants create, whereby the people in question are passed from one country to the next. In this regard, there is definitely a need for such cascade agreements to be better regulated at the international level. It seems to me even more important, however, that this kind of situation is avoided in the first place. I therefore believe that the idea of facilitating the circular visa for people from the ACP countries is the wrong way to go. Let us, therefore, support self-help. Let us promote self-sufficiency. Let us turn charity cases into producers with a sense of self-worth. That would certainly put a stop to social emigration and the flight from social poverty.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, this afternoon, the debate was held on the massive and unimaginable disaster in Haiti and on how Europe can help to bring relief to the victims. This debate should remind us – and this is why I have taken the floor during this evening's sitting – that we need to approach agreements with countries which face serious economic problems and which are especially vulnerable to natural disasters, as the tragedy in Haiti has proven, in a completely different spirit from other economic agreements entered into by the European Union. We are talking about countries at the mercy of poverty, indigence and disease. We are talking about countries in which the term humanitarian crisis is tending to become the rule.

It is therefore our responsibility, it is our duty, it is our creed, it is the foundation stone of the European Union for us to put human life above all else and any technical or economic dimensions after that. That is why, everything we have debated today, the red tape, the technical issues, need to be resolved as quickly as possible.

Hans-Peter Martin (NI). – (DE) Mr President, when I think of the Caribbean, two images come to mind: the current major disaster in Haiti, and, when you have been working in this House for many years, also the MEPs luxuriating at the meetings of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA).

After this long debate, in which important things have been said, it could perhaps be possible to send out a very concrete sign and, in consideration of the situation in Haiti, do without the next one or two opulent sittings of the ACP-EU JPA in these very countries and use the net profit to actually benefit the victims. It

would only be a drop in the ocean, but it would be symbolic, and it would show that we really do mean, in practice, the many fine words that are spoken in this House.

Crescenzo Rivellini (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the ACP Assembly is particularly important at this political juncture where globalisation has more or less divided the world into countries producing products and countries producing ideas, giving rise to a migration of workers as well as, naturally, goods.

At the heart of this process is the Mediterranean, the true fulcrum between Europe and the ACP countries. The Cotonou rules must therefore adapt to this new situation and I propose – at the request of the President of the Republic of Italy, Giorgio Napolitano, who officially supports this proposal – that a decentralised office or a fixed annual meeting of the ACP Assembly be established in the most multi-ethnic, most Mediterranean European city, which is also close to the ACP countries: Naples.

I therefore repeat – again at the request of the President of the Republic of Italy – I recommend discussing this proposal in the new agreements. Moreover, it has the advantage of bringing Europe closer to its citizens and the people of southern Italy, which is Europe's true logistical platform with regard to the countries of the Mediterranean.

Janusz Wojciechowski (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, I permit myself to ask for the floor after hearing Mr Niculescu's speech, and would like to support firmly the thought he expressed – that in our economic relations with other countries, including the ACP countries, we should not lose sight of the food security of European society. In relations with ACP countries, we can recall the reform of the sugar market, which was carried out under the noble slogan of support for those countries, but which, in reality, made the situation in the European Union, for our farmers and consumers, much worse, and was not of much help to the ACP countries. Let us always remember food security, and our society, which needs that security.

Karel De Gucht, Member of the Commission. – First of all, with respect to the GSP and GSP+, we have nothing in principle against these being included in the Cotonou Agreement, but we should realise that GSP and GSP+ are unilateral and Cotonou is contractual. I think it is therefore very difficult to put them in the Cotonou Agreement, but maybe we can find formulas that make the link more intricate.

(FR) Democratic scrutiny: several speakers have requested that the practice of holding two annual plenary meetings be maintained. The Commission is prepared to reconsider its point of view in this respect, but perhaps we could nevertheless agree to let the regional meetings coincide, as far as possible, with one or two of the plenary meetings, since it seems to me that all the meetings of the European Parliament, together with those of the other institutions, create an awful lot of meetings. I therefore agree in principle with the idea of having two plenary meetings, but let us try to bring them closer to the regional meetings.

Several speakers also spoke of the nature of the Economic Partnership Agreements. This is the term we agreed on, but in fact we should really talk in terms of development partnership agreements, and I think that this would also make the discussion with the ACP countries easier. I think that this would be liable to make the debate a little more open. In any case, if the European Parliament should agree at some point to a new Commission, of which I am a member, I will do everything possible, within my remit, to make these agreements a success and to be present at the sessions of the Joint Parliamentary Assembly.

There were some questions on fiscal matters. I think that I have already dealt with this point in my introduction, and I really believe that it is important that this becomes a crucial subject in our discussions with the ACP countries, but also among ourselves, since, let us be serious – and I know that the Spanish Presidency also has a keen interest in this subject – if we really want to do something, we also have to have the courage to intervene with our societies in these developing countries. The problem does not only arise there, the problem arises in particular, and I would even say above all, in the relationship between Europe and its own societies and industries in developing countries. This is a process that is under way and I understand that the Spanish Presidency will also take initiatives in this respect.

Migration.

With respect to Article 13, both sides want to update migration. On Article 13, the Commission has put forward a balanced and coherent proposal that builds on the three pillars of cooperation in the areas of migration and development, legal migration and illegal migration and readmission. The aspects put forward by the report are duly taken into account. All areas deserve equal attention. Negotiations are ongoing, and we are optimistic about finding an agreement provided the balance between the three pillars is kept.

Mr Cashman made a remark with respect to discrimination. Mr Cashman is not here at the moment, but I think he is completely right. Sexual orientation was part of the elements proposed by the Commission and we attach a lot of importance to it, but you should also be aware, as the Commission is, that in some ACP countries, homosexuality is forbidden by law. We recently made representations to the Burundian President and also to the Ugandan President because they have introduced discriminatory laws, but this is a very touchy subject and I think, at a certain moment in time, you will have to come to grips with it. Either you insist that the text is very clear, and probably we will not get an agreement on it: that is the first possibility; or another possibility is perhaps that we have some language which is less specific. UN language is less specific but would also cover sexual orientation. That is something that should be further discussed in the course of the negotiations. I think I have reacted to most of the points, even if it meant that I have spoken for too long.

Eva Joly, rapporteur. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, since the entry into force of the Cotonou agreements, poverty has not subsided. We have therefore failed in our development mission. Something has to change with this second revision.

I am pleased to say that there is a fairly broad consensus on the measures that I am proposing, and I think that one of the measures that we can use to eradicate poverty is to really combat tax havens, and to use this instrument to do what we can. Within the European Union and in the ACP region, we can force multinationals to declare, on a country-by-country basis, how much they earn and how much tax they pay.

That is also an international demand. However, many years will go by before this demand is met at international level. So let us use the opportunities that we have within this agreement to establish this rule in Europe. This is why I am asking you to reject the proposed amendment to paragraph 16, but to preserve the initial wording, which calls on us to put our own house in order.

In the same vein, what we can do is also force our own investment bank to take action with regard to tax havens. We should prohibit European Development Fund investments in companies that do not make profits in the countries in which they operate, but prefer to make profits in tax havens.

This was the case in Zambia, where very substantial investments – to the tune of USD 46 million, I believe – were made in the Mopani mine, for example. This has done nothing to improve the lives of Zambians; rather, it has improved the lives of the shareholders who have benefited from this aid. It is therefore totally counterproductive. This is within our power. We can change the mandate of our bank. Let us therefore do what we can and put nothing off until tomorrow. Let us take action in this regard.

Then, there are principles to which we should remain totally committed: human rights and migrant rights, and I urge you to retain my proposed wording of Article 31 and not quell the protests against bilateral agreements which, in reality, constitute an outsourcing of migratory flows.

(Applause)

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow (Wednesday, 20 January 2010).

Written statements (Rule 149)

Corina Crețu (S&D), in writing. – (RO) The second revision of the Cotonou Agreement presents an opportunity to evaluate the fields left open to incorrect or inefficient changes and is also the time when corrections can be made to the agreement according to developments in the globalisation process. There are numerous challenges to face, triggered by economic and social events, such as the economic and financial crisis and armed conflicts, as well as those posed by the negative trend in terms of the population's health, as highlighted by the increase in the number of people infected by transmissible diseases (TB, AIDS, malaria) and the rise in the number of victims of violence or natural disasters. There are also the challenges posed by climate change, which are more difficult to control, and all these challenges create the urgent need to make the developing countries' population more resistant to systemic social deficiencies. This also assumes that the offer of development cooperation is better focused on key elements in the public health and education systems. Consequently, I think that it is vital to deal with these aspects with greater clarity by consolidating title I – Development strategies – in Part 3 of the agreement.

Martin Kastler (PPE), in writing. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I will be voting in favour of this report, as I think that the deepening of cooperation between the European Union and the ACP states within the framework of the partnership agreements is important. That said, I would like to point out that this

report contains the wording 'protection of sexual and reproductive health'. Yet what is behind this phrase? Does it, first of all, mean ensuring people's physical and mental well-being in relation to all areas of human sexuality and reproduction, for example, by combating sexual violence and genital mutilation? Does it, secondly, mean access to information about what has come to be called family planning? Or, thirdly, does it also include abortion? In the past, the Commission and the Council have made it clear in relation to questions from MEPs that this 'sexual and reproductive health' does not include abortion. That is exactly how I see it. I therefore think it important to establish that the term 'the sexual and reproductive health of women' is not in the context of abortion and I am therefore proposing a clarification to that effect in the text of the agreement.

Siiri Oviir (ALDE), in writing. – (ET) Today, the second revision of the Cotonou Agreement introduced in 2000 is in progress, and within the framework of this revision, the aim is to introduce a range of changes to the agreement, changes which will help us to achieve the objectives set out in the agreement: the abolition of poverty, economic development and the gradual integration of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States into the world economy. It should be noted that, since the latest revision to the Cotonou Agreement in 2005, there have been many new developments in the global situation (e.g. the financial crisis, climate change, rising food and energy prices, etc.), all of which directly affect the countries in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific. I totally agree with the rapporteur's opinion that all those developments in the global situation that have taken place could, if they are not dealt with appropriately in the process of revising the agreement, make it difficult to achieve the objective of the Cotonou Agreement and the Millennium Development Objectives by the year 2015. As is well known, the EU and ACP countries have today agreed on areas and articles that will be revised in the Cotonou Agreement, in which the above has also been partly taken into account. Unfortunately, this means, worryingly, that the European Parliament, the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and the parliaments of the Member States and the ACP countries have not been involved in the process of making the appropriate decisions, which crucially affects the transparency and credibility of the revision to the agreement. I am of the opinion that, in order to increase democratic legitimacy and self-accountability, the role of the European Parliament, the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and the parliaments of the EU Member States and the ACP countries should be increased in the process of revising the agreement.

9. Procedural rights in criminal proceedings (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on

– the oral question to the Council on procedural rights in criminal proceedings, by Sarah Ludford, Elena Oana Antonescu, Carmen Romero López, Heidi Hautala and Rui Tavares, on behalf of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (O-0155/2009 - B7-0343/2009),

– the oral question to the Commission on procedural rights in criminal proceedings, by Sarah Ludford, Elena Oana Antonescu, Carmen Romero López, Heidi Hautala and Rui Tavares, on behalf of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (O-0156/2009 - B7-0344/2009).

Sarah Ludford, author. – Mr President, I frankly and fully acknowledge that these two oral questions tabled on 1 December last year have been overtaken by events, but this debate is still worthwhile to acknowledge that the issue of procedural rights is fully back on the table after a regrettable absence of several years and to stress the urgency and priority of this programme.

It has been a consistent complaint of the European Parliament for the last decade that procedural safeguards and defendants' rights have not received the same attention, let alone action, as moves to enhance the speed and efficiency of investigations and of prosecutions. We have supported the latter because, then, more criminals get caught. Those who reject in principle the European Arrest Warrant are the apologists for mafia criminals and absconding robbers, rapists and terrorists. But it is question of balance and getting 'European Arrest Warrant plus', and thus justice all round, through procedural guarantees to accompany simplified cross-border prosecutions. Opponents of the European Arrest Warrant of course do not want any EU action on rights either; they just want 'European Arrest Warrant minus'.

But the application of the European Arrest Warrant without proper procedural guarantees has, in some cases, led to the denial of justice, because mutual recognition has not been accompanied by a solid basis for mutual trust. One of those cases is my own constituent Andrew Symeou. Andrew has been in prison in Greece for six months awaiting trial on a manslaughter charge which seems to be based on mistaken identity and, I am afraid to say, police brutality to witnesses, and I believe the European Arrest Warrant has been

misused. When it was agreed upon in 2002, it was with the understanding from all sides that this measure, which would have the effect of EU citizens standing trial and being held in prison in another Member State, would be swiftly followed by measures guaranteeing their fair trial rights and guaranteeing there would be no miscarriages of justice. That promise was betrayed by Member States in failing to accept the Commission's 2004 proposal for a reasonably wide framework decision on procedural rights, and now a piecemeal approach is the best we can get. I am grateful that it was relaunched by the Swedish Presidency, but it is only a roadmap on a step-by-step basis.

We need to see the glass is half full and be optimistic, although I regret that the Council is, worryingly, only promising to consider, not to legislate on, Euro-bail, which would have helped Andrew Symeou, who has been explicitly refused bail because he is a foreigner. Judges are currently asked to enforce the judgments and orders of courts in other Member States without examining the facts, and they will be subject to increasing criticism and public unease if there is no EU-wide compliance with minimal procedural safeguards and defence rights for criminal investigations and prosecutions. It is not just individual citizens who fear poor guarantees of rights; this also deters judges, but also police and prosecutors, from working together, too.

I happen to believe that the human rights assurance in European Arrest Warrants should be an explicit condition of extradition, even if the Commission hates that. Thanks to Liberal Democrats, the UK legislation implementing the measure says that the court must be satisfied there is no breach of the European Convention on Human Rights. Puzzlingly, British courts seem shy of invoking this clause to block surrender. Now if all Member States genuinely observed their obligations under the ECHR, there might be no need for EU measures. The problem is not the absence of standards but the absence of practical respect, and many Member States find themselves before the Strasbourg Court for this reason. Considering that the Treaty on European Union and now the TFEU obliges EU States to respect the ECHR, this is shameful and unacceptable. So we do need an EU mechanism for enforcement which, from now on, will be provided by Commission infringement competence and European Court of Justice supervision. So EU measures need both to be consistent with the ECHR and not conflict with or undermine it and, at the same time, to add value in the sense of strengthening practical implementation.

I hope the Commission and Council agree that the standard of directives guaranteeing fundamental rights should be high. The Member State initiative on interpretation and translation, proposing the text which the Council agreed on last October, is less ambitious than the Commission text and needs improving. So we are concerned that the first measure does not demonstrate the highest standards. I hope we will be more ambitious and set a precedent for the next stages in building up procedural rights which, after interpretation and translation, are followed by other measures like legal advice, right to information, right to communicate with consular authorities and so on. Therefore, I want reassurance from the Council and Commission that measures in the roadmap will be rolled out fast enough to keep up the momentum towards a genuine achievement of fair trial rights, long overdue.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) I am pleased that this question has been tabled by Baroness Ludford, who spoke just now, Mrs Antonescu, Mrs Romero, Mrs Hautala and Mr Tavares, because we are indeed faced with a matter of overriding magnitude in the shape of procedural guarantees in criminal proceedings. On this subject, I would like to say that we agree on raising the profile of the matter you have brought to our attention and we also agree that it should be harmonised at European level.

In your question, you indicated at the outset that the Swedish Presidency made significant progress. The Swedish Presidency did indeed make important progress in this field. In October, the Council agreed on general guidelines for the text on the right to interpreting and translation in criminal proceedings and one month later, in November, the Council adopted a plan to make progress on further measures regarding procedural guarantees, in response to Baroness Ludford's call for action. Some of these you mentioned yourself, Baroness Ludford, such as the right to information on a person's rights – the repetition is intentional – and obligations in any criminal proceedings, on aid, on legal advice, on communication with family members and consular authorities, or on the special guarantees that must be put in place and the protection of vulnerable accused people. That was with regard to the Council during the Swedish Presidency.

At this point you may well say: That is all very well, but is there any agreement with the European Parliament to continue treating this work as a priority? And we can say to you: Yes, it is a priority to continue this approach. How? Through what initiatives?

The first thing that the Spanish Presidency will do is to try, by working with the European Parliament, to ensure the adoption of the Directive on interpreting and translation rights in criminal proceedings proposed by 13 Member States. It was not possible to continue with the proposal tabled by the Commission and

13 Member States have replaced this initiative. We want this initiative to be approved, naturally in cooperation with the European Parliament. Apart from this, we hope that the Commission will put the appropriate initiatives in place for the remaining aspects of procedural guarantees. We are very willing for this to happen as soon as possible so that we can start the process of adopting them, again in conjunction with the Council and Parliament.

I would like to end by telling you that the Spanish Presidency is planning to organise a seminar in Madrid this coming March, together with the Commission and the European Law Academy, on the subject of Common Standards in Procedural Guarantees. This shows, Baroness Ludford, that we agree wholeheartedly with you and those who supported this question on the urgency of regulating these matters, of harmonising them throughout Europe and, naturally, of keeping Parliament informed at all times on how the work is progressing.

Jacques Barrot, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (FR) Thank you for this question. You know how much I value these procedural guarantees. It is true that, for many years, the Commission has been fighting to ensure that minimum common rules relating to the right of defence are genuinely applied in all criminal proceedings in Europe. This is necessary for judicial cooperation and it is a condition for the vital mutual confidence among the Member States. The Commission has worked tirelessly to ensure that European legislation is adopted in this area. Moreover, it is true that, thanks to the Swedish Presidency, the roadmap was adopted by the Council on 30 November 2009. This is a fundamental step in the creation of European legislation on minimum procedural rights. The Member States have, through this act, agreed on the scope of this legislation and on the need to adopt it as a matter of priority in full cooperation with the European Parliament. Like you, I have just listened to Mr López Garrido, who gave a very good explanation of how the Spanish Presidency also tended towards this will to adopt these initial measures, which will provide us with a range of minimum guarantees.

It is true that the roadmap's step-by-step approach ultimately seemed to us to be a good solution. This approach will allow us to achieve our intended objective. The step-by-step approach means not only that a more thorough analysis can be made of each right in the context of the legislative proposal, but also that, in negotiations, each right can be examined individually. That allows us to avoid cross-sector bargaining, which sometimes characterises legislative texts that are too broad-based and can allow some Member States to hijack the negotiations in order to gain an advantage on a very specific point. So, Mrs Ludford, I am sure that the new Commission will work as quickly as possible to table all the legislative proposals provided for in the roadmap and to have them adopted at the earliest opportunity.

With regard to the right to interpretation and translation, which is the first provision of the roadmap, the Commission has noted the initiative presented by a number of Member States. This initiative, I must say, is based on the Commission's proposal of July 2009 and on the negotiations held within the Council during the second half of 2009. However, it is true that the Member States' initiative is not in full conformity with the European Convention on Human Rights, or with the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights.

The Commission's old proposal, which made the interpretation of meetings between the accused and defence counsel compulsory, is not completely followed up by the Member States' initiative, which limits this right to communications that take place in front of police authorities and during the trial. Moreover, the Commission's old proposal provided for a right to translation, a more comprehensive right in the text of the Commission.

Of course, there will be work in this area between the European Parliament and the Council, and I think we will be able to obtain an ambitious text regarding procedural rights. This is essential if we want to create a truly European judicial area. We will also ensure that the text complies with the standards laid down in the European Convention on Human Rights and in the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights, as well as in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. Therefore, I am sure that we will be able to count on Parliament to act on this matter and, once again, I note that the Spanish Presidency will also lend us its support.

Elena Oana Antonescu, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (RO) Although progress has been made in the area of mutual recognition of decisions in criminal matters, very little progress has been made with regard to guaranteeing and ensuring the rights of suspected and accused persons.

The importance of common standards is an essential condition for instilling mutual trust in the Member States' legal systems. The lack of balance between the rights of suspected and accused persons, on the one hand, and the instruments which the prosecution has available, on the other, may jeopardise the principle of mutual recognition of decisions. This is why the initiative launched by the Swedish Presidency in July 2009

to present a roadmap for consolidating the procedural rights of suspected or accused persons has marked a very important step forward.

As far as the right to translation and interpretation is concerned, the Treaty of Lisbon's entry into force on 1 December has established a new institutional framework. The proposal for a framework decision pending in the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs needed to be converted into a proposal for a directive for the work on this dossier to be able to continue.

We were concerned about the timetable and scope of application of the future initiatives on procedural rights. This is why we decided to submit these questions to the Commission and Council. Shortly after they were submitted in December, 13 Member States, including Romania, presented an initiative for a European Parliament and Council directive. I am confident that in the course of the whole process, we will manage to make improvements to this text, both with regard to its scope of application and to ensuring the integrity of the procedures and the quality of translation and interpretation.

With regard to the other measures stipulated in the roadmap, we believe that they are intended to ensure access to rights, as well as to legal advice and assistance, to establish special guarantees for suspected or accused persons who are vulnerable, and to provide information about the rights they have and the costs involved. We would like to see clear commitments from the Council and Commission so that proposals for a regulation are submitted as quickly as possible.

The differences which currently exist between Member States require common standards to be adopted urgently.

Carmen Romero López, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (ES) I wish to welcome the Spanish Presidency and, at the same time, emphasise that this is the first initiative on procedural rights. We had been debating this topic but it was left in the air when the Swedish Presidency ended.

This draft initiative is already with Parliament and the first debate has already taken place. We therefore believe that the question is relevant and continues to be relevant due to the importance of the topic. Improvements can certainly be made in this area and we hope that progress will be made as the initiative moves through the various stages.

As Mr Barrot pointed out, the Commission proposal was certainly more ambitious and we must therefore improve on the present text in Parliament. It is by no means a new text, however, because it has already been debated by Parliament and the Commission, with the resistance of Member States.

The Swedish Presidency tried to get things going again with its roadmap, but despite this, the situation is still difficult for Member States. The situation clearly changed after the Treaty of Lisbon, because Parliament now makes the decisions. We therefore believe that the Commission and the Council must re-examine procedural rights in the new scenario we find ourselves in today.

We would like these procedural rights to be considered as a package. It is not possible to recognise the right to translation without recognising the right to legal assistance or the right to information. For that reason, the Commission's plans to carry on tabling these rights year after year must, in our view, be fast-tracked so that the subject can be considered as quickly as possible.

It is true that anti-terrorist legislation overturns the guarantees, but if we wish to build an area of justice and freedom, we must trust in our values so that we can also convey them to the European project.

Graham Watson, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, this House proposed the creation of the European Arrest Warrant on 6 September 2001. Our proposal would still be on a shelf gathering dust if it had not been for the events in New York five days later. Mr Bin Laden helped make it a reality, and it was to me that fell the honour of piloting the measure through the House.

This House insisted at the time that it should be accompanied by minimum procedural guarantees in criminal legal proceedings. The Commission made its proposals in 2002 and undertook to see speedy action. So why is it that until recently, this has been stuck in the Council's in-tray? Why has the Commission not been waging war to see all of its proposals approved, and not have them approved separately?

The European Arrest Warrant has replaced extradition. It has substantially cut the time needed for surrender. It has encouraged direct contact between Member States' judicial authorities. It has ruled out decisions based on political expediency to the extent that Member States surrender their own nationals.

It has vastly enhanced the rule of law on our continent, but the European Arrest Warrant relies on mutual trust, and there are too many cases where such trust is called into question by our citizens.

Two of my constituents are currently in detention in Hungary awaiting trial. Though their extradition was requested over a year ago, and though they have been there for two months, they have not yet been indicted and their trial may yet be months away. One has lost his job and his family's main source of income. Both are deprived of the company of loved ones. And yet both may be innocent of the crimes of which they are charged.

Cases like this give European judicial cooperation a bad name. They pour shame on the inaction of governments in Council. The authors of this oral question are right: they require Europe's urgent attention.

(The speaker agreed to take a blue card question under Rule 149(8))

President. – Thank you, Mr Watson. I was going to call you the 'Godfather' of the European Arrest Warrant, but I thought it could be misunderstood.

William (The Earl of) Dartmouth (EFD). – Mr Watson, you mention Bin Laden and 9/11 as being the justification paving the way for the adoption of the European Arrest Warrant. Is it your contention therefore that the European Arrest Warrant should be used only against terrorists and murderers and in cases of serious violent crimes?

Graham Watson, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – Mr President, with permission, I did not give Mr Bin Laden as the justification; I said he helped us to speed it up. It was never intended solely to cover terrorist crimes; it was intended to cover all serious crimes. Those who oppose its use are those who, effectively, oppose the rule of law on our continent and the protection that the European Arrest Warrant gives to our citizens.

Heidi Hautala, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (FI) Mr President, Mr Watson is absolutely right when he says that the European Parliament insisted right from the start that the European Arrest Warrant should be accompanied by clear minimum criminal procedural norms. We can now clearly see the sort of problems that many Member States are facing because the European Arrest Warrant was built on sand. It is indeed built on sand, because the assumption is that Member States should be able to rely on the legal systems of others; that the rule of law and norms relating to fair trials are a reality in the various Member States.

Just like some here before, I, too, could tell you stories about how that is not actually the case and how urgent it is that the Commission acts, just as my fellow Member proposed a moment ago. We need to establish a comprehensive system in which minimal rights in criminal procedures are taken forward. I believe that the Treaty of Lisbon will also allow us this opportunity, because now, the European Parliament is a fully competent legislator along with the Council, and it was very agreeable to hear Mr Barrot say that he had confidence in this partnership between the Commission and Parliament. The Commission and Parliament must now form an axis of power that truly overcomes resistance on the part of the Member States that have been unwilling to make progress in this matter.

I promised to tell you a story about what happens if the rule of law is not adhered to but the European Arrest Warrant system is. In Finland at present, there is a Chechen couple, Hadižat and Malik Gataev, who have been detained. They arrived from Lithuania where, for years, they kept an orphanage for the child victims of the war in Chechnya and, as it turns out, in Chechnya, the security police interrupted their activities on the pretext that there may have been some minor connection with violence in the family; it was perhaps mainly family-related and so not anything actually approaching serious assault, for example. Now this couple is in Finland. They are applying for asylum and Lithuania is demanding their extradition. The case is being heard next Monday at the Helsinki District Court.

What on earth is one to do in this situation, given that the basic notion here is that Finland should be able to rely on the fact that in Lithuania, this couple will have a fair trial? We have very hard evidence that that has not actually been the case, and I would say that there are any number of examples of everyday cases such as this, where the European Arrest Warrant has actually been meaningless. We must be able to make progress in this matter, as, otherwise, it will be completely impossible for us to build the trust between Member States that will inevitably be required if we are to engage in judicial cooperation.

Janusz Wojciechowski, on behalf of the ECR Group. – (PL) Mr President, I, too, will give an example, as Mrs Hautala has done. A certain young man from Poland was sentenced in Great Britain to life imprisonment for rape, in a trial based on circumstantial evidence, which took place under the influence of a strong smear campaign in the press and which, in the opinion of some observers, did not meet Polish standards, at any

rate, for a fair trial. The man is now serving his life sentence in a prison in Poland, although Polish law does not provide for a life sentence for rape, only for murder – rape carries a maximum sentence of 12 years. We have, therefore, a situation in which there is someone in a Polish prison who has been given a sentence which is not in accord with the principles of Polish law.

I give this example to illustrate the problem and as an argument for the urgent need to establish certain general standards, both in the area of criminal procedure and, in my opinion, in the area of the rules for carrying out sentences. For we are facing, with increasing frequency, situations where the perpetrators of crimes are tried in one country and serve their sentence in another. Therefore, I support the idea of standards and the idea of a directive.

Rui Tavares, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (PT) Mr President, the European Union need two legs to walk: one is the Member States, and the other is their citizens, who are represented by their elected representatives in this house.

Now, it often happens that after the Member States have resolved their problems, they shut up their judicial systems; after allowing their political systems to communicate, they forget to take care of everything else and forget to lay their foundations by creating a basis of trust among the citizens of the European Union. This is one of those cases.

The European mandate clearly speeds things up and makes life easier for the judicial systems within the European Union. However, other rights, like the right to translation and interpretation (on which we have the pleasure and honour to work with our fellow Member, Mrs Ludford), are essential if European citizens are to have confidence in their dealings with the judicial systems of other Member States.

I am pleased to join my colleagues in requesting that the Commission and the Council make haste to produce texts which, via the codecision process, take this process forward in other procedural rights in criminal cases.

William (The Earl of) Dartmouth, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – I speak tonight because, as has been mentioned, two constituents – Michael Turner and Jason McGoldrick – are imprisoned in Unit 2 of the Central Budapest jail in Hungary. They have been imprisoned since 3 November and they are yet to be tried. There is, in fact, no trial date. The terms of imprisonment are burdensome. They are separated and have no contact with each other. They share a small cell with three other prisoners. They are confined to their cells 23 hours a day. They are permitted three telephone calls and one shower a week. They are allowed one family visit per month.

In short, they are isolated. The language barrier makes the isolation worse. They are accused of a white-collar crime. They are not murderers or terrorists. And they are imprisoned only because of the European Arrest Warrant.

The European Arrest Warrant swept away, at a stroke, the safeguards against arrest established in Britain over a thousand years. Well may you shake your head, Mr Watson: it would be better if you apologised. Mistaken identity and identity theft mean that what has happened to Jason and Michael can now also happen to any British citizen at any time.

The Labour Party, the Liberal Democrats and the Conservative Party all voted in favour of a European arrest warrant. To restate Zola, *'J'accuse'* – I accuse – the parties of the British political establishment: their support for the European Arrest Warrant has put everyone in Britain at risk of random arrest.

Krisztina Morvai (NI). – (HU) As a Hungarian and a criminal lawyer, I should be ashamed because today, here in the EU Parliament, on the subject of the lack of procedural guarantees in criminal proceedings, two of my fellow Members, who otherwise represent two different political views, have mentioned Hungary as a flagrant example. Though I am ashamed, I have to agree with them because I myself have had similar experiences. I ask them, and all you, the few Members still present here during the discussion of this important topic, to consider the following: if they have come to know of such serious infringements of the law in cases of foreigners who are politically quite irrelevant to the Hungarian State and Hungarian Government, what may be the fate of those who are opponents of the Hungarian Government, let us say because they are politically opposed to the government?

There are currently 15 persons in jail under preliminary arrest for having tried to take a stand against the corrupt dealings of the Hungarian Government. In retaliation, criminal proceedings were brought against them on trumped up charges of terrorism. To this day, not a single piece of evidence has been presented; the authorities feel no obligation to point to any kind of evidence. They are in custody under the same conditions

that you have heard, shut off from their families, from public view and from the press. Please, let us join together and do something in order to normalise the situation in Hungary and make it impossible to take advantage of the lack of procedural guarantees in criminal proceedings, especially for political reasons. Hungary must institute such guarantees.

Carlos Coelho (PPE). – (PT) Mr President, Mr López Garrido will not mind if my first words are addressed to Vice-President Barrot. I do not know whether we will have the opportunity to be with him in Plenary before the new Commission enters into force, and so, just in case, I would like to thank him for his efforts, intelligence and fantastic collaboration with the European Parliament in this field of justice and home affairs.

I would like to add my voice to those who consider this field to be very important. We do not simply want to build a safe Europe. We also want to build a just Europe, so any initiative that has a bearing on procedural rights is vital.

We have to take measures to support victims and promote respect for the rights of citizens who are brought to justice. I believe that this message has two very clear appeals, one of which is for the Council, prompted by Mr Watson, who put it much better than me in his speech.

It is ridiculous that after eight years, we are still at this stage of the process, and only looking at certain types of rights. We must be more efficient and more rapid. This is a job for the Council and Parliament, and Commissioner Barrot should also bring his influence to bear on his colleague, the next Commissioner, and the next Commission.

The Commission must take the initiative in all other areas that have to do with procedural rights, not only those that relate to language and translation.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D). – (SK) The issue of fundamental procedural rights in criminal proceedings is one of the key topics that should resonate in the field of justice and internal relations.

In principle, the draft framework decision defines a set of fundamental procedural rights in criminal proceedings, namely the right to legal advice, the right to interpretation and translation, the right to specific attention in sensitive areas, and the right to communicate and cooperate with consular authorities. This list of fundamental rights should be considered strictly demonstrative because the role of the European Union is to ensure that Member States respect the broadest possible range of fundamental rights, also with a view to Member States' membership in the Council of Europe and with a reference to its Convention.

Our effort should be to promote such means of regulation of procedural relations in criminal matters that would provide the aforementioned rights to all participants in criminal proceedings, whether they are victims and injured parties or offenders, in order to reach a fair and democratic judgment that fully meets the purpose of any penalties imposed, which is not only repression but also social rehabilitation and education.

Gerard Batten (EFD). – The Committee calls for the Council to continue work in introducing common European procedural rights in criminal matters. An existing common procedure in the form of the European Arrest Warrant has removed the centuries-old safeguards against unjust arrest and imprisonment that the English used to enjoy. This is not an academic argument. The EAW is destroying innocent people's lives. My constituent, Andrew Symeou, is just one of a growing number of people extradited without an English court having the power to consider the *prima facie* evidence against them and to prevent unjust extradition. Extradition has now been reduced to a mere bureaucratic formality. Mr Symeou has been held for six months in the notorious Korydallos prison without bail or prospect of trial. The political cynicism of the British Liberal Democrats is truly breathtaking. They now cry crocodile tears in London over Mr Symeou's fate despite having been materially responsible for the common procedures that caused it and while here, they work for more of the same legislation. The common procedures are about lowering European legal standards and not raising them.

Let me make a suggestion. If you want higher standards in European criminal proceedings, then adopt habeas corpus, trial by jury and the main provisions of the Magna Carta and the Bill of Rights 1689 as the common European standards.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, it is crucial that we progress as far as possible with the creation of a common European reference framework for procedural rights during the dispensation of justice. The key concept is the concept of trust. We want European citizens taking recourse to justice to be confident that their fundamental rights will be protected. We also want trust between the Member States in terms of their cooperation and the ultimate dispensation of justice to each person called to account. Finally, we need

trust from all of us in terms of the dispensation of justice. As long as we fail to promote these common frameworks at European level, whether we like it or not, there will sometimes be some crimes which exploit the loopholes and ultimately, we shall not achieve the dispensation of justice we are striving for precisely because no such frameworks exist.

Diego López Garrido, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (ES) Having listened to the speeches, I would like to say how pleased I am to see that many MEPs, from very different groups, agree over the need to harmonise procedural guarantees at European level and to draw up a genuine European law on procedural guarantees.

All the speakers and all the Parliamentary groups agree on the need to draw up a genuine European law on procedural guarantees. This illustrates the importance and need for the European integration process and the importance of a citizens' Europe, of a European judicial area and of implementing the Lisbon Treaty. This subject is the focus of the Spanish Presidency's programme for the next six months and has received indubitable support in all the speeches I have heard, based on a variety of arguments and seen from different perspectives: the need to move towards harmonised procedural guarantees.

I would also like to take up the point raised by Mrs Flašíková Beňová, which I believe is very important, on the need to take this step specifically at the time when the European Union is about to sign the European Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, as laid down in the Treaty of Lisbon.

I wish to end, Mr President, by stating that the Council and the Spanish Presidency will work to ensure that all these procedural guarantees are put into practice, through the directives that the European Commission will table in due course and also the directive that is already in progress, based on an initiative by 13 Member States, as far as I remember.

I would like to make one final point about the European Arrest Warrant. The European Arrest Warrant has been brought up only to criticise it. I wish to say that the European Arrest Warrant is a fundamental example of European Union and of cooperation against organised crime in the European Union. I am entitled to shout this from the rooftops, coming as I do from a country like Spain, which still suffers from terrorism and for which the European Arrest Warrant is an essential weapon in the struggle against terrorism.

Jacques Barrot, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, the Minister is right, and Mr Coelho put it very well earlier when he said, 'a Europe of security, a Europe of justice'. Yes, Mr Watson, the European arrest warrant has been very effective and very useful, even if it is true that, at the same time, we need to get the European judicial area up and running, and it is in this area that we must work for this Europe of justice, so that there really is confidence in the way in which justice is provided throughout Europe.

In this regard, I would like once again to thank the authors of the question and indeed to tell them again that, on the basis of the text that reflects the general approach of the Council of 23 October 2009, the Commission, with the help of the European Parliament and the Spanish Presidency, will ensure that this is a higher quality text than the current one. I would add that we will obviously be careful to formulate all the necessary legislative proposals in due course, so that no initiatives are necessary on the part of the Member States.

The Commission is already working on the proposal on a letter of rights. The Commission will endeavour to have all the measures planned in the roadmap adopted as soon as possible. The estimate of one year to enforce each measure is only indicative. If the negotiations allow, the Commission is happy to move things up a gear; this is quite clear.

I firmly believe that opinions have changed and that, with the multiannual Stockholm Programme, we really have an obligation to produce results in this area. Moreover, I have to say that, since I have had these responsibilities, I have done everything possible to make progress with this issue of procedural guarantees, and, although we have chosen a step-by-step formula, I believe that we are now well on our way. I would like to thank the European Parliament and the Spanish Presidency, convinced as I am that a Europe of justice will make significant progress in 2010.

President. – Thank you, Commissioner. I am sure there are many outside this Chamber who would like to endorse the remarks of Carlos Coelho in thanking you for your dedication and application as a Commissioner over this period. Thank you so much.

The debate is closed.

10. Preventing trafficking in human beings (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on

– the oral question to the Council on preventing trafficking in human beings, by Anna Hedh and Edit Bauer, on behalf of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (O-0148/2009 - B7-0341/2009), and

– the oral question to the Commission on preventing trafficking in human beings, by Anna Hedh and Edit Bauer, on behalf of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (O-0149/2009 - B7-0342/2009),

Anna Hedh, author. – (SV) As we are all aware, trafficking in human beings is one of the most serious and heinous crimes in the world. That is why I am very disappointed to be debating this important issue here so late in the evening before an empty chamber with no audience and no journalists.

In 1850, slavery was officially banned throughout Europe. Nonetheless, nearly 200 years later, hundreds of thousands of people are suffering the modern form of slavery that is trafficking in human beings in Europe. The European Parliament and the other EU institutions have a huge responsibility to combat and stop modern day slavery, which takes many different forms: forced labour, sex slavery, trading in organs, adoption and begging, for example.

That is why I am pleased that we are debating this important issue this evening. I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for your good cooperation to date and I hope that together, we will ultimately be able to arrive at a common resolution. I also hope that the new Commission will present a directive on trafficking in human beings as soon as possible – a directive that is more forceful and goes even further than the proposal made by the old Commission, which was, in itself, a good one.

In order to tackle the problem of human trafficking we need to have an overall perspective that takes into consideration all the affected policies; that is, not just penal law but also migration. We also need to have proper sanctions in place that really reflect the seriousness of this crime and that really hurt those who are making money out of trafficking in human beings. We must ensure that the victims receive better help and protection, that particular consideration is given to victims who are minors, and we need better coordination within the EU institutions.

In order to really get to grips with the problem of human trafficking, however, all the Member States must put substantial effort into preventive work, and that largely means reducing the demand that exists in our countries for the services provided by the victims of human trafficking. If we can reduce demand, then the supply of services will also go down.

Finally, I appeal to the Council, the Commission, the European Parliament, the Member States and the other EU institutions: let us stand together to put a stop to the trafficking of human beings in Europe, which is a modern form of slavery.

Edit Bauer, author. – (HU) There is no greater sign of the seriousness of the problem of trafficking in human beings than the fact that even in Europe, several hundred thousand people fall victim to it each year. This is probably so unbelievable that the interpreters said several hundred instead of several hundred thousand. Popular opinion is also more or less of this view. It feels that this is a marginal issue, and underestimates both its consequences and the weight of the phenomenon itself. I think that Europe has an obligation to increase the struggle against human trafficking. I would like to address two matters. The first is the protection of victims, and the second the elimination of demand. As regards victim protection, there is a piece of European Community legislation, which the Commission has promised to reassess by 2009. Unfortunately, in spite of the fact that this Directive, number 2004/81, indeed requires updating, so far, this reassessment has not seen the light of day, while the majority of victims are treated as accessories to the crime and are further victimised. We all know, as well, that without the victims' help, it is impossible to round up the criminal gangs, as the management of Europol has also confirmed.

I would like to draw attention to the legislative process regarding another matter, namely, the elimination of demand. Human trafficking has its own market. The laws of supply and demand apply there as they do to other markets. We usually deal with the supply side, and more or less forget, or do not want to address, the demand side, although as long as we have not succeeded in eliminating demand, we will probably strive in vain to combat human trafficking. In addition, I would like to emphasise the need for policy coordination.

We have found that within the Commission, certain DGs, certain Directorates-General, do not really coordinate their policies, and the flow of information between them is also unsatisfactory. I think that there is work for us to do in this regard as well.

Diego López Garrido, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (ES) Mrs Hedh, Mrs Bauer, I could not agree more with the initiative, the question and the debate you have sparked here tonight. I believe that human trafficking is the greatest scourge of humanity. It is therefore one of the great challenges we must tackle, and one that we must tackle together. This is one more example of the importance of combining our efforts at European level, and outside Europe, in order to stamp out this scourge.

In your question, you began by talking about whether the approach to be taken by the European Union should be human rights centred, holistic, and focus on repatriation and reintegration, social affairs and social inclusion. The answer is yes. We absolutely agree that this is the right approach. We also agree with proportionality in the severity of sentencing – this is another of the points you raised in your question – and with the need for additional measures for victim protection. You pointed out and stressed – and I totally agree with you – that victim protection is essential if we are to fight trade and trafficking in human beings and also that consent by a defenceless victim or child to exploitation is absolutely irrelevant; it has to be irrelevant when it comes to punishing this exploitative behaviour.

I believe that your idea on the subject of demand is also important. It is a very important idea that must also be seen through. The same applies to the subject of jurisdiction.

In part 2 of your question, we believe that the coordination of information is absolutely necessary. We therefore agree with the proposal in this question, which seems to us highly appropriate.

You also asked us about preventive measures. I can say, on this subject, that the European Union is working on such preventive measures. Back in 2005, the Council adopted a plan in this regard, which would need to be implemented effectively. Also, as you know, human trafficking is also included in many agreements between the European Union and third countries, for example, the Africa-European Union Strategic Partnership. It is also one of the priorities of the stabilisation and association agreements between the European Union and the Western Balkans. I should also point out that assistance with the training and awareness raising of people who might come into contact with victims plays an important part in the fight against human trafficking. Examples of such people are border police and police and security officers in third countries.

I wish to end by saying that the Spanish Presidency will work in this direction and will concern itself specifically with the subject of children affected by this trafficking, which is one of the main priorities of the Spanish Presidency. Among other initiatives, we have called on the Commission to submit an action plan on unaccompanied minors entering the European Union at the start of 2010.

Lastly, Mr President, during its term of office, during this six-month period, the Spanish Presidency is calling for an immediate debate on a directive to combat human trafficking and I am sure that the new Commission will table this immediately. When the Commission produces its draft, the Spanish Presidency will begin its discussions in the Council and with Parliament. You can take this as an expression of our determination to fight this modern form of slavery, as the previous speakers aptly described it.

Jacques Barrot, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, the Minister has just explained how, in fact, this trafficking in human beings is a form of slavery. I would very much like to thank Mrs Hedh and Mrs Bauer for having raised this question.

We must come up with a holistic, multidisciplinary approach which is not limited to repression, but which integrates international cooperation with third countries. This integrated approach was that adopted by the Commission following the proposal for a framework decision published in March 2009. This framework decision is based on the 2005 Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, but it goes further.

Naturally, as the Minister has just said, we are going to use the new legal basis offered by the Treaty of Lisbon to present, as quickly as possible, a proposal for a directive, which will take into consideration the discussions that took place before the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. With this new proposal for a directive, we hope to be able to maintain a high level of ambition.

We feel that the European Parliament must play a central role and that its commitment is very important in terms of further strengthening the European legal framework of measures to combat trafficking in human beings. I shall therefore give you some information in response to the content of the question.

Firstly, penalties: trafficking in human beings constitutes a very serious offence, and it must be punished accordingly. Sentences must be severe and the harmonisation of maximum penalties must continue. These vary greatly among Member States, from three to twenty years for basic offences and from ten years to life imprisonment for aggravating circumstances.

While I admit that the way in which sentences are pronounced may differ from one Member State to another, such an enormous discrepancy between penalties is unjustifiable in a European context, and so in the new proposal, we will provide for very severe penalties.

I now come to the help and protection provided to victims. The help, support and protection given to victims of people trafficking, notably as regards accommodation, medical and psychological assistance, advice, information, interpretation services and legal representation, are all essential.

Obviously, as it is something the Spanish Presidency wishes, we will also consider specific and more protective measures for child victims of trafficking. The system for legal aid and representation should be free, especially for children.

Finally, in the course of 2010, the Commission will publish its first report on the implementation of the directive relating to residence permits issued to nationals of third countries who are victims of trafficking in human beings and who cooperate with the competent authorities. Following this report, we will see whether it is appropriate to amend the directive.

As for measures aimed at discouraging demand, in its future proposal for a directive, the Commission also intends to include a clause obliging Member States to take initiatives in this area, as well as to encourage them to criminalise the use of sexual services or labour when the user knows that the person is or has been a victim of trafficking in human beings.

As far as jurisdiction is concerned, we must increase the capacity of each Member State to prosecute not just its own nationals, but also people who habitually reside on its territory, and who are found guilty of trafficking in human beings abroad. This is essential when it comes to combating the phenomenon of the so-called new mafias, namely criminal organisations made up of individuals of different nationalities, who establish the centre of their criminal interests, and therefore their habitual residence, in a country of the European Union.

Next I come to data collection. The Commission has invested heavily in the development of common indicators for data collection. We must provide the European Union with reliable and comparable statistics. Several important projects have been carried out, and the results of these initiatives must be followed up in an appropriate manner, allowing the development of a common model of indicator with Eurostat, with the agencies of the European Union, Europol, Eurojust, Frontex and the Agency for Fundamental Rights.

Finally, I will end with prevention. We have a financial programme, 'Prevention of and Fight against Crime' which, in 2010, will include a targeted appeal concerning the fight against trafficking in human beings. Then, the Stockholm Programme provides for specific action which, in the general guidelines document adopted by the Justice and Home Affairs Council, concerns measures to strengthen cooperation with third countries.

A more comprehensive policy for combating trafficking in human beings is therefore taking shape. As I have said, the Commission will present a draft directive very soon, and I am delighted that the Spanish Presidency has, for its part, announced a debate that will enable you to further enrich the Commission's proposal which, it seems to me, is timely given that this phenomenon is unfortunately far from being in decline and is still growing in our Member States. It is therefore time to react, and to react forcefully.

Roberta Angelilli, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I would like to thank Mrs Hedh and Mrs Bauer for their initiative.

Human trafficking, as everyone has said, is an extremely serious offence linked to sexual exploitation and illegal employment. These crimes are committed by unscrupulous people who recruit their victims through violence or deception, perhaps by promising an honest, well-paid job or through threats, directed not only at the victims, but also at their children or relatives.

Unfortunately, as is often the case, it is women and children who pay the highest price. It is estimated that there are nearly three million victims of trafficking worldwide, and nearly 90% of these are women and

children. In 2008, with the first European strategy on the rights of children, the European Parliament stated that trafficking in children has many criminal aims: trafficking in organs, illegal adoption, prostitution, illegal work, forced marriages, exploitation of street begging and sexual tourism, to give just a few examples.

In that document, trafficking was described as a real scourge within the European Union, and it was said that combating trafficking and exploitation must therefore become a priority for the future agenda of the European Union, first and foremost, through the adoption of all the urgent legislative measures needed to guarantee the full protection of and provision of assistance to victims. The recent Stockholm Programme also talked about the trafficking and exploitation of minors.

In conclusion, therefore, and in the light of this evening's debate, our hope is that the Commission and the Council will maintain their commitments and that the Commission will produce this new proposal for a directive, which we will assess very carefully.

Claude Moraes, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – Mr President, the achievement of Mrs Hedh and Mrs Bauer today, although speaking at a very late hour, as Mrs Hedh said, is to come here tonight and hear the outgoing Commissioner, Mr Barrot, and the new Spanish Presidency use words like 'determined' and 'ambitious' for the Commissioner. It is worth waiting until this late hour to hear it, because there are many people in this Chamber today, including the authors, who understand the complexity of this brutal modern day phenomenon, but also understand that the EU is expected by its citizens to tackle this modern day scourge.

Mr Barrot talked about the need for new legislation. We hope we will see the Commission proposal very soon. This morning, at the hearing of Commissioner-designate Mrs Malmström, we also saw a positive response to our proposal for an EU anti-trafficking coordinator.

If you start to put together the various pieces of this puzzle, at least we are moving forward, but the sheer scale of the problem described by Anna Hedh means that we really have to turn words into action. With trafficking being such a complex phenomenon, touching on so many different areas such as forced labour, organised crime, sexual exploitation and child abuse, our response must be multi-pronged and holistic. Mr Barrot listed many of the things that we would like to see as a reality and, if they come together in a package across the EU, we will have a determined policy which EU citizens will see as a plan of action. At the moment, EU citizens understand the scourge of trafficking but they do not see the holistic approach and they do not understand what the EU is doing as a whole.

I am happy that Commissioner-designate Malmström underlined her commitment today to come forward with a new legislative proposal very soon, and I am also happy to see the Spanish Presidency underlining not just the fight against trafficking but related issues such as violence against women. It is important that these all come together to show real determination and heart in this proposal. Although the hour is late, we now need the words to be turned into action and the authors have done a good job for us today.

Nadja Hirsch, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, first of all, I would like to thank the rapporteur for her commitment and excellent cooperation, as this really is an important subject. As we have said already, human trafficking is perhaps the very worst form of crime. Europol's figures, cited in the question, show that there has been no improvement in this field. The opposite is true, in fact. In the area of forced labour, specifically, the figures are going up, whilst the figures on the trafficking of women remain unchanged. It is thus absolutely clear that there is an urgent need, above all, for consistent action.

In order for such action to succeed, it is necessary, first and foremost, to adopt an integrated approach in the most varied of areas. One absolutely essential element is to increase awareness – including amongst the population within Europe – that human trafficking takes place right in the middle of Europe, in every country. We need, above all, to get to work on education in this regard, as we did, for example, for the football World Cup in Germany, in order to bring the issue of forced prostitution to light, and to show that this really happens everywhere, and also to inspire debate amongst the populace so that there is an awareness there which will lead to the victims being helped.

My second point concerns the protection of victims. Precisely when people are rescued from such a dramatic situation, the Member States, too, must ensure that there is medical and psychological care for them so that they are supported in going back to their countries of origin where appropriate or so that the way is opened to asylum or other similar possibilities here to find a new home and to begin a new life.

Judith Sargentini, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (NL) Today, there was a report in a Dutch newspaper about an asparagus farmer who was taken into custody because she was suspected of human trafficking and

of using slave labour by Romanians, in other words, European citizens. Human trafficking is not just something that takes place with citizens of countries outside the Union, but also with those of countries within it. A well-integrated policy on combating human trafficking cannot simply be limited to taking traffickers like this one into custody and robustly tackling those who commit such crimes, but must also properly focus on the victims. Their rights and their future must be top priority. Victims of human trafficking should never get the impression that they are alone or that they have been left in the lurch. We must support them in all kinds of ways: legally, medically, socially and in communities and financially, and we should possibly also compensate them. The ability of these victims to take possession of their rights and make use of the opportunities that our law allows for is crucial in any new directive. I heard good things from Mr López Garrido and Mr Barrot in this regard.

The Commissioner also said that people who use the services of people who have been trafficked should face stiffer penalties. For me, stiffer penalties for such activities are certainly not wrong, but I do wonder how we help the victims if we further criminalise their function, their work – as it is still work, even if it is slave work. How does it help the victims if they have to be afraid that the work that they are doing at that point in time is being criminalised still further? I would appreciate an answer to this question.

In the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance's book, victims of human trafficking have a right to a residence permit, a permanent residence permit under certain circumstances, in order to ensure that they do not have to be afraid of being sent back to the country where it all started and in order to ensure that they are able to bring charges against the trafficker, as they are safe in the knowledge that their stay in the country is secure. This is because there must not be even a small chance that anyone is sent back and then comes across the trafficker again. Your new framework directive, Commissioner, President-in-Office of the Council, must be about empowering the victims. It must give them rights and a new future. That is what I would like to see.

Zbigniew Ziobro, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) Mr President, it is a matter of extreme embarrassment that modern Europe, which enjoys freedom and respect for human rights, has become a place of oppression and abuse for so many people. This is all the more shocking because it often concerns women and children, who are at particular risk and are especially helpless.

As Minister for Justice and Prosecutor General in Poland, I supervised numerous investigations which revealed that such things are happening in Europe, that they extend beyond the borders of particular countries and are sometimes very cruel in nature. The main objective of human trafficking is sexual exploitation or enforced slave labour. In order to prevent and eliminate these phenomena effectively, it is essential that in particular EU Member States, professional enforcement agencies exist which ideally would be centralised, and would guarantee decisive and effective action as well as good international cooperation. European Union institutions should play a major role, especially as regards that last point.

In addition, there are two other matters. Conscious of the fact that human trafficking is often the work of organised criminal gangs, individual countries should guarantee sufficiently severe sanctions for such serious crimes in order to deter and isolate the perpetrators, including sanctions in the form of seizure of assets, which would strike at the economic reason for their activity.

Cornelia Ernst, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Mr President, human trafficking is, in reality, a scourge of the present day, and it feeds on poverty and ignorance. Its worst form is the trafficking of children, which is often linked to sexual abuse. We in the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left believe that there is an urgent need for action on the Commission's part. One of the most important prerequisites for successfully combating human trafficking is strengthening the rights of the victims. Only if this succeeds – and not only through punitive measures – can human trafficking be combated at all. That requires very clear rules whereby human trafficking will not result in any sanctions against its victims. One of the things these victims need is effective protection and support before, during and also after criminal proceedings in which they testify as witnesses. This must be a high priority for the period of reconsideration, specifically, as well as where witness testimonies are retracted. Long-term witness protection programmes are urgently needed.

Another thing that I think is important is that all victims of human trafficking, not just children, must be given free counselling. When dealing with children it is also necessary – coming back to this point – for it to be made possible to make use of child-specialist lawyers. There is a need for urgent measures to strengthen prevention, such as training for lawyers, the police, judges and counsellors. I am pleased that the Spanish Presidency intends to address this issue.

Mario Borghezio, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, today, during the hearing of the Commissioner-designate, I heard a very specific commitment regarding combating human trafficking.

I have been pleased to hear a unanimous opinion expressed here. The same unanimity was not heard when, many years ago, some people occupying these seats – including myself – denounced the dangers that mass illegal immigration would give rise to, among them, a substantial boost for the criminal organisations that utilise this labour and the risks of human trafficking and even organ trafficking. Today, everyone has discovered this phenomenon, and we can only be pleased with the unanimous nature of the commitment.

However, it is important for us to realise that the cause is still the same. The cause, the origin, the breeding ground for this trafficking has but one name, or a main name, a main cause: the scale of illegal immigration and the role played in it by local, European and also non-European criminal organisations, because now we also have trafficking in humans easily managed by organisations outside Europe.

Now, let us take this as our starting point. We should take a considered view that this extremely serious and shameful phenomenon is a sub-species or sub-consequence of mass illegal immigration that has not been properly controlled. Europe should have the courage to call a spade a spade.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, I, too, should like to take my turn in congratulating the authors of this very important question. We are living in modern times in which one would expect trafficking in human beings to have been eliminated from our society. Unfortunately, however, the numbers refute this. For example: it is estimated that over 1 800 000 children and young people fall victim to trafficking throughout the world every year. According to UN figures, we have 270 000 victims in the European Union. In Greece alone, the estimated number of victims of trafficking for prostitution has been increased to 40 000 a year, including women and children, but excluding other forms of trafficking.

The two basic parameters that I should like to highlight, without underestimating the importance of other parameters are: firstly, the European institutional framework for combating this crime, which is cross-border and is exacerbated by illegal immigration, is – as has rightly been said – inadequate. That is why we need to up the ante towards a holistic approach and the directive we are awaiting is very important within this framework, as has rightly been said.

Secondly, a particular gap has been identified in the protection of victims, especially in terms of support structures. It is therefore necessary – and I am delighted to have heard this from the Spanish Presidency – for resources and infrastructures to be made available in order to improve any existing infrastructures and create new infrastructures and, of course, to give the staff which can provide such support suitable training.

This modern form of the slave trade cannot and must not have any place in a European Union based on the principle of respect for human rights and human dignity.

Silvia Costa (S&D). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to express my great satisfaction that today we are tackling a subject like this with an important question, for which I warmly thank the authors, and I would also like to express my gratitude for the high level of cooperation that we have seen between all the political parties and the two committees.

I am also very happy to have heard very serious commitments voiced by the Commission and also by the Spanish Presidency, and I truly hope that the new directive will soon be drafted along the lines that essentially seem to enjoy a large consensus.

I think we know that the numbers in this field are very complex to analyse, but in brief, we are talking about almost 300 000 people, 79% of them women, many of them minors, being trafficked every year in our civilised Europe. Unfortunately, numbers have been rising in recent years. For this reason, too, we need to make very strong progress in the light of the new areas of responsibility that the European Union has and also in the light of what we have already approved in the Stockholm Programme to bring in some innovations.

It was a great step forward when we approved, at EU level, the provision – which, for example, had already been in force in Italy since 1998 – allowing humanitarian residence permits to be issued to victims. However, we must also make progress on safeguarding victims in relation to protection, social and employment reintegration, the possibility of preventing there being customers – which we must think very seriously about – and more serious and effective measures on sanctions which must, as you said, Commissioner, be harmonised at EU level.

In particular, we ask that the consent of victims to their exploitation be considered irrelevant, in view of the high level of blackmail involved in these circumstances.

I will conclude very shortly, just adding this: we need not only special protection for minors but, above all, also forms of support for persons arriving in Europe who have already previously suffered forms of trafficking along the journeys, ever longer and ever more tragic, that they complete before reaching our coasts and our territories.

Antonyia Parvanova (ALDE). – (BG) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I, too, would like to congratulate the rapporteurs, the Commission and the Spanish Presidency for their boldness in enabling us to finally find a serious solution to this problem. When we talk about human trafficking, it is extremely important for us to think about establishing a permanent policy at European Union level. Such a policy will contribute to a more coordinated approach and enable Member States' actions to have a greater impact in terms of law enforcement, and protection and assistance provided to the victims of this form of trafficking.

The appointment of a European Union coordinator for combating human trafficking, working under the direct supervision of the commissioner responsible for justice, fundamental rights and citizenship, will guarantee that a single, coherent political approach is used by all Member States in tackling this serious crime. The coordinator's role will be to identify the problems and sources of human trafficking, implement preventive measures, devise and enforce strategies at European level, including active cooperation and consultation with civil society agencies, as well as to organise information campaigns and introduce measures to increase protection for and provide help to victims, and also support them in the reintegration process.

In order to tackle this global, transnational problem successfully, a coordinated strategy is required at European level which guides and supports Member States in their joint efforts to combat human trafficking effectively. Thank you very much for your attention.

Marina Yannakoudakis (ECR). – One who is another's property and a helpless victim of some dominating influence – you might be forgiven for thinking this is a definition of human trafficking. In fact, it is a definition of slavery.

Trafficking is today's slavery. Trafficking of people, be it women, men or children, is a criminal offence and on the increase in all Member States. Extreme poverty, family breakdown and domestic violence contribute to some of the root causes of human trafficking. In the UK, we estimate approximately 5 000 victims, of which 330 are children.

The ECR Group welcomes this debate. National governments, law-enforcement agencies and border-control agencies need to work together. Mechanisms for victim support need strengthening. Initiatives must be robust, Member State-driven and EU-supported.

Eva-Britt Svensson (GUE/NGL). – (SV) If there were no demand for exploiting people as cheap labour, if there were no demand for organs, if there were no demand for the purchasing of sexual services – then in such a world, we would not have trafficking in human beings either.

Demand is a key word as regards the combating of trafficking in human beings. Another important factor is that people in many parts of the world are living in poverty and in inhumane conditions, with the result that they can easily fall prey to those wanting to buy and sell human beings.

We therefore need not just efforts to reduce demand, but also, of course, preventive measures in the form of improving living conditions for many people in those parts of the world where the victims are recruited.

I and the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left would like to thank Mrs Hedh and Mrs Bauer and their colleagues on the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. However, I would like to see some differentiated proposals for how we can support the victims of trafficking in human beings. Those who are victims of forced labour need different measures and support to those who are victims of the sex slave trade.

Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio (PPE). – (ES) According to a United Nations report, in 2009, some 270 000 people were victims of human trafficking within the European Union. With these figures in mind, we need to ensure that European Union action is based, first and foremost, on victim protection, with special focus on the situation of women and children, who are the most vulnerable.

We cannot continue to stand by and remain indifferent to the play that is being enacted, to the sideshow of sexual exploitation that is unfolding before our eyes. For this reason, I completely support the Parliament's demands that victim assistance should be unconditional and that more forceful methods and more severe penalties should be adopted, as Mr Barrot has just told us.

Having said that, I would like to call on the Spanish Presidency, the European Commission and the Council to use all the European legislation at their disposal, both existing and future legislation, to protect the victims of human trafficking. I consider that the proposed European victim protection system, which I personally demanded from the Spanish Presidency during the Stockholm Programme debates, and which has finally come to fruition, will be an effective instrument for fighting such crimes. I hope for a firm undertaking, as we have already seen, from the Spanish Presidency, to ensure that this system offers victims special protective measures that will be effective throughout the European Union.

I hope that we who are responsible for taking action against the most severe problems in our society will come up with a real and substantial response to this extremely severe problem of human trafficking and that our words will not be empty promises. We really owe it to all the victims.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D). – (SK) First of all, I would like to express my appreciation for my fellow MEPs, Mrs Hedh and Mrs Bauer, because despite the limited space available to them, they approached this topic very comprehensively.

I support the question and I would like to add a few factual observations and notes. Ordinary people usually have no idea of the enormous scale of trafficking in human beings. As a matter of fact, it is the third most lucrative illicit trade in the world. The fact that it mostly concerns women and children makes this immense business all the more inhumane. Our response to it must be massive and concentrated. Our fight has to be equally effective at all points of the trafficking triangle – it has to impact the supply and demand sides, as well as the traffickers themselves. Supply exists especially where there are inhumane living conditions, poverty and its feminisation, unemployment, violence against women, and overall oppression and instability engendering desperate human beings. Therefore, we should do everything in our power to help the people who fall victim to criminal trafficking within and outside the Union live a more dignified life.

The demand side deserves strict sanctions. Those who profit from exploitation of desperate or manipulated people within the grey economy must not go unpunished. Those who provide such services and those who use them consciously should also be faced with sanctions.

Finally, trafficking operators deserve exemplary punishment – organised crime in this area must be a priority target for organisations such as EUROJUST, EUROPOL and FRONTEX.

Cecilia Wikström (ALDE). – (SV) Slavery has not yet been abolished, as many in this House have already emphasised. Modern day slavery takes the form of the sex trade, and it is going on here and now. The bodies of women, girls and boys are sold like pieces of meat, just like any other goods, and it is happening all the time.

People are robbed of their most basic human rights and become the slaves of our times in our various Member States. This ought to be seen as Europe's greatest failure and shortcoming, and it must be dealt with by restricting and stopping both supply and demand.

In my home country of Sweden, a law entered into force ten years ago under which it is illegal to purchase sex. This law is important, because through it, society signals that no human being is for sale. The slave trade to America was made illegal in 1807, but it is still going on right in our midst in Europe. It is time that it was consigned to the dark recesses of history. It is our time and our responsibility to do all we can and I would like to thank the authors, Mrs Hedh and Mrs Bauer, for their excellent work that benefits us all.

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, a few minutes ago, the representative of the Green party very correctly emphasised that this matter – human trafficking, or the sale of living people – is not an external problem which is imported by the European Union. It is also an internal problem. Citizens of my country are also being sold to at least several Member States of the European Union. It is a very significant and serious problem. It is my conviction that, on this matter, strong, united action is needed, and not only from EU institutions, but also from individual Member States. I will recall, here, an incident which took place a couple of years ago, when the Italian police and administration, reacting to certain information coming from Poland, put an end to cases of human trafficking where Polish workers were being illegally employed in Italy. This, too, is human trafficking, and we must not be silent about it.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE). – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, every year more than one million people are abused for slave labour, and 90% of them are abused for the purpose of sexual services. Only 3 000 victims have received assistance, and a mere 1 500 cases have been brought to court, even though this qualifies as a criminal offence throughout the European Union. Studies have shown that the profits from trafficking in human beings exceed those from drug smuggling and dealing. This kind of organised crime has grown with the Union's enlargement to the east. And yet, we still have no common strategy, and there is no coordination of measures taken by the various institutions and the Member States, which should not resist harmonisation of their legislation, even though this is not anchored in the treaties.

That is why I am asking the Spanish Presidency to complete negotiations with the Member States on the common definitions of punishments and sanctions. I would like to stress that the new directive we are waiting for should also combat more effectively the demand for illegal sexual services; in actual fact, it is alarming that the abuse of children in particular has been rising. In the case of children, the figure is nearing 20%. Also missing is effective prevention and education focused on children and parents alike. Do you know that only 4% of the parents of abused children admitted that their children had been lured to meetings via the Internet? As many as 1 500 websites where children are sexually abused were discovered in 2008. What we undoubtedly owe to the citizens of the European Union is a new, coordinated approach, and harmonisation of legislation to also combat the demand for and naturally the trafficking in humans itself. Therefore, I urge the Commission to submit to the European Parliament a comprehensive legislative proposal for a more effective struggle against trading in humans, within the shortest possible time.

Britta Thomsen (S&D). – (DA) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank the authors for this important initiative, for the EU faces a huge challenge in preventing and combating trafficking in human beings. Trafficking in human beings is a rapidly growing lucrative business, and it is attractive because the punishments are mild compared with other money-making forms of organised crime such as drugs and the arms trade. Consequently, we have to come down hard on those behind it.

The victims of human trafficking are the most vulnerable and defenceless people, and they need our protection. We must not send them back into the arms of the human traffickers. They must be offered residence permits. In addition, we must also focus on the demand for the services that are provided by people trafficked and implement various measures such as criminalising the purchase of prostitution and increasing the sanctions against those who use trafficked labour. I am therefore pleased that the Commission is contemplating the criminalisation of the abuse of trafficked human beings.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D). – (LT) Events of recent days in Lithuania, when an organised gang was arrested for profiting from human trafficking, demonstrated once again that this crime is a widespread phenomenon that is intensifying even more during the economic and financial crisis. At present, almost 90% of the victims of people trafficking are women and children, the majority of whom fall victims because of poverty and attempts to seek means to survive. Human trafficking is a monstrous crime and an extreme humiliation of human dignity; there is nothing worse than being sold into slavery. Therefore, it is very important to strengthen cooperation between the Member States and with third countries, to ensure a dialogue with non-governmental organisations and to call on the Commission to establish the position of a European coordinator for these matters. It is also necessary to ensure the security of victims of trafficking in human beings and their complete integration. The accomplices, organisers or sponsors of this terrible crime must not be allowed to avoid responsibility.

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE). – (SK) I would like to congratulate the authors of this question, Mrs Hedh and Mrs Bauer. I would like to say that trafficking in human beings is one of the most profitable forms of international organised crime and, according to various reports and sources, its worldwide scale is estimated to be between 700 000 and 2 million persons, some say more, of whom 300 to 500 000 individuals are victims of trafficking in the European Union alone.

The current legal framework appears to be inadequate; therefore, I fully support the adoption in the near future of effective measures to strengthen both prevention and repression of trafficking in human beings. Stricter sanctions should be imposed on the direct offenders, including legal persons, as well as the users of services provided by the victims. On the other hand, I firmly believe that a high level of protection, together with fair and adequate compensation, needs to be provided to the victims, regardless of the Member State in which they are located or where the crime was committed. The protection, support and assistance provided must not lead to secondary victimisation and I would also like to say that the provisions relating to minors, who easily become victims due to their vulnerability and gullibility, deserve special attention.

In conclusion, I would like to say that trafficking in human beings also often occurs for the purpose of organ harvesting.

Karin Kadenbach (S&D). – (DE) Mr President, it is quite significant that we should be debating the subject of human trafficking here today, as this is a subject that remains taboo and since, unfortunately, in our highly developed society, it is women who, in particular, are very often victims of such human trafficking. I am thinking of prostitution, first and foremost, but also of children. Very often, we do not want to see it. For a successful programme against human trafficking, we need to prioritise education, awareness-raising, and we will need money later on. We should take this into account in our considerations right from the start, as it cannot just be the aim to arrest the perpetrators and enforce a just punishment; we must also seek to have victim protection that means victims do not become victims a second time, but that we also have the funds to re-integrate them into society. We must aim to take away the traumas experienced by children and integrate the women, as a top priority, into our working world, a legal working world.

Catherine Bearder (ALDE). – Mr President, European action on this issue is long overdue, so I was very pleased to hear Mr López Garrido's remarks on children, the Commissioner's remarks and, this morning, that Commissioner-designate Malmström plans to bring forth a new directive in this area as a priority.

I want to urge both the Council and Commission to look at the support systems for victims, particularly the specific needs of trafficked children, who have very different needs to those of trafficked adults. In the UK, last year alone, 325 children were identified as being suspected victims of trafficking. Many of those were UK citizens trafficked within the UK, not externally sourced, if I might use that expression.

There are children in my own region who are trafficked but we find that, even after registration with social services, many trafficked children just disappear because they remain under the control of their traffickers. They find it just too easy to re-traffic these children. This occurs all over the EU and we must put a stop to it. Trafficked people are voiceless and vulnerable and they rely on the European Union to speak out for them, to stop this abhorrent crime, and to care for them.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, begging, prostitution, theft and burglary – human traffickers and people-smuggling gangs need people, primarily women and children, for these and other, similar objectionable activities. We are talking about hard-to-monitor criminal activity here, with a very high number of unreported cases. At this point, I would like to point out that my home country of Austria is particularly affected, as a popular transit country, but also as a popular final destination. We therefore need to be aware that the vast majority of people-smuggling gangs are active in moving people from eastern and south-eastern Europe to central Europe and that the victims are not only recruited in third countries but also come from the Member States themselves. The fact is that there has been a rise in such cases and that our external border controls scarcely function.

In the light of this development and the verifiable reality that these journeys are often undertaken in buses – criminal tourism – the question must be asked as to whether it would not make sense, in these circumstances, in addition to the drawing up of reports by Europol, Frontex and others, to re-introduce border controls in the relevant border regions and suspend Schengen for a limited period where necessary.

Anna Záborská (PPE). – (SK) I congratulate the authors on the submitted question and you, Commissioner, on your response.

I would like to underline one of the many topics relating to this issue. The draft resolution states that children are particularly vulnerable and thus at greater risk of becoming victims of trafficking in human beings. At the same time, it says that 79% of the identified victims of trafficking are women and girls. However, it fails to mention that parents should play a primary role in protecting children from trafficking. Parents often do not even know what risks their children are exposed to or are not at all interested in how they spend their spare time. In the context of prevention, I have repeatedly proposed a European-wide campaign called: 'Do you know where your child is now?' This campaign should alert parents to the risks that their children face. I firmly believe that we can protect children from trafficking only if we cooperate with parents. Unfortunately, parents are not mentioned anywhere in the draft resolution.

Artur Zasada (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, in the context of today's debate, it is necessary to draw attention to three matters which require particular attention. Too few criminals are brought to justice. Despite the rise in the number of criminal proceedings involving human trafficking, it is still many times lower than the number of crimes committed.

The victims do not receive appropriate assistance, shelter or compensation. Bearing in mind the estimated scale of human trafficking in Europe, it should be noted that only several countries have taken measures which can be said to be a real reaction.

Thirdly, the situation is not being monitored sufficiently. It is obvious that this problem does not affect only the European Union. It is, therefore, of key significance that the Union work yet more closely with the appropriate international organisations to create a new standard in the fight against this terribly dangerous phenomenon.

Diego López Garrido, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (ES) I believe that this wide-ranging debate has served to highlight that we are faced with an enormous problem, a problem that poses us an enormous challenge. I am pleased that this debate has taken place on the very day that I have spoken before the European Parliament for the first time, which is undoubtedly an honour. I am pleased that it has happened in these two important debates that have been held tonight in this important and mighty Parliament.

I believe that it is not enough to simply refer to or reflect on this huge problem. It must be tackled with all our strength because it is a very serious problem and the enemies we are facing are very strong. We therefore need great political will to tackle the problem. Here tonight, this great political will has been displayed, and how! I can assure you that the Spanish Presidency is going to show it means to tackle this matter, together with all the other European institutions.

I believe we can also say that this is a problem that must be tackled from a European perspective. You have stated very clearly how such things come to pass in Europe; Mrs Hirsch pointed it out clearly and Mr Papanikolaou and Mrs Parvanova spoke about the cross-border nature of this matter. It is happening in Europe and we must tackle it from Europe. It has been repeated many times and I repeat it now: it is important for the Commission to propose a directive as soon as possible in order to tackle the problem from this angle. I believe that Mrs Roithová put it very succinctly in her speech.

I believe that the three major aspects that we must cover and emphasise in the regulation that will be issued by Europe, in the work that will be done by Europe, must be as follows. The first is victim protection. Victim protection is a central aspect and certainly the one most discussed here tonight. The authors of the question, Mrs Sargentini, Mrs Ernst, Mrs Thomsen and other speakers indicated the importance of victim protection, which normally refers, above all, to women and children – the most vulnerable people. Mrs Jiménez-Becerril Barrio, Mrs Kadenbach and Mrs Bearder also eloquently expressed the need to introduce a victim protection system, which is an essential instrument and a priority of the Spanish Presidency.

Victim protection, then, is in first place; secondly, we must have tireless persecution and harsh punishment for traffickers – Mr Ziobro expressed this very forcefully in his speech; and thirdly, we must consider the subject of demand for these services. This is something hard to tackle but it is part of the problem and, as such, I therefore believe it must be included as one of the three major aspects on which I believe a global approach must be based. As I stated before, ladies and gentlemen, the Spanish Presidency is and will be absolutely committed to a subject of such overriding importance as this.

Jacques Barrot, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, I believe that this debate has done much to clarify the preparation of the future directive, and I can, of course, confirm Minister that the Commission intends to present it this spring.

I would like to echo the comments made by Mr Moraes, by saying that we must use the most modern means to fight against this scourge, which itself is also often carried out using the most modern methods, and that we must fight against all forms of exploitation.

Minister, you said just now that there are three pillars: the victims, the seriousness of the penalties and then the problem of demand. I would emphasise somewhat the issue of victims and victim protection since, in the framework decision, we had already negotiated unconditional support for all victims, immunity from criminal prosecution, and the right to legal assistance. Furthermore, in the future directive, we intend to deal with accommodation, medical and psychological treatment, advice and information, in a language that is understood by the victim, and then all kinds of supplementary support.

In response to Mrs Záborská, I would add that, indeed, as far as child victims of people trafficking are concerned, the Commission will address issues relating to the prevention of this scourge, as well as the protection, return and reintegration of these children, in an action plan on the situation of unaccompanied minors. Incidentally, Minister, this was a strong demand made by the Spanish Presidency.

We will therefore present this action plan, which will be adopted by the College in spring 2010, so that it may be examined by the Council and by the European Parliament. This action plan will propose several areas of action to tackle the main challenges posed by this phenomenon, which affects unaccompanied minors arriving in the European Union in different contexts, and will be guided by the best interests of the child.

However, Mrs Záborská is also right; families must be increasingly involved in supervising, in particular, use of the Internet, which exposes children, once again, to new risks.

As you said, Minister, political will does exist in the European Parliament. I believe the Commission has already done some good preparation work on this draft directive. It will submit it shortly, and I would like to thank the European Parliament for offering not just its full support, but also a whole series of very interesting ideas that have emerged during this debate. Once again, I would like to thank all the speakers. Indeed, I believe that the European Parliament has a crucial role to play in the fight against this major scourge.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place at the February I part-session.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Liam Aylward (ALDE), in writing. – (GA) Those who are involved in human trafficking do not make any distinction between men, women or children, as long as they can make money from trafficking them. Often, it is children who are in the greatest danger. According to the ILO, roughly 218 million children are involved in child labour at present. It is impossible to give a definite figure, however, as these children are involved in prostitution, slavery, forced labour and so on, areas for which accurate figures are not available. The EU must urgently tackle trafficking in the labour market. I find it encouraging that this issue is a priority of the Spanish Presidency and I hope that members of the Council will work together to put issues related to human trafficking and child labour at the heart of EU legislation and, in particular, that these questions will be dealt with within the context of trade agreements. As a result of its important role in global trade matters and its commitment to protecting human rights, the EU has a responsibility to combat human trafficking and child labour.

Nessa Childers (S&D), in writing. – The trafficking of human beings is deplorable anywhere in the world, but particularly disgraceful in the European Union given our high levels of internal cooperation and resources. In particular, the trafficking of young women for use in the sex trade is a relic of Europe's fragmented past and must become an aspect of European history. In this regard, the Union must commit over the five-year term of the incoming Commission to increase border security, and to implore national governments to do more to tackle the sex trade, particularly when it involves young women who have been trafficked from another country. Currently, the laws exist in most countries but are simply not being enforced.

Vasílica Viorica Dăncilă (S&D), in writing. – (RO) The speed with which this debate has been initiated so soon after the Treaty of Lisbon's entry into force is not only opportune from a legislative perspective, but is also an absolute requirement dictated by a situation exacerbated by the economic crisis. Poverty, job losses, the lack of prospects for young people, the absence of accurate information about the risks involved and an absence of even a minimal level of sex education are some of the factors contributing significantly to the vulnerable situation of the potential victims. I believe that a hard-hitting information campaign is required, especially among minors from disadvantaged areas and groups, to improve the effectiveness of preventive actions. We cannot talk about specifically combating the trafficking of women without considering strong measures for tackling criminal activities and the networks controlling this traffic, which is extremely busy in the Balkan and Mediterranean regions. I want to emphasise that measures are needed to discourage the level of demand for prostitution, which is the most direct route, with the adoption of measures to punish clients. I should mention that better funding is also required for the programmes intended to combat human trafficking. I call for the adoption of harsh punitive legislation and for closer cooperation between Member States and the authorised European institutions: Europol, Frontex and Eurojust.

Kinga Göncz (S&D), in writing. – (HU) Although two pieces of European legislation currently in force deal with trafficking in human beings and its victims, the Member States of the European Union in practice often look upon these persons as illegal immigrants. It is very important to make a distinction between the two. Illegal immigrants are often obliged to leave their countries on account of some financial or social circumstance, and they arrive on European territory illegally, albeit as a result of their own decision. Those affected by human trafficking have not taken a free, informed decision about all this. They are to be treated entirely as victims.

EU Member States must offer victims adequate protection. Not only should they be guaranteed legal or physical protection, but medical and psychological assistance, social rehabilitation, and those who collaborate with the authorities should be given residence permits for the duration of the investigation of the human trafficking case. It is important, moreover, that the Commission should use information campaigns to help make sure that all those who may be at risk should be aware of their rights, opportunities and the dangers both within the EU and in third countries, and that it should do everything possible to ensure that Member States duly transpose and implement the relevant European legislation. Given that the matter of human trafficking falls under the purview of several commissioners, including the commissioners for justice, freedom and security, for external relations, and for employment, social affairs and equal opportunities, it would be worth considering the appointment of a portfolio coordinator who could effectively liaise in order to ensure appropriate handling of this problem.

Zita Gurmai (S&D), in writing. – Women and children are the principal victims of human trafficking. When a new Council Framework Decision will be formulated regarding human trafficking, women and children have to be put at the centre of action. Therefore, I agree with opinions stating that gender-specific violence data must be collected throughout the European Union as soon as possible. Victim protection costs money, and this life-saving money should be spent wisely. We should bear in mind that without reliable and comparable data, we will not be able to locate resources to the appropriate places in an appropriate manner. We also have to be aware of the fact that different Member States and especially different cultures handle the problem differently. There are Member States where victim protection is well organised and reachable for everyone, like in Spain, and there are Member States where it is almost a non-issue. That means that we not only need to locate resources wisely, but we also have to come up with practical and statistical solutions (namely with a minimum European standard at least) in order to tackle the latency problem, and in order to draw attention to this question where it is needed.

Jim Higgins (PPE), in writing. – The problem of the trafficking of human beings has been with us for a long time, but instead of getting to grips with the issue, Member States stand indicted for our individual and collective failure to deal with this exploitation and degradation of women. While free movement facilitates trafficking in terms of the removal of border controls, on the other hand, one would imagine that increased police cooperation should be in a position to tackle the problem. What is clear is that the political will is not there. The May 2005 ‘Council of Europe Convention on the Action Against trafficking in Human Beings’ has only been ratified by nine countries, two thirds of women trafficked for prostitution come from Eastern Europe and yet, countries like the Czech Republic and Estonia have not signed the convention. Apart from the political will not being there, the police will is not there either. The number of convictions is derisory in terms of the problem; the police do not see human trafficking as a crime.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The United Nations has estimated that there were around 270 000 victims of human trafficking in 2009 in the European Union. The European Union must commit itself in the very near future and come up with legislative instruments which will cover both the prevention of and fight against human trafficking, as well as protection of the rights of trafficking victims. Future European legislation will have to review the level of sanctions against traffickers so that they are commensurate with the severity of the offence. International judicial cooperation, collaboration among all agencies for protecting minors and those campaigning for human rights, setting up specific funds for providing compensation, and effective protection for victims are all areas which need to be strengthened. Furthermore, I feel that Eurojust, Europol and Frontex must have even further involvement in the fight against human trafficking and the protection of victims, as well as collect data and compile statistics on this phenomenon.

11. Agenda of the next sitting: see Minutes

12. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting was closed at 24.00)