

THURSDAY, 12 MARCH 2009

IN THE CHAIR: MR VIDAL-QUADRAS

Vice-President

1. Opening of the sitting

(The sitting was opened at 9 a.m.)

2. Documents received: see Minutes

3. Workers' participation in companies with a European Statute (motion for resolution tabled): see Minutes

4. Eastern Partnership (debate)

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, the first item today is the Commission statement on the Eastern Partnership.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I am very glad to have this opportunity for a timely debate on the Eastern Partnership. It is one of the flagships of the European Union's foreign policy, and its strategic rationale is clear: more security, more stability and more prosperity in our eastern neighbourhood.

The conflict in Georgia and also the gas crisis in Ukraine are just two examples of the periodic crises and the instability affecting this region. These have had a direct impact on the Union and its citizens. To these two crises we now have to add the financial crisis, which hits our eastern neighbourhood particularly hard. While each crisis requires its own immediate response, we also have to provide medium- and long-term action to prevent new problems from arising and, in addition to these immediate issues, our eastern neighbours all want stronger links with the European Union, albeit to varying degrees. They also need reinforced help to consolidate their democratic institutions, statehood and rule of law.

The European Union can and must respond to these challenges and the Eastern Partnership is, so to say, our political answer. Increasing our support for reforms and helping our partners to align with the EU acquis will help stabilise our eastern neighbours.

On 3 December 2008 the Commission put forward an ambitious communication on the Eastern Partnership on my initiative. It built on prior ideas by our Czech, Polish and Swedish friends, and it built on many of the European Parliament's suggestions, including deep free trade agreements, more mobility of people and greater funding. As part of the Eastern Partnership, we also proposed upgrading our political relationships through association agreements with each partner – but only once they have fulfilled the relevant political reform criteria.

We proposed measures to enhance cooperation on energy security and, importantly, increase support for economic and also social development to address the imbalances within countries that are so often a destabilising force. We also recommended setting up a multilateral framework for the Eastern Partnership with four thematic cooperation platforms: firstly, democracy and governance stability; secondly, economic integration and convergence with EU policies; thirdly, energy security and, fourthly, contacts between people.

We suggested making the European Parliament's Euronest initiative an integral part of the Eastern Partnership and setting up an Eastern Partnership parliamentary troika for the European Parliament, the OSCE and the Council of Europe.

To implement all these proposals and step up support for internal reforms, the Commission asked for EUR 350 million additional funds over four years. That is only 3.1% of the total ENPI envelope and, for example, much less than the additional allocations to the occupied Palestinian territories in 2007 to 2009 alone. In short, this is not an excessive sum: it is a necessary investment in our long-term security.

I know some of you would like to do even more for our eastern partners. You have said that the Commission proposals do not go far enough or fast enough, particularly for the mobility of people, but other voices have said the opposite. We need to strike the right balance, therefore, between ambition and realism, and we need to move fast.

I am glad that we all share the goal of bringing our eastern partners gradually closer to the Union and also tackling the threats to their stability. The Eastern Partnership is a key tool to accomplish that.

I hope that today's debate sends a strong signal to the 27 Member States in the run-up to next week's European Council and in preparation for the Eastern Partnership Summit on 7 May 2009.

The Eastern Partnership goes to the very heart of the challenges we face today. It is in the EU's direct strategic interest: a new security crisis in our eastern neighbourhood would have implications not only for our neighbours but also for the whole EU and its citizens. I am, therefore, very grateful for the support of this Parliament, and I look forward to working with you on your contribution and in the implementation.

Charles Tannock, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Mr President, as rapporteur for the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, I welcome the Commission's commitment to deepening relations with six countries to the east in the new Eastern Partnership. It is important to emphasise that the Eastern Partnership should not by itself preclude the possibility that some of those countries should one day join the EU as full members. For example, as you well know, I have long been an advocate of Ukraine's EU membership, and I remain convinced that absorbing Ukraine is definitely in the EU's strategic interest.

I also welcome the establishment of a new parliamentary body, Euronest, as a forum for MEPs and national parliamentarians to reinforce each others' democratic mandates through dialogue including, for instance, facilitating Armenia and Azerbaijan to sit down together and discuss the Nagorno-Karabakh dispute, and negotiating free trade agreements and visa facilitation through these new association agreements. However, I hope that the Eastern Partnership will not lead to new dividing lines being drawn between those countries in the Partnership and those countries further east and outside of it. We must bear in mind that countries in Central Asia like Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are looking west to the EU for assistance and engagement. We must therefore be careful not to lose sight of our responsibilities to Central Asia simply because we wish to strengthen relations with countries adjacent to the EU to its immediate east.

With regard to Belarus, I have been a staunch critic in the past of the Lukashenko dictatorship. Nevertheless, I welcome the recent thaw in relations. I have long advocated a carrot-and-stick approach whereby President Lukashenko's efforts at democratic reform and openness should be recognised and rewarded by closer ties to the European Union.

As to whether Mr Lukashenko should be allowed to participate in the summit in Prague to launch the new Eastern Partnership in May, such a step, to my mind, is probably premature, as President Lukashenko still needs to demonstrate an irrevocable commitment to EU common values and democracy.

Hannes Swoboda, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, thank you for your opinion and your commitment to this matter.

I would like to underline what you said, namely that we are facing huge challenges in our neighbourly relations as regards stability, democratic change and now, of course, economic development as well. Now is therefore also a good time for us to express our commitment and our readiness to cooperate closely with our eastern neighbours.

It is clear – and we should also say openly – that we have an interest in the influence we as the European Union have on our eastern neighbours. However, we want to extend our influence, not by violence, not by threats and not by coercion, but by offering to support precisely those countries in their search for stability and democratic change. I hope that they really are all seeking democratic change, particularly now when, like Ukraine, they have huge economic problems.

Economic problems, for some of which they are not to blame, but of course for some of which they are also partly responsible. We should also be aware that we also need to be critical of some things. Precisely because we are offering our support, we also need to criticise what we think needs criticising and to demand what is necessary in order for these countries to play their part too. I am thinking in particular of Ukraine, but I will come back to this country shortly.

It is absolutely vital that we do not see this Eastern Partnership as a tool to use against Russia, but rather as a strengthening of the countries which, in terms of neighbours, have the European Union on one side and Russia on the other, as – all being well – Russia should become our partner, particularly with regard to this policy.

I am very pleased that the United States and President Obama, together with Vice-President Biden and the Secretary of State Mrs Clinton, are now pursuing a different policy. We should not hold back our criticism with regard to internal developments in Russia. However, the reset button of which Mr Biden spoke in Munich should also be pressed as an attempt, as an offer to Russia to start a new relationship.

In this regard, my group is not particularly happy about the fact that the report by Mr Onyszkiewicz, as agreed in the Committee on Foreign Affairs, does not take up what the US is now offering. We are lagging behind the US. That is terrible. We should be going forward with the US, while naturally always keeping the issue of human rights in the foreground. This will be necessary and I hope that we shall still achieve a joint resolution on Russia. This, in my opinion, is vital.

I have already mentioned that our offer, our Eastern Partnership, does not mean that we approve of everything that is happening in our neighbouring countries. For example, if I consider the situation in Ukraine, it must not be a case of 'no matter what you do, what disputes you have and what problems you fail to solve, you will have the support of the European Union'. The leading forces in Ukraine must ultimately address the problems together, because the gas crisis is linked to a dispute within the political spectrum of Ukraine, and that, to us, is totally unacceptable. I do not wish to apportion blame here – we can all form our own opinion. However, it is absolutely vital that we make this clear to Ukraine. The same applies to Georgia and to all other countries. The European Union has made an offer and I hope that our eastern neighbours will accept this offer, take it seriously and actually make stability and democracy a reality.

István Szent-Iványi, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (HU) The Eastern Partnership, as a logical and essential new priority resulting from the expansion towards the east, is perhaps the most ambitious foreign policy initiative of a reunified Europe. It is a good step, but it will make sense and be successful only if there is real political will behind its implementation. It is therefore not enough simply to stick a new label on our existing neighbourhood policy; we have to set our sights far beyond the existing policies and formulate much higher aspirations.

The first task is undoubtedly to convert the existing cooperation agreements into association agreements. Part of that process also entails setting up a permanent institutional organisation, but that is not the most important part. Meetings of Heads of State or Government and ministerial meetings are obviously essential, but they succeed only if real advances are made in the domain of the two fundamental pillars. The goal is to establish a free trade zone with free trade agreements and gradually to abolish visa requirements. We know that both of these seem distant goals at the moment. The countries concerned are not yet ready for this, and the Eastern Partnership has to help these countries fulfil these conditions as soon as possible, since this is to everyone's mutual benefit. The gas crisis in the past months has demonstrated how vulnerable Europe is in terms of energy. Therefore, an especially vital part of the agreements is energy cooperation, which may involve transit countries like Belarus and Ukraine or exporting countries such as Azerbaijan. Consequently, we consider this of extreme importance.

I would like to emphasize that this cooperation must also convey values. The Eastern Partnership will be a success when the values of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and minority rights are constantly kept in the forefront, lending a helping hand to partners in their steps forward but also making them accountable in these areas. The Eastern Partnership must also be open to Belarus, but only once the conditions have been fulfilled. It must be made clear that distancing themselves from Russia does not in itself mean getting closer to Europe. Indeed, they have a lot to do in guaranteeing human rights and democracy before the road to cooperation opens up for them as well. The Eastern Partnership has obvious budgetary consequences: EUR 350 million have been appropriated for the next few years – and even this will probably not be enough. The task of Parliament is to furnish the necessary financial backing, and thus we must recognise that within the Eastern Partnership the most crucial motivating factor for the partners is their European aspiration. Thank you.

Konrad Szymański, *on behalf of the UEN Group.* – (PL) Mr President, the announcement of the Eastern Partnership has raised new hopes amongst our European neighbours. If we dash these hopes again, we will be limiting our influence in the East in every respect. Our neighbours will thus be pushed into Russia's sphere of influence, marked by destabilisation and authoritarianism. I would appeal for caution in the case of Belarus.

This country's current promises that it will achieve democracy remain groundless. In the meantime, the Belarusian authorities are deporting Catholic priests linked to the television channel BelSat, and have refused to grant them permission to register their office in Minsk. Young people who support the opposition are being conscripted into the army. Attempts to use the crisis as a pretext to refuse the Eastern Partnership funding and to slow down the process of signing agreements on free trade and visa freedom are a recipe for disaster for the European Union in this part of the world. If that happens, remember not to grumble about Moscow's policies. We have the necessary instruments available to us today. If the Eastern Partnership winds up merely providing new packaging for the same old content, then we should not be surprised if we fail in the East.

Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I would firstly like to welcome the Commission initiative, which is very well prepared. Secondly, it is not about the eastern policy of the Union, it is about a new formula, so the question should be raised of what is the value added. I would say that, besides what we have been trying to do, whether successfully or not so far, we are now trying to have not only friends around us, but also friends who are friends amongst themselves. That is key for the stability and security of the European Union. In this multilateral dimension I see the value added of this new project. I hope it will be approved in March by the European Council. We know that it is the priority of the Czech Presidency – although we do not have the pleasure of seeing the Czech Minister in the Chamber.

Association agreements are the key element of this and should be similar but, at the same time, differentiated according to the possibilities and performance of every one of the six parties in this multilateral framework. Energy security, as was said, is a key issue. It is of key interest to us and to the six countries to be linked by this energy security access.

There were questions during the debate on whether to have third countries involved. I think the approach whereby we have Turkey and Russia linked on a case-by-case basis is the correct approach. Belarus should obviously be invited, but on a very conditional principle, where we should fix the minimum thresholds on fundamental values.

We are very happy that the Commissioner has noted and taken into account that the parliamentary assembly of the Eastern Neighbourhood, Euronest – invented by this House – will be an integral part of the project.

Regarding funding, properly addressed, it will have to be in the next financial perspective. So far I hope that this 600 will be fine, but I have one important remark in order to eliminate all the controversies. It should not be done to the detriment or at the expense of the southern neighbourhood. The southern and eastern neighbourhoods should be both synergetic and symmetric in this context.

Kristian Vigenin (PSE). – (BG) Mr President, Commissioner, we cannot but give a positive assessment of the Commission's proposal. Its timing is perhaps really ideal too because in the current crisis situation all European countries need solidarity. We discussed fairly extensively just yesterday and the day before yesterday the issue of solidarity between new and old Member States. This is an artificial argument to a certain degree, but is one which is actually going on in the heads of many people. However, it is the European Union's eastern neighbours which are in need of a particular show of solidarity at the moment because, in practical terms, they do not have those support mechanisms which their neighbours immediately to the west of them have. Therefore, such an initiative will offer them a significant assurance that the European Union is still thinking about them and is prepared to invest in developing relations with them.

At the same time, we can say that this is a good initiative, but we will have to see from now on how this initiative will develop because, on a number of occasions, we have witnessed good initiatives fizzle out over time. On the other hand, the fact is that some of these countries which this initiative is targeted at have membership of the European Union as their prime objective. In this sense, it is very important that this notion of Eastern Partnership is not perceived either by us or our eastern neighbours as an attempt to replace future membership for good by such an initiative. With this in mind, I would like you to tell us, Commissioner, based on your contacts, how this initiative is being received by our eastern partners. Officially, of course, they are bound to support it, but specifically from the point of view of possible future membership, I wonder whether they have these misgivings.

I also think that this initiative has one element missing, which was also emphasised by fellow Members, namely the role of Russia. We are aware, of course, how delicate this matter is, given that the countries we are talking about are neighbours not only of the European Union, but of Russia as well. It is also very important for us to develop relations with Russia in respect of these countries so that no rivalry emerges between the European Union and Russia, no clash between the two main influences in these countries, resulting in political

instability. In fact, this is exactly what we are witnessing at the moment, to a certain degree. Some of the countries are literally divided and their citizens are split between expectations of Russia and expectations of the European Union. I believe that we must be more active and have much more to offer these countries.

I would like to conclude by saying that I support the easing of visa requirements, which is a very important step, but I want to see as part of this initiative more measures linked to education and exchanges, all of which is related to expanding contacts between citizens in these countries and the European Union, as well as, of course, to increasing the knowledge in these countries about the European Union. Thank you.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE-DE). – (LT) The Eastern Partnership policy is a particularly important policy, like the Euronest project which should be implemented in the nearest future. Therefore, I am convinced that we must find the additional EUR 350 million required to implement the Eastern Partnership policy in the coming four years. Regarding Belarus, three weeks ago a delegation from the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats in the European Parliament visited Minsk. Our delegation arrived the day after High Representative Javier Solana's visit to Belarus. On the one hand, his visit was a clear signal to Minsk that the European Union is ready to begin a new stage of pragmatic relations. On the other hand, it seemed that many of the European Union's earlier requirements are, if not forgotten, at least not being mentioned. For the majority of people in Belarus, resonant phrases about a constructive dialogue and the discussion of fundamental problems failed to show clearly what policy the European Union will pursue in the future. What is done is done. The visit took place and not a word on democratic values was uttered. I am pleased that the PPE-DE delegation was in Minsk the day after Mr Solana, and we especially emphasised the human rights situation and requirements for freedom of the press. In conclusion might I add that an invitation to Mr Lukashenko to participate in the Prague Spring Summit would be incomprehensible and hard to justify. Secondly, the Belarusian government must implement democratic reforms, and must continue implementing them. There should be no *carte blanche* for the Lukashenko regime.

Adrian Severin (PSE). – Mr President, the Eastern Partnership is a project which covers six countries. One of them, Belarus, is a dramatic example of self-isolation, to which we have responded in the past with a policy marked by the 'too little, too late' syndrome, both in terms of sanctions and of incentives. Belarus has little in common with, say, Georgia. Cooperation between Mr Lukashenko and Mr Saakashvili looks like political fiction and political horror combined.

The other five countries are on the Black Sea, where we have a synergy – which means that there is no strategy yet. Could the Eastern Partnership stand in for a Black Sea strategy? One could hardly imagine a regional strategy there without Turkey and Russia, but these particular countries are left out of the process. What all these countries have in common is the fact that they were all part of the Soviet Union, and they are all neighbours of Russia as much as they are neighbours of the European Union. In other words, we are dealing with a common neighbourhood. Russia looks to that neighbourhood as being its reserved sphere of interest. We certainly cannot accept that but, on the other hand, the Eastern Partnership appears to be a way to reciprocate the Russian policy on its neighbourhood. This makes that neighbourhood an area of conflicting interests and rivalry.

The real challenge is how to develop an EU-Russia common policy in respect of their common neighbourhood. Otherwise we will not achieve security and stability there, but the opposite. As far as everything else is concerned, we already have democracy and good governance, economic integration and convergence, energy security and human contacts on the agenda. From this point of view, Ukraine is much further advanced than the others, and I assume that it is not very happy to see that our offer now has to be shared with the others.

The real problem was not the lack of labels but the lack of delivery. By putting our money where our mouth is – and of course, Madam Commissioner, you are perfectly right to say that we need a budget in order to make good policy – and by adding a little visionary realism instead of naive confrontation, we might really transform the Eastern Partnership into a valuable and positive asset.

Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I would like to welcome the Eastern Partnership project that will hopefully strengthen democracy and reforms in our eastern neighbourhood. This is not just a regional initiative, however: it should be seen as an all-European project. Therefore, it is crucial that all Member States commit themselves to making their full contribution.

With commitment of that kind the traumatic conflict in Georgia last August could probably have been prevented. It is high time, therefore, that all states in the region understand that such projects cannot be seen as an old-style fight over spheres of influence, and I share the view of the Commissioner that the goal is to achieve more stability and security in our neighbourhood.

The Eastern Partnership will mean upgrading the EU's relations with six of its neighbours. It could be compared to establishing four common spaces between the EU and Russia, but the main element of this relationship will be reciprocity and conditionality. The Partnership will mean bilateral commitments to advance both free market economic relations and the rule of law, and the scope of the relationship will depend on the progress of each partner in these areas.

I would like to stress one more principle. The Eastern Partnership should not be limited to cooperation between governments. It has also to involve civil society and especially stimulate grass-root exchanges between citizens, NGOs and local authorities.

Belarus opposition leaders who were here this week were, by the way, worried by the EU opening up to Belarus because it did not include the civil society, and in the case of an authoritarian country like Belarus I think partnership must be clearly based on concrete steps of progress in the field of human rights.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE). – (RO) The Eastern Partnership initiative is especially important and a set of instruments needs to be implemented as quickly as possible to facilitate its application.

I welcome the platform for cooperation promoted by this new partnership framework as the need to readjust our relations with our neighbours is vital, not only with a view to making cooperation with them more effective, but also in order to be able to resolve the major problems which we are facing at the moment, such as the economic crisis and energy security, and which cannot be handled solely internally.

The partnership encourages projects of the utmost importance to the EU by promoting an institutionalised framework which puts both relations with neighbours and intraregional cooperation among neighbours at a higher level. There are priority projects which are vital for dealing with the energy crisis: those in the Black Sea region and those using resources from the Caspian Sea area. These projects can only be carried out against the backdrop of a secure neighbourhood and close relations with the relevant regional players, based on joint, mutually beneficial commitments.

Christopher Beazley (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I would like to refer to Ms Andrikienė's speech on the recent visit to Minsk by a delegation from this Parliament.

Commissioner, in your reply perhaps you could confirm that you would reject the view of Lukashenko and his colleagues that we should have a relationship without condition. When we were in Minsk we obviously met the democratic opposition leaders and we also spoke with the press. It is clear that Lukashenko does want good relations with us, but this is not out of the goodness of his soul: it is because he has very serious economic problems and wants to stay in power. He has ordered his police to break up peaceful demonstrations and, having released political prisoners, he is now re-arresting them.

Commissioner, in your speech – which I was present for – you talked about people-to-people contact. What do we, here in the EU, say to the people of Belarus and the students of Belarus? Are we supporting them, or are we supporting the dictatorship which, for the time being, rules over them?

Ioan Mircea Pașcu (PSE). – Mr President, my speech looks at the relationship between the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea synergy.

In my opinion, the main obstacle is finding the synergy's proper place in this increasingly complex picture of EU initiatives towards the east. Consequently, the real substantive issues of the Black Sea area, like energy and frozen conflicts, are approached either through: the EU Neighbourhood Policy, where the money is; the future Eastern Partnership, designed to increase the security confidence of the countries involved and secure the energy deliveries to the EU after the Georgian war; the EU's strategic relationship with Russia and Ukraine; or the accession talks with Turkey.

What then, is, left for the Black Sea synergy to achieve? Not much, I should say, apart from seminars and studies on how to extend the existing European initiatives towards the area and non-political issues. It is, therefore, necessary to improve the substance, too, of the framework known as 'synergy' if one wants to maintain its credibility.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, the Eastern Partnership is a complex set of proposals which should support our eastern neighbours along the path of democratic change. Each of these countries is faced with a choice. They can follow either the Russian or the European model. The European Community can certainly offer them more. The European Partnership is not an attempt to gain control of this area, or to extend our sphere of influence. Instead, it is an agreement which will clearly benefit both

sides. Partner states are being given a new opportunity and support for their economic and social development. The Community will guarantee greater energy and political security for itself.

We should aim to relax visa restrictions. If we make it easier for the citizens of Eastern Partnership countries to enter EU territory, they will discover how significant the benefits of cooperation with the EU can be. Greater contact between citizens, especially young people, will certainly also help to bring the partner countries and the EU closer. We should make it possible for young people to learn and to travel, and we should promote educational and cultural exchanges. Young people, who are aware and educated, are the future of our continent.

Margarita Starkevičiūtė (ALDE). – (LT) During my visit to the Ukraine I noticed that little attention is being paid to the development of the legal framework in our eastern neighbourhood. The introduction of the Community *acquis* helped Lithuania to reform its economic and legal system and to become a member of the European Union. I hope that the Eastern Partnership Programme will devote ever more attention to the development of the legal framework in our neighbouring countries. Not only will this help ensure institutional stability, it will also help implement economic reforms. On the other hand, the development of the legal framework allows us to encourage cooperation between the European Union and its eastern neighbours, because it ensures a stable environment for capital investments and for the application of human knowledge.

Charles Tannock (PPE-DE). – Mr President, as two of my colleagues are not in the Chamber, I am availing myself of the time to say a couple of extra words on this issue, which is so vital to the immediate external priorities of the European Union in the coming years.

I want to congratulate the Commission on its initiative on the issue of making energy security one of the prime objectives for dialogue and for the political agenda. External energy security policy is vital. We saw the recent spat between Ukraine and Russia and the downstream effects it had on consumers in countries as far afield as Bulgaria and Slovakia.

It is important to remember that a number of the countries of the six concerned – such as Belarus, Ukraine and Georgia – are key transit countries. There are also producers – like Azerbaijan and the Caspian gas and oil fields. There is potential for a trans-Caspian link to central Asia which, as you know, Commissioner, is dear to my heart, and I have always been an advocate of further rapprochement with Kazakhstan. It is important that we maintain stability in the Caspian region and also diversify away from over-dependence on gas supplies from Russia, and in particular Gazprom, which is often used as a sort of branch of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

I have to say also, with some regret, that while the Eastern Partnership is great for the countries of the South Caucasus – although it remains to be seen whether they can also integrate more regionally, rather than just enjoy bilateral relations with Brussels – it does not bring much that is new for countries like Ukraine. Such countries already have access to free trade agreement negotiations, with the issue of visa facilitation on the table, along with participation in the CFSP and the SDP. There is nothing much new for Ukraine, I am sorry to say, but it is great for the other countries.

Marie Anne Isler Béguin (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would still like to remind you that we have not managed to settle the frozen conflicts in these eastern regions, nor have we managed to avoid war between Russia and Georgia.

I believe in fact that this Eastern Partnership is welcome because there is a need, in the first place, to stabilise these regions and to avoid falling into the trap of the area of influence because there is us, there is the United States, there is Russia and there is Turkey. I also believe that we have to ask ourselves, in the context of this partnership, if there is not a need to introduce a neutral buffer zone, in other words states which would have neutral status to avoid the friction which we are witnessing today with Georgia and the Ukraine seeking NATO membership. We know perfectly well the effect of this membership on Russia.

We are looking for stability and energy security from this Eastern Partnership. We must ensure this security because, as one of the Members said, energy from the Caspian Sea travels through the Caucasus; so we must have stability in the Caucasus.

I also believe that our fellow citizens should get to know these regions and, for this, I believe that the Commission must invest in some projects. The problem showed itself in fact when the new countries gained accession. I think then that we must introduce projects to make these regions known and to ensure that they have a European perspective.

Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (PPE-DE). – Mr President, catch-the-eye is a good opportunity for polemics. I disagree with my colleague Mr Severin. He would admit a *droit de regard* in zones of influence for Russia. If we want stability on our eastern frontiers we need more democracy and more market economy. Russia is less democratic and less a market economy than those neighbours, so no joint policy will bring us closer to that goal.

Symmetry with Russia in this policy will not provide us with more progress in the region. We were not invited by Russia when the CIS was constructed, and a mix of our and Russia's policies would be totally counterproductive.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, this is a really interesting debate, and I wish to thank the Members very much for their overall great support for this Eastern Partnership approach.

Let me say at the outset that it is based on values. It gives support for both political and economic reform. It will require resources – and I wish to thank Mrs Andrikienė for her clear support on this – and, as many of you have said, it will also require political will.

It is crucial that, apart from government-to-government cooperation, there be cooperation with the population, which is clearly there, and there is also the parliamentary aspect to things. Therefore, it is very important that you also use the new Euronest and all other means in order to really instil our ideas. That is my first comment.

A lot can be said about this Eastern Partnership. The first thing to ask is what the added value is to our normal neighbourhood policy. The answer is 'quite a lot'! We are going into greater depth: the association agreements are already very broad and deep. There should normally also be free trade agreements, which cannot easily be offered to everybody, because it requires a lot of structural changes in the countries concerned. That is very important.

There is a move to more political cooperation and mobility for security, which many of you have mentioned. It is very important to have visa facilitation, but other countries need to do more on border management and documentary security etc. There is an outreach – a greater offer.

Then there is the multilateral component because, as I have always said, the neighbourhood policy, along with the Eastern Partnership, is in principle a bilateral offer – as Mr Swoboda rightly said – but it also has a multilateral component that enables countries to work with each other, which, as in the case of the south, is always more complicated.

This is an offer, and by that offer we are trying to bring the countries closer to us. We do not have the same instruments as one has with candidate countries, where in order to enter the 'club' they have to comply with a certain number of conditions, and if they do not, then they cannot enter. Therefore, we have to work with initiatives, with instigations and with positive momentum. That will take time, because this is also a question of societal change, but it is very important to be there and offer and agree to that.

I also agree with those who said that we should not see this as a threat to Russia. That is true, and at the same time this is a small group of six eastern partners, together with the European Union, and on an ad hoc, case-by-case, basis we can here or there maybe associate Russia or Turkey.

However, the Black Sea synergy is a very important initiative on projects that reaches out to all partners, including Russia and Turkey. It is a young policy and one has to give it a chance. We cannot implement a strategy in just one year. We have to be patient with this very important policy, which we must continually try to develop.

I would say to Mr Szent-Iványi that we support the eastern partners in meeting our conditions. That is crucial. We therefore have a mechanism for giving them more capacity-building and more institution-building, because we can see that sometimes the institutions are weak.

Concerning Ukraine, we are working on the legal framework, but implementation is up to the governments in every democratic country, once the parliament has adopted the legislation. Therefore, with the Eastern Partnerships, we are trying to support and to push, but it is also up to those countries to do their job. As Mr Swoboda mentioned, it is very important that we are also critical when necessary, and there has to be genuine leadership in a country. At present we are not always sure about that, and want the country to move ahead.

I am very grateful to Mr Saryusz-Wolski for his support. It is absolutely right to say that differentiation is also key here, because the various countries are very different: Ukraine is in the forefront, in principle, then there are Moldova and Georgia, and then there is a country like Belarus, in which the situation is very delicate.

I am preparing for a visit to Belarus, where we have to work a delicate balance, because we want to offer something – particularly to the population. From the very beginning, the Commission has supported the students in Vilnius, and I would like to see more support from the various Member States, because the ones that always speak up about this should also do something. I have always been in favour of that.

However, we also want Mr Lukashenko to go on with his reforms, which is what we are saying. It is important to communicate in such a way that this message is clear. On Monday, there will be a GAERC meeting at which the question of what to do about Belarus will certainly come up. The outcome will most probably be along the same lines as now, because we are not yet satisfied but, at the same time, we have seen some positive steps.

In reply to Mr Vigenin, I would say that this does not replace membership. There cannot be membership, because neither these countries nor the European Union is mature enough for their membership. Therefore, we have to design. This is a policy designed to give as much as we can, provided the countries want to take it. The difficulty is that it is much easier, as I have already said, to give something if you lay down conditions or if you say: 'well, try to do this, try to do that, and we will give you opportunities'. In this case there is no immediate goal of having a specific result, but the overall result is better stability, more security and more opportunity.

Concerning security questions, I would say to Mrs Isler Béguin that it is absolutely true that we have to work for more security, but many other questions also come into the picture. We are working very hard on Azerbaijan, on the question of Nagorno-Karabakh, on Moldova, Transnistria and on Georgia, and are sticking very firmly to these questions. It is a principal question. We will not recognise the independence of Abkhazia and South Ossetia but, at the same time, we have to work with Russia and have to engage with Russia. On this point, I agree with Mr Swoboda that we have to be realistic, but also to make our firm position clearly known.

These are the major issues, on which all of you have made very valuable points. In a multilateral framework it is very good to have civil society involved, in all its different forms, and also presents a great opportunity for them and for us to work on energy security. Energy security today is one of the important issues where we have a real win-win situation: we are highly interested and they are highly interested. We have to bring that together.

President. – That concludes this item.

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José Ribeiro e Castro (PPE-DE). – (PT) I should like to ask the Bureau whether we are going to discuss a proposal for a European Parliament recommendation to the Council, given that the Council representative is not here. Is there any news as to whether or not he will arrive during the debate?

President. – Mr Ribeiro, we have no news from the Council. We hope they are well, but no, we have no news.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Urszula Gacek (PPE-DE), in writing. – In a time of economic crisis, one could ask the question: should Europe focus on looking after its own rather than assisting its eastern neighbours?

Europe should decidedly continue supporting them.

Firstly, economic instability in the eastern neighbourhood, mostly notably in Ukraine, which is suffering major problems, poses a threat to security in Europe. Conversely, a stabilised Ukrainian economy, increasingly integrated with the EU, is an enormous potential market for EU Member States.

Secondly, bringing our eastern neighbours into the European family, even if the prospect of actual membership of the EU is probably still a not a realistic option in the immediate future, is a long-term project. Dealing with

the current crisis is something we will have hopefully resolved in the next year to 18 months. The Eastern Partnership is a project for many years.

Thirdly, even if the leaders of some of our eastern neighbours, such as the Belarusian President, and, to a lesser degree, bickering leaders in the Ukraine, may discourage us from tightening these ties, we must remember that our eastern neighbours are more than their current leaders and, in the light of their internal political problems, they need our support, example and encouragement.

Mieczysław Edmund Janowski (UEN), in writing. – (PL) We should be pleased that the European Union is opening up new opportunities in terms of relations with its eastern neighbours. In December 2008, the European Commission adopted a proposal, tabled by Poland and Sweden, to strengthen the European Union's cooperation with six of its eastern neighbours. This move encourages hope. I hope that this project will not remain on the figurative drawing-board, and that it will be implemented in the context of our relations with Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus. The Eastern Partnership provides for a real increase in the level of political cooperation, including new types of association agreements, far-reaching integration with the EU's economy, easier travel throughout the EU for citizens of the countries covered by this partnership (provided that security requirements are met), agreements aimed at improving energy security, which benefit all those involved, and increased financial assistance.

We should be aware that the Eastern Partnership requires commitment from both the European Union and from the partner countries. This effort can bring tangible political and economic benefits. It will contribute to increasing the level of trust between partners and, as a result, stability and security for all. We may have particularly high hopes for the proposed main framework of the Partnership, especially the creation of four political platforms, democracy, good governance and stability, economic integration and convergence with EU policies, and energy security and interpersonal contact. Of course, there are many doubts, such as the matter of the real intentions of the Belarusian government and the issue of relations with Russia.

5. EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership - Mexico Strategic Partnership (debate)

President. – The next item is the joint debate on the following reports:

- A6-0062/2009 by Mrs Koppa, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, with a proposal for a European Parliament recommendation to the Council on the European Union-Brazil Strategic Partnership (2008/2288(INI)), and

- A6-0028/2009 by Mr Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, with a proposal for a European Parliament recommendation to the Council on an EU-Mexico Strategic Partnership (2008/2289(INI)).

José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, rapporteur. – (ES) Mr President, Latin America is a continent with more than 600 million inhabitants, contributes more than 10% of the world's gross domestic product, has 40% of the earth's plant species and at the same time has a dynamic and extraordinarily active young population.

Despite the economic boom of recent years, however, this is not the best time for Latin America in terms of its integration. This is what President Óscar Arias said at his inauguration and I was reminded of it last weekend at a seminar organised in São Paulo with Alejandro Toledo, the former President of Peru, and Fernando Enrique Cardoso, the former President of Brazil.

There have been tensions between Argentina and Uruguay; the ALCA project has failed; Venezuela has left the Andean Community; there have been problems between Brazil and Bolivia over the nationalisation of energy resources, and between Argentina and Bolivia for the same reason; there have been disputes between Ecuador and Colombia, between Colombia and Venezuela, between Mexico and Venezuela, and so on.

This initiative by the European Commission, supported by Parliament and the Council, to establish this strategic partnership therefore sends out a clear, well-defined message that Latin America remains on the list of action priorities for the European Union, due not least to Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner's personal commitment.

In the case of Mexico, this strategic partnership aims specifically to underline that country's importance on the Latin American and world stages and, in addition, it is an essential, key step in consolidating our existing relations with Mexico and expanding coordination on topics of world importance.

This new step is an opportunity to boost political dialogue even further and to coordinate the positions of both parties at world level and also in the various multilateral forums and international bodies. Consultation mechanisms will enable joint positions to be adopted on concrete issues of global reach such as security, the environment or socioeconomic questions.

For the European Union it is also an excellent opportunity to develop privileged relations with a country that plays a leading role in Latin American forums such as the Rio Group, in which it holds the presidency until 2010. Mexico takes part in the G20, the G8+5, the World Trade Organization, the International Monetary Fund and also the OECD, in which it is the only Latin American member.

Therefore, seeking joint solutions to the world economic and financial crisis, drawing up ambitious strategies for the success of the United Nations Conference on Climate Change to be held in Copenhagen, developing a structured dialogue on immigration, or collaborating to achieve the Millennium Development Goals are some of the things that can be achieved at the annual summits between the European Union and Mexico if the strategic partnership that we are proposing is set up.

In the resolution that it will adopt this morning, Parliament will also reiterate its support for President Calderón in the fight against drug trafficking and organised crime. In addition, and in a spirit of mutual respect, dialogue and shared responsibility, I believe we should take on joint challenges, such as seeking to protect vulnerable groups in society like women or representatives of the media.

Commissioner, this year we are celebrating the 25th anniversary of the political talks held in San José, at which, thanks to the major mobilisation of political talent in Central America and the monitoring by the European Union, peace was finally brought to the conflict-torn Central American isthmus.

In its support for peace, understanding, concord and reconciliation, the European Union has, in my view, been doing an honourable job in Central America and also in other parts of the world. Now that these values are being consolidated, albeit not without difficulty and not everywhere to the same extent, it is clearly time for development. Based on our European experience, however, that will be more difficult if there is no integration.

I believe that we are providing a substantial impetus through this strategic partnership with Mexico and, above all, we are sending out a clear, well-defined message about Europe's commitment to Latin America.

Maria Eleni Koppa, *rapporteur*. – (EL) Mr President, I am delighted that we are debating and will be voting today on the report on improving our relations with Brazil. The creation of a strategic relationship between the European Union and Brazil is of mutual benefit, firstly due to Brazil's changing position at global level to become a leading force in the developing world and, secondly, because Brazil plays a vital role in bridging differences on questions of global interest.

Over recent years, the European Union has maintained a very broad spectrum of relations with Brazil and a coordinated cohesive framework is therefore needed for relations on both sides. Stronger relations will be based on historical, cultural and economic ties and on common values for democracy, the rule of law, human rights, concern about climate change and sustainable development, disarmament, energy and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. The strategic partnership must be substantial in scope and of a gradual nature.

Brazil is also a country of decisive importance to Mercosur. It must therefore commit, within the partnership, to strengthening relations between the European Union and Mercosur and addressing questions of common interest. Within this framework, the strategic relationship will be a means of deepening interregional, economic and trade relations.

Due to its enhanced role in the area and its active involvement in the UN, Brazil can, I believe, play an essential role in preventing and resolving regional conflicts in Latin America, thereby helping to consolidate peace in the area.

In light of the global economic crisis, the European Union and Brazil must cooperate at World Trade Organization level with a view to the successful conclusion of negotiations on the Doha Development Agenda. Brazil is in a position to do more to address the new challenges of the global economy, given that regulatory matters play an important part in safeguarding competition law and in sustainable development.

As far as the reform of the financial system is concerned, its membership of international fora may help in reviewing the role of international institutions in the surveillance and regulation of financial markets.

Like other developing powers, Brazil is becoming more and more active in international efforts to deal with global poverty and inequality through cooperation programmes with the long-term objective of sustainable development.

As far as environmental protection is concerned, Brazil is the country with the largest areas of vital rainforests. The European Union and Brazil must cooperate proactively at international level to protect them and to address climate change and the loss of biodiversity. Political undertakings need to be made to implement the UN Convention on Biological Diversity. Action also needs to be taken to protect and manage water resources.

I should say at this point that Brazil is the first country to develop important biofuel production, thereby achieving tangible results in reducing emissions of greenhouse gases. Consequently, exchanging experiences and cooperating in this sector may prove to be very useful to the European Union and, conversely, renewable energies and energy-saving measures will be very useful to Brazil.

Migration is one basic issue on the European political agenda. Consequently, the strategic partnership should, in light of the Lima Declaration, promote a wide-ranging dialogue on migration, covering regular and irregular migration and the protection of migrants' human rights.

Finally, the European Parliament welcomes the launching of negotiations on a visa agreement between the two sides, which will facilitate the free movement of people.

IN THE CHAIR: MR MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ

Vice-President

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Honourable Members, friends, allow me first of all to thank in particular the rapporteurs, Mrs Koppa and Mr Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, for their excellent reports on, respectively, the strategic partnership between the European Union and Brazil, and between the European Union and Mexico.

I must also say that I am proud, as Commissioner, that we have brought forward many proposals and many communications concerning Latin America in general, and Brazil and Mexico in particular, because it seems to me that it was the right time to do it.

In recent years, Brazil and Mexico have proved to be front-line actors, both on the world stage and at regional level. In line with this fact, the European Union has recognised the need to consider these countries strategic partners, in particular because of their economic weight in Latin America and also because of their role as regional leaders and, very often, their importance in regional security issues.

The foundations of our relationships are extremely solid. Not only do we have, as we all know, close historical and cultural links, but we also share common interests and values, and our economic links are increasingly solid.

The European Union is, in fact, the top trading partner for Brazil which, for its part, is the principal beneficiary of European Union investments in Latin America. Brazil alone has, in fact, attracted some EUR 87 billion, in other words more than all of the capital invested by the European Union in the other three 'BRIC' countries, namely Russia, India and China. It is also true that Brazil is very important to cooperation in relation to the WTO. As a partner, it can sometimes be difficult but, naturally, it has its own point of view.

Since the implementation of the European Union-Mexico agreement, which was a pioneering agreement between a Latin American country and the European Union, average annual European investment has tripled and the Union is today Mexico's second biggest trading partner. Naturally, Mexico is also a partner that shares the same values and the same interests. That is why we have drawn up this strategic partnership as a powerful instrument that, we hope, will bring tangible benefits not only to our respective citizens, but also to those of other countries and regions in the world.

I wish to stress that the European Union, Brazil and Mexico continue to cooperate to confront the financial crisis and to prepare the ground, as you said, Mrs Koppa, to ensure the success of the G20 summit taking place in London in April.

They also continue to work together on common challenges such as climate change – the major issue for us – the fight against drugs, in which we are relying greatly on President Calderón, who has a major fight on his hands, and the sensitive and difficult question of migration.

We have seen the Mexican Government's current efforts to fight the illegal drugs trade, even though, unfortunately, the government is having to confront an almost unprecedented level of violence. We must absolutely, therefore, help Mexico.

Honourable Members, what does the strategic partnership mean for us? I believe that it will allow us better to prepare for the future by addressing a whole host of bilateral and world issues of common interest in a more structured, more coherent and better coordinated framework.

I am very happy to note that, with the deepened relations with these two countries, we have laid the emphasis, correctly, on several priorities identified in the European Parliament's report, such as coordination at a multilateral level, meaning the United Nations as well, democracy, human rights and the other global issues that I have just mentioned.

With Brazil especially, we have also begun work on the question of renewable energies, like biofuel, in which Brazil has real experience and on which President Lula himself addressed us during the Portuguese Presidency.

On the monitoring and implementation of this partnership, Mr President, our main challenge for 2009, as relates to Brazil first, is to make a reality of the joint commitments entered into in the action plans.

We would like to complete the negotiations on two major aspects. First, the agreement on the exemption of short-stay visas and the granting of market economy status to Bulgaria and Romania. Also, we are planning in 2009 to open new dialogues on education, culture and economic and financial affairs, as well as pursuing the current dialogues, and we will continue to work with Brazil on all the other global questions.

As for Mexico, the strategic partnership decided on by the Council will, I hope, soon be announced at a European Union-Mexico summit. Meanwhile, the Commission, with the Member States, has committed to work with the Mexican Government on an operational document that specifies the practical actions that will optimise the strategic partnership.

Finally, let me mention the role of the European Parliament. We have always been in favour of any contribution Parliament could make in relation to the launch of this strategic partnership, and we enthusiastically welcome these recommendations today. In this context, I wish to say that I can only welcome the fact that the Parliamentary relationships appear to be extremely promising, given that some 96 members from the Brazilian Parliament's parliamentary group on the European Union are here.

I believe that we share the same interest and, as for the joint EU-Mexico parliamentary committee, we can also see that it is in operation and its next meeting will take place at the end of March.

To summarise, Mr President, I believe that we are actively engaged in making a reality of the numerous commitments that we have made in the framework of the partnership and we hope in this way to work for greater security in the world as a whole.

Juan Fraile Cantón, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Development*. – (ES) Mr President, I shall take the floor first of all to congratulate the Commission on its initiative, which implies recognising Brazil as a regional power and upgrades its relations with the European Union to strategic level. These relations have until now been based on the 1992 Cooperation Framework Agreement and the 1995 EU-Mercosur Framework Agreement.

In recent years, however, Brazil's role in world affairs has changed for the better and the country has shown itself to be a key partner for Europe. This new scenario leads us to intensify and diversify our relations.

Firstly, the EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership should help that country exercise regional and world leadership.

Secondly, in connection with the Millennium Development Goals, although programmes such as the '*Bolsa Família*' ('family fund') have succeeded in improving human development and in cutting extreme poverty practically by half, it cannot be ignored that income inequalities are still very great, that there exist considerable concentrations of poverty and that there are also substantial regional differences between the north and the south of the country.

In this respect, an exchange of political experiences would be welcome, which could lead us to propose innovative solutions in the fight against poverty, inequality and social exclusion, the reduction of imbalances, and in terms of social protection and decent work for all.

We share basic concerns in the area of environmental protection and, on this basis, we should begin a dialogue on issues such as climate change, water management, biodiversity and deforestation, as well as on the role that indigenous peoples should play in all these things.

In the field of energy cooperation, the dialogue initiated in 2007 has enabled us to make progress which we now need to consolidate on topics such as sustainable biofuels, renewable energy, energy efficiency and low-CO₂ energy technology.

The strategic partnership with Brazil also brings with it a commitment to greater regional integration to strengthen our cooperation with Mercosur.

Erika Mann, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on International Trade*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, I am pleased that we are having this debate. Of course we have intensive relations with both these countries, but I would like to talk about Mexico in particular.

In our debate, we in the Committee on International Trade saw it as particularly important to discuss matters that affect our area. It is especially important to us that we strengthen the free-trade agreement once again. If you look at the figures, you can see that, although our trade has definitely intensified in recent years, there is still considerable demand and that we – and the European side – still have considerable restrictions when it comes to market access. I would sincerely ask you, Commissioner, to again do everything you can to analyse the situation once more together with your competent colleagues and, where problems exist, to really lift these restrictions.

It makes no sense whatsoever for us, on the one hand, to talk about strategic partnerships with such important countries in Latin America and then, on the other hand, to still have to battle with such absurd market restrictions. Sometimes, of course, they make sense, but as a rule they are in fact not useful at all. I would be very grateful to you, and to the committee, if we could resolve this matter.

The second point that we feel is important is that, in the context of global international relations, we should also truly give Mexico the status it deserves. This, of course, relates in particular to the still very fragile arrangement in connection with the G20. Our delegation has written a letter, which we have also sent to you, in which we ask that Mexico also sit at the G20 table and for this to be a permanent arrangement rather than merely a brief appearance.

My final request is for you to attend our delegation meeting on 30 and 31 March; I know that you cannot attend personally, but for you to arrange for someone from your area of competence to attend when Mr Guadarrama, Mr Buganza and Mr Green, who chair the Mexico delegation, come so that they really feel that the Commission values the delegation and its visit.

Francisco José Millán Mon, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, the countries of Europe are linked to Latin America by close historical, cultural and human ties. As a Spaniard and, what is more, a Galician, I am very aware of that. In addition, we share principles and values that are also a result of our Christian heritage.

Latin America and the European Union are, in general, natural partners, and we must intensify our relations. I am delighted that there is broad agreement in this House on the fact that the European Union should establish strategic relations with both Mexico and Brazil. I said as much myself with regard to Mexico in April last year during a debate here in Parliament on the Lima summit.

The strategic partnership should be accompanied by regular yearly summits. We have held them with Brazil since 2007, and the Salafranca report rightly calls for them in relation to Mexico, in view of the Council's somewhat ambiguous conclusions of October 2008. I hope such a summit may be held with Mexico this year.

Ladies and gentlemen, the European Union's strategic partnership with Mexico and Brazil is highly beneficial at both bilateral and global levels. Bilaterally, there is ample potential for the relations to grow. In the case of Mexico, for example, the association agreement has resulted in a spectacular increase in trade and investment. The fight against organised crime and drug trafficking and cooperation in the field of energy are other areas where joint cooperation is necessary, as well as greater coordination in multilateral forums.

In the case of Brazil, the intensification of relations should also help to unblock the EU-Mercosur Agreement.

I should like to highlight the positive economic results achieved by Mexico and Brazil throughout this decade, in contrast to previous periods. Without that progress, which has been due to well-conceived policies, the current extreme world crisis would have devastated their economies. In contrast, their governments can now use the reserves they have built up to implement anticyclical policies in the same way as the developed and some emerging countries.

Mexico and Brazil are also playing an increasingly important role on the world stage. They take part in the Heiligendamm process and, as major economic powers in Latin America, they are members of the G20.

In today's complex and interconnected world – I am just finishing – with all its global challenges and threats, including climate change, cooperating in a spirit of shared responsibility with players as significant as Mexico and Brazil is highly beneficial for the European Union and also, of course, for the whole international community.

Vicente Miguel Garcés Ramón, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, on 15 July 2008 the European Commission adopted a communication to the Council and Parliament recommending that a strategic partnership be established between the European Union and Mexico.

For its part, on 13 October 2008 the European General Affairs and External Relations Council recognised Mexico as a strategic partner, pending Parliament's opinion on the matter.

I would recall that, at the seventh meeting of the EU-Mexico Joint Parliamentary Committee held at the end of October last year, we said that a strategic partnership between Mexico and the European Union would provide the impetus needed to strengthen and develop the true potential of our bilateral relations.

This is a good time in the relations between the two sides and the results of the current global agreement are good. We stress the need for our respective executive powers to strengthen collaboration in the political, economic and cooperation spheres, particularly in view of the new challenges of all kinds resulting from the financial and economic crisis that is causing havoc in our continents.

Mexico is a great country with which we share values and goals, such as the development of democratic forms of government, a commitment to gender equality, consolidation of the rule of law, fair and sustainable development and respect for human rights. We advocate closer cooperation in the fight against organised crime, terrorism and drug trafficking, based on the principles of shared responsibility and strict adherence to international law.

Consequently, we shall support the proposal for a recommendation on the EU-Mexico Strategic Partnership to be put before Parliament this morning.

Renate Weber, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, it is already widely acknowledged that Brazil has become an increasingly significant regional and global player. The crucial role Brazil played in the establishment of UNASUR is just one more confirmation of the country's reputation and deserves clear recognition, as does Brazil's endeavour to support and influence the democratic evolution of some countries in Latin America.

I agree with the rapporteur that Brazil and the European Union share the same values regarding democracy, the rule of law and the promotion of human rights, and share the same principles on market economy. Therefore it is clear why Brazil is a key partner for the European Union.

For several years, Brazil has enjoyed an economic growth which I hope will not be too badly affected by the current ravaging economic crisis. Unfortunately, however, the economic development and accumulation of wealth in Brazil did not translate into the eradication of poverty. As the report notes, Brazil still has a high number of poor people and it is a sad reality that the concentration of wealth is based on cultural and racial grounds. It should be emphasised that 65% of the poorest Brazilians are black or of a mixed ethnicity, while 86% of the most privileged are white. I appreciated President Lula's idea that his government should not fight wealth but poverty. I am convinced that EU support and assistance would be beneficial in trying to put an end to this polarisation between the very poor and the very rich.

But, in order to do this, we need the financial assistance available under the development cooperation instrument for Brazil to be used to support the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals and for sustainable development purposes. At the same time, the European Union needs to continue to focus on the topic of combating deforestation. This is a key issue, as Brazil has a rich but fragile environment. We

need not only to develop strong partnerships, but also to coordinate with other donors and have projects that should put words into action as far as the protection of the environment is concerned.

Our strategic partnership should also support the development of a strong Brazilian civil society, encouraging contacts between European and Brazilian NGOs, entrepreneurs and businesspeople fora, and should promote exchanges on an educational and cultural level. Cooperation on higher education under the Erasmus Mundus programme or other biregional schemes should be viewed as an investment in what is the most precious capital of a country, its human resources.

Roberta Angelilli, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, dialogue and political and commercial collaboration with Brazil is an important goal for Europe; a goal to be developed and strengthened, beginning with the fight against poverty, particularly among children, and moving towards strong commercial agreements to build up trade and investment.

However, this strategic partnership cannot avoid certain immovable points. Firstly, the need for greater cooperation in the fight against corruption, organised crime, cross-border crime, drug trafficking, money laundering and international terrorism. Secondly, the need for close collaboration in legal matters, notably with regard to collaboration in extradition procedures and the mutual recognition of judicial rulings.

Raúl Romeva i Rueda, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, I think it is obvious that we cannot ignore the context in which we are discussing this agreement. In Europe the current crisis is above all affecting the sectors more oriented towards exports, while in Mexico it is very specifically affecting those actors that suffer most from the consequences of the economic slowdown.

An agreement of this kind should be beneficial to both parties, but the experience we have at the moment is that that is not always the case. For Europe it is very beneficial. I think that is obvious, and we can see it clearly when we look at the results of the last eight years, during which the trade balance has been strongly in the EU's favour.

There has been an 80% rise in the trade deficit, which means that Mexico is now highly dependent on Europe. There are other risks, however, which we must not forget. The fact is that most of the investments that the EU has made will later have positive consequences for Europe as well. I mean that many of the exports that are made are basically in-house, within companies.

I am not saying that that is necessarily a bad thing, but I am saying that we must be careful and remain very aware that it may have highly negative consequences. Above all, however, the most worrying factor is the liberalising obsession shown by certain governments, which is embedded in certain attitudes in this context. Banking, for example, is one of the most important sectors and one that has proved to be essential in tackling this crisis but, in Mexico, 90% of this sector is currently in foreign hands, with 50% of that in European hands.

I do not think that that is the best way to approach an agreement of this kind. An agreement should correct, or at least not fuel, some of these risks, and that is what we propose with some of our amendments.

Willy Meyer Pleite, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (ES) Mr President, with regard to the partnership with Brazil, the report undoubtedly has some highly positive aspects. The call for multilateralism, especially in the international forums of the United Nations; cooperation in the areas of the environment, sustainable development, forest and water resource management and education; as well as cooperation relating to renewable energy and technology are, in our view, highly appropriate and positive.

As for the focus on immigration, despite the shameful directive, I believe that in this specific case it is talking about human rights and the rights of migrants, which is why I think it is very appropriate. Another important point is cooperation to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, as well as social cohesion in relation to the important leadership shown by Brazil in its policy to reduce poverty through the '*Bolsa Família*' or 'family fund'. A further undoubtedly important aspect of the partnership is Brazil's role as one of the leaders in the process of regional integration through Unasur. In other words, there is a whole range of important points which also suggest that civil society itself should be involved in these negotiations.

On the other hand, there are aspects of the report that we do not like, which is why we are going to abstain. Firstly, it recommends putting an end to economic protectionism in Brazil. I think this text was drafted before the crisis; as I see it, protectionism is a reality today. The winds of change that are blowing to end or mitigate the crisis are undoubtedly pointing towards public intervention in the economy by governments. I think the free market is over, and it has left behind a crisis of unforeseeable consequences for humankind.

Another very important point that we do not like is that the report calls for joint participation in nuclear research projects, especially the ITER thermonuclear reactor project. I do not think that is right for us, as we are not in favour of nuclear energy. With greater efficiency in energy consumption and more renewable energy, I think we can do without a form of energy that is highly damaging to humankind. That, despite the positive points, leads us to abstain.

The Mexico report is a very different matter, since the partnership with Brazil is yet to take off. Mexico has been working within our strategic association agreement since 1997, and we therefore already have results that enable us to judge whether it is going well – whether it is going as well as we would like or not.

We are going to abstain on this report as well, for a number of reasons. Firstly, we believe that the report ignores negative consequences in economic terms. It is true that there has been progress if we look at aspects where the country has a poor human rights record, in relation to the murder of women. Amendments have been tabled that I think clarify and improve the text, but there is a part that we do not see as being positive, and that is everything concerning the Treaty on Free Trade and the consequences it is having for small producers in Mexico. This is not a good time for Mexico, as for any other country in the world in the current crisis. Foreign investment in Mexico is certainly concentrated in just a few sectors and is not helping to expand the domestic economy.

Our group, the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left, is therefore going to abstain in the vote on this report.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group.* – (NL) Mr President, in recent years there has been a growing trend in the Union to conclude strategic partnerships with third countries. In itself, this does not trouble me much. It can be useful to give more shape to bilateral relations through such a partnership, but there are at least two risks involved in this structure.

Firstly, Europe cannot declare every country a strategic partner. To do so, in my view, would lead to a devaluation of the term 'strategic'. I therefore argue that only the bilateral relationships with crucial partners should be brought under this banner. As far as I am concerned, this actually applies more to Brazil than to Mexico, the subject of our debate this morning.

Secondly, I sometimes get an indefinable feeling that these strategic partnerships are largely symbolic. It is a chance to call another summit and then things remain largely as they were. These partnerships often function solely as a forum. The question of tangible results is frequently left unanswered.

I have the same sense, to some extent, in relation to Parliament's draft recommendation to the Council in relation to Brazil, which we shall be discussing tomorrow. Here, too, I feel that there is not enough mention given to specific problems. Mr President, I should like to illustrate this concern using three elements of the draft recommendation.

Firstly, the recommendation notes, somewhat misleadingly, that this partnership is not to be at the expense of the Union's relations with Mercosur. How is it possible that the European Union, which always puts itself forward as a promoter of regional cooperation, could allow its bilateral relations with Brazil to take preference over its regional cooperation with Mercosur? The Union is choosing the wrong priorities here.

On the strength of our involvement with the region, the European Union must, in fact, indicate to Brazil the importance of a strong Mercosur and must encourage the country to itself invest strongly in this cooperation agreement. Instead, the Union will be sitting down with Brazil at the bilateral level and, in so doing, will be signalling that Mercosur is of secondary importance as far as we are concerned.

In the field of trade, too, it seems to me the draft recommendation has not been worded strictly enough. There is a call for us to work together for the smooth conclusion of the Doha round. This is, of course, a fine aim, but would it not be better to first specify the key points of difference between the Union and Brazil?

The subject of market access is a salient issue for both camps. I believe that the Doha round has more chance of succeeding if this matter is resolved at the bilateral level. I am not saying that that would be easy, but I do believe this to be a better way forward than making rhetorically appealing declarations.

I have also looked at the draft recommendation from the perspective of my geopolitical interest. From that perspective, it occurs to me that the recommendation fails to call on Brazil to take up a leadership role in the region. With this point, I shall wind up my speech. Brazil must gauge political developments in the region well and can do so primarily from the ambition of its neighbour Venezuela to dominate the continent.

That is a situation that is in the interests neither of the continent itself, nor of the European Union. The controversial Venezuelan referendum on amending the constitution illustrates well enough that there will then be little left of European values such as democracy.

Jean-Claude Martinez (NI). – (FR) Mr President, it is fine to have a strategic partnership to begin with, to have the Volkswagen factory in Puebla and to have joint parliamentary committees with Chile and with Mexico, but it has been 30 years, as Mr Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra said in his report, of being realistic, of cooperating, of setting a climate, a little discussion on agriculture, drugs, women, water and so on.

We have to go further. More ambition is needed, both for Europe and for Latin America. We have to set a target: for example, 2025. In a generation, in the next 20 years, we must create an alliance of civilisations between Europe and Latin America, and why not even integration!

To do this, there is the EuroLat framework, the parliament which brings together Europe and Latin America. In this framework, a manifesto is needed, a resolution which will be the equivalent of what 8 May 1950 meant for Europe. Let us pool our peoples, our resources, our intelligence, old and young from both sides and create, without delay, an area of free movement for students, researchers, intellectuals and intelligence. That would mean an automatic cultural visa. Malinche needed no visa to go and teach Quechua or Mayan to Cortés. It is the first step on the road to creating a block with a billion Latin Americans, a billion Christians in the match of nations.

I know full well that this may appear unrealistic to the economic realists, but if the dream you are chasing is not big enough, you are going to lose sight of it even as you chase it.

Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE). – (RO) I wish to express my support for Mr Salafranca's report. I believe that once the Global Agreement has been implemented, we must move to a higher historic level in the strategic partnership between the European Union and Mexico.

This partnership has become necessary, bearing in mind not only Mexico's important role on the global political and economic stage, but also its very close economic ties with the European Union. Mexico has a population of more than 100 million, is the tenth-largest economic power in the world and is a member of the G20 Group.

Against the backdrop of global challenges such as the economic crisis and global warming, cooperation with Mexico will prove to be beneficial. It goes without saying that we want the new partnership to formalise annual summits between the European Union and Mexico, based on the model used for high-level meetings featuring in the European Union's relations with other strategic partners.

We must also support the parliamentary dimension of this partnership through the EU-Mexico Joint Parliamentary Committee and the EuroLat Assembly, which have played a particularly beneficial role in recent years. Given that it is the European Year of Creativity and Innovation, I think that we must focus greater attention on cooperation between the European Union and Mexico in the fields of research, culture and education, as well as scientific and student mobility.

Mexicans are the largest Spanish-speaking population in the world and share common cultural values with Europeans, which includes close ties with Romania's cultural heritage, based on their Latin legacy. For example, an exhibition staged in July 2005 at the Romanian Peasant Museum in Bucharest demonstrated the astounding similarity between Mexican popular art and numerous creative works of Romanian popular art. I feel that the European Union's institutions should tap to a greater extent and on a constant basis the potential which culture, education and art offer in terms of bringing peoples closer together.

Last but not least, I think that this strategic partnership's contribution should also include guaranteeing the safety of European citizens who travel to Mexico. Mexico offers exceptional tourism potential, has magnificent historical cultural treasures and is also a favourite destination of many Europeans. However, they must not be put in danger because of the crime and corruption which are evident in certain regions of the country. The battle against crime may become more effective through trilateral cooperation between Mexico, the European Union and the United States.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE). – (RO) I feel that the cooperation agreements between the European Union and Mexico and the European Union and Brazil are of paramount importance. These cooperation agreements must be based on respect for the values of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights.

I would like to emphasise the need to step up the efforts between the European Union and these two countries in promoting scientific and technological transfer, with a view to consolidating real cooperation in fighting climate change and improving environmental protection. The Integral Support Programme for Small and Medium-Sized Enterprises will make a fundamental contribution to the economic and social development of these countries. Especially during the current global economic crisis, it is important to create and preserve jobs and continue the efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

As rapporteur for the Agreement between the European Community and the United Mexican States with regard to certain aspects of air services, I want to stress the importance of this agreement. It promotes free competition in the area of air services. Mexico can impose, if applicable, in a non-discriminatory manner levies, taxes, charges, duties or dues on fuel supplied on its own territory for the aircraft of the air carrier appointed by a Member State of the European Community, operating on a route between a point located on Mexican territory and another point located on the territory of another state on the American continent.

I would like to mention that this matter is extremely important, particularly in view of the implementation of the system for trading greenhouse gas emission certificates. Furthermore, these two countries, Brazil and Mexico, have a particularly important role to play in concluding the future post-Kyoto agreement, which we hope will be signed in Copenhagen in December.

Monica Frassoni (Verts/ALE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance will vote against the report on the Brazil partnership and will abstain on the issue of partnership with Mexico. We do not take great pleasure in this, but we feel that this vote clearly demonstrates our dissatisfaction with practices that we have been denouncing for some time. As regards Brazil for example, the subject of partnership is being settled with more Mercosur dumping. It focuses on what we believe to be the wrong priorities – Mrs Ferrero-Waldner has for instance referred to biofuels, but in the resolution there is a whole series of considerations about nuclear power and CCS, and therefore carbon. A country like Brazil, however, should instead work with us to develop renewable technologies and energy savings: that is the way forward for that country.

Then, as regards Mexico, Mr President, we have tabled some amendments – the rapporteur, moreover, has been fairly open with certain matters mainly concerning human rights. However, a strategic partnership and parliamentary dialogue should, in our opinion, focus on current political concerns. Top of the political agenda today is the great economic crisis that the country is experiencing, the problem of returning migrants and, of course, violence and organised crime. I think that the partnership must concentrate much, much more explicitly on this rather than on matters that we surely consider to be less important.

One word more, Mr President, concerning the issue of interparliamentary dialogue, to which we all, of course, attach great importance: I believe and hope that the next EuroLat meeting will be able to find a way out of that somewhat formal and, frankly, unhelpful framework that has characterised many of our meetings, and I sincerely hope that it will also have an impact on national debate in those countries.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). – (PT) The changes taking place in Latin America should encourage the European Union to establish new cooperation relations with the countries of Latin America. Greater attention should be paid to social and cultural aspects and to support for development in a framework of mutual respect for the different levels of development and different political choices of the people. Unfortunately, these are minor aspects in the proposals put forward by the European Union.

Generally speaking, their main interest is economic, aimed at safeguarding the business of large European economic and financial groups. This situation has been highlighted by social organisations, particularly in Brazil, as we discovered during the last trip to Brazil by the Delegation for relations with Mercosur. At a time when, for example, most of the population in Mexico is suffering from the consequences of the serious economic recession and when the overwhelming majority of the Mexican banking sector is controlled by foreign companies, particularly European banks, it is regrettable that the European Union is still using its agreement with Mexico more as a point of entry to the United States than to support local development. As a result, it is contributing to the destruction of Mexico's small and medium-sized enterprises and its productive fabric, particularly the industrial fabric, due to the insistence on free trade, liberalisation of strategic sectors and commercialisation of essential goods such as water.

We therefore need to radically overhaul the EU's policies on partnership agreements, so as to give priority to cooperation and to economic and social development. In this way we can help to create jobs with rights, ensure social progress, promote the rights of indigenous peoples, defend the forests and biodiversity, and also recognise the sovereign right of Latin American countries to high-quality public services, control of

strategic sectors within their economies and respect for the decisions of the institutions chosen by their people.

Luca Romagnoli (NI). – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would argue, as I have on other occasions, that a strengthened relationship of cooperation with Latin America is a strategic move for the EU because, as in the case of the Salafranca report, the establishment of a closer relationship is explained not only by historical and cultural ties and shared values – as the rapporteur rightly states – but it also provides multi-sector, inter-regional and intra-regional development opportunities for both sides.

While I therefore welcome the proposed initiatives to increase trade and investments between the Union and Brazil, I do however wonder what improvement is possible as regards legal and environmental collaboration, the recognition of human rights and protection against organised crime often exported to the Union – these areas are just as important. The subject of migration and emigrant remittances must also be examined, as there is no doubt that profits acquired through clandestine work and other illegal activities are illegally exported. As regards migration, I would question what guarantees we can receive from a nation that protects criminals and swindlers like Cesare Battisti and the ‘wizard’ Mário Pacheco do Nascimento. This example alone explains my total opposition to opening negotiations on a visa waiver agreement between the European Union and Brazil.

José Ribeiro e Castro (PPE-DE). – Mr President, as the Czech Presidency is not in the House, I shall speak in English because I believe the message will get through quicker.

I draw your attention to paragraph 1(l) of the proposal for a recommendation on the partnership with Brazil and also to the communication from the Commission of September 2008 on multilingualism.

The fact is that to establish and to develop a strategic partnership with Brazil we speak in Portuguese. When we go to the USA or Australia, we speak English; when we go to Mexico or Colombia, we speak Spanish; when we go to Brazil or Angola, we speak Portuguese; when we go to Senegal or Côte d'Ivoire, we speak in French. This is key to communication; this is key to doing business.

This draws attention to what I called a few years ago the ‘European world’ languages: *linguas europeas globais* in Portuguese. I mean that some European languages have the ability to establish a very intimate and close connection with various parts of the world, and these are: English, Spanish, Portuguese, French and, to a lesser extent and on different grounds, German and Italian. The Commission fully understood this and put it in the communication, but, unfortunately, there were misunderstandings in the Council – mainly on the part of the Germans, I believe – and the Council passed a much weaker line in this matter.

I have to clarify that this does not affect, by any means, the equal value of official languages in the Union. This has to do with the internal vision of multilingualism, and we all agree that every citizen has the right to speak, to read and to be answered in his own language. However, this adds another dimension in the broad field of the external value of multilingualism. To have those European world languages in today's globalised world, in today's globalised economy, in this global village, which is cultural, economic, social and political, is a most valuable asset for the entire EU, which we must take full account of and full benefit from. That is why I ask that these languages be properly introduced and managed inside the youth external services and also taught in our schools, as a common asset, as second, third or fourth languages, because these languages, as our relations with Brazil clearly show, increase our EU capacity to relate closely worldwide: to mingle more, to really share, to be part of the same club. This is my appeal to the Council and I greet and thank the rapporteur for her support.

Vladko Todorov Panayotov (ALDE). – (BG) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would first of all like to congratulate Mr Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra on the excellent report in such an important area as global cooperation with our strategic partners. Globalisation not only brings us benefits, but it also makes us more vulnerable to global crises and threats. That is why identifying strategic partners and strengthening cooperation at global level will enable us to cope with current and future challenges. We highlight in the report that Europe is Mexico's second biggest partner after the United States. It must be emphasised that Europe regards Mexico as an important partner for supplying raw materials. The security of raw material supplies is specifically one of the key factors supporting Europe's sustainable development. For its part, Europe plays a leading role in protecting the environment and in adopting green industrial solutions.

The strategic partnership with Mexico will strengthen bilateral relations, with the specific aim of achieving more efficient trade in technology and raw materials, and provide a good foundation for bilateral cooperation in the area of environmental protection. To achieve these aims, we must develop and improve the

sector-related programmes on which the mechanisms and measures for science and technology transfer are based, because only specific measures will make this cooperation real. In addition, this science and technology transfer is inconceivable without establishing an educational exchange and creating a joint network of scientific research centres. I am therefore calling for the expansion of bilateral cooperation in the field of education and innovation as well. Thank you for your attention.

Reinhard Rack (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, fortunately the time when Latin America was regarded as the backyard of the United States is long since past. Today we view this area quite differently, and there are a considerable number of areas of common ground and common interest between Europe and Latin America in particular, which justify our extending our strategic partnerships into this area also.

The issues of climate change, energy policy, the financial crisis, drug trafficking and so on have been mentioned. In this regard, we have a lot of common ground and common interests. It is good that we are cooperating on a multilateral basis with this area. It is good that we are also concluding bilateral agreements. However, it is important for us to achieve a balanced relationship between both partners in each case.

Therefore, if we achieve visa-free travel, we should also consider how we will handle deportations, extradition agreements and similar issues, in order that ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Marcin Libicki (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, I would like to point out that, this morning, we spoke about the partnership between the European Union and countries such as Brazil and Mexico. We also discussed the Eastern Partnership this morning. I would like to stress as strongly as possible, and this is particularly addressed to Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, that when we discuss the European Union's foreign, or external, policies, such as the EU's relations with Brazil, Mexico or with North African countries, our debates are, to a certain extent, removed from reality. On the other hand, when we discuss our relations with the East, then we are dealing with fundamental matters affecting the EU. Similarly, when we discuss our partnership with Turkey, and that country's EU membership prospects, these are also fundamental matters. When we discuss our relations with Belarus, Ukraine and Russia, in terms of gas supplies, or the issue of Georgia, then we are discussing matters of fundamental importance to the EU, and ones which could plunge the European Union into a serious crisis.

Bogusław Rogalski (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, Brazil's role on both the international and the regional stage is growing every year. As a result, this country has become one of the European Union's most important and significant partners. Historical, cultural and economic ties should provide the basis for action within the scope of the strategic partnership between the EU and Brazil. Key issues, on which political dialogue should focus, should include promoting joint strategies to meet global challenges, in areas such as security, human rights, the financial crisis and, perhaps most importantly, the fight against poverty.

We should also aim to diversify our efforts to prevent regional conflict in South America. Our priority should be to strengthen bilateral cooperation in the field of trade and cooperation to protect Brazil's forests — which are, after all, the lungs of the world. A strategic partnership should facilitate the creation of a permanent platform for dialogue between the European Union and Brazil.

Charles Tannock (PPE-DE). – Mr President, as a Member of EuroLat I welcome the EU Strategic Partnership with Brazil and Mexico, both thriving democracies. The word 'BRIC' – for Brazil, Russia, India and China – is very much in the vocabulary of foreign-policy specialists, and Brazil is indeed an emerging global player.

President Lula has demonstrated moderation in government and has been a stabilising force against the rise of populist demagogues like Chávez in Venezuela and Morales in Bolivia. Brazil will be hit now by the credit crunch and the fall in commodity prices. Mexico will also be affected by the dramatic fall in oil prices. These two countries have enjoyed stability. I also commend the work of President Calderón in Mexico and he also deserves our support in his struggle against the drug cartels.

The two countries, being embedded respectively in NAFTA and Mercosur, are big players in the region and they are key to our relations with Latin America.

Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE). – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, ten seconds. A while ago, I attended a convention on the subject of pensions, pension payments and how long pensioners draw their pensions before going to a better place. At this convention a league table of states was published in which countries were ranked according to the average number of years for which pensions were paid out. Mexico was considered a shining example to be followed. Why? Because its pensioners, having received their

pension and enjoying this benefit, lived for an average of six months, and that was the record, that is to say it was the state held up as the best ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I fully endorse paragraph 1(e) of this report, which talks about the need for a partnership tackling the major issues of climate change, energy security and the fight against poverty and exclusion.

I have some concerns regarding the WTO agreements – or potential agreements – from the perspective of EU farmers and food producers. As you know, there was a major battle about food production standards, and the Commission finally conceded that it could not allow Brazilian beef into the European Union until it met our production standards. I applaud that decision and I think that we need to do this for every commodity. We cannot expect our producers to meet standards that third countries are not meeting. We will not get the cooperation of our producers for a WTO agreement if that continues to happen.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission. – (ES) Mr President, I occasionally indulge in a little multilingualism, and so I am going to try to speak Spanish now.

First of all, I would like to explain to Mr Belder why we have opted for a strategic partnership. I think it is very important to realise, first, that the countries themselves are very interested in it. Naturally, it is a political decision based on certain criteria. For example, Mexico is a very important bridge between north and south and is a stabilising factor, even though it has problems within the country itself.

Secondly, it is currently a member of the G20 and I hope of course, to answer Mrs Mann, that it will continue to be one in the future.

Thirdly, both Mexico and Brazil are strongly committed to global issues that we can only, in fact, tackle jointly. These include particularly the question of climate change and the financial crisis. That is why I think the idea of strategic partnerships is valid: not with the whole world, of course, but with the major players in the world.

In addition, there are many minor or particular, sectoral issues, some of which I would like to mention.

The fact is that we talk to these countries about many difficult issues, such as drugs, corruption, terrorism and organised crime. We hold meetings at senior official level and also at ministerial level, for example, at which we see what can be done to help these countries and where we also exchange experience.

We have set up a forum with Mexico on public security issues, especially in relation to the problem of corruption, and we are exploring cooperation in a number of areas, such as police training, policies on how to work in prisons, and policies to combat people trafficking, drugs, arms trafficking, cybercrime and money laundering. I think it is very important to carry on with these special dialogues.

Regarding the question on when we can have more meetings, I can say that we will try to have a meeting at the highest level this year, but it also depends on the Presidency and whether it includes this topic on its agenda. I hope it will happen in the latter part of the year. In any event we will have a ministerial meeting in Prague on the Mercosur issues, Mercosur and the strategic partnership with Mexico or Brazil. Neither one is ruled out, because we have tried to work very hard in favour of the agreement with Mercosur, but you all know that neither we nor the Mercosur countries, especially Brazil and Argentina, are yet willing to sign an agreement at a time when we do not know which way Doha will go. It has always gone in parallel with Doha.

Of course, we are going to have another ministerial meeting in Prague in May, and again we are going to try and force a possible conclusion, but I think we are still going to find ourselves facing this challenge.

The subject of migration is also extremely important, and I think we have a balanced, non-confrontational dialogue with Mexico, for example, especially on the Return Directive. We greatly appreciate the fact that Mexico has responded very positively and with understanding in an area that is very complicated, as we all know, and in which, in fact, we have to both respect human rights, of course, and also consider the sensitivities of all our countries. I believe this has been taken into account.

I would also like to say that it is the major issues that are always on our table. In December last year, for example, President Sarkozy, President Lula and President Barroso talked especially about the issue of the financial crisis and how to tackle it together, but they also talked about the issue of renewable energy, on which we are already working with Brazil to develop second-generation biofuels.

We are also going to hold a dialogue on human rights for the first time in 2009, in which the rights of indigenous peoples will be discussed, as that is also one of the priorities of the Human Rights Council.

I think I will stop here, Madam President, because there were so many points that I cannot address every one of them.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS MORGANTINI

Vice-President

José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, *rapporteur*. – (ES) Madam President, to conclude this debate I should simply like to say that the decision to grant Mexico and Brazil the status of strategic partners is the right decision and one that will mean a qualitative leap in our relations, due to the political, economic, strategic and demographic importance of those countries. It will see them playing in the premier division of EU relations, together with other global partners such as the United States, China and Russia.

Madam President, the difference between Mexico and Brazil at the moment, as the Commissioner has just reminded us, is that Mexico has an association agreement linking it to the European Union, which is something that Brazil does not yet have.

I disagree with the assessments that have been made of the results of this association agreement. The EU-Mexico Association Agreement has a history of success – as Mrs Mann, who chairs the Joint Parliamentary Committee, has acknowledged. That is because the European Union concludes these agreements in such a way that our partners, in this case Mexico or the Mexicans, represent not merely a market but a particular way of viewing things, based on principles, values, representative democracy, respect for human rights, and the rule of law.

I believe we should realise, therefore, that the agreement has resulted in a boost to our relations, which must now be endorsed by the nature of this biregional strategic partnership.

The Commissioner said that the next encounter now will be the Rio Group meeting, which will take place during the Prague meeting under the Czech Presidency of the Union in May this year. Latin America and our partners need opportunities from us, rather than handouts, and such opportunities are represented today by association agreements.

I am perfectly aware of the limitations that the Commissioner pointed out, because concluding an association agreement, in this case with Mercosur, requires political will on both sides. I realise that the WTO Doha Round and the path of the bilateral association run absolutely in parallel, and the examples of Mexico and Chile fully demonstrate that.

Therefore, Commissioner, we for our part must make every effort to consolidate this strategic association between the European Union and Latin America, which these partnerships with Mexico and Brazil will stimulate and move forward a long way.

Maria Eleni Koppa, *rapporteur*. – (EL) Madam President, I wish to thank Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner and all my fellow Members for their comments on the two reports which we are debating today. I agree with Mr Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra that Latin America is extremely interesting and important for the European Union and we must send out clear messages about cooperation via these reports, especially in these critical times. We need a substantial framework which can cover all issues and provide clear answers.

I should just like to mention a few points in connection with what has been said. First of all, I want to emphasise that under no circumstances is the enhanced relationship intended to undermine Mercosur. On the contrary, we consider that the strategic partnership with Brazil, with the biggest and perhaps most important country in Latin America, could give new momentum to Mercosur. We also need to be perfectly clear about the financial framework within which relations with Brazil will be determined.

I would add that Brazil has been increasingly active in cooperation with the Portuguese-speaking countries of the South and in Africa and could therefore cooperate actively in this sector with the European Union.

We must take care to maintain the balance between the development of biofuels and food security, especially in these critical times.

Mrs Weber raised the question of inequality. I think that the Lula Government has taken important steps in this direction. A lot still needs to be done, but I think the way has been paved.

Finally, I should like to mention that we need to seriously examine the possibility of creating a joint EU-Brazil parliamentary committee, because it is the only BRIC country with which we have enhanced relations which have not been institutionalised.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place today at 12 noon.

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Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, yesterday, at a school in Winnenden, in southern Germany, a teenage madman named Tim Kretschner shot 15 people, mostly children. One of the teachers was killed whilst trying to shield a pupil with her own body. I would like to ask the President to announce a minute's silence before the voting, in order to honour the victims of this tragedy.

President. – I am sorry, you were probably not in the Chamber at the time, but this was remembered yesterday and a minute's silence was observed, announced by our President. I regret that you were not present and were unaware of the fact that it had already taken place.

Written Statement (Rule 142)

Flaviu Călin Rus (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I feel that the EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership is beneficial for both sides. In my view, the European Union is a pillar of democracy; indeed, Europe is the cradle of our civilisation. As a strategic partner, Brazil is a bastion of balance and stability in Latin America.

Strengthening EU-Brazil ties may create a common framework which will facilitate the development of these two entities, thereby contributing to an increase in cooperation between the two regions. The EU-Brazil strategic agreement may be, not only in my view but in the rapporteur's view as well, an instrument which will help promote democracy and human rights. In addition, this partnership may contribute to the promotion of good governance at global level, as well as good cooperation within the framework of the UN.

I support the proposal for a European Parliament recommendation to the Council on an EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership and I would like to congratulate the rapporteur.

6. 50th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising and dialogue between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Government (debate)

President. – The next item is the oral question to the Commission on the 50th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising and dialogue between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Government, by Marco Cappato, Marco Pannella and Janusz Onyszkiewicz, on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, and Monica Frassoni and Eva Lichtenberger, on behalf of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance (O-0012/2009 – B6-0012/2009).

I should like to make a brief personal comment: I truly believe that our debate can contribute to the freedom of all Tibetan citizens and not to the domination of either a state or a religion.

Marco Cappato, author. – (IT) Madam President, I share your hope. Unfortunately we cannot hope that the President-in-Office of the Council will take advantage of this debate and this discussion to help advance the position of the European Union. In fact the Czech Presidency evidently considers a common European policy to be a barrier to the great national foreign policies of our national states. China is grateful for this, Russia is grateful, that is to say repressive and anti-democratic countries all over the world give thanks for this absence of Europe that is so well illustrated by the absence of the Presidency in this House.

I would like to point out to Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, as we tackle this point together, what is in my view the ultimate issue: it is not just a question of law and order – in other words looking at how many monks have been arrested and how many Tibetans have been killed recently due to brutal Chinese repression, hoping that the count will be lower than it was a year ago. What I would have liked to say to the Council and will now say to the Commission is that it must give an opinion on the fundamental political point, that is on the talks between the People's Republic of China and the envoys of the Dalai Lama, the aim of these talks and the reason why they were suspended – we could now say they have failed – unless we can revive them.

There are two opposing positions: on one side, the position of the Chinese regime, which says the Dalai Lama is a violent man at the head of a violent people, and that the Dalai Lama and the Tibetan government in exile want independence for a national Tibetan state, which runs counter to Chinese territorial unity. That is the line taken by Beijing. On the other side, there is the Dalai Lama, the exiled Tibetan government and the Dalai Lama's envoys, who say they seek something else, that their means of fighting is through non-violence and that they simply want true autonomy, meaning autonomy to retain their culture, tradition, language and religion, or their cultures and religions. This is the message of the memorandum that the Dalai Lama's Tibetan envoys presented to the Chinese regime. This memorandum has been published and contains their demands.

At this point the European Union is being asked to choose, to take sides. There are two conflicting positions: one of the parties is lying. The EU can be decisive in the search for the truth. As the Radical Party we propose *satyagraha*, the search for truth, as a collective global political initiative. The European Union should make use of its diplomatic tools – Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, please say this to President Barroso – we must meet with the Dalai Lama and do him the honour of allowing him to speak, in order to find the truth. Is Beijing right in saying that the Tibetans are violent terrorists favouring independence, or is the Dalai Lama right in saying that they want a decent and dignified autonomous state? Europe cannot stand still and remain silent in the face of this conflict.

Eva Lichtenberger, author. – (DE) Madam President, 50 years ago, the Chinese army delivered the final blow to Tibetan resistance. Since then, Tibetans have fled, with an inordinate amount of effort, over the Himalayas and across the borders into other states. Up to now, several thousand people a year – all of whom are refugees – have made this supreme effort to cross 5000 m high passes. If, as China has always claimed, the situation of the Tibetans is so wonderful, there would be neither grounds for flight nor justification for the fact that journalists, people from the West and observers have been prevented for months from visiting this country at all or only under close escort. Female journalists are even followed to the toilet by female intelligence service observers to ensure that nothing forbidden can be done.

I therefore ask myself: what is our task as the European Union? We need somehow to bring about the resumption of the Sino-Tibetan dialogue. However, it must take place on a different basis. Up to now all that has happened is that China has repeated the same accusations and demands, without trying in the slightest to understand the Tibetan representatives' explanation that it is not a matter of leaving China and becoming an independent state; it is about achieving autonomy.

Commissioner, how do we deal with the fact that the monitoring of the Internet in Tibet is stricter than anywhere else in China and that it was European companies that supplied the tools to make this monitoring so efficient? We need to act. We are being called on at home to enter into dialogue.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, I am very pleased that this discussion is taking place today, on an issue which has preoccupied many of us for a long time and especially since the sad events a year ago in Tibet. Therefore I think that it is very good that we are having this open discussion to again see what can be done.

Before I come to the many issues you raised in the tabled joint resolution, let me also have a quick word on our bilateral relations with China. The EU policy vis-à-vis China is one of engagement. Our strategic partnership is strong, and this permits us to tackle all issues, including the most sensitive ones. We have constructed an impressive framework of high-level interaction where we regularly address all the global changes that our citizens are facing, without neglecting the issues where we may disagree. Tibet is one of them. Let me be very clear – we do not see eye to eye with China on Tibet, and we still have a very real and legitimate concern about the human rights situation in Tibet, as you have both just outlined; about the fact that Tibet has remained largely closed for the international media, for diplomats and for humanitarian organisations for almost a year now; and about the stalemate in talks between the representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese authorities, despite the three rounds of talks last year.

These issues were also at the top of the agenda for several EU leaders in bilateral meetings held with the Chinese leadership last year. We have endeavoured to find common understanding with China on this delicate subject, and we have been very clear whenever we have addressed the situation in Tibet with them.

Let me again mention the EU's position, which does not leave any room for misinterpretation. Firstly, we support the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China, including Tibet. Secondly, we have always supported a peaceful reconciliation through dialogue between the Chinese authorities and the Dalai Lama's representatives. I remember, when I went there with the Commission, President Barroso and other colleagues,

I had specific dialogues with many of my interlocutors on this issue. We have always maintained that there should be a reconciliation dialogue and that the dialogue should go on.

This dialogue has to be constructive and substantive, and of course we therefore regret that, up to now, this dialogue has not brought really substantive results. We have always said that the dialogues should address the core issues, such as the preservation of Tibet's unique culture, religion and traditions as well as the need to achieve a system of meaningful autonomy for Tibet within a Chinese constitution. We have always said that this dialogue should address the participation of all Tibetans in decision-making. Therefore we would welcome it if these issues were to be addressed in China's future national human rights action plan.

For us, Tibet is a human rights issue and has therefore invariably been approached as such. We have also consistently passed this message to our Chinese counterparts and listened very carefully to their views. We have made every effort to understand the position in a spirit of mutual respect, but human rights are universal, and the situation in Tibet is therefore – rightly – of international legitimate concern to the whole international community, particularly the European Union. This fact is, of course, emphasised by the existence of instruments of international law for the protection of human rights over half a century.

In your resolution you stipulate the future of a Sino-Tibetan dialogue. As you all know, at the last round of talks, following the request of the Chinese Government, the Tibetan side submitted a memorandum on genuine autonomy for the future of Tibet. In my opinion the paper contains some elements that could provide the basis for future talks. I am thinking of a paragraph on culture, education and religion.

I am also encouraged by the fact that, for the first time in a written document, the Tibetan side has expressed its firm commitment not to seek separation or independence. I think this is important in order to bring this dialogue further. I am also pleased that the Dalai reaffirmed before this House last December his devotion to the middle-way approach and to dialogue as the only means for achieving a mutually acceptable and lasting solution.

Let me conclude by sharing with you a personal conviction. Throughout my political and personal career, I have always strongly believed that, through engagement and dialogue, even the most difficult issues can be addressed and hopefully, when the time is right, can also be solved. Therefore I wish to appeal to China and to the Dalai Lama's representative to resume this dialogue at the earliest possible opportunity with an open spirit and a view to achieving a durable solution in Tibet. I can guarantee, from our side, our wholehearted support for such a process. This is our position and this is the position that we bring to the Chinese side.

Charles Tannock, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Madam President, the EU's motto is 'Unity in diversity'. It is a principle that has served us well.

Unfortunately, such an idea does not resonate at all well with the authoritarian Communist dictatorship in the People's Republic of China. Diversity is suppressed, rather than embraced. Minorities wishing to express themselves in any way other than the mainstream Party-sanctioned way are routinely marginalised and persecuted. This trend can be seen in the treatment of many religious minorities, including Christians, Muslims and Falun Gong practitioners, and most notably in the PRC's attitude to Tibet.

In 1950, Communist forces invaded Tibet, leading to the exile of the Dalai Lama 50 years ago. Ever since then, Tibet has been under the control of Beijing. The traditional Tibetan culture, which was isolated for hundreds of years, has now been heavily diluted by the actions of the Government, which has been at pains to prevent any sense of Tibetan nationalism from resurfacing. In fact, the systematic and sometimes brutal suppression of Tibetan culture has kindled the fire of Tibetan identity and awakened the world's conscience to the plight of the people of Tibet.

The inspirational leadership of the Dalai Lama has ensured that Tibet's future remains very much at the forefront of public debate, notwithstanding the huge efforts made by the PRC to admonish those like the former President-in-Office of the Council, Nicolas Sarkozy, who dared to question Beijing's point of view.

We in this Parliament have always taken a strong line in defence of the autonomous rights of the people of Tibet, which does not automatically mean the right to self-determination or independence. In doing this, we do not seek to provoke or antagonise China. However, we recognise that our commitment to certain values – human rights, democracy, the rule of law and freedom of conscience – cannot be seen separately from the undoubtedly important strategic economic partnership that the EU is developing with China.

Pro-China voices on the other side of the House will have their say in this debate, but for too long the people of Tibet have been denied their voice, and we must speak for them.

Glyn Ford, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – Madam President, the Socialist Group is concerned about the human rights situation in China. While we recognise that the situation has improved significantly over the last 10 years, there are still many areas where human rights are still not properly or adequately protected. There may be a degree of freedom of thought, but there is not freedom of action. We would certainly highlight the failure to allow free trade unions to operate within China. We are concerned about the plight of the 100 million migrant workers who have moved from country to city and who have the most limited access to health and education. We are concerned about the plight of religious and ethnic minorities across the whole of China.

Nevertheless, the Socialist Group was opposed to this debate and resolution. The reason was proportionality. It is right to criticise China for its human rights record, as we criticise the United States for its use of the death penalty, Guantánamo and extraordinary rendition, but we do not have to do it every part-session. Frankly, it is becoming counterproductive. At one time, the Chinese authorities paid heed to our resolutions, but no more. As some individuals and groups in their desperate attention-seeking continue to up the ante with today a demand, I think for the first time, that Member States should abrogate the one-China policy and recognise the Tibetan government-in-exile.

The Dalai Lama was here only in December, speaking on behalf of Tibet in the plenary. Why is it necessary to revisit the issue again? There is nothing new in the resolution.

I, along with Elmar Brok, Philippe Morillon and other Members of this Parliament, had the opportunity last summer to visit Lhasa. We were the first international group to travel there after the troubles in March and spoke both to the authorities and those who were sympathetic to the Tibetan protesters. As I wrote afterwards, the reality was that peaceful protests – and we support peaceful protest – turned into race riots, when shops, homes and Han Chinese were attacked and burned, with dozens of deaths. Schools suffered arson attacks and hospitals and mosques of the Muslim minority were attacked. The Dalai Lama himself recognised the reality of the situation when he threatened at the time to step down as a living god.

China has done an enormous amount for Tibet in terms of providing infrastructure, like the new Qinghai–Lhasa railway, and higher levels of social provision than elsewhere in rural China. The problem is it is beginning to be resented elsewhere within China.

(Protests)

But the problem is, to quote the Beatles: ‘Money can’t buy you love’. Tibetans still want a degree of cultural and political autonomy far beyond that which China is prepared to grant. As I said at the time, China needs a dialogue with representatives of Tibet to find a solution that grants that autonomy, while protecting minority rights of ethnic and religious groups in the province.

The alternative is that impatient, young Tibetans will turn to violence and terrorism. As a result of the article I wrote at the time, I was asked to discuss the matter with Dalai Lama’s representative in London, which I did at some length. I agree with the Commissioner: it is through dialogue and engagement that we will find a way forward, not through shrill, endlessly repetitive, rehashed resolutions, such as the one we have here today.

Hanna Foltyn-Kubicka, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Madam President, during the last few decades, democratic countries have called, on numerous occasions, for human rights to be respected in non-democratic countries. These efforts have been effective only when countries and international organisations have been consistent in their actions and demands. Unfortunately, the case of Tibet or, more broadly speaking, the issue of human rights in China, has generally often been pushed to the sidelines, with trade relations taking priority. If it were not for the Olympics in Beijing, and the decisive stance taken by many social and non-governmental organisations, the world would still know very little about the situation in Tibet.

Our role, as the European Parliament, is to ensure that democratic countries react strongly and decisively to the actions of the Chinese authorities, such as the ‘Strike Hard’ campaign which was implemented some time ago. However, this can only be achieved if we consistently and decisively condemn all human rights violations perpetrated by the Communist authorities in China.

It is worth remembering that, in its resolution of 6 July 2000, the European Parliament called on Member States to recognise the Tibetan Government in exile if, within the space of three years, no agreement had been reached between the Chinese authorities and the Dalai Lama’s administration. As we know, Beijing still refuses to engage in talks with the indisputable leader of the Tibetan people. Let us also not forget the Eleventh Panchen Lama, the youngest political prisoner, who has been in Chinese custody for 14 years. He will be 20 this year.

I would, therefore, like to once again call on Parliament to be consistent in its actions and to treat its declarations seriously. If we do not show that we mean what we say, it will be difficult to expect others to keep their promises and fulfil their obligations.

Raül Romeva i Rueda, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (ES) Madam President, I have been following the case of Tibet for years. I have visited the region and have spoken to many people inside and outside the country. I consider the Tibetan people's claims to be legitimate and to a certain extent logical. I especially find their current fears more than justified in view of the Chinese Government's policy of severe repression towards them, which has now lasted more than 50 years, apart from a brief and, I would say, false truce during the Olympic Games.

I have known few people more clearly willing to talk and reach an agreement than the Tibetan people. That is why I fail to understand this obsession by the Chinese Government both to twist reality and to insist on blocking the round of talks again and again.

A country is not made great by its military strength or its size or its economic wealth. What makes it great is the magnanimity of its acts and its generosity. The European Union can and must help to resolve this situation, while of course respecting the sovereignties involved, but it must do so firmly. The way to do this is to support the Tibetan request to restart the Chinese-Tibetan talks and to recognise that, if anyone has spent years giving way to and being pressurised by the Chinese authorities, then in this case it is the Tibetan people.

This is not a conflict between equals in terms of either capacity or motives. The European Union must be respectful towards both parties, but it cannot remain neutral towards the oppression, indiscriminate detentions, torture, murders or the religious, linguistic and cultural genocide.

The memorandum for genuine autonomy for the Tibetan people, now rejected by China as a working document, shows that the Tibetan people have already made a genuine effort and given up an enormous amount of what, I emphasise, are their legitimate aspirations.

China now has the opportunity to show the world its generosity and its desire for peace and harmony and, above all, the European Union has the opportunity to help it act in accordance with its greatness.

Thomas Mann (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, on 10 March 1959, the Tibetan people were subjected to unspeakable suffering at the hands of the Chinese. Sixty thousand people lost their lives and hundreds of thousands were arrested, taken away and tortured in the months that followed. A year ago, the violence escalated once again. More than 200 Tibetans died, some as a result of deliberate fatal shots, and now – shortly after the 50th anniversary – monasteries are closed to the outside world, access roads are controlled and soldiers and security men stand in readiness to nip demonstrations in the bud. We still have no news of possible rioting. What is the response to this show of power? Silence in the media. The Dalai Lama has urged his people to maintain the path of non-violence. His call for dialogue has had no positive response in Beijing. When an envoy of the Dalai Lama presented specific steps for autonomy in a memorandum, they were rejected by President Hu Jintao. He said, 'we must build a Great Wall against separatism'. This idea, which is pure provocation, was topped by the planned forced introduction of a holiday for Tibetans: 28 March is to be Serfs' Emancipation Day. This is the bitter reality.

Two days ago, the European Parliament displayed flags. In plenary, an impressive number of us placed the Tibetan flag on our tables and showed our solidarity with the suffering Tibetans. There were peaceful protests in all parts of the EU. Our fellow Members – Mr Cappato, Mrs Lichtenberger, Mr Tannock and Mr Romeva i Rueda – are absolutely right: today's resolution speaks loud and clear. The memorandum must form the basis for further negotiations. It is a document for true autonomy within the framework of the Chinese constitution. The isolation of Tibet must stop – for the inhabitants, for tourists, for journalists. We must have an answer to 600 imprisoned Tibetans.

Roberta Angelilli (UEN). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, this Parliament cannot allow the recent cry of pain from the Dalai Lama to go unheard. Only a few months ago we listened to him speak in Brussels; we all know him to be a gentle man, a peace-maker, a spokesman for Tibetan culture, that is to say the culture of harmony and fraternity *par excellence*. It is in the name of these values, speaking of his 'Chinese brothers', that the Dalai Lama has asked – forcefully, however – for legitimate and tangible autonomy for Tibet, recalling the torture and terrible suffering of his people and his land. This is a request that Parliament should be proud to support. It is our political and institutional duty, in the name of democracy, human rights

and the values of freedom. The Tibetans look to Europe, perhaps, as their only hope; we really must not disappoint them.

Georg Jarzembowski (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, without a doubt we Christian Democrats recognise the sovereignty of the People's Republic of China over its territory, including Tibet.

However, at the same time we reject China's view that any statement from the European Union regarding human rights in China constitutes impermissible interference in China's internal affairs. According to a modern understanding of human rights and international law – which hopefully China will also soon share – the international community is required express concern about human rights in all parts of the world, particularly in very blatant cases.

How else could an International Criminal Tribunal take action against the crimes against humanity in the countries of the former Yugoslavia and pass judgment if it did not have the right to intervene for the sake of human rights?

The People's Republic of China and its government should therefore recognise that the discussion of human rights such as the freedom of assembly, the freedom of an independent press, religious freedom and the rights of cultural minorities in Tibet and in other parts of China does not constitute impermissible interference. It must face up to this discussion.

Our main concern today, however, is simply the plea – and I cannot therefore understand Mr Ford in this regard, although he has always been more on the side of the Chinese government – for the People's Republic of China and its government to resume talks with the Dalai Lama as leader of a large proportion of the Tibetan people.

To be honest – as my fellow Member has already said – the government did hold these talks last year, but broke them off after the Olympic Games. We are forced to suspect then that these talks were only conducted during the Olympic Games to divert our attention. However, Mr Ford, we will not allow our attention to be diverted. We will place this matter on the agenda time and again and we call on the Chinese Government to enter into real and serious talks with the Dalai Lama, as human rights are still being violated in Tibet and we must ensure that this situation changes.

Marcin Libicki (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, if we are discussing the fate of persecuted Tibetans today, then we must be aware that their prospects will improve only if the whole international community exerts political pressure on China. Therefore, I must also stress that, in this regard, all the efforts made by Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, and by those in a position to influence global politics, may very well bear fruit.

I must also stress that it was with the greatest regret that I listened to the speech made by the representative of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, who claimed that China's crimes were justified by the construction of a railway line to Tibet. This reminds me of a time when, in Europe, the construction of motorways was used to justify the construction of concentration camps. We cannot allow railway lines and motorways to be built on the pain and suffering of persecuted people.

Cornelis Visser (PPE-DE). – (NL) Madam President, I stood here one year ago, when we were discussing the unrest in Tibet. We implored China to give the media and international organisations access to the area and I am glad to say that we, as Parliament, called at that point for a serious dialogue between China and the Dalai Lama.

Last year, China showed the whole world, through its organisation and holding of the Olympic Games, that it is a country capable of transformation and of astonishing the world. In the run-up to the Games, China gave foreign journalists some space. I appreciate that this temporary granting of some freedom of the press was for foreign journalists. Sadly, it was short-lived. Last Tuesday, journalists were unable to get into Tibet in order to report on the situation there.

I deeply regret the fact that the Chinese Government no longer guarantees the freedom of the press. At the same time, there is absolutely no freedom of the press for journalists in China. Chinese journalists apply a system of self-censorship that requires them to adopt the government's position. In this case, too, there is a world of difference between the law – which is sound and guarantees the freedom of the press – and the reality on the ground, where journalists have to impose restrictions on themselves. All the media have to submit to the censorship diktats of the parties.

What is more, the government also blocks websites. Internet users inform one another quickly of political developments as they happen. For the dialogue between the Tibetans and the Chinese – the population, the people – it is crucial that they have accurate information. Negotiations can only be held on the basis of facts, and the freedom of the press in China is an important precondition for that to happen. There must be freedom to write, to enable journalists to inform the rest of the Chinese people about what is going on in Tibet.

Let us, Europe, bang our fist on the table and stand up for human rights in China. This is a necessary step in order to get the dialogue between China and Tibet going again. Let China take this one step in the right direction and pave the way for dialogue, or, in the words of the Chinese philosopher Lao Tzu, 'a journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step'.

Zita Pleštinská (PPE-DE). – (SK) I was in China at the time of the sad events of March 2008 in Tibet and I was able to follow the events only on the Internet because we were not allowed into Tibet. I saw then how much the inhabitants of Tibet need help.

I firmly believe that, through this resolution, the European Parliament must convey to the Chinese Government the words of His Holiness the Dalai Lama about how Tibet does not have separatist tendencies and is striving only for the recognition of Tibetan cultural autonomy within the framework of China.

I understand that the EU is trying to establish good economic relations with China, and we communicated this in our discussions with the Chinese Government and MPs in Beijing within the framework of the IMCO delegation visit in March 2008. However, we cannot remain indifferent to the situation in Tibet or to the constant violations of human rights, the reprisals, the suffering and the violence.

On the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the departure of the Dalai Lama into exile in India, I expect the Chinese authorities to allow independent observers and foreign media unrestricted access to Tibet in order to assess the situation on the ground.

Victor Boştinaru (PSE). – (RO) Commissioner, I would like to thank you for the balanced position which you have presented once again today during Parliament's plenary.

The European Union's relations with China are of strategic importance to all Members of the European Parliament and they do and will have major global repercussions. I would have expected us to discuss the European Union's cooperation with China in reforming the global financial system, bearing in mind China's balanced and constructive position, especially now, before the G20 summit in London. It could have been the right time to put Africa on a common agenda, bearing in mind the major role which China plays there, and I could continue.

In spite of these obvious issues, in spite of the European Commission's agenda with China and unlike the 27 Member States' much more consistent and balanced agenda with China, I note with regret that we, in the European Parliament, are turning this strategic relationship into an issue and pawn in the political groups' electoral campaign.

Human rights are and must be the main priority, but they cannot be the only one.

Janusz Onyszkiewicz (ALDE). – (PL) Madam President, in the early 1950s, the Chinese Government forced Tibetan representatives to sign an agreement in which it guaranteed Tibet far-reaching autonomy. These guarantees came to nothing. As a result of public pressure and the fear of a boycott of the Olympic Games, the Chinese Government began talks with the representatives of the Dalai Lama. However, these talks were held at a gallingly low level and, moreover, the dialogue was akin to communication between two televisions, set to different channels.

We do not want dialogue, we want negotiations. We want the Chinese to negotiate with the representatives of the Dalai Lama, on the basis of the proposed memorandum. If the Chinese Government thinks that this memorandum is not a good basis, let it justify its opinion, rather than hiding behind the blanket statement that it is nothing more than a memorandum proposing Tibetan independence, which is absolutely not the case.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I fully support what has been said by the Commissioner, that dialogue and engagement are of crucial importance. At the same time, we have to admit that what we see today is a clear lack of political will on the Chinese side to have serious and result-oriented dialogue with the representatives of the Dalai Lama.

For many of us the case of Tibet – its autonomy – is a litmus test for the Chinese authorities. Tibet is a reflection of the human rights situation in China, as well as the situation of human rights defenders like Hu Jia, Sakharov Laureate 2008. I do not see Mr Ford in the Chamber now, but I would like to assure him that human rights always have been and always will be at the top of our political agenda.

Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE). – Madam President, the Chinese Government has termed the anniversary of the occupation of Tibet the ‘liberation of serfs’. Sadly, this is Orwellian Newspeak still being practised: slavery is freedom; lies are truth. But it shows that the Chinese Communist leaders have become long-term prisoners of their own bad conscience.

Achieving genuine autonomy for Tibet is closely related to realising the message of another date: soon, 20 years of Tiananmen student democracy.

Achieving real democracy in China is key to a solution in Tibet, but time is running short, and much will depend on our own moral determination.

I also call on the Council Presidency to make a similar statement to our resolution on this occasion and also in June on the occasion of the Tiananmen Square massacre.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, this debate has briefly but clearly shown once again our great concern at the situation in Tibet. The interventions have underlined that this concern remains as real and legitimate 50 years after the Tibetan uprising of 10 March 1959. Moreover, I think our discussion has also underlined the necessity for both parties to resume dialogue promptly. I say ‘dialogue’ because dialogue is always the first important step before moving on to negotiations. It is also the best way to avoid frustration and violence among young Tibetans. I think this is a very resonant reason. That is why a more substantial dialogue is in the interests of both sides.

The Dalai Lama is a respected religious leader and, amongst other things, a Nobel Peace Prize Laureate. While individual European leaders have met with him in various, but usually religious, contexts, meetings in a political context are not our policy. Having said that, we have frequent exchanges with his envoys, especially on progress with the dialogue process, and this is how we will continue.

President. – The debate is closed.

I too hope that the Tibetan people can have their freedom, but also that they will not have to live under the control of either a state or a religion.

I have received five motions for resolutions⁽¹⁾ pursuant to Rule 108(5) of the Rules of Procedure.

The vote will take place today at 12 noon.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PL) For 50 years, Tibetan refugees have been calling for their fundamental rights to be respected. I am convinced that respecting these rights and reopening the process of dialogue with the people of Tibet is clearly in China’s interest. In today’s world, a country’s image is an important part of the way it operates within the global economy, and in terms of international cooperation. China’s refusal to engage in dialogue with the Dalai Lama’s representatives, and its rejection of the extremely moderate demands of the Tibetans, is harmful to its image. Engaging in talks on rights which are in accordance with the principles of the Chinese constitution would not pose any significant risk for China. In fact, quite the opposite is the case. Great countries and great nations should be magnanimous. Such behaviour may provide proof of their greatness.

Engaging in a dialogue with Tibet provides China with an opportunity to show its good, positive, side. Showing solidarity with Tibet and the Tibetan people is not anti-Chinese. It is an expression of concern for human rights, religious and linguistic freedom, cultural diversity and the right to maintain one’s national identity and autonomy. Therefore, we are not interfering in China’s internal affairs, but merely trying to defend standards and values which are important to us everywhere — in Europe, Asia and throughout the world. China has not been singled out in any way. We defend the rights of small nations even when this proves to be bothersome or uncomfortable. This is because we believe that it is the right approach to take.

⁽¹⁾ See Minutes.

(The sitting was suspended at 11.55 a.m. and resumed at 12.05 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MR PÖTTERING

President

7. Voting time

President. – The next item is voting time.

(For the outcome and other details of the vote: see Minutes)

7.1. Better careers and more mobility: a European partnership for researchers (A6-0067/2009, Pia Elda Locatelli) (vote)

7.2. on the protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games (A6-0051/2009, Toine Manders) (vote)

7.3. Developing a Common Aviation Area with Israel (A6-0090/2009, Luca Romagnoli) (vote)

7.4. Multi-annual recovery plan for bluefin tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and Mediterranean (vote)

7.5. Sri Lanka (vote)

7.6. Deterioration of agricultural land in the EU (A6-0086/2009, Vincenzo Aita) (vote)

7.7. Employee participation in companies with a European Statute (vote)

7.8. Children of Migrants (vote)

– Before the vote on paragraph 7:

Philip Bushill-Matthews, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.* – Mr President, paragraph 7 – the final paragraph – instructs you to forward this resolution to the Commission, the Council and those other illustrious bodies, including the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, and the social partners but, unusually, does not instruct you to send it to the parliaments of Member States. So I would like to repair that omission and propose the very simple oral amendment: ‘and the parliaments of the Member States’.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

7.9. Croatia: progress report 2008 (vote)

– Before the vote on Amendment 13:

Hannes Swoboda, *on behalf of the PSE Group.* – (DE) Thank you, Mr President. There have been a lot of discussions between the groups over the last few days, right down to the last minute in fact. The following amendment now seems to me to be the one that has the broadest agreement in this House and also, according to direct information which I have received, was voted on with the agreement of both Croatia and Slovenia.

The amendment reads as follows in English:

‘Recalls the informal agreement reached on 26 August 2007 by the Prime Ministers of Croatia and Slovenia on the submission of their border dispute to an international body; welcomes the readiness of Croatia and

Slovenia to accept the mediation offer made by the Commission and takes the view that this mediation should be based on international law; in this context, looks forward to a rapid advancement of the accession negotiations;’.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

7.10. Turkey: progress report 2008 (vote)

- Before the vote on paragraph 4:

Andrew Duff, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, in paragraph, please insert the adjective ‘secular’, so that the phrase would be: ‘stable, democratic, pluralist, secular and prosperous society’.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

- Before the vote on Amendment 9:

Joost Lagendijk, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Mr President, after yesterday’s debate and after consultation with the rapporteur, I would like to add one word to the amendment. The word would be ‘transitional’, and the amendment would then read as follows: ‘except for temporary, transitional derogations’.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

- Before the vote on Amendment 10:

Joost Lagendijk, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Mr President, after yesterday’s debate, I would like to propose replacing the word ‘involve’ with ‘consult’.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

7.11. Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia: progress report 2008 (vote)

- Before the vote:

Erik Meijer, *author*. – Mr President, before we vote on the resolution I tabled on the accession process for the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, I wish to make three technical remarks so that everybody can decide on the correct texts.

First remark: where it speaks about the Macedonian negotiator in paragraph 12, the text should be ‘the negotiator of the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia’. This is entirely in line with what we decided on when voting on my reports of 2007 and 2008.

Second remark: in paragraph 18, the Macedonian Orthodox Church is the official name of the biggest religious community in the country. This is mentioned in order to distinguish it from the Serbian Orthodox group. This use of the word ‘Macedonian’ cannot be replaced by any reference to any state name. As it is the official name of an institution, I propose surrounding the name with inverted commas.

Third remark: as regards the translation of the word ‘pending’ in paragraph 10 in the phrase ‘pending full implementation of the key priorities of the Accession Partnership’, the French and Italian versions – at least – differ from the texts in English, German and Dutch. For all final translations I propose using the original English version.

- On paragraph 12:

Giorgos Dimitrakopoulos, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (EL) Mr President, in paragraph 12 we had Amendment 1 by Mr Swoboda, on which a roll-call vote was requested and, as you know, Mr Swoboda withdrew Amendment 1 today. I would therefore ask that a roll-call vote be taken on the second part of paragraph 12.

- Before the vote on Amendment 2:

Anna Ibrisagic, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Mr President, I should like to propose a deletion of one part of the text, so the new text of the second part of paragraph 13 should read: ‘in view of the new round of

negotiations announced under the “Nimetz process”, expresses the hope that all governments in the neighbourhood will support the integration of this country in the EU, thus contributing to the stability and prosperity of the region;’.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

Hannes Swoboda, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, I would like to say first of all that I do not think it is fair that, when I withdrew my amendment, you rejected part of my original text. That is not a fair procedure.

However, with regard to what Mrs Ibrisagic has just said, I would like to say that we are able to accept this wording. I would then also withdraw my Amendment 3 and I hope for fair treatment from the other side.

7.12. The mandate of the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia (A6-0112/2009, Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck) (vote)

– Before the vote on paragraph 1(h):

Doris Pack, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, with the agreement of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament and the rapporteur, I would like to propose the following regarding paragraph 1(h):

‘stresses that the key documents vital for the prosecution of General Ante Gotovina, Mladen Markač and Ivan Čermak should be handed over by the responsible authorities;’. The rest is the same.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

7.13. 5th World Water Forum in Istanbul, 16-22 March 2009 (vote)

– After the vote on Amendment 5:

Inés Ayala Sender, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, the Zaragoza 2008 International Expo closed on 14 September 2008. It was the first exhibition devoted exclusively to water and sustainable development, and the first exhibition in which the European Parliament took part on an equal footing with the Commission.

The three months of constant debates, with more than 2 000 experts and NGOs, resulted in the Zaragoza Charter, which precisely reflects the state of the debate between Mexico 2006 and Istanbul. Hence we propose the following recital, which I shall read in English:

‘having regard to the Zaragoza Charter of 2008 “A New Comprehensive Vision of Water” and the recommendations of the Water Tribune adopted on 14 September 2008, the closing day of the 2008 Zaragoza International Exhibition, and forwarded to the Secretary-General of the United Nations;’.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

7.14. EC Development Assistance to Health Services in Sub-Saharan Africa (vote)

7.15. Implementation of the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) (vote)

7.16. EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership (A6-0062/2009, Maria Eleni Koppa) (vote)

7.17. Mexico Strategic Partnership (A6-0028/2009, José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra) (vote)

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President. – Before the last vote, which is always unruly, I would like to say something. This is the last plenary sitting in which our Secretary-General, Harald Rømer, will participate. I expressed the thanks of the

European Parliament at length on your behalf at the reception two days ago. I would also like to do that here in plenary by way of conclusion: thank you very much Harald Rømer for your service to the European Parliament, which spans several decades.

(Loud applause)

(Protests)

Anyone who has worked for the European Parliament for 36 years deserves well of the European Parliament. Our warmest thanks, Harald Rømer.

(Protests)

To those who are heckling now, I would like to say that I hope that your parents do not discover how you are behaving here.

(Applause)

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7.18. 50th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising and dialogue between His Holiness the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Government (vote)

- Before the vote:

Marco Cappato, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (IT) Mr President, I would like to request that the separate votes proposed for paragraphs 1, 2 and 3 be taken by roll call.

- Before the vote on recital E:

Marco Cappato, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (IT) I also request roll-call voting for the final vote.

IN THE CHAIR: MR ONESTA

Vice-President

8. Explanations of vote

Oral explanations of vote

- Report: Vincenzo Aita (A6-0086/2009)

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I just wish to say on this report that I am pleased that our group's Amendment 1 was accepted and, therefore, I welcome this development. There is a challenge to protect soils in the European Union, but it is a Member State competence and does not require an EU approach, or EU directives or regulations. Therefore, I welcome the outcome of this vote.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0104/2009)

Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, I am very pleased with this and would also like to thank Mr Swoboda very much because this important report has been adopted with a very large consensus.

I would like to take the opportunity to urge our Slovene Members, for whom and for whose country I have the greatest sympathy, to find a way once again of continuing Slovenia's great achievements towards European integration. This country was the first new Member State to introduce the euro and was the first to implement Schengen. Slovenia is a pioneer of European unification. I would like to see Slovenia, in its national interest, also act as a pioneer in connection with the accession of Croatia to the EU.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Mr President, in principle I support the accession of Croatia to the European Union, but I did not vote in favour of this report. I abstained because there are still a number of problems in Croatia, one example being the problem of corruption. Experience has now taught us that corruption has

actually increased in a number of countries that have acceded to the European Union before they were actually completely ready to do so.

The problem with this report is that it states that the conclusion of the negotiations could perhaps be reached in 2009, which is to say this year, while, in my opinion, it is, in fact, unwise to tie ourselves down to a given date. Croatia should be allowed to accede when it is completely ready. At this moment in time, that is absolutely not the case.

Romana Jordan Cizelj (PPE-DE). – (SL) It is my sincere wish that Croatia becomes a member of the European Union as soon as possible and this is a wish that is shared by Slovenia. If our wishes are to become a reality, we need to assist and cooperate with Croatia. We can resolve disputes by listening carefully to all of the parties involved. However, there is nothing in this report, which was endorsed by the European Parliament today, which suggests that we have struck the right balance in voting on the so-called Croatian-Slovenian border dispute. In order to avoid bias, we should also include the principle of equity as a minimum requirement.

In conclusion, I would like to point out that, if we really want to solve this problem, we should ensure that both Slovenia and Croatia observe the outcome of the relevant international body. This is why the parliaments of both countries should ratify that outcome beforehand.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0105/2009)

Marusya Ivanova Lyubcheva (PSE). – (BG) Thank you, Mr President. I supported the Turkey progress report. The negotiations with Turkey on accession to the European Union pose a serious challenge to all Member States of political and economic significance, as well as in terms of the issue of security. It is particularly important for the country to meet the accession criteria and show consistency, sufficient precision and transparency towards the citizens of the European Union. I feel that it is especially important for the process to progress via good cooperation with neighbouring countries. In this respect, I think that we must note certain progress between Bulgaria and Turkey with the agreement which has been reached on initiating negotiations on matters which remain unresolved so far, specifically on resolving the property issues of the Thracian refugees, which is happening thanks to the efforts of the European Parliament. We will monitor this process particularly closely as it concerns the rights of thousands of people, which must be respected across the territory of the European Union. The Thracian question is also just as important as relations between Turkey and the other neighbouring countries. Thank you.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0104/2009)

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE-DE). – (SK) We know what a testing time our friends in the Balkans have had. This applies both to Slovenia and Croatia, when they were attacked by Serbia and our sympathies lay on both sides. I must say that it was generous of the EU to accept Slovenia into the EU before all of the disputes between Slovenia and Croatia had been resolved and I believe that we should adopt a similar approach now towards Croatia.

I am sorry that some politicians in Slovenia would now like to block the accession of Croatia, but this is what I am told by Mrs Jordan Cizelj, who has a sensible and, I would say, balanced approach to this political question. I trust that the informal agreement to be discussed further between Croatia and Slovenia under the auspices of the Commission will end in success.

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to explain a point in our Rules of Procedure. To speak during the explanations of vote, you must make a request to the services before the start of these explanations. Of course, I am very flexible and I allow the Members present to speak. But we are not using the 'catch the eye' procedure. You have to put your name down beforehand, prior to the explanations of vote.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0105/2009)

Kristian Vigenin (PSE). – (BG) Mr President, I supported the report which was drafted on Turkey's progress as I believe that it is an objective report which offers both Turkey and the European Union the opportunity to forge ahead together with Turkey's preparation for membership. At the same time, I would like to express a certain dissatisfaction that the Chamber rejected the Socialist Group's proposal for it to be noted that Turkey's membership of the European Union is a goal shared by Turkey and the European Union.

I believe that if we want more rapid progress from Turkey on the problems we see with its development, we must also be sufficiently open and not leave our partners in any doubt that the goal of this process is still actually Turkey's admission to the European Union. Turkey's role will grow and it is in the European Union's interest to have a non-Christian country among its Member States because this will give us a number of opportunities to conduct policies which are not possible at the moment. Thank you.

Dimitar Stoyanov (NI). – (BG) Ladies and gentlemen, the Attack Group is voting against the Turkey progress report because we do not see any progress. In fact, no progress could be achieved anyway. Turkey does not consider anything else other than its own interests, which do not include respect for human rights and the other European and Christian values. For more than 80 years Turkey has not fulfilled the Treaty of Ankara, according to which it owes Bulgaria USD 10 billion. Just imagine how it will comply with European regulations.

Yesterday Mr Wiersma mentioned that failure to acknowledge the 1915-1916 Armenian genocide is a problem. What should we say then about the acts of genocide against the Bulgarians which went on for 500 years, such as the massacres in Stara Zagora, Batak and Perushtitsa, described by the International European Commission in 1876? Mr Wiersma also said that there is no place in the EU for an Islamist Turkey; however, 20 years ago Turkish Islamists blew up coaches in Bulgaria, carrying women and children. Indeed, Turkey paid for monuments to be erected for these terrorists. This is modern Turkey, governed by a fundamentalist, Islamist party. These are its values and we think that they are not appropriate for Europe.

Bruno Gollnisch (NI). – (FR) Mr President, 'to err is human, to persist is diabolical'. Never has this saying been more appropriate than in the lamentable saga of the accession negotiations with Turkey.

Since 2005, you have been giving us the same negative reports on human rights, respect for minorities and the commitments made to the Union, whilst keeping the objective of accession intact.

Now, in reality, that is not the problem. The underlying issue lies in the wish of Europeans no longer to accept the consequences of the freedom of establishment which would necessarily result from accession.

It also lies in the fact that Turkey belongs geographically, culturally, linguistically and spiritually to an area which is not Europe. Consequently, we must abandon this fiction; we must abandon this masquerade of accession and immediately begin practical discussions, in other words aim for a partnership built on our mutual and reciprocal interests. This accession procedure must be abandoned.

Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, in the crucial areas – human rights, the rights of minorities, religious freedom, freedom of expression – Turkey has made next to no progress, and in the last few days has even taken steps backwards.

However, irrespective of this, the Commission claims that we are nevertheless obliged to take a positive position, as this is an important strategic partner. That is true, but that is a foreign policy matter. The fact that we need strategic partnerships is not a criterion for accession.

However, I have nevertheless quite clearly voted in favour of the report, because the Socialist call to focus the report on accession was rejected. This report is a great success and a breakthrough for us, because it expressly avoids setting accession as a goal and because it talks about a long-lasting, open-ended process, the outcome of which is still unclear. We would have preferred a 'no' to full membership, but this wording nevertheless comes close to that and is therefore a great success for those of us who are happy to say 'yes' to partnership with Turkey as part of our foreign policy, but say 'no' to accession.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Mr President, I abstained from the vote on the report about Turkey because, while this report contained a complete catalogue of criticisms relating to the number of major wrongs that are still ongoing in Turkey, I believe that the only possible conclusion to this report surely had to have been that the negotiations must be stopped, and indeed on a permanent basis, because, after three years, there has still been no appreciable improvement in the situation in Turkey.

I am, in any case, of the opinion that the European Union must remain a European project and that, therefore, there should be no place within the European Union for a country like Turkey, which is not a European country.

Yesterday, a Member from the Socialist Group in the European Parliament said that he would never accept Turkey being further Islamicised. Well, I hope that he and his group will also come out against the Islamicisation of Europe, although I shall not hold my breath.

Martin Callanan (PPE-DE). – Mr President, this report sets out Turkey's progress towards eventual membership of the EU. That is an eventual aim that I support. However, I do have some concerns about Turkey's progress towards membership.

One of my concerns is the gradual erosion of the secular republican ideal and the growth of religion in politics. I am also worried about some of the human rights abuses in Turkey that have been documented and some of the actions that have been taken against minority communities. We need to see action over some of those areas before we can consider Turkish membership.

However, it is also important for us to be honest with Turkey, and to say clearly and unambiguously that, if it fulfils all the conditions that other Member States have fulfilled, then it has the right to join. It is not right for individual heads of Member States to put unfair and unbalanced obstacles in the path of Turkish membership. If Turkey fulfils the conditions, then it has the right to join, and should be permitted to do so. We need an EU which is wider and not deeper.

Kyriacos Triantaphyllides (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, I voted in favour of the report on Turkey due to the positive elements for Cyprus in paragraphs 32 and 40, even though I disagree with the content of Amendments 9 and 10.

Amendment 9 introduces an unacceptable position on – albeit temporary – derogations from the principles on which the European Union is founded, including the four fundamental freedoms. This has been done at a time when negotiations are being held between the leaders of the two communities in Cyprus, who are the only people who can decide on the matter.

Amendment 10 contradicts the fact that the CFSP is part of the Community *aquis* for the EU and the Member States, and third countries cannot be given *carte blanche* to participate in planning and decision-making procedures.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0106/2009)

Árpád Duka-Zólyomi (PPE-DE). – (HU) For the last three years, Macedonia has been a candidate country for EU membership. In spite of this, accession negotiations have not yet begun. Unless the European Union promptly takes decisive steps, the resulting loss of credibility could have destabilising consequences for the region. Macedonia has progressed a great deal in the last few years, achieving good economic results, moving closer to a functioning market economy and showing success in the field of lawmaking. Consensus has been reached among government and the opposition, civil society and public opinion in order to fulfil the Copenhagen criteria as soon as possible. Coexistence between national and ethnic communities has also been well organised. Greece's stubborn obstruction of the start of negotiations for accession is beyond comprehension. The naming of the country must not be an obstacle! Bilateral talks about the name can be held simultaneously. I support the report because it is an important message to the Macedonian people and will give a decisive impetus to starting genuine negotiations before the end of this year. Thank you very much.

Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, this report sends an important signal to a country that is playing a stabilising role, has exemplary legislation on minorities, has a broad government majority in which all nationalities are represented and has taken a clear European course under the leadership of Prime Minister Gruevski. I therefore gladly voted in favour of this report, and I believe that we should emphasise two points in particular: firstly, we want the Council and the Commission to tell us this year when accession negotiations are to begin and, secondly, we will not tolerate any bilateral troublemaking, and definitely not with regard to this bizarre name issue. The country is called Macedonia, whether that suits some people or not, and we must finally start to smooth this country's way towards Europe.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Mr President, I voted against Mr Meijer's report because I, and my party, are of the opinion that enlargement must be brought to a halt for an indeterminate period after the accession of Croatia. European citizens want nothing to do with any further enlargement in the short or medium term, and certainly nothing to do with an enlargement to include Turkey, of course. Yet it is time that this Parliament listened, for once, to those it is supposed to represent.

That being the case, I also oppose the commencement of accession negotiations with the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, which this Parliament is calling for, as well as the granting of a European perspective to the entire Western Balkans. Some of these countries or entities are Islamic through and through and, as far as I am concerned, should not be allowed to join the European Union.

Christopher Heaton-Harris (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I was very pleased with the vote today.

I visited Macedonia very recently, on behalf of the Westminster Foundation for Democracy, set up by Margaret Thatcher when she was Prime Minister of my country, and saw a country with vibrant political parties and a fascinating tax policy, with flat taxes on both corporation and income tax, and a growing economy. It is a country that this coming month is going to have free, fair and honest elections – probably better than the ones we recently had in the UK, with postal votes. Such a country should be allowed to join the European Union, should it choose to, based on its own self-determination – which is why my previous colleagues should possibly reflect on this matter.

Today we have seen a significant change because, up until this point, Greek Members of this House have been making themselves look completely absurd, and have been placed in a position of ridicule because of their arguments about the name of this country, which is the Republic of Macedonia.

Martin Callanan (PPE-DE). – Mr President, the problem with speaking after Mr Heaton Harris is that he has made many of the same points I wanted to make on this issue. It seems to me blatantly absurd that Greece should continue to pursue this long-standing and, frankly, ridiculous tirade against the name of Macedonia. I have some beautiful counties in my constituency – Durham, Northumberland – and it really does not bother me too much if another Member State wishes to give itself the names of those fantastic counties.

For the accession negotiations to be held up not because of an ethnic dispute or a democratic dispute or a human rights dispute but purely because the country decides to name itself Macedonia, is patently ridiculous. I hope that the Greek Members will see the sense of this. I hope that Macedonia will be judged on free criteria that apply to everybody else and, if they fulfil those criteria, if they are a democratic, secular state, if they pursue the right human rights policies then, like all other Member States, they should have the right to join and not be subject to a ridiculous veto by Greece purely on the grounds of the name.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0140/2009)

Martin Callanan (PPE-DE). – Mr President, the Tamil Tigers have been designated a terrorist group by the EU and by the United States, but thankfully it looks as though their bloodthirsty campaign for an independent Tamil homeland may now be coming to an end. Sri Lanka deserves to live in peace, as we in Europe do.

Like other colleagues in this House, I support a unitary state for Sri Lanka. I think it is also appropriate to place on record that I also think it is probably a good idea, within that unitary state, to grant the Tamils a degree of autonomy. I do not support the Tigers' campaign of violence, and I consider it actually essential that the Sri Lankan army be permitted to continue their military campaign against the Tamil Tigers.

However, it is also appropriate to recognise that there is a humanitarian crisis in Sri Lanka at the moment, and the aid agencies should be allowed access. So perhaps it is appropriate to ask for a cessation of the fighting, whilst aid agencies can get access and whilst civilians are allowed to leave the disputed areas. But after that we have to allow the army to continue their campaign.

- Report: Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck (A6-0112/2009)

Daniel Hannan (NI). – Mr President, the growth of a corpus of international jurisprudence not anchored in any elected national legislature is one of the most alarming developments of our age. We are reversing not just 300 years of legal understanding of territorial responsibility, that is, that a crime is the responsibility of the territory where it is committed; we are also going back to the pre-modern idea that people who decide on laws should not be accountable to the people who live under them, but rather only to their own consciences.

It might seem very reasonable that, if a man like Milošević or a man like Karadžić is not receiving justice in his own country, we need to do something about it. But the objection to authoritarians like Milošević is precisely that they vitiated the democracy of their country and set themselves up as being above the law. If we replicate that problem internationally, we drag ourselves down to his level, as we did with the farce of a trial we had in The Hague, where for six years we had 27 changes of legal procedure, imposition of counsel and, ultimately, no conviction.

I am not in favour of Mr Milošević: he was a baleful and wicked Communist. But bad men deserve justice – bad men, especially, deserve justice – and when they do not get it, it is the rest of us who are diminished.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0113/2009)

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Mr President, we all know how important water is and in the developing world in particular, where access to water is very difficult, it is young girls and women who suffer the most. Their educational prospects are hugely diminished because they are the water-bearers, if you like. I saw this in India on a delegation visit and it is very important that we invest more in water management and make sure that it does not become an impediment to the educational progress of young girls and women.

I particularly welcome the vote on paragraph 2, which declares that water is assumed as a public good and should be under public control regardless of how it is managed. It is a precious resource and it is there for the good of the public, not for individual control or profit.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – Mr President, I, too, am very supportive of our motion on the resolution of water and welcome our vote on paragraph 2, where we strongly declared that water is a public good and should be under public control. I personally strongly oppose the privatisation of water.

We have seen in recent times how the relentless pursuit of profit has brought the global economy to its knees. We certainly do not want to see the same thing happening where water is concerned. In order to ensure water quality and ongoing improvements in the distribution system, there needs to be continued investment in the transition system. There is no incentive for those in the private sector to do this because, of course, the temptation is simply to increase the price to the consumer, rather than invest in upgrading the transmission system. I have seen this happen in my own county of Sligo, where certain sectors of the community will end up paying more for their water than their fair share because there is simply a lack of investment by the private sector in the transmission system.

- Report: Maria Eleni Koppa (A6-0062/2009)

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I voted in favour of this resolution and report, but I have some concerns. This morning, the Commission acknowledged that we do not know where the WTO is heading at this point, and therefore how it knits in with the strategic partnership.

We cannot allow a situation where either the strategic partnership arrangement – or indeed a world trade agreement – has a negative impact on Europe's food security concerns. I reiterate the issue around food production standards, which are higher in the European Union. We penalise our producers where they do not meet those standards. We cannot allow a situation where we bring in food from third countries – Brazil or elsewhere – which does not meet our production standards and which results in very unfair competition for producers of food and agricultural commodities within the European Union.

- Report: José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra (A6-0028/2009)

Philip Claey's (NI). – (NL) Mr President, of course a strategic partnership between the European Union and Mexico, and also, in fact, countries like Brazil, is a good thing and something that is in the interests of the EU. The report itself is framed in a largely balanced way, but what I would say is not in the interests of Europe – and this is something that will also give rise to a whole range of questions amongst the general public – is the provision in the report that calls for the conclusion of a mutual agreement on an immigration policy. This does not bode well and it is also the reason why I chose to abstain in the vote on this report.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0135/2009)

Zita Pleštin'ská (PPE-DE). – (SK) I have also voted for the resolution on the situation in Tibet on the 50th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising because the Chinese authorities have tightened the security in Tibet recently and have forbidden journalists and foreigners from entering the region.

Today's debate in the European Parliament broadcasts the message that we are extremely concerned about the situation in Tibet, particularly the suffering and reprisals against innocent inhabitants.

I call on the Council to set up a Truth Committee in accordance with the resolution, with the aim of finding out what really happened in the negotiations between the People's Republic of China and the representatives of His Holiness the Dalai Lama.

I call on the Chinese Government to release immediately all persons who have been arrested merely for participating in a peaceful protest.

Marco Cappato (ALDE). – (IT) Mr President, I take the floor to express my satisfaction at the widespread support the Assembly has given to the motion that we have put forward with Mr Pannella and Mr Onyskiewicz. The motion does something different from what we heard from Mrs Ferrero-Waldner today; that is, it takes sides: the side of the search for truth, for the real reasons why talks broke down between the Chinese and the Tibetans, rather than looking at this from a neutral standpoint, as the Commission and the Council unfortunately continue to do, as if it were enough for us to simply hope for dialogue between two parties.

I would like to stress that the behaviour of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament seems to me to be particularly hard to understand; first they were opposed to the debate, then they were opposed to my tabling a resolution, and then they actually voted against it, with Mr Ford offering a political explanation that we are passing too many resolutions on Tibet. Well, perhaps the party and Mr Ford do not understand – or else they understand all too well – that much more is at stake here; the freedom and democracy of more than a billion Chinese citizens as well as the Tibetan people.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Mr President, it goes without saying that I voted in favour of this resolution; although, of course, we cannot allow ourselves to think that this ultimately innocuous resolution will make much impression on the totalitarian communist regime in China, with whom we nonetheless are so happy to trade.

We would make more impact on the regime if this Parliament and the Council had the courage to state that the occupation and subsequent annexation of Tibet were contraventions of international law and, as such, cannot be recognised by the European Union. We must keep ramming home the message that Tibet must be an independent state and not an autonomous province of China and that a genocide and an ethnocide have been and are being carried out in Tibet.

9. Communication of Council common positions: see Minutes

10. Explanations of vote (continuation)

Oral explanations of vote (cont.)

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0135/2009)

Daniel Hannan (NI). – Mr President, Tibetans, like all nations, have the aspiration to live under their own laws and their own people, and, in denying their national aspirations, the Chinese Government uses a series of arguments about abolishing feudalism and overcoming serfdom and superstition.

Ultimately, it is all a version of what Engels called 'false consciousness': they believe that the Tibetans do not really understand the issue and, therefore, should not be allowed full democracy.

I would just appeal to Members of this House to consider the irony of the similarity between that argument and the one that was trotted out in the aftermath of the French, Dutch and Irish 'no' votes. In this Chamber again, we kept on hearing that people had not properly understood the question, that they had really been voting on something else – against Mr Chirac, or against Turkish accession, or against Anglo-Saxon liberalism – and that they had not understood the issue and that they needed better information.

I believe that people, whether in Tibet or in the nations of the European Union, do have an understanding of their wishes and desires, and they should be allowed to express that through the ballot box. I know I am getting as tedious as Cato the Elder, but he was eventually listened to, and I will repeat, as I have in every speech, that we should have a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. *Pactio Olisipiensis censenda est!*

Written explanations of vote

- Report: Pia Elda Locatelli (A6-0067/2009)

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing. – (IT) Mr President, Italy is suffering a real brain drain. This exodus of researchers, year on year, is becoming a definite trend. The Nobel Prize winner for medicine, Renato Dulbecco, said that those who want to carry out research are leaving as they have done in the past, and for the same reasons. They leave because there are no career prospects, suitable salaries or funds for research, and the doors to research centres are barred because, as well as lacking funds, they lack the organisation to receive new groups and develop new ideas.

Italian researchers are leaving due to the absence of infrastructure, above all in the field of science and technology, the lack of funding, the laughable salaries and a selection system that discourages the best candidates and rewards recommendations. They are leaving and they are complaining, because the basic preparation provided by our universities is excellent. All the rest is lacking, however.

I agree that Member States need to ensure open, transparent, competition-based recruitment of researchers based on scientific merit. Merit should be measured in terms of scientific excellence and scientific production (publications). However, other important aspects should also count as merits in a researcher's career: innovation capacity, research management skills, training and supervision skills and collaboration with industry.

Nicodim Bulzesc (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of this motion for a resolution because I agree with the idea that Europe needs more researchers. This report is very important because, amongst other things, it urges Member States to improve existing career opportunities for young researchers, for example, through better funding and promotion based on achievements, such as innovation capacity, training periods in companies etc., rather than on seniority.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE), in writing. – Deputy Locatelli's report is part of the review of the Lisbon Strategy to make Europe's economy the most competitive in the world by 2010, and central to this is the position of researchers in Europe. Four priority areas were identified where progress is essential namely

- Open Recruitment and Portability of Grants,
- Social Security and Pensions,
- Attractive Employment and Working Conditions and
- Training and Skills of researchers;

These areas deal with mobility, transparency, publicity and support to researchers and potential researchers. Tying education, innovation and research into a coherent supportive policy is a vital part of a functioning knowledge economy. Our efforts to combat 'brain drain' and establish a 'brain network' will be enhanced by proposals which minimise bureaucratic obstacles and increase social security support for researchers. As Rapporteur on EU ETS I am only too well aware of the critical role of research and the need to nurture the talent and minds available to solve the considerable climate challenges with which we are faced. I am pleased to acknowledge the introduction of an Innovation Alliance between UCD and TCD in Ireland, which is a fine example of investing in researchers at the beginning of their careers.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) Despite current events clearly showing that the neoliberal Lisbon Strategy is one of the instruments responsible for the worsening economic and social situation in the European Union, the report insists on its application, with which we disagree.

However, there are positive aspects in the report, which we support, particularly with regard to meeting the needs of researchers, their rights in terms of working and social security conditions, reunification of families, rights of female researchers and access for young researchers, and the call for increased funding for research and the involvement of a greater number of researchers.

However, it is not clear how the proposed European research strategy will guarantee equal rights in all Member States and universal access for researchers, particularly young researchers, to the European Partnership for Researchers, especially in countries such as Portugal, which is not at the heart of political decision-making in a European Union that is increasingly being managed by the major powers. That is why we abstained from voting on the report.

Adam Gierek (PSE), in writing. – (PL) Mr President, does an academic career depend on mobility? To a certain extent, it does. One could say that mobility, especially in the case of young researchers, can have a significant influence on their future achievements. That is because it facilitates access to new information and allows them to overcome the limitations of the environment in which they have been educated. However, that is not all. An academic career begins earlier, in secondary school, where youngsters build the basis of their general knowledge, especially in maths and science.

The next stage involves higher education and graduate and doctoral studies. It is, and here I speak on the basis of my own experience, at the initial stage of a young person's academic career, that mobility, easy access

to research facilities and an interesting and promising topic pursued under the supervision of outstanding researchers is most important to these young people, more so than their future retirement pension.

Thus, the most important step towards obtaining scientific research staff involves preparing the right conditions for this kind of study, within the framework of the European Technological Institute or the European Research Infrastructure, for example, including the support provided by PhD grants that are open to EU students and students from third countries, and which are widely publicised. The conditions we provide, in terms of family and professional stability, will determine whether young people, once they obtain their doctorates, go into industry or academic institutions, and whether they go back to their home countries or travel further.

Adrian Manole (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) When a student is looking towards a career in research, physical mobility must be promoted as an educational experience which cannot be replaced by virtual mobility. We must ensure that the most brilliant minds receive sufficient finances and human resources to support them. For some, this might mean having access to resources beyond the borders of their country of origin.

The benefits (for example, value added) associated with the mobility of students, lecturers and researchers must be promoted and publicised. Administrative and structural barriers must be removed. Scholarships and loans should be available to students and researchers, along with other incentive measures for both individuals and institutions.

The globalisation policy must take into account the following factors: the vital importance of researchers with international experience; real linguistic opportunities; the need to offer all students going to be future researchers the chance to obtain a number of foreign language credits, irrespective of their specialist field; good quality; and information telling them about the opportunities for study and research abroad.

Athanasios Pafilis (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL) The report on a European partnership for researchers seeks to strengthen the competitiveness of the EU in relation to the other imperialist centres, limit the 'drain' of researchers and attract researchers from developing countries.

It promotes the free movement of researchers between states, the public and private sectors, companies, research centres and universities, greater cohesion between the private and public sectors in the field of research, the absolute subjugation of science to the market's temporary technological requirements and the orientation of researchers towards applied research, recognising previous experience as a corporate researcher as a formal qualification.

The introduction of 'research forms' in order to select researchers from a scientific institution or university in another Member State and the mobility of researchers and senior company executives will help big business to select the *crème de la crème* of researchers and staff its companies on terms which will boost its profitability (flexible terms of employment, unpaid work, exemption from insurance contributions). These arrangements also encompass PhD students, who carry out the lion's share of research activities.

We voted against the report, because researchers must work under stable terms of employment, in institutions which are not competing for 'predominance', but which cooperate in order to develop science and serve modern grassroots requirements, not the plutocracy and the profits of big business.

Teresa Riera Madurell (PSE), in writing. – (ES) To help make up for the lack of research staff, it is necessary to facilitate the return of European scientists who work outside the European Union and also facilitate the entry of scientists from third countries who want to work in the EU.

Women continue to be under-represented in most areas of science and technology and in positions of responsibility. It is therefore important, in my view, to call on the Member States to ensure a better gender balance in the bodies responsible for hiring and promoting research staff. It is essential to make the selection and promotion processes open and transparent.

To create a single employment market for researchers, it is also important to define and establish a single European career model in the field of research, and also to introduce an integrated system for information on offers of employment and trainee contracts in the field of research throughout the EU.

With regard to improving mobility, I would like to point out that, to facilitate exchanges with men and women scientists from third countries, including those with which there is already substantial scientific cooperation, as may be the case with certain Latin American countries, it is crucial to introduce a special, faster and less bureaucratic visa policy.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, I voted in favour of Mrs Locatelli's report on a European partnership for researchers. As a university lecturer, I understand that Europe needs more researchers in order to improve its productivity and competitiveness, especially in light of competition from other large economies at world level such as the United States and Japan, as well as other developing economies like India and China. For this reason, therefore, I agree with the rapporteur's call for Member States to ensure open, transparent, competition-based recruitment of researchers based on scientific merit.

- Report: Toine Manders (A6-0051/2009)

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, I voted in favour.

New technologies have now transformed our lives, and leisure activities are by no means excluded from this process.

Video games are now the favourite recreational activity of young people in Europe and beyond. Many video games are in fact aimed at adults, with content that is in many cases unsuitable for children.

Taking account, therefore, of the Commission Communication of 22 April 2008 on the protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games, there is an urgent need to regulate labelling and use measures such as providing a 'red button' or the PEGI online system, included in the European Safer Internet programme.

It is also important for Member States to continue to work in close collaboration to promote the protection of children and to help the industry to develop systems that serve this purpose.

We must not overlook the fact that to achieve this objective we also need to gain the support of manufacturers and above all parents, who are the primary instruments of control within the family.

Glyn Ford (PSE), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of the Manders report on the protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games. I did so with some slight reluctance. The danger is that a justifiable concern in some cases turns into a 'moral panic' that is wilfully disproportionate to the extent of the problem. I am not necessarily committed to moving further than we have done so already.

Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), *in writing*. – (SV) This report contains a whole series of requirements on what Member States are to do to limit the harmful use of video games: schools should inform children and parents of the advantages and disadvantages of video games; parents should take measures to avoid negative consequences when their children play video games; Member States should explore the merit of introducing a 'red button' to install on game devices and computers to block access to certain games; national information campaigns for consumers should be conducted; owners of Internet cafes should prevent children from playing games that are intended for adults; a special pan-European code of conduct for retailers and producers of video games should be introduced; and Member States should introduce civil and criminal legislation on the retailing of violent television, video and computer games.

Video games for minors are associated with many disturbing cultural and social problems. However, it is precisely for this reason that Member States need to arrive at solutions that suit their own culture and values in order for them to have a democratic basis within the Member States' own populations. Lectures from EU institutions have almost the opposite effect.

Member States' ability to find different ways forward with regard to this issue is also important in order to broaden our experience and knowledge in this field.

For these reasons, I voted against this report in the final vote.

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (SK) Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to talk about the video games industry, which has annual revenues of almost EUR 7.3 billion. As video games are becoming more popular both with children and adults, it is important to have a political debate about their regulatory framework. There are some video games which help to develop dexterity and to obtain knowledge essential to life in the 21st century. However, I would like to point out that video games with violent features which are intended for adults can have negative effects, particularly on children.

It is therefore our duty to protect consumers, especially children. Children should not be able to purchase video games that are not intended for their age group. The introduction of the Pan-European Information System on Games, which classifies age, has helped to increase transparency in the purchasing of games for

children, but retailers still do not have enough information on the harmful effects of video games on children. At this point it is essential to raise awareness of these negative effects on children and it is necessary to have the cooperation of producers, retailers, consumer organisations, schools and families. Member States must introduce measures that will prevent children from buying video games intended for older age groups. At the same time I welcome the proposal of the European Commission and the Council concerning rules for labelling video games and the creation of a voluntary code of practice for interactive video games that are intended for children.

Nicolae Vlad Popa (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of Mr Manders's own-initiative report, which focuses particular attention on the topic of video games.

The video games market is a fast-growing global market. However, video games are no longer targeted only at children as an ever-increasing number of them are designed specially for adults. This is precisely why the content of many games is unsuitable and may even be harmful to our children.

It is true that video games can be used for educational purposes, but only on the condition that they are used according to their intended purpose for each age group. For this reason, we must pay particular attention to the PEGI system for rating games. The PEGI online version provides assistance to parents and minors, offering both tips on how to protect minors and miscellaneous information about online games.

The report also emphasises the need for Member States to ensure that adequate control measures are implemented with regard to online purchases of video games, thereby preventing minors from accessing games with content which is not appropriate for their age, intended for adults or another age group. The rapporteur also suggests developing a 'red button' which offers parents the opportunity to disable a game with content not appropriate for the child's age or restrict minors' access between certain hours.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE), in writing. – (CS) Despite warnings from experts, parents underestimate the effect of computer games on the development of their children's personalities. Meanwhile children and young people are exposed for hours at a time to the effects of aggressive or sexual content in computer games. Children imitate the games which can lead to tragic results. The street criminals of the future will be just one outcome of the influence of aggressive games on behaviour, psychology and late-manifesting habits.

I am therefore promoting the creation of a code of ethics for retailers and producers of video games.

In contrast to the rapporteur, of course, I believe that we need not only voluntary but also binding common rules in the EU. Therefore, with this reservation, I have voted for the report.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) Mr President, I voted in favour of the Manders report on the protection of consumers, in particular minors, in respect of the use of video games. I believe that playing video games is very important for educational reasons. There is, nonetheless, a huge amount of software that is aimed at adults and is characterised by an almost gratuitous use of violence. For this reason we must provide adequate protection for children, including by preventing them from gaining access to potentially harmful content that is aimed at a different age group. Lastly, I believe that standardising the labelling of video games will lead to a better understanding of labelling systems, while at the same time promoting the effective operation of the internal market.

- Report: Luca Romagnoli (A6-0090/2009)

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing. – (IT) Mr President, I voted in favour.

Israel is an important partner for the European Union in the Middle East and in the context of the European Neighbourhood Policy.

A Community-level aviation agreement would establish a level playing field for all Community and Israeli air carriers and would allow passengers in all Member States to benefit from similar conditions and increased competition between air carriers. That may lead to more, cheaper and better air services between the EU and Israel.

It is for the EU to ensure the implementation of common standards compatible with European legislation in its relations with the Mediterranean partners. This is only possible through a comprehensive agreement negotiated at Community level which provides for regulatory cooperation or, as a minimum, mutual recognition of aviation standards and procedures.

I therefore regard the comprehensive negotiation with Israel as a fundamental step towards further development of EU-Israeli aviation relations and the extension of the Common Aviation Area in the Euromed Area. The conclusion of the agreement will result in increasing opportunities of economic and social development for the air carriers and passengers as well.

Chris Davies (ALDE), in writing. – I do not understand how a Parliament that has called for the lifting of Israel's economic blockade of Gaza can today have voted in favour of a report intended to increase our cooperation with that country.

Last Tuesday was a fairly typical day at the Gaza crossings. Israel allowed through a limited amount of food, some hygiene products, some cooking oil, and some heavy diesel fuel, in all a total of 110 truckloads – although UNRWA tells us that the Gaza Strip needs 500 truckloads of supplies each day.

No writing paper for the schools was allowed through, no clothing, no furniture, no electrical equipment, and no materials for reconstruction. Gaza has been bombed to bits and Israel is not allowing it to be rebuilt. The misery continues.

Our President has visited, Javier Solana has visited, national MPs have visited, MEPs have visited, even Tony Blair has visited. All have called for an end to the suffering, yet Israel has changed nothing.

This was not the time for us to give our support to this report.

Proinsias De Rossa (PSE), in writing. – I voted against this Report which seeks to establish a common aviation area with Israel. Despite claims to the contrary, this is not simply a technical Report. Rather, the EU, as Israel's largest trading partner, entering into a Common Aviation Agreement will clearly yield rich commercial reward to Israel.

However, given recent events in Gaza; involving the brutal and indiscriminate slaughter of civilians, and, the levelling of Gazan infrastructure, effectively obliterating billions in European development aid; In the context of the decision by the European Parliament last December to defer the upgrading of EU relations with Israel; and considering the continuing disregard for UN resolutions and the extension of settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem; and further considering my own recent visit to Gaza where I saw first hand that Israel simply hasn't lifted the siege of Gaza to allow crucial humanitarian aid to pass;

I regard it as wholly inappropriate for Parliament to approve this agreement. The special trade agreement with Israel should be suspended until it complies with Human Rights norms and engages in constructive and substantive negotiations with its neighbours to implement the Two-State solution to the conflict.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE), in writing. – I abstained on the final vote on the EC-Israel aviation agreement as a mark of protest with regard to the ongoing crisis in Palestine. I believe that it is inappropriate to upgrade relations with Israel until such time as it displays concerted efforts to alleviate the suffering of Palestinian residents and engages in sustained political dialogue to reach a two-state solution to the region's problems.

Athanasios Pafilis (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL) We consider it unacceptable to debate and for the European Parliament to propose agreement with Israel on the creation of a Common Aviation Area between the EU and Israel while the slaughter of the Palestinian people in the murderous war unleashed against it by the Israeli Government in the Gaza Strip is still fresh.

The proposal for such an agreement confirms the criminal responsibility of the EU which, with its hypocritical stance of sitting on the fence, is basically rewarding and strengthening Israel and the new war which it has unleashed and which has caused a huge humanitarian disaster among the Palestinian people, the death of more than 1 300 Palestinians, the overwhelming majority of whom were civilians, children and women, injury to over 5 000 people and the total destruction of civil infrastructures in Gaza, including schools and the UN premises.

It also supports Israel's intention to flatten dozens of houses in East Jerusalem, uprooting more than 1 000 Palestinians in yet another bid to evict the Palestinian people from Jerusalem and making it even harder to find a solution to the Middle East.

Actions such as this give overall support to the imperialist policy in the area, which forms part of the imperialist designs of the EU, the United States and NATO in the Middle East in general. However, the people are strengthening their solidarity and their fight at the side of the Palestinian people for an independent, territorially united Palestinian state within the 1967 borders, with its capital in East Jerusalem.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, I have voted in favour of my report on developing a Common Aviation Area with Israel. It would be superfluous for me to repeat here the reasons that led to my vote of approval. It goes without saying that these reasons are to be found in the report itself.

- Proposal for a regulation (C6-0081/2009)

Catherine Stihler (PSE), *in writing*. – I voted against because due to the precarious nature of the stocks there should be a ban on the fishing of bluefin tuna until the stocks recover.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0140/2009)

Proinsias De Rossa (PSE), *in writing*. – I strongly support this Resolution which calls for an immediate ceasefire by the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE in order to allow the civilian population to leave the combat zone. It condemns all acts of violence and intimidation which are preventing civilians from leaving the conflict area. It further condemns the attacks on civilians as documented by the International Crisis Group. Both sides must respect international humanitarian law and protect and assist the civilian population in the combat zone, as well as in the safe zone. The European Parliament is also concerned about reports of serious overcrowding and poor conditions in the refugee camps established by the Sri Lankan Government. We have demanded that international and national humanitarian organisations, as well as journalists, be granted full and unhindered access to the combat zone and to the refugee camps and we call on the Sri Lankan Government to cooperate with countries and aid organisations that are willing and able to evacuate civilians.

Jean Lambert (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – I welcome today's resolution on Sri Lanka. What is happening in the north of the country is a tragedy, largely hidden from the eyes of the world, as humanitarian organisations and journalists have not been freely allowed in to see what is happening but have to rely largely on partisan information. Even before the Government's military action, it has been impossible for there to be an open debate, due to press and political harassment.

There can be no long-term military solution to the conflict but only a political solution which recognises the rights of all people on the island. There must be an immediate ceasefire on both sides to relieve the enormous human suffering. If the interests of the Tamil people come first, as both sides claim, why is this continuing suffering necessary? What purpose does it serve in finding a long-term solution? Peace talks must involve all parties. The channels will be open for dialogue, if that is what both parties want. But there must be an end to violence and oppression and active implementation of human rights instruments and the rule of law if people are to have any confidence in the outcome. The international community stands ready to assist, both in the relief of the immediate suffering and in the long term.

Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (NL) On 9 September 2006, 5 February 2009 and last night we held debates in this House about the permanent and hopeless conflict between the Tamils and the Sinhalese on the island of Sri Lanka. I participated in all these debates. In so doing, I have always called for us not to take sides in this conflict but for us, instead, to play our part in getting both sides to agree a peace treaty. Under all circumstances such a treaty must deliver a self-governing Tamil region in the north-east of the country.

Last night, Mr Tannock and Mr Van Orden argued for the complete opposite. They make reference to atrocities by the Tamil resistance movement and want to offer all possible support to the Sinhalese Government. This attitude overlooks the fact that both sides make use of unacceptable violence and that it was the government that broke off the peace process established by the Norwegians.

I am pleased that a resolution has been adopted today incorporating most of the amendments tabled by Mr Evans and calling for humanitarian aid, mediation and a peaceful resolution to the conflict.

Tobias Pflüger (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (DE) The Sri Lankan army is acting with the most brutal severity in its war against the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) with absolutely no regard for civilians. Civilians are constantly being killed or wounded in attacks by this army. Hundreds of thousands are confined and many have no access to humanitarian aid. The International Committee of the Red Cross has described it as one of the most catastrophic situations they have ever experienced.

An immediate cessation of all fighting on both sides, that of the Sri Lankan army and that of the LTTE, is needed. All international organisations and governments should demand this.

In the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the British Conservative Mr Tannock, representing the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, gained acceptance for his demand

for a 'temporary ceasefire'. This would have supported the brutal war policy of the Sri Lankan government and given clearance for attacks on civilians.

I voted in favour of the resolution, because, thankfully, the majority of the European Parliament, including the PPE-DE Group, did not ultimately follow the inhumane policy of Mr Tannock and the British Conservatives and voted in favour of the demand for an immediate ceasefire.

By placing the LTTE on the EU list of terrorist organisations, the EU positioned itself on one side and gave the LTTE *de facto* clearance for carrying on the shootings. As a result, the negotiations under way at the time under Norwegian mediation were blown out of the water and could only be continued with great difficulty outside the EU.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, I agree with the motion for a resolution on the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Sri Lanka, and therefore voted in favour of its adoption. In my opinion, given the emergency situation of an estimated 170 000 civilians who are trapped in the battle zone between the Sri Lankan army and the forces of the Liberation Tamil Tigers of Eelam (LTTE) without access to the most basic aid, an immediate temporary ceasefire by the Sri Lankan army and the LTTE is needed, in order to allow the civilian population to leave the combat zone. I also believe that national and international humanitarian organisations should be granted access to the combat zone.

- Report: Vincenzo Aita (A6-0086/2009)

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, I voted in favour. As the old Indian proverb says, we do not inherit the earth from our parents; we borrow it from our children. The agricultural lands of southern Europe are crying out in warning. They are suffering increasing environmental pressure with negative consequences such as disruption of the hydrogeological balance, rising sea levels and consequent soil salinisation, agricultural land loss, a reduction in biodiversity and greater vulnerability to fire, plant disease and animal disease.

It is thus clear that one of the priorities for agriculture must be to draw up a common plan of action, mainly through programmes aimed at preventing the deterioration of and protecting agricultural land.

Approaches to combating soil degradation must include a strategy for soil conservation by focusing greater attention on the maintenance of hydraulic systems used in agriculture and on afforestation programmes. Dryland farming techniques, crop rotation, the use of appropriate genotypes and controlling evapotranspiration are also particularly important.

We must also provide training and refresher programmes for those working in the sector and the general public, with the dual aim of seeking specific solutions and raising user awareness of the need for a more sustainable use of natural resources and the land.

Constantin Dumitriu (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (RO) Soil deterioration is a problem which cannot be ignored. I am therefore pleased with the initiative of drafting a report specially devoted to combating this problem. Agriculture offers the best method for halting this phenomenon as long, however, as the pedoclimatic features are respected in the process.

However, as I have also highlighted through the amendments tabled and accepted by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, I believe that this report must be applicable throughout the whole of the European Union. Unfortunately, climate change and soil deterioration are no longer isolated phenomena and our approach, therefore, must be consistent throughout the whole of the EU, based on the principle of solidarity.

As the rapporteur also emphasises, we not only need to recognise this problem of soil deterioration, but we also have to allocate the necessary financial resources to combat its adverse effects. I am pleased that through the European Economic Recovery Plan EUR 500 million are being earmarked for actions involving adaptation to the new challenges of climate change. However, these are short-term actions. I think that the European Union needs an integrated, financially supported action strategy to prevent and combat the effects of climate change, especially soil deterioration.

Edite Estrela (PSE), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted in favour of the motion for a European Parliament resolution on the challenge of deterioration of agricultural land in southern Europe, because I believe that the common agricultural policy guidelines must include instruments aimed at combating the effects of climate change and protecting the soil.

I must stress the importance of creating a European observatory on drought and reinforcing the EU's coordinated reaction to fires.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The approach taken by the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats of rejecting various proposals in this report in order to get its alternative proposal accepted, which we reject, is regrettable. Despite various inadequacies, we agree with many aspects contained in the tabled report, in particular that agriculture is the best means of preventing soil deterioration and requires a reasoned strategy to maintain this activity. We also regard as vital the contribution made by the agricultural population to combating desertification and the pivotal role played by producers in preserving plant cover in regions affected by persistent drought. We also agree with the statement on the negative contribution of intensive agriculture, promoted to a large extent by agro-industry, to soil erosion, rendering it non-productive.

However, we believe that the report should have gone further in attributing responsibility to the EU's agricultural policies and governments, such as those in Portugal, because it is these policies that have encouraged over-exploitation of soil and water and caused environmental damage. We still believe that these problems can be overcome by breaking with these agricultural policies. We support the coupling of agricultural aid to production, allowing the agri-foodstuffs production of countries such as Portugal to grow and, in general, allowing its primary sector to modernise.

Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV) This report, which does not form part of any legislative process, recommends, among other things, an EU forestry policy, a specific EU fund to finance preventive actions in connection with climate change and an EU-funded observatory for drought and the like.

We believe that the environmental responsibility for agricultural land must rest, first and foremost, with the Member States. There is no reason to declare the Member States to be incapacitated in this way in this area.

As usual, the June List observes that, in this situation, it is fortunate that the European Parliament does not have powers of codecision in respect of the EU's agricultural policy. Otherwise, the EU would fall into the trap of protectionism and of increasing subsidies to various special interests within agriculture.

I have voted against this report.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) Climate change is accelerating the processes of soil deterioration and desertification, especially in the Member States in south-east Europe, including Romania. This is the reason why these phenomena must be dealt with in a coordinated manner, through consistently reviewing agricultural policies and exchanging experiences and good practice between Member States, under the coordination of the European Commission.

I firmly believe that there are numerous examples showing effective management of soil and water and the use of resistant crops which can regenerate the soil. There are specialist research institutes in this field, including one actually located in the county which I represent in Romania, Dolj. Sharing these experiences and extending their application to the areas affected by desertification can result in damaged lands being restored to agricultural use and, consequently, in stimulating production. The pilot project proposed for the 2009 Community budget is, in fact, an opportunity to do this. I support the rapporteur's proposal to set up a European Centre for Drought Monitoring.

I call on the European Commission to deal with this issue with the utmost responsibility as part of the CAP reform and to provide Member States with an effective set of financial instruments which support the fight against desertification in order to ensure sustainable agriculture and food security for Europe's citizens.

Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I welcome the report from our fellow Member, dealing with a subject which is extremely important from a social and economic perspective. Soil deterioration not only affects the lives of people living in the relevant regions, but also the potential for economic development. In Romania we have seen in recent years the damage which can be caused by this phenomenon: ruined houses and people left without the basic necessities to ensure their subsistence, a fall in agricultural production of up to 30-40% and a southern region at risk of desertification.

The economic impact of this phenomenon is indisputable: a fall in the incomes of citizens who live in the affected regions, along with a rise in food prices. This is the reason why the European Union has the obligation, based on the principle of solidarity, to contribute to the fight against this phenomenon and to supporting those affected by it. As I also suggested in written declaration 0021/2009, which I tabled with colleagues of mine, the EU needs a special financial mechanism to prevent and combat the effects of climate change. This

must be a flexible financial mechanism to help release funds in the shortest time possible, supported by a medium- and long-term strategy and action plans which take account of the varied impact of climate change on the EU's regions.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, I welcome Mr Aita's report on the challenge of deterioration of agricultural land in the EU and the response through EU agricultural policy instruments.

Indeed, I approve of the report's aim, which is to set out pointers, ideas and practical proposals for consideration in due course with a view to formulating a common strategy for the recovery, conservation and improvement of agricultural soils. Given the current crisis, it should be pointed out that soil protection is a means of safeguarding our production potential, which is of political and strategic importance, of maintaining an import-export balance and of ensuring a degree of autonomy and negotiating leeway in multilateral forums.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0110/2009)

Glyn Ford (PSE), *in writing*. – It is important in this time of financial and economic crisis that we maintain and strengthen workers' rights to ensure that the costs of the crisis do not fall on those least able to bear it. It would be all too easy for this to happen unless we ensure that the balance of forces is not allowed to shift to favour employers over employees. I therefore support this resolution. I only wish it were stronger.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, I voted in favour of the motion for a resolution on employees' participation in companies with a European statute. We also need to facilitate constructive dialogue between institutions and employees in light of the recent rulings of the European Court of Justice. Furthermore, I agree with the point expressing the need for the Commission to assess crossborder problems with regard to corporate governance, tax law and employees' financial participation in shareholding programmes related to this consultation.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0112/2009)

Nicodim Bulzesc (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of this motion for a resolution because I support this initiative which calls on Member States to devise cooperation mechanisms aimed at preventing the detrimental effects on families, especially children, of living apart from their parents and of the distances between them.

Bruno Gollnisch (NI), *in writing*. – (FR) This text on migrant children left behind in the country of origin describes a poignant situation of children left to their own devices or with more or less well-intentioned third parties, threatened with ill-treatment or subject to psychological problems or problems with their education, socialisation and so on.

This proves that immigration is a human drama which creates inhuman situations.

Everything must be done to put this right, to promote the unity of families in familiar cultural and social environments.

In a word, and this is the only solution, everything must be done to reverse the immigration flows, to dissuade those who are tempted to leave their country, to promote development and ensure that families are reunited only in the countries of origin.

This is how you should use the resources that you have dedicated to 'importing' or acclimatising to Europe the people who are attracted by the mirages that you maintain.

Carl Lang and Fernand Le Rachinel (NI), *in writing*. – (FR) It is a known fact that Europe wants to take care of everything and be everywhere. With this resolution on migrant children left behind in the country of origin, the European Parliament has reached the height of madness with proposals which are not only demagogic, but also aim at turning the Member States into the guilty parties.

We are told that the Union has paid insufficient attention to the phenomenon of children left behind in their countries when their parents migrate. The Member States should implement measures aimed at improving the situation of these children left behind and guarantee them normal development, in terms of their education and social life. It is like being in a dream! After the measures encouraging the reuniting of families in the receiving countries and right of abode for the families themselves, now it is time for measures for the children who do not migrate.

The problem of immigration will not be solved like this. The logic is wrong. It is not the children who stay behind who should be helped; it is the families and the entire populations from these countries who should be helped and encouraged to stay at home.

Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV) As the barriers across borders within the EU disappear, the opportunities to seek work in an EU Member State other than one's own increase. This is a very positive development, which gives people the chance to do something themselves to improve their own lives and those of their families.

The rapporteur admits this, but nevertheless chooses stubbornly to concentrate on the negative aspects that the absence of a parent seeking an income abroad can entail.

I feel that it is unreasonable for the European Parliament to direct the individual Member States' social and education policy in the intrusive way proposed. We need to show our respect for, and trust in, the Member States and their democratically elected assemblies to look after their people and their people's welfare by themselves.

I have therefore voted against this resolution.

Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of this European Parliament resolution to improve the situation of children left behind in the country of origin by their parents who have gone to work abroad.

However, I would like to emphasise that it is not enough to make a commitment in this respect. We need concrete measures to ensure these children's normal development in terms of health, education and social life, and guarantee their successful integration into society and, later on, into the labour market.

For example, national authorities must develop a series of educational programs specifically to deal with this problem. Not only children should benefit from programmes of this type, but their migrant parents too. The latter must also be involved in information and empowerment programmes which tell them about the adverse effects that going to work abroad has on family life, especially on their children.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) Mr President, following Mr Andersson's oral question, I will vote in favour of the motion for a resolution on migrant children. Indeed, labour migration has steadily increased over the past decades, and most of the world's migrants – 64 million – reside in Europe. Furthermore, I believe that migration can have a positive impact on households in the sending country, because through remittances and other channels it reduces poverty and increases investment in human capital. I therefore agree that we must ask Member States to take steps to improve the situation of the children left by their parents in the country of origin and ensure their normal development in terms of education and social life.

Flaviu Călin Rus (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of the motion for a European Parliament resolution on migrant children left behind in the country of origin as I feel that the situation of these children must be significantly improved. Every child has the right to a complete family and an education so that they can develop harmoniously. I feel that we must support these children as they represent the future of Europe and the European Union.

Catherine Stihler (PSE), in writing. – We have to do all we can to help children of immigrants fulfil their potential and flourish in their new environment.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0104/2009)

Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV) The June List is very positively disposed towards future enlargements of the European Union. However, it is of the utmost importance that the candidate countries *de facto* meet the requirements laid down and are thereby fully democratic states governed by the rule of law on accession. The Copenhagen criteria must be met, the legislation that we agree on must not only be introduced but also upheld in practice and legal certainty must be guaranteed.

The three countries that we have discussed today certainly have the potential to be Member States in the future, but it is important that we do not ease up on the requirements. Experience shows that progress is most rapid before membership negotiations are initiated and goes more slowly during the negotiations, particularly if these negotiations are perceived to be heading towards a successful outcome.

Zita Pleštinšká (PPE-DE), in writing. – (SK) I voted for the resolution on the Croatia progress report for 2008 and I am delighted that this resolution has been adopted in the EP by a large majority.

The resolution praises the fine results achieved by Croatia in 2008 in passing laws and carrying out the reforms necessary for obtaining EU membership. These results must be constantly reinforced through the adoption and implementation of reforms.

I believe that the border dispute between Slovenia and Croatia will be successfully resolved thanks to the personal involvement of Commissioner Rehn, to the satisfaction of both sides, so that rapid progress can be made in the negotiation procedure for accession. Of course, for a successful result it is necessary to have a consensus and in particular the good will of the Governments of Slovenia and Croatia to find a satisfying and sustainable solution.

And we must not consider only Croatia in this resolution. We must not forget the pioneering role of Slovenia which to a significant extent started the pro-European process in the Balkans. Slovenia was the first Balkan country to join the EU and the Schengen area, it has become a member of the Eurozone and it is an example and an inspiration to other Balkan countries.

I believe that the accession talks with Croatia will be completed by the end of 2009.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) Mr President, I do not agree with the motion for a resolution on the progress made by Croatia, and have therefore voted against it. As I have said many times before this House, I do not believe that Croatia has made sufficient progress. Let them give back what they stole from our Istrian and Dalmatian refugees from 1947 onwards. Then, and only then, will we be able to discuss Croatia's accession to the European Union. The dispute over the property of those expelled from Istria, Rijeka and Dalmatia, if not definitively settled, will in fact make dialogue between the two peoples impossible.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PL) I value all efforts, including action taken by both Croatia itself and by the European Union, to strengthen existing relations between the two partners. I would encourage further cooperation and the joint resolution of existing problems, particularly in view of the fact that the Croatian Government wants to address both the internal and bilateral problems it currently faces. In the spirit of European solidarity, without any differences or barriers, we should assist them in this endeavour.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0105/2009)

Edite Estrela (PSE), in writing. – (PT) I voted in favour of the motion for a European Parliament resolution on Turkey's progress report 2008. Given the slowdown in Turkey's reform process, the Turkish Government must prove its political will to continue the reform process to which it committed itself in 2005, towards a more democratic and pluralistic society.

Jens Holm and Eva-Britt Svensson (GUE/NGL), in writing. – We favour the accession of Turkey to the European Union given that the country fulfils the Copenhagen criteria and that accession is supported by the Turkish population. We regret, however, that we were not able to vote in favour of the progress report on Turkey voted today. The report unfortunately comprises both serious lacks and misdirected demands. For example, in paragraph 20 unreasonable demands are made of a democratic party. In paragraph 29, Turkey is encouraged to cooperate closely with the IMF, and in paragraph 31 the country is said to be obliged to conclude FTAs with third countries. The report does not make sufficient reference to breaches of human rights or to the critical situation of national minorities, in particular the Kurds. The Armenian genocide is not mentioned at all, which differentiates this report from earlier resolutions from Parliament.

Marine Le Pen (NI), in writing. – (FR) Once again, Parliament, completely hypocritically, has passed a resolution asking the Turkish Government to show its political will to pursue its reforms.

The truth is that you want, at any price, and against the wishes of the peoples of Europe, to continue the negotiations for Turkey's accession to the European Union, despite Turkey's continuing refusal to recognise Cyprus and despite the fact that the democratic reforms are at a standstill.

You should have offered Turkey a privileged partnership, but to do so you would have had to admit that Turkey is not a European state and, thus, has no place in the European Union.

It was high time to respect the opinion of the peoples of Europe, most of whom are strongly opposed to your fateful project and to give up the accession negotiations with Turkey once and for all.

I solemnly remind you that, at a time when the European nations are fighting fundamentalist networks and when, in France, our principle of secularism is challenged by the rise of militant Islamism on our soil, it is particularly dangerous to continue accession negotiations with a nation which is, without doubt, respectable but whose government defends a radical Islam.

Fernand Le Rachinel (NI), *in writing*. – (FR) Like the previous reports on Turkey, the one by Mrs Oomen-Ruijten does not question the Euro-Brussels dogma that ‘Turkey must accede to the European Union’. Thus Mr Sarkozy, once again betraying his election promises, opened two chapters of the accession negotiations while he was presiding over the European institutions.

However, our peoples reject the inclusion of this Asian country with a population that has become 99% Muslim since the Armenian genocide and the disappearance of the other Christian communities. This country is led by an Islamist party and its army is occupying the territory of the Republic of Cyprus, a member of the European Union. They also remember that, over the centuries, the Turks have been the main threat to Europe. It was only in the 19th century that the Greeks, Romanians, Bulgarians and Serbs cast off the Ottoman yoke.

The stubbornness of the Eurocrats in trying to give Turkey entry to Europe, as with their stubbornness in imposing the Treaty of Lisbon, shows the anti-democratic and anti-European nature of the Europe of Brussels. On 7 June, our peoples will have the chance to express their will to build a new Europe: a Europe of European nations, free and sovereign.

Kartika Tamara Liotard and Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (NL) Within this Parliament there are three points of view about the future accession of Turkey to the EU.

The first view, advocated by the former US president George W. Bush, is that accession is very desirable as Turkey can supply a lot of cheap labour and soldiers and is a loyal NATO member.

The second view is that the accession of Turkey will always be undesirable as the country is viewed as Asian, Islamic, too large and too dangerous.

We, and our group, have always supported a third view, which is that Turkey must be able to join the Union if desired. This is important for the many Europeans of Turkish origin.

Before we get to that stage, the country must become a complete democracy, without political prisoners, without a prohibited media and without proscribed political parties. The Kurdish language must be given equal rights in administration, education and the media, the high election threshold for the parliament of 10% must be abolished and the Kurdish south-east must be given autonomy in a decentralised state. The genocide of the Armenians in 1915 must no longer be denied, no more than the Germans can acceptably deny the genocide of the Jews between 1938 and 1945. Mrs Oomen-Ruijten's report is much too weak in this regard. For that reason, we are sad to say that we feel we must vote ‘no’.

Jules Maaten (ALDE), *in writing*. – (NL) Paragraph 45 of Mrs Oomen-Ruijten's report contends that the EU's accession negotiations with Turkey should be expanded. The Dutch People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) has major objections to this. In the VVD's view, Turkey has made too little progress in recent years and there is therefore no reason to speed up negotiations.

The VVD believes, in fact, that Turkey must first adhere to a number of firm commitments. If Turkey has not complied with these by the end of this year, the VVD is of the opinion that the accession negotiations must be put on hold. It is our belief that this is not the time to be sending Turkey positive signals. Instead, it is time for Turkey to send positive signals to the EU.

Despite our major opposition to paragraph 45, the VVD delegation has decided to vote ‘yes’ on the report as a whole, given that we do agree with the rest of the text.

Yiannakis Matsis (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (EL) I voted in favour of Mrs Oomen-Ruijten's report as a whole. However, I would like to expressly state that I disagree with and I am not bound by and therefore voted against Amendment 9 to paragraph 40 of the text, which was tabled initially by the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance and supplemented by the rapporteur. The amendment is worded as follows: ‘except for temporary transitional derogations’ (referring to temporary transitional derogations from the four fundamental freedoms of the EU) and is attached to the final text. In explaining my vote, I would clarify that it is in no way binding on me and, as such, I do not endorse the amendment in question, because I consider that it is disrupting to the process of finding a democratic and European solution to the Cyprus problem.

Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I have supported this report, which describes in detail Turkey's relations with the EU and the process required to obtain membership status.

Both I and those I represent strongly support Turkey's candidature for the EU and not only because of the good relations between our countries. We sincerely believe that the EU has a tremendous potential to effect change. As citizens from East European Member States can confirm, acquiring a definite European perspective triggers a radical change in both internal public debate and in a country's foreign policy options.

I strongly believe that once Turkey's membership status becomes a question of 'when' rather than 'if', it may be easier to resolve the tensions which are fuelling the current social polarisation. This is precisely why the EU must give Turkey a clear signal regarding the completion of its accession procedure within a reasonable timeframe, which will provide the fillip required for the reform process and for cooperation on matters of common interest.

On the other hand, this reality does not alter the fact that, until then, the EU expects the Turkish authorities to assume continuously and without hesitation the role of partner and future EU member, including in its relations with relevant players in the Middle East and Eurasia.

Rovana Plumb (PSE), in writing. – (RO) As a social democrat, I voted in favour of this report in order to support Turkey in the accession process. I urge the EU Commission and Council to accelerate the negotiation process, which includes opening an Energy chapter, especially in the current climate of the economic crisis and bearing in mind the important role which Turkey can play through its contribution to Europe's energy security.

I also welcome the adoption in May 2008 by the Turkish parliament of the package of employment measures intended to promote employment opportunities for women, young people and the disabled. However, I would like to express concern about the unfavourable state of the labour market, which offers jobs to only 43% of the working population and, especially, about the fall in the general employment rate among women.

I support the requests made to the Turkish Government to continue to implement tangible measures aimed at consolidating the role of women in the political, economic and financial sectors, for example, through using temporary measures to ensure their active involvement in politics.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) Mr President, I have voted against the 2008 progress report on Turkey. The fact is that there are too many unresolved issues for us to claim that significant progress has been made on the accession negotiations, which began almost four years ago. I refer to the situation of the Kurdish population, to capital punishment, which is still in force in Turkey, and to the cultural and religious issues that need to be addressed. Under no circumstances can these be dealt with superficially or lightly.

Renate Sommer (PPE-DE), in writing. – (DE) I welcome the clear majority in favour of the resolution on Turkey. We need to make it clear to the Turkish Government that the standstill in the reform process that has lasted for years has consequences.

Freedom of expression and freedom of the press, in particular, have suffered severe setbacks. This is especially evident in the current behaviour of the Turkish Government towards the Doğan Media Group. The ruinous fines being demanded on account of alleged tax evasion are disproportionate and are tantamount to censorship of the media.

No progress has been made with regard to religious freedom, despite the new Law on Foundations. Religious minorities continue to be discriminated against and harassed. I am pleased that my proposal to call on Turkey to retract its plans for the expropriation of the Monastery of St. Gabriel in Tur Abdin has been included in the motion for a resolution.

We are also demanding that Turkey complies with the EU's ecological and environmental standards and respects the rights of the people affected in connection with the dams in the South-East Anatolia Project.

Rather than being on its way to meeting the Copenhagen criteria, Turkey is moving ever further away from our fundamental values. Does the Turkish Government really want to set the Republic on a new democratic foundation? The court procedure against the AK Party and the mysterious Ergenekon proceedings present a picture of a deeply divided society that is neither willing nor able to meet the challenges presented by the European Union. It is therefore time we finally started talking specifically about a privileged partnership between the EU and Turkey.

Geoffrey Van Orden (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – While I support the main thrust of this report, I oppose the lack of balance on the particular question of Cyprus. I strongly oppose Amendments 14 and 15, which are directed exclusively against Turkey on several questions, including the fulfilment of international obligations, and make no equivalent calls for action or engagement on the part of the Greek or Greek Cypriot authorities. During the Committee stage, my amendment rejecting the idea that resolution of the Cyprus question is to be achieved through unilateral action by Turkey was not accepted. I called on the Council – as a preliminary step – to give practical effect to its commitment of 26 April 2004 to end the isolation of the Turkish Cypriot community. Nevertheless, without abandoning my reservations, I voted in favour of the report.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0106/2009)

Athanasios Pafilis (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (EL) The Greek Communist Party voted against the motion for a resolution on the FYROM. It has repeatedly voted against the integration of the FYROM and other countries into the EU for the same reasons that it is opposed to the integration of Greece.

The motion for a resolution calls for the integration of the FYROM into the EU to be speeded up so that it can be turned from a US/NATO protectorate into a Euro/US/NATO protectorate and quickly annexed to the EU. The New Democracy, PASOK, SYRIZA and LAOS parties agree with this general line, focusing their 'differences' on the question of the name of the FYROM, and have voted on this count against the report, which really is negative as far as the Greek positions are concerned, as it calls on them not to obstruct the integration of the FYROM into the EU.

The Greek Communist Party has voted against all the relevant reports, because it considers that the question of the name comes under the more general imperialist interventions in the Balkans and infighting between the imperialist powers. That is why it has taken a stand on the inviolability of borders and the fact that there are no unredeemed or other claims. There is no Macedonian ethnic minority. The word Macedonia is a geographical term. The New Democracy, PASOK, SYRIZA and LAOS parties, subscribing to the philosophy of the European one-way street, are concealing from the peoples of the Balkans the political expediencies of the EU, which deals with minorities on the basis of its interests.

The Greek Communist Party supports the united, anti-imperialist fight of the peoples of the Balkans and opposition to the US/NATO/EU policy.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, I have voted against the motion for a resolution on the progress made by the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia in 2008. We have come to the point at which we must decide whether to create a large common market, for which we must of course establish clear rules, or whether we want to create a Europe that is an expression of a single strong and sovereign identity. For this reason, on the basis of the elements listed in the motion for a resolution, which I believe to be insufficient, I oppose the report.

- Report: Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck (A6-0112/2009)

Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (RO) I think that the EU institutions must continue to support the International Criminal Court in The Hague. This court has tried many war criminals but, at the same time, we must also bear in mind the broader significance of its decisions, such as its contribution to the process of reconciliation between the peoples of the Western Balkans.

I want to draw your attention to the fact that some of the indictments or verdicts issued by the ICC in The Hague have been regarded as controversial in different regions of the Western Balkans. Lessons can be drawn from these reactions, which form part of the ICC's legacy. These reactions highlight at the same time the need for an Appeals Chamber as well as an outreach programme.

Let us not forget, however, that many other war criminals have not yet been tried. The EU institutions must support the investigations conducted at national level in the Western Balkan states. The EU Council must set out clear norms for evaluating the performance of the judiciary in the countries in the region after the International Court's term comes to an end.

Those responsible must be duly tried and punished, individually, based on their actions.

Justice must be applied in the same way for everyone.

David Martin (PSE), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of this report which will ensure that all those who committed War Crimes in the former Yugoslavia will not escape justice. I support this report because it will

extend the temporary ICTY which prosecutes those who committed war crimes in the former Yugoslavia by two years, ensuring enough time for the completion of ongoing trials.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0113/2009)

Edite Estrela (PSE), in writing. – (PT) I voted in favour of the European Parliament resolution on water in the light of the Fifth World Water Forum as I believe that we urgently need to devise global policies on water supply and management in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). These provide for the halving by 2015 of the proportion of people without access to safe drinking water.

However, the global financial crisis means that the Member States need to step up their support for the least developed countries, through public development aid and cooperation in adapting to and mitigating the effects of climate change.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) Not even water can escape the privatising and liberalising zeal of the majority of the European Parliament. The resolution is right when it says, albeit in the conditional, that 'water is a shared resource of mankind and that access to water should constitute a fundamental and universal right' and that 'water is assumed as a public good and should be under public control'. However, what follows is serious and unacceptable. It declares that, while water may be under public control, its management can be handed over 'partly or totally' to the private sector. This means keeping under public control the role of investment in collection and supply infrastructures, while giving the private sector the profitable role, namely the charging of consumers. These experiments have already been conducted in several countries, particularly in Latin America, where prices have grown exponentially and quality has deteriorated.

We also do not agree with agriculture being held responsible, with agro-industry and small farmers being treated equally so that the latter suffer from high water prices. As the capitalist crisis grows, water seems to be a tempting asset which can generate the profit that capital so greatly needs. We continue to believe that water must be kept exclusively as a public good, in terms of both collection and supply.

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FI) Mr President, I voted in favour of Mr Berman's resolution for the Fifth World Water Forum. The World Water Forum meets every three years and takes place next week in Istanbul. It is an opportunity to discuss global policy solutions for managing water and water resources and preparing the groundwork for them.

Two years ago, I myself drafted a report on water management in the developing countries for the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly. As is evident from Mr Berman's resolution too, poor management is largely the reason why the world's water situation is bad. Support is needed, mainly to increase regional decision making and cooperation.

It is also obvious that the public sector cannot alone come up with the World Bank's estimated USD 49 billion a year (up until 2015) to develop water infrastructures. To address the problems of water supply, a solution could be found to establish the funds needed by means of a partnership agreement between the public and private sectors, especially as state-owned companies are suffering from a dearth of funds and there is no chance of privatisation.

Nor should the importance of research be underestimated in finding a solution to water problems. Adequate monitoring of, and investment in, subterranean water resources are also vital. Like energy, water is becoming more and more a political issue, and there is going to be a massive struggle to ensure access to it. There is an obvious need to make it a political priority before it is too late.

Kartika Tamara Liotard (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (NL) I voted against this resolution in the final vote. I did so not because the report, overall, is not good, but because one element in it was so important, in my view, that I just could not bring myself to vote 'yes'. Water is not a tradable commodity; it is a basic necessity of life, and something that everyone has a right to.

The use of water is not a choice for human beings, it is essential in order to stay alive and, for that reason alone, it is not appropriate to regard it as a commercial or economic commodity. The provision of water must be, and remain, in public hands. Past positions taken by the European Parliament have already made it clear that water is a right, and the wording of this report would weaken that stance.

Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV) Water is a prerequisite for all life on Earth. However, the responsibility for safeguarding access to this necessity does not rest on the EU's shoulders. It is through

international cooperation within the framework of UN cooperation that the countries of the world should seek solutions to the problem of how to improve access to water.

Since the rapporteur's proposal leads in a completely different direction, I have chosen to vote against the resolution.

Rovana Plumb (PSE), in writing. – (RO) Sustainable development cannot be imagined without the protection and proper management of the vital resource of WATER. I wholeheartedly back points 15 and 16 of the resolution aimed at supporting local public authorities in their efforts to implement a democratic water management policy that is efficient, transparent, regulated and respectful of sustainable development objectives in order to meet the needs of the population.

I would like to join with the requests submitted to the Commission and Council to recognise the fundamental role played by local authorities in the protection and management of water, in order to make them accountable with regard to managing the water sector. I regret the fact that the competences of local authorities are not utilised more by European cofinancing programmes.

In the case of Romania, which has been granted a transition period in this area until 2018, it is vital that investments are speeded up, especially now when poor populations are the most vulnerable to climate change, as well as the least able to adapt to it.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) Mr President, I have voted in favour of the motion for a resolution on the Fifth World Water Forum, to be held in Istanbul. I firmly believe that water is one of humanity's common resources and that it should be regarded as a fundamental and universal right. Furthermore, I would argue that water should be proclaimed public property and placed under public control, regardless of the fact that it is managed wholly or partly by the private sector. Lastly, I hope that systems of general water distribution subsidies, which undermine incentives for efficient water management by creating overuse, will be scrapped in order to free up funds for targeted subsidies in particular for poor and rural populations, aiming at affordable access for all.

Catherine Stihler (PSE), in writing. – Water is a precious resource, and access to clean drinking water across the world has to be a key priority. Too many people, in 2009, in the developing world have no access to clean drinking water. We have to focus our efforts in helping countries and communities in the poorest parts of the world have access to this resource.

Gary Titley (PSE), in writing. – History is littered with wars over access to land and oil, but I fear they will pale into insignificance when compared to likely future conflicts over access to water.

Water is the most vital of all resources: life is impossible without it. Yet even in developed countries we are seeing serious water shortages. The consequences for less developed countries are catastrophic.

The international community must take access to water much more seriously before it is too late. As we have seen in Copenhagen this week, climate change is accelerating at an alarming rate, which will further exacerbate water shortages. Access to clean water is a basic human right, so let us make it a major campaign.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0114/2009)

Proinsias De Rossa (PSE), in writing. – I support this Resolution which brings forward specific recommendations for the European Commission to strengthen its support for health services in sub-Saharan Africa and to review the balance of the European Community funding with a view to prioritising health system support.

Half the population of sub-Saharan Africa is still living in poverty. Indeed, Africa is the only continent that is not progressing towards the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially the three health-related MDGs – on infant mortality, maternal mortality and the fight against HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria – which are crucial to addressing poverty but at current progress are the least likely to be achieved by 2015. Basic healthcare infrastructure needs stable, long-term financial support if the health-related MDGs are to be delivered. Indeed, this must include access to sexual and reproductive health services.

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PL) I voted to adopt the Resolution on an approach to health services in sub-Saharan Africa. This part of Africa will not be able to develop without a real improvement in the health of its population. The list of threats to health in this region is exceptionally long and well known, and the fact that these threats are real is most emphatically confirmed by the estimated life expectancy of

the population. Often, the average life expectancy in individual countries is similar to that in medieval Europe. This fact is painful, regrettable and frustrating, but it should also motivate developed and wealthy countries to provide more intensive and more effective aid. It is a good thing to be involved in projects that aim to save lives. There is nothing more human and, at the same time, European. Let us save those whose lives are threatened. That is the least we can do.

Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), *in writing*. – (SV) The rapporteur's depiction of human suffering throughout sub-Saharan Africa is a terrible reminder of how important it is to continue, and to intensify, the fight against poverty.

The proposals presented by the rapporteur, however, are based entirely on the idea that the EU should play a leading role in the Member States' aid policy. We in the June List are opposed to this. The EU must not carry out aid operations, nor should it try to influence the Member States' activity in this area.

Aid is an area in which, unfortunately, our experiences are quite depressing. It is therefore important to be able to experiment with new forms of aid. Our own country, Sweden, is currently looking for new and interesting paths. At this historic time, to repeatedly take away the Member States' opportunities to think in new ways and to reform aid policy is utterly wrong. The responsibility for aid is, and should remain, a matter for the Member States.

International cooperation with a view to finding solutions for improving health care in sub-Saharan Africa should, first and foremost, be sought within the framework of the United Nations, not the EU.

I have therefore voted against this resolution.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, I have voted in favour of the motion for a resolution on EC Development Assistance to Health Services in Sub-Saharan Africa. EC aid to the health sector has not risen since 2000 in proportion to overall development assistance, despite the commitments made by the Commission on the Millennium Development Goals and the health crisis in sub-Saharan Africa. For this reason, I believe it is right and necessary to make a joint commitment in order to see better results on health and to meet the health development targets agreed at international level.

- Motion for a resolution (B6-0111/2009)

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, I have voted in favour of the motion for a resolution on implementation of the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA). I think it is extremely important to support the creation of the SEPA, which is subject to effective competition and where there is no distinction between cross-border and national payments in euro. Finally, I believe that the Commission, as stated in the proposal, should be called on to set a clear, appropriate and binding end-date, which date should not be later than 31 December 2012, for migrating to SEPA products, after which date all payments in euro would have to be made using the SEPA standards.

Peter Skinner (PSE), *in writing*. – The EPLP wishes to see the Single European Payment area a success. That is why we cannot support the amendments to this report which extend the life of the MIF (multilateral interchange fee). This fee is uncompetitive and raises costs for consumers. This would undermine the thrust of the report's objective of making sure the single market breaks down barriers and reduces costs. We could not support this resolution in the final vote because these amendments were accepted.

- Report: Maria Eleni Koppa (A6-0062/2009)

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, I voted in favour. I support Mrs Koppa's report on the importance of the EU-Brazil Strategic Partnership, since the partners share the same world view on the basis of their historical, cultural and economic ties. Together they can encourage change and solutions at global level, for example by working closely to promote and implement the Development Goals in order to tackle poverty and economic and social inequalities at global level, by strengthening cooperation in the area of development aid, including triangular cooperation, and at the same time by working together to combat international terrorism, drug trafficking and crime.

Taking into account the central role played by Brazil in Latin American integration processes and the EU's interest in reinforcing dialogue with that region, and that the EU welcomes the initiatives taken by Brazil to promote political and economic integration between Latin American countries, we agree that Brazil deserves recognition as a main promoter of the recently established Union of South American Nations (UNASUR).

We must also acknowledge Brazil's role as mediator in the resolution of regional conflicts in Latin America and the Caribbean, on the basis of respect for the principles of national sovereignty, non-interference and neutrality, with a positive effect on political stability in the region.

Vasco Graça Moura (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) I voted in favour of this report. Brazil was the last BRIC country to engage in a summit with the EU, which took place in July 2007 during the Portuguese Presidency. It was therefore a natural reflection of the relations that Portugal has always maintained with Brazil. As was said in this House in September 2007, Brazil is a country whose 200 million inhabitants speak one of the most common European languages in the world, Portuguese, and whose historical, civilising and cultural traditions have a close relationship with European traditions. This is proven by the various political agreements throughout history to the present day. This relationship will help to build other bridges with Latin America.

Given Brazil's recognised potential and its current economic and political performance at regional and global level, this Strategic Partnership must not be regarded as a future hindrance to other partnerships with Mercosur. It should in fact be acclaimed as an example, in which the EU has obtained the necessary consensus on the common commercial and political interests. It should be noted that both sides regard multilateral action as essential, based on the United Nations system and within the framework of the World Trade Organization.

Finally, I must say that I am somewhat curious about the future scope to be given to the cooperation protocols on education and culture.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) Mr President, I have voted in favour of Mrs Koppa's report on the European Union-Brazil Strategic Partnership. The role of the partnership is of prime importance; it should provide fresh impetus for the conclusion of the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement, which is itself an EU strategic objective for deepening economic and trade relations, as well as expanding political dialogue and cooperation, between the two regions. In addition, the strategic partnership should be a tool to promote democracy and human rights, the rule of law and good governance at global level.

Flaviu Călin Rus (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I voted for the proposal for a European Parliament recommendation to the Council on the European Union-Brazil Strategic Partnership because I feel that this is beneficial to both sides and can contribute to the development of ties between these two entities with the aim of promoting the common good in both areas and throughout the whole world.

- Report: José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra (A6-0028/2009)

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing. – (IT) Mr President, I voted in favour. Given the fact that Mexico and the EU have maintained cooperation relations since the 1970s, I share the hope that this strategic partnership will represent a tool with which to strengthen cooperation between the partners in international forums such as the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, the OECD and the G20, the G8 and the G5, in order to seek solutions to the world financial crisis and to formulate a common response aimed at restoring confidence in financial institutions, in line with the San Salvador Declaration.

Mexico's geographical location gives it a strategic position as a 'bridge' between North and South America and between the Caribbean and the Pacific. It is hoped that this strategic partnership can institutionalise annual EU-Mexico summits and give fresh impetus to the EU-Mexico Global Agreement in various political spheres including human rights, security, anti-drug trafficking, the environment and technical and cultural cooperation.

In light of the Council resolution of 11 October 2007 on the murder of women (femicide) in Mexico and Central America and the role of the European Union in fighting this phenomenon, we hope for more dialogue, more cooperation and the exchange of best practices.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) Mr President, I welcome the report by Mr Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra on an EU-Mexico Strategic Partnership. It is indeed crucial that this strategic partnership should mark a qualitative leap in EU-Mexico relations both multilaterally in terms of issues of world importance and in strengthening the development of bilateral relations.

For this reason I have every confidence that this agreement will lead to closer coordination of positions on crisis situations and issues of world importance, on the basis of shared interests and concerns. Lastly, I hope that it will be seen as an opportunity to debate how better to implement the clause on human rights and

democracy, which are essential values in all the agreements and for both parties, and to evaluate compliance with it, including development of its positive dimension.

Catherine Stihler (PSE), *in writing*. – The EU needs to take a greater interest in the increasing violence in Mexico created by drug wars. The doubling in murders related to drug violence is a worrying situation.

- Motion for a resolution (RC-B6-0135/2009)

Carl Lang (NI), *in writing*. – (FR) The worthy sentiments propounded by the different political groups, with the notable exception of the Communists (and with just cause), is merely an echo of the political correctness spouted by the hippies of international show business. The cause of Tibet, the real liberation struggle, has been throttled by the stranglehold of trendy Europeans short on spirituality. It is a prime example of what not to do in internal and international policy.

The Members wish to condemn with the utmost politeness the exactions of the Chinese Communists whilst declaring themselves in favour of autonomy for a region which is not the historic Tibet. The idea of autonomy for Tibet, the 'Save Tibet' path, is just waving a leash in front of an impotent elite and a people which has been slaughtered, both spiritually and physically.

Tibet, like other oppressed nations, shows what happens when a Communist dictatorship is installed and the weapon of invasive immigration is used to prevent any going back, be it on a political, ethnic, cultural or spiritual level.

Tibet has without a doubt missed its chance of regaining its sovereignty by not keeping up the armed struggle following the exile of its leader. The road to follow now is one of a fight for independence, for 'Free Tibet', and not one of slavery perpetuated under the guise of a paper 'autonomy'.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, I wholeheartedly support the motion for a resolution on the 50th anniversary of the Tibetan uprising and dialogue between the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Government. The abuse of power, wherever it might take place, must be condemned. On the other hand, it has to be said that the Chinese Government has a moral obligation, among others, to release immediately and unconditionally all those detained solely for engaging in peaceful protest and to account for all those who have been killed or have gone missing, and all those detained, indicating the nature of the charges against them.

11. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

(The sitting was suspended at 1.20 p.m. and resumed at 3 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MRS KRATSA-TSAGAROPOULOU

Vice-President

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

President. – The Minutes for yesterday have been distributed.

Are there any comments?

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José Ribeiro e Castro (PPE-DE). – (FR) Madam President, I ask the Members to allow me to take up a few minutes of their time.

I would like to speak on the subject of China. There was a motion for a resolution for today on China, on the case of Mr Gao Zhisheng, a well-known lawyer who is under arrest. There are fears that he will be tortured; his family has just been allowed entry to the United States and there are fears for his life.

Unfortunately, though, as only three subjects may be dealt with, the motion relating to Mr Gao Zhisheng could not be included. We did intend to move it in the March II session. Now, we have been told that there

will be no urgent matters in March II because, according to the rules, when there are two plenary sessions in the same month, there can be no urgent matters in the second.

I question this interpretation. In fact, this interpretation refers to the double sessions in September and, prior to that, in October, during which the budget was discussed. The fact that there are two sessions in March is due to the elections; it is a totally exceptional case. This means that we can only deal with human rights issues at the end of April, which is too late.

I therefore ask the Presidency, first, to examine this question and, secondly, to express our immense concern about the case to the Chinese embassy – I can provide you with Mr Gao Zhisheng's case for this purpose – as nobody really knows his whereabouts and there are fears that he may be tortured and his life put in danger.

(The Minutes were approved)

13. Debates on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law(debate)

13.1. Guinea Bissau

President. – The next item is the debate on six motions for a resolution on the situation in Guinea Bissau.⁽²⁾

José Ribeiro e Castro, author. – (PT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, once again, sadly, we are discussing in this House the situation of Guinea-Bissau, which is a truly painful situation. It is a country that has known chronic instability for many years and that tried to take the road towards democracy at the beginning of the 1990s. Nothing went right, there was a coup d'état and a minor civil war, and it has since been in a situation of major political and military instability, tensions and deep rivalries. Recently there has also been a very worrying presence of drug trafficking interests, which have become increasingly evident to all observers.

We strongly condemn the recent attacks: the bomb attack that killed the Chief of Staff, General Tagme Na Waie, and also the particularly barbaric, if not savage, assassination of President Nino Vieira. Regardless of their past, we express our solidarity with their families and with the people of Guinea-Bissau and we regret and strongly condemn these attacks.

We want to see a return to normality. The lesson that I have learnt and that I wanted to stress in this resolution was that impunity is not an answer. In the past, with regard to the assassination of Ansumane Mané and General Veríssimo Seabra, how could we have closed our eyes to the fact that the perpetrators were not found and brought to justice? It is clear that this is not the answer. We must therefore impress upon the government of Guinea-Bissau that those responsible must be found. The guilty parties must be brought to justice and we have to provide all the assistance that is needed.

Finally, I also want to draw attention to our concern at the presence of drug trafficking throughout the region, the risk that this also poses to the European Union and its shocking presence, which is clearly evident, in Guinea-Bissau. I also want to call for a closer relationship in this context with Cape Verde. We have established a special partnership with Cape Verde, which has very close relations with and extensive knowledge of Guinea-Bissau, but which is also very vulnerable. This is therefore also essential for our own European security. As a result, the intensification of this special partnership with Cape Verde is also very important in this context.

Justas Vincas Paleckis, author. – (LT) The killings in Guinea Bissau are a major blow not just to democracy in a state impoverished by drug trafficking, but to the whole West African region. The assassination of the President and the army chief of staff pushed the country ever deeper into a quagmire of failing institutions, increasingly fragile democracy, growing corruption and personality cults. The state's inhabitants live in chaos and there is a shortage of water, medicine and schools. Drug trafficking knows no limits or borders and is becoming a threat to the entire region, even reaching European Union states.

Although until now the commanders of the armed forces have kept their promise not to interfere in the country's internal affairs, recent events may completely overwhelm what remains of democracy in Guinea

⁽²⁾ See Minutes.

Bissau. The new government must respect the constitutional order, deal with conflicts peacefully and thoroughly investigate the murders. With the assistance of the European Union's Security and Defence mission, we must reach a turning point in the country's development, offering stability and a decent life. We must hope that presidential elections will take place in a few months and that they will comply with international standards for organising elections. We call on European Union states and the entire international community to give Guinea-Bissau the financial and expert assistance required to organise democratic elections. Guinea-Bissau's opposing political forces should seek common ground and compromises at this difficult time for the state and urgently adopt decisions on the country's security, election procedures and public administration. We call on them to fight corruption more effectively and to consult with civil society and other organisations on internal reconciliation in the state.

Ewa Tomaszewska, author. – (PL) Madam President, on 2 March of this year, the President of Guinea-Bissau, João Bernardo Vieira, was shot dead in an attack carried out by soldiers loyal to the army's Chief of Staff. The previous day, General Batista Tagme Na Waie, the army's Chief of Staff, died after being injured in an explosion. Both deaths are linked to the political conflict in Guinea-Bissau, which has been going on for many years and has led to tragedy and a lack of stability in the country. Although the elections held in 2008 were peaceful, an initial assassination attempt took place shortly afterwards. The President survived that attack. Guinea-Bissau, a former Portuguese colony, is one of the poorest countries in the world. At the same time, a cocaine-smuggling route passes through the country.

We condemn attempts to resolve conflicts by means of a *coup d'état*; we call for presidential elections to be held in Guinea-Bissau within two months; and we call for these elections to meet democratic standards and for constitutional order to be restored.

Ilda Figueiredo, author. – (PT) When the political situation in Guinea-Bissau is analysed, we should not forget that the people of this young African country were the victims of Portuguese colonialism, against which they in fact fought a very courageous struggle. With regard to what is happening there, which we regret, in particular the assassinations of the President and the Chief of Staff, we cannot forget that this is the result of all the difficulties and all the divisions that have existed for years, and that still exist, and that stem from its colonial past. We should also bear in mind that it is still one of the poorest countries in Africa, which means that the European Union must pay greater attention to cooperation in the areas of public health and education, in order to improve the living conditions of its population and overcome the difficulties that a large part of the Guinea-Bissau population still has to face, particularly women, mothers and children.

It is vital that the European Union reinforces its sympathetic support of these people. We also need to support education, the safe supply of drinking water and, in some cases, even agricultural production to ensure that the whole population has access to food. However, this support must be provided without external interference and with full respect for the sovereignty and choices of the people.

Marios Matsakis, author. – Madam President, this poverty-stricken ex-colony has suffered decades of political instability and crisis, resulting in profound and prolonged suffering for its citizens.

Its transition to democratic rule and better times for its people appeared a promising prospect after the 2008 legislative elections were carried out in an apparently fair and peaceful manner. However, the dark clouds of divisive hate and violence appeared again over the country after the shooting of President Vieira by renegade soldiers on 2 March, the day after the killing of the chief of the army. We condemn both those murders, and we can only hope that the rival parties in Guinea-Bissau will find the necessary will and power to resolve their disputes through dialogue at the negotiating table for the sake of their citizens' well-being. In addition, as Guinea-Bissau has in recent years evolved into an important drug-trafficking country, we urge not only the country's authorities but also the international community to do their utmost in fighting effectively this deadly curse.

Marie Anne Isler Béguin, author. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance strongly condemns the assassination of the President of Guinea-Bissau, João Bernardo Vieira, and the head of the armed forces, General Tagme Na Waie, on 1 and 2 March 2009.

We demand that a full investigation be carried out and that the perpetrators be prosecuted, and similarly for the killers of Generals Mané and Correia, killed in 2000 and 2004, who remain unidentified to this day.

As one of the poorest of the poor and noted for its low life expectancy, Guinea-Bissau is today faced with drug trafficking. As a bridgehead for the South American drug smugglers, Guinea-Bissau has become a country of transit for drugs which are destined for Europe, where we represent the biggest consumer. We

also know only too well that this is affecting the entire sub-region as, in Mauritania, for example, large quantities of drugs have been discovered, even at the airport.

The European Union must help this country to turn its back on this trade by fighting it both here and there and by a return to development based on that country's own resources.

While the last elections were welcomed by the international community and the European Union has shown its support for the process of learning about and installing democracy in Guinea-Bissau, the events this country has just lived through can only reinforce this position of aid and assistance.

The army too, which did not intervene in the electoral process, must also continue with its strict observation of the constitutional order, as it has promised.

While the neighbouring West African countries have, after years of problems and chaos, rediscovered the road to democracy, respect for the institutions and human rights, Guinea-Bissau must not fall into the trap of reprehensible practices. The European Union must be present and use its influence and its example to help this country to stay on the road to democracy.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Madam President, in addition to what has already been said today on the situation in Guinea-Bissau, I would like to comment on two issues.

Firstly, the assassinations of the President of Guinea-Bissau, João Bernardo Vieira, and the chief of the armed forces, General Tagme Na Waie, should be thoroughly investigated and those responsible should be brought to justice.

Secondly, in our resolution today, we express our hope that the presidential elections in the country will be held within 60 days. We should today call upon EU Member States and the international community to make sure that Guinea-Bissau receives the financial and technical support which is needed to conduct credible elections.

Leopold Józef Rutowicz, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Madam President, it is very easy for destabilisation, which has tragic consequences, to occur in poor African countries, such as Guinea-Bissau. The assassinations of President João Bernardo Vieira and General Tagme Na Waie, the head of the armed forces, in March of this year, were certainly part of an attempt to destabilise the country, probably instigated by the drugs mafia. The lack of an effective security force in this country has meant that various kinds of homicide go virtually unpunished. We need to provide all the vital assistance that the government of this country needs, and this is an issue which the resolution addresses.

In addition to this, and in order to prevent these kinds of incidents, we need to declare a ruthless war on the drugs trade, which is a destabilising force in many poor countries in Africa, Asia and South America, supports terrorism and, through drug addiction, destroys the lives of hundreds of millions of people throughout the world. If we cannot overcome this problem, we will pay an increasingly high price for our helplessness.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, let me first of all, on behalf of the European Commission, say that we deeply regret the assassination of His Excellency the President of the Republic of Guinea-Bissau, João Bernardo Vieira. We condemn this assassination in the strongest possible terms and also the attacks that resulted in the deaths of the Chief of Staff of the armed forces, General Batista Tagme Na Waie and other soldiers. I would like also to send condolences to their families.

The presence of drug-dealers and so much crime are more than worrying today. Under the eighth EDF and other instruments, but in addition by contributing to EUR 2 million to the UN ODC, the Commission has signed up to a very ambitious plan in the counter narcotics field. We think this is really very important, as has been shown by what has happened.

We urgently call for calm and restraint, and urge the national authorities of Guinea-Bissau to fully investigate these events and bring to justice those responsible. There should be no impunity. Unfortunately, these violent acts follow the successful legislative elections, which paved the way for enhanced EU and international support for the country's peace-building efforts. These attacks also come at a time of increased international engagement, intended to build a democratic and a stable Guinea-Bissau.

Under these extremely difficult circumstances, the Commission remains fully committed to continuing its strong support to the national authorities, aiming to bring back stability but also to sustain development. I am thinking of education, the poorest of the poor, the necessity for basic needs and basic services, and also

of economic growth in the country. We are now starting to deploy the wide range of instruments at our disposal, thus aiming to help Guinea-Bissau achieve sustainable peace and, hopefully, consolidate its democratic process.

An ambitious country strategy paper for an amount of EUR 100 million, covering the period 2008-2013, was approved last year. This will focus on security sector reform – including the fight against drugs that I mentioned earlier – and the enhancement of the national sovereign institutions.

Last year the Council also decided to establish an EU mission supporting security sector reform in the framework of the European security and defence policy. The forthcoming presidential elections – now expected 60 days after the nomination of the new President – will probably take place even before the summer break. Taking into account this extremely tight schedule, the feasibility of the deployment of the electoral observation mission is being carefully considered by the Commission. Nevertheless, the provision of post-electoral assistance to support the required reforms to the electoral framework, following the recommendations formulated by the EU-UN 2008, and the support given to observation of the forthcoming elections by regional organisations remain, among other things, our key priorities.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place at the end of the debates.

13.2. Philippines

President. – The next item is the debate on six motions for a resolution on the situation in the Philippines.⁽³⁾

Bernd Posselt, author. – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, I have followed the situation in the Philippines ever since the unfortunate Marcos couple ruled that country. Since then, this great island republic has experienced a lot of ups and downs, the ups and downs of a dictatorship and of attempts to move towards freedom, of economic crises and of developments towards a market economy, which were then continually stifled in a quagmire of corruption, mismanagement and, unfortunately, constant authoritarian incursions.

If we look at the map we see that this island republic is of supreme strategic importance. Like Indonesia, it controls certain maritime routes that are central and vital to our economy, but also to that of Asia. Therefore, stability in the region matters a great deal, and that is why we need to make it clear to those in power that it is only through dialogue, only through the rule of law, only by strengthening democracy, infrastructure and small and medium-sized enterprises that this country will finally find long-term stability. Otherwise, it will continually be under the threat of collapse, and separatist movements, movements in individual island groups, religious and cultural movements that oppose each other will threaten the unity of the country. This is therefore an issue that is of central importance for the European Union.

Erik Meijer, author. – (NL) Madam President, many states in other parts of the world came into being as a result of European intervention. They are the successor states to the colonies of the European countries, areas that were conquered in centuries past in order to get hold of raw materials cheaply. The mining of metals and the harvesting of tropical plants were the most important objective while, in some cases, human beings, too, were traded as slaves. People with completely different languages and cultures thus found themselves living in one of these colonies and separated from those with whom they had much more in common linguistically and culturally.

The Philippines were seized from Spain in 1898 by the United States, which then proceeded to govern the islands as its own colony until 1946. As an independent state, the country has since developed a reputation for poor government. The question is whether this is a coincidence. States like this one are not a product of the will of the people. They were not formed from the bottom up. They were constructed from the top down and by outside influences.

States like this are not the best breeding ground for a democratic state under the rule of law and for the peaceful resolution of societal conflicts. They are often held together by force, and the army's power is great. There is often a lot of scope for foreign companies to get involved, which then maltreat and exploit the environment and their employees to ruination. They get the chance to behave badly by providing the rulers of these countries with privileges and wealth.

⁽³⁾ See Minutes.

Abuses of this nature bring into being counter-movements. If such movements are not regarded by the state as a legal opposition that can peacefully develop into a participant in government, the chances are that these movements will fall back on the use of force out of the need for self-preservation. The government will then respond with more state-sponsored violence, perhaps without even admitting that this violence is being perpetrated by the state.

Since 2001, hundreds of activists, trade unionists, journalists and religious leaders have been killed or abducted. Opposition members freed by court order are then locked up again by the state, regardless. Those guilty of murders and abductions are neither tracked down nor punished. Foreign attempts at mediation have been repudiated and eventually ended.

The resolution rightly calls for greater efforts in respect of mediation, compromises and peaceful solutions. Without the integration of opposition movements into the democratic state under the rule of law, the Philippines will remain a chaotic country where life is bad.

Marios Matsakis, *author*. – Madam President, the situation in Mindanao is grave, with hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons living in desperate conditions. The long-standing insurgency is a factor in this sorry state of affairs, but so is the not-so-democratic status of successive Filipino governments with the latter being widely held responsible by international agencies, such as the UN Human Rights Council, for showing remarkable impunity from extrajudicial killings and the forced disappearances of hundreds of Filipino citizens whose activities were thought to have been in disagreement with official government policy.

Such impunity must be terminated. In addition, the Government of the Philippines must urgently resume peace negotiations with the MILF and both sides must renounce violence and solve their differences at the negotiating table.

Leopold Józef Rutowicz, *author*. – (PL) Madam President, the Philippines are a country with a rich, albeit unfortunate, history. The country was conquered by the Spanish in 1521, after they had overcome the strong resistance of the local population by force. Following a rebellion against Spanish rule in 1916, the United States took control of the Philippines. The country gained full independence, following a period of temporary occupation by the Japanese, in 1946, and was ruled as a dictatorship for many years by President Marcos. In 1983, Benigno Aquino, the leader of the democratic opposition, was assassinated. In the Philippines, both the Moro Islamic Liberation Front and communist partisans are active. Abu Sayyaf hit squads want to separate the southern part of the islands from the rest of the Philippines. The country is plagued by corruption. People are dying in droves, the death penalty is widely applied and those whose existence is viewed as awkward by certain groups are being secretly murdered. Attempts to introduce and uphold human rights and democratic principles face serious obstacles in that country. The economic development of the Philippines and its membership of the Association of South-East Asian Nations are positive signs.

The resolution, which I support, is the European Union's contribution to taking specific measures to put an end to internal conflict in the Philippines, and to reintroduce the principles of the rule of law.

Raül Romeva i Rueda, *author*. – (ES) Madam President, the case of the Philippines indeed demonstrates that the peacemaking process sometimes requires us not to look in just one direction.

At the moment we are working on many fronts in the Philippines, and all of them need to be approached in a specific way in their context. It is therefore important to understand the multiplicity of responses. There is a humanitarian dimension in the Philippines case, but there is also a clearly political dimension, and they are both fundamental if we want to make progress in the frustrated peace talks. I say they are frustrated because what seemed to be a good way forward this summer was blocked by several incidents, and particularly because the Supreme Court considered that the memorandum of understanding was clearly unconstitutional.

This essentially brought the whole negotiation process to a halt, and it requires a response from the international community, I insist, at two levels.

The first is the humanitarian level. I think it is clear that the situation not just of the 300 000 displaced people but also, basically, of the now countless victims of disappearances, torture and even serial murders needs first to be investigated and then to receive a political response from the government, at the insistence of the international community.

Secondly, however, there is also a need for a political response. Norway has for some time been negotiating and establishing various frameworks to be able to reach agreements to resolve the situation. It is a kind of

parallel diplomacy or silent diplomacy; it is not the kind of diplomacy to which we are accustomed, in terms of high-level officials, but it is necessary.

It is sometimes absolutely essential that there are actors to perform the role that Norway is performing, and I believe the European Union should not only develop this kind of activity, but it should also, basically, support any initiative that might encourage dialogue and help resolve the differences between the various groups currently involved in disputes in the Philippines.

Ewa Tomaszewska, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Madam President, the conflict between the Government of the Philippines and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front from Mindanao has been going on for decades. It has been accompanied by terrorist attacks, carried out by the Abu Sayyaf organisation, as well as kidnappings and murders. In 2004, as many as 116 people died in an attack on a ferry in Manila Bay. According to the government in Manila, Abu Sayyaf is collaborating with al-Qaida. The kidnappings continue. Peace talks were suspended in August of last year. In the meantime, the separatist conflict has already claimed over 120 000 victims. Human rights are violated on a regular basis. We call on all parties to the conflict to begin negotiations aimed at achieving an agreement on economic, social and political matters. We support all action which intends to achieve a fair and lasting peace.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, the Philippines, as many honourable Members have just said, still faces very strong challenges: on the one hand, the question of minorities in Mindanao, and on the other hand, many extrajudicial killings. We are well aware of that.

However, the Philippines has made considerable progress in its international obligations to ensure and to protect human rights, ratifying 12 international human rights treaties and abolishing the death penalty, largely thanks to the advocacy role played by the European Parliament, the Commission and the Member States. So there is a mixed picture, but we have to see both the positive and the negative sides.

But the human rights situation remains very difficult and we use the opportunity of our regular, senior official meeting to raise these issues. Human rights warrant particular attention for our relationship with the Philippines, also in the run-up to the presidential elections in 2010, and we are already going in this direction.

I would, therefore, like to focus on the long-standing issue, as I have already said, of the extrajudicial killings. These assassinations of journalists of human rights and land rights activists have certainly decreased significantly in number in the past two years. But, from time to time, they have flared up and there has been a flare-up very recently. Most unsettling is that the majority of the perpetrators remain at large. It has become a very sensitive political issue and it has eroded confidence in the Government.

We are about to launch an 'EU-Philippines Justice Assistance Mission' under the Instrument for Stability. What we have in mind is capacity-building for the Philippine judicial authorities, including police and military personnel, to help them investigate cases of extrajudicial killings and to prosecute those guilty of murder.

We have also ongoing projects at local level to promote respect for human rights, funded by the EU Instrument for Democracy and Human Rights. These include monitoring the implementation of international commitments in the field of human rights, actions to support the ratification of the Rome Statute of the ICC and electorate education.

We are currently in the process of reviewing our cooperation with all our partner countries in the framework of the Mid-Term Review and there are good reasons to step up our efforts in the area of good governance, justice and the rule of law in the Philippines.

As far as the Peace Process in Mindanao is concerned, the Government appears ready to re-launch talks and we encourage an early resumption of negotiations between the parties and, of course, every discreet mediation that might be there. Meanwhile, the civilian population has once again borne the brunt of the long-lasting conflict, and ECHO has supplied significant assistance.

Finally, current priorities of our relationship with the Philippines include the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) negotiations, which started last month in Manila. In this framework too, we are looking for common ground on human rights.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place at the end of the debates.

13.3. Expulsions of NGOs from Darfur

President. – The next item is the debate on six motions for a resolution on expulsions of NGOs from Darfur. ⁽⁴⁾

Charles Tannock, author. – Madam President, it was entirely predictable that President Omar Al-Bashir of Sudan would respond to his indictment by the ICC with a political gesture, but by expelling NGOs and aid agencies from his country he has reinforced the popular image of a brutal tyrant, without any concern for the plight of the long-suffering people he nominally governs.

A few people still argue that what has happened in Darfur is not genocide. Fewer still support Bashir openly, although China – regrettably – has been a lone voice in his defence because of the heavy Chinese involvement in Sudan's extractive industries.

Like most Members, I welcome the indictment of President Bashir by the ICC and the issue of an international arrest warrant. It may not succeed, but it is an important gesture to show the world's disgust at the horrors he has perpetrated in Darfur without any remorse.

I also think that the indictment strengthens the reputation of the ICC, which hitherto has been shunned by some, including the great powers such as the USA, for fear of politically motivated prosecutions. Indeed it is fascinating that the United States, which is not a signatory to the Rome Statute, has nonetheless used its position on the UN Security Council to facilitate the ICC indictment of Bashir.

One possible way out of the impasse that now exists is for the Security Council to strike down the indictment, as it has a right to do under the Rome Statute, on condition that Bashir goes into exile and the killings and repression stop, and in partial recognition that Sudan was never a signatory to the Rome Statute.

While this might seem to some like an unjust response to the killings in Darfur and effectively grants some form of partial immunity, it would remove the main protagonist and spare the long-suffering people of Darfur more bloodshed and enable Sudan as a country to move on. Of course, if Bashir refuses, then he should be prosecuted with the full force of international law. The AU, Arab League and China should make this clear to President Bashir before it is too late for him and his brutal regime.

Catherine Stihler, author. – Madam President, the situation in Darfur is desperate. Can you imagine the human suffering behind the United Nations statistics? According to the UN, up to 4.7 million people – including 2.7 million internally displaced persons – are in need of assistance.

We cannot allow this situation to deteriorate even more, and I urge the Sudanese Government to step back from the decision to expel 13 leading non-governmental organisations from Darfur. The aid agencies in Darfur run the largest humanitarian operation in the world. Only today we have discovered, I believe, that three people who work for Médecins Sans Frontières are missing. The departure of the NGOs could lead to even more loss of life, due to the break in medical services and outbreaks of infectious diseases such as diarrhoea and respiratory infections. Children are greatly at risk.

The United Nations has said that kicking out the humanitarian groups puts more than one million lives at risk. I stress the overriding humanitarian need to allow the agencies to continue with their lifesaving work. As President Obama said, it is not acceptable to put that many people's lives at risk. We need to be able to get those humanitarian organisations back on the ground. I urge colleagues to support this resolution.

Erik Meijer, author. – (NL) Madam President, Sudan has been ruled for many years now by regimes founded on a combination of military force, Arab national pride and a conservative interpretation of Islam. The primary objective of these regimes was and is to hold together the territory of this enormous state, which is inhabited by a range of completely different peoples. These different peoples are made subject, by all possible means, to the authority of the capital, Khartoum.

That is why there has been conflict for many years against the separatist movement in the south of the country, the region that is predominantly non-Arab and non-Islamic. It is still very far from certain whether the south will be allowed the freedom to actually utilise the right to secession that has been agreed for 2011.

In the western region of Darfur, the government seeks to prevent such a secession by all means. In that region there has always been a conflict of interests between nomadic herdsmen and settled farmers. The government

⁽⁴⁾ See Minutes.

has now taken an interest in this conflict. Depopulating the region by chasing the settled inhabitants to neighbouring Chad is an important tool in keeping the area under control. In this dirty work, the government can do without foreign observers, aid workers and mediators.

Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs called for European military intervention a number of years ago. Comments like this are popular with certain sections of domestic public opinion and give the impression that a rich and powerful Europe is able to impose its solutions on the rest of the world. In practice, that is not a solution that can be implemented. What is more, there is little clarity about what the objective of such an intervention would be.

Would it be about temporary humanitarian aid or establishing an independent state of Darfur? Either way, it would be seen in Africa as a new showing of colonial strength from Europe, primarily out of European self-interest. A less spectacular, but probably more effective, strategy is the issuing of an international arrest warrant for President Al-Bashir and the detection of war crimes. From outside, you must always offer to contribute to humanitarian aid and bringing about peaceful solutions. The affected population groups, who have largely fled, deserve our support in their struggle to survive.

Marios Matsakis, *author*. – Madam President, this House is very concerned about the decision by the Sudanese Government to expel humanitarian organisations from Darfur, a move which could have catastrophic results for hundreds of thousands of innocent civilians. We understand that Commissioner Michel, the EU Presidency, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator, President Obama and many others have involved themselves in trying to affect a reversal of this decision.

Since this is a very sensitive matter requiring very delicate handling, we consider that, before any resolution is passed by this House, every possible chance of success must be given to these efforts. Therefore, we will vote against this resolution, not because we disagree with its contents but because we must wait to see the outcome of the aforementioned efforts. This we consider to be the most sensible and wise thing to do at this point in time and under the present circumstances.

Ewa Tomaszewska, *author*. – (PL) Madam President, as a result of brutal ethnic cleansing in Darfur, around 300 000 people have died and 2.5 million have become refugees. Humanitarian aid is needed by 4.7 million people. More than 10 000 have taken refuge in Chad, where the peace mission includes a contingent of the Polish Army. The population has been affected by one of the most serious humanitarian crises in the world. The representatives of human rights and humanitarian aid organisations, such as *Polska Akcja Humanitarna* or *Médecins Sans Frontières*, have been expelled from Darfur. The International Criminal Court in The Hague has accused the Sudanese President, Omar al-Bashir, who is responsible for this situation, of war crimes and crimes against humanity, and has issued a warrant for his arrest. The court accuses him of authorising genocide, murder and displacements, as well as tolerating torture and rape. I fully support the International Criminal Court's decision. We call for humanitarian organisations to be allowed to return to Darfur, so that they may bring aid to the population.

Raül Romeva i Rueda, *author*. – (ES) Madam President, I think this resolution has come at a crucial moment for two reasons. The first is that – as has already been said, and I join in the congratulations and celebrations – the indictment of President Bashir demonstrates the importance of putting an end to this situation, especially in Darfur, although it relates to the whole context of Sudan. It also shows that the international community can and must act when such situations reach the extremes that the Sudanese situation has reached.

Ideally, of course, President Bashir should be forced to resign and be handed directly to the International Criminal Court. That is unlikely to happen, but the response by the international community has to be clearly along those lines, and there can be no misgivings about that kind of procedure.

Secondly, the humanitarian situation also requires us to adopt a clear position regarding what we have just learnt today, that three people working for Médecins Sans Frontières have been kidnapped and at the moment we do not know where they are or what condition they are in, and that 13 NGOs that have recently been providing basic assistance and addressing essential needs, amongst other things, have been expelled.

Their expulsion reveals that the response being given by the government is precisely the opposite of the kind of response that is needed and desirable and that should be acceptable to the European Union and, above all, the international community.

Not only is it unacceptable, but it requires a response; a response has to be given to this situation. That is why I believe this resolution is fundamental, and it is absolutely crucial that we adopt it today by the largest

possible majority. I also urge my fellow Members to do so to ensure that we are not left behind in such matters.

Lastly, I want to make a very specific request to the United Nations Human Rights Office: it should start investigations to find out whether this expulsion of NGOs can be added to the long list of war crimes for which the Sudanese authorities must, of course, be held answerable.

Bernd Posselt, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, we find ourselves in a very complicated situation. What is going on in Sudan is neither so incomprehensible nor so surprising that we need to wait to see what happens. A war against the people of southern Sudan has been going on there for decades. This is a humanitarian disaster brought about by the genocidal policy of Mr al-Bashir. Millions of people have been displaced and are struggling to survive and they have been in this situation for months or years rather than for weeks. That is one side of the coin.

On the other side, it is true that we are involved in a situation in which we must not jeopardise the work of the humanitarian organisations. We must take their concerns and needs seriously. Which way should we go, then? We must be guided by the facts. The facts are that Mr al-Bashir is quite deliberately exerting this pressure on the humanitarian organisations. Anyone who has seen his demonstrative performance, his mocking dance in this action against the humanitarian organisations and in his demonstrations knows that he is quite intentionally being provocative.

We must not allow ourselves to be provoked. However, neither must we simply shut up, as many fellow Members would like. That would not impress the dictator either. I therefore suggest that we remove the three paragraphs 2, 5 and 6 from the resolution and adopt the remainder as proposed.

Józef Pinior, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (PL) Madam President, I have here a letter, written by 28 women from Darfur who managed to escape from the conflict zone, which is addressed to the African Union and the League of Arab States. The women of Darfur, in the letter dated 4 March 2009, express their support for the warrant issued by the International Criminal Court for the arrest of the Sudanese leader Omar al-Bashir. For the first time in the seven years that the Court has been in operation, a warrant has been issued for a sitting head of state. In their letter, the women of Darfur describe the horrifying scenes of violence and rape which are part of daily life in the province, where rape is intentionally used as a weapon, in order to cause women suffering and to stigmatise them, as well as to destroy unity and demoralise the whole of society.

Omar al-Bashir responded to the international arrest warrant by expelling 13 foreign charitable organisations from Sudan. This means that, in the coming weeks, over a million people living in refugee camps in Sudan will have no access to basic aid, such as clean water, food or medical care. The shortage of clean water, which will begin to be felt in the coming days, will promote the spread of communicable diseases, especially in western Darfur. Witnesses have reported cases of diarrhoea in the Zam-Zam camp and cases of meningitis in the Kalma camp. The first, and the main, victims of the decision taken by the Sudanese Government will be the children. Omar al-Bashir's decision to expel charitable organisations from Darfur will result in further crimes.

The European Parliament resolution calls on the UN and the International Criminal Court to investigate whether the Sudanese President's latest decision constitutes a war crime under international law. Omar al-Bashir's Government does not guarantee Sudanese citizens the right to protection, and must be held to account by the international community for violating this right.

Leopold Józef Rutowicz, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Madam President, one of the greatest human tragedies in the contemporary world is taking place in Darfur. The instigator is the Sudanese President Omar Hassan al-Bashir. Nearly five million people need urgent humanitarian aid. In the meantime, the Sudanese Government has decided to expel 13 of the leading non-governmental aid organisations from Darfur. The spread of disease which will occur once medical and food aid are cut off will, in the 21st century, result in genocide on a large scale. The resolution, which I support, does not go far enough, as in this case we should force the African Union and the UN to authorise a military intervention, in order to stop the genocide.

Urszula Krupa, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (PL) Madam President, the conflict in Sudan, which has racial, religious and economic roots, has been going on for over 50 years. It has already claimed over 3 million victims, and forced over 4.7 million people in the region to leave their homes. In spite of attempts to reach an agreement, and the UN peace missions, the conflict between the Arab and non-Arab inhabitants of Darfur has recently escalated.

The latest stage of the most serious humanitarian crisis in the world, which has once again come to the attention of the European Parliament, has involved the decision taken by the Sudanese Government, led by President al-Bashir, to expel 13 humanitarian organisations which are providing much-needed aid in the form of food, medication and medical care. The photographs and films emerging from Darfur, which have moved viewers around the world, cannot truly reflect the crisis facing people in this region, who are trying to emigrate to nearby Chad, as well as to other countries and continents, including Egypt, Israel, the United States, Canada and Europe.

However, it is not only the President of Sudan, who has been accused of war crimes, who is responsible for allowing human rights violations, involving mass rape, kidnappings, displacement, hunger, epidemics and torture, to take place. The blame also lies with the major world powers and their leaders, who are trying to lay the blame for supplying weapons or profiteering on each other. Even the intervention of the public prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, who wanted to indict the Sudanese President and issue a warrant for his arrest, is to be a celebration marking the 10th anniversary of the Criminal Court. According to some people, this could prove catastrophic for Darfur and put an end to the UN mission there.

This is not the first time that we have protested and expressed our outrage at the human rights violations taking place in that region. However, the previous, comprehensive European Parliament resolution, which called on international bodies to impose sanctions and block the economic activities stoking the flames of the conflict, produced no results. I am sure that, by fuelling the conflict, those responsible aim to unify the people of Darfur before the referendum on secession from Sudan, due to take place in 2011.

José Ribeiro e Castro (PPE-DE). – Madam President, the truth is that we knew the order to expel the NGOs was coming, and that is why I reaffirm that my preference is for a firm and clear line that is also pragmatic. It is very easy to play the hero in the coffee shop, miles and miles away.

Those of us who visited Darfur in July 2007 and went to al-Geneina and al-Fashir, to Nyala and Kapkabia and to many IDP camps around those cities, are fully aware of the suffering of the people of Darfur and the tremendous job that NGOs do there. It is therefore essential to protect the remaining NGOs and to work by all means for them to stay, and also to fully support those that will continue, including religious charities.

I also support the exerting of more pressure on China, which, on the one hand, does not apply the needed pressure on the Khartoum authorities and, on the other hand, delays or blocks more effective measures at UN level.

I also support Mr Tannock's idea that 'any way out is a good way out'. If President Al-Bashir goes away and his regime is put out of the way, that would be a tremendous relief and help for the people of Darfur and Sudan. That is not impunity – impunity is to continue as you are for many years.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (PSE). – (PL) Madam President, according to a variety of data, the war in Darfur has already claimed over 200 000 victims. It has frequently been called the greatest humanitarian crisis in history and has been compared to the genocide which took place in Rwanda in 1994. According to the UN, almost 5 million Sudanese people currently need urgent aid.

The International Criminal Court has issued a warrant for the arrest of the current President, Omar Hassan al-Bashir, for alleged war crimes and crimes against humanity. The Sudanese Government has responded by expelling 13 of the largest non-governmental organisations involved in the largest humanitarian aid effort in history. This decision may have catastrophic consequences for the people of Darfur, who will be left without access to much-needed medical aid. The uncontrolled spread of communicable diseases may lead to mass epidemics, contributing to an increase in the death rate, especially amongst children, who will be left without access to medical treatment or food aid and thereby lose all hope of survival in these exceptionally difficult conditions.

In view of the existing situation, we should unequivocally condemn the decision taken by the Sudanese Government to expel non-governmental organisations from the country, and call for this decision to be revoked. At the same time, we should call on the Commission and the Council to begin talks with the African Union, the League of Arab States and with China, with a view to convincing the Sudanese Government of the potentially catastrophic consequences of its actions. Moreover, we should strongly support the actions of the International Criminal Court and its indisputable contribution to promoting justice and humanitarian law at an international level, as well as its activities aimed at weeding out lawlessness.

In this respect, we should inform the Sudanese collaborating with President al-Bashir that a conviction for war crimes and crimes against humanity is now inevitable, and force the Sudanese Government itself to stop discriminating against human rights activists who supported the Court's decision to arrest President al-Bashir. This action should be taken as soon as possible, in order to prevent a further humanitarian crisis, which inevitably threatens Darfur.

Jürgen Schröder (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I personally was in Darfur and I was also in neighbouring Chad with Mr Ribeiro e Castro and I can therefore fully support what he has said.

It is a calamity, and this calamity is exacerbated by the fact that, due to the expulsion of non-governmental organisations, only around 60% of humanitarian aid is getting through. This disaster could escalate. Three million people depend on our help. Therefore, Madam President, Commissioner, I am of the opinion that paragraph 4 of our resolution, in which we call on the only great power in the world that can influence this region, the People's Republic of China, to make the Sudanese Government retract its expulsion of NGOs, is particularly important.

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, we are witnessing serious events taking place in the field of international politics. The Sudanese President, for whom an arrest warrant has been issued, is seeking to take revenge on the international community by expelling politically neutral organisations which seek to bring humanitarian aid to the suffering people of Darfur. International opinion cannot, of course, ignore the fact that the President of Sudan has banned the activities of non-governmental organisations such as *Polska Akcja Humanitarna* which, for the last five years, has been engaged in water projects in the Darfur region, in order to help the Sudanese people. The Fifth World Water Forum might provide a good opportunity to react to the Sudanese President's behaviour, as we mentioned yesterday in this Chamber. I hope that the issue of the expulsion of non-governmental organisations operating in Darfur will be raised, within a political context, in Istanbul. Ironically enough, the Forum aims to address the problem of the lack of access to water experienced by billions of people throughout the world. In the meantime, in Darfur, President al-Bashir is expelling organisations which are trying to resolve this key issue. We will need to react to such a move.

Vittorio Prodi (ALDE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, very quickly, we are being blackmailed by a dictator who has taken millions of people in Darfur as victims and seeks to use these victims to avoid international sanctions. We must not therefore give in to this blackmail.

It is clear that we need an international coalition to put pressure on President al-Bashir to abandon this position. However we must not turn a blind eye to the fact that the real effect, the real cause of these things is this obsession with natural resources. It is no coincidence that the greatest breaches of human rights are in countries where there are great natural resources and in particular in China, which drives this pressure for natural resources. Therefore we cannot fail to consider how to tackle the root of this problem, that is to say by guaranteeing fair access to natural resources for everyone in the world – that is what we must do.

Marie Anne Isler Béguin (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to say very quickly that we deplore all the horrors of Darfur and that we all demand that everything be done to ensure that the associations and NGOs, who have a crucial role to play in these cases, can continue their work and are not expelled. I would, however, like to put a question to the Commissioner.

I would like to know what you are expecting, what the European Union is expecting, of the African Union. We have heard one Member demand armed intervention. In our resolution, we call on the Commission and the Council to intensify the efforts to influence the government via the African Union. In other countries, we delegate the resolution of conflicts to the African Union. We are aware of the African Union's position on the al-Bashir case. It appears that there are double standards here.

What strategy, then, will the Commission adopt in relation to the African Union, as we are talking about the African continent? Is it the case that here, too, we want to delegate the work and the resolution of this conflict to the African Union?

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, the European Commission is deeply concerned – like you – by the Sudanese decision to expel 13 international, as well as to suspend three national, humanitarian NGOs and two national human rights NGOs, following the ICC indictment of President Bashir. Six of these international NGOs operate with EC humanitarian funding amounting to a total of EUR 10 million.

Those organisations provide essential services to millions of Sudanese in Darfur and in other areas of Sudan. The suspension of their activities is, therefore, not only highly regrettable but will also seriously affect the humanitarian situation, as many of you have said. In a statement, Commissioner Michel has already expressed our deepest concern and urged 'the Government of Sudan to reconsider the value of their decision and to urgently restore these NGOs to their full operational status'.

If the full impact of the Sudanese decision is still being assessed, it is clear that the lives of hundreds of thousands of people might be at risk in Darfur. Appropriate measures need to be taken urgently, as the approaching rainy season and the yearly hunger gap will soon exacerbate the humanitarian vulnerability of the 4.7 million people directly affected by the conflict.

We know that the Government is not going to reverse its decision under further international pressure calling into question its decision to expel the NGOs in question. If we cannot persuade the Government to reverse the expulsion orders, we have to engage the Sudanese authorities in order to put in place the appropriate delivery mechanisms. In this respect, we must certainly hold the Sudanese Government fully accountable for its assurances that it takes full responsibility for delivering humanitarian aid.

It is also our duty to take the necessary contingency measures with respect to our assistance. Sudan is the Commission's single largest humanitarian operation: EUR 110 million in 2009. The Commission, together with other donors, like the United Nations and the NGOs and other humanitarian partners, is currently looking into how best to redesign the humanitarian response in order to avoid dramatic consequences. It is not an easy task, as the expelled NGOs were among those very capable of working in such difficult and remote areas.

These contingency measures will clearly require some cooperation and agreement with the Sudanese authorities. In this respect, it is essential to insist on strict separation between the humanitarian activities and the political agenda.

On the political front, we will have to maintain maximum diplomatic pressure on the Sudanese authorities and the rebel movements alike to reach peace in Darfur. We will also have to press for the full implementation of the North-South Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The stakes are very high, and it is our responsibility not to let Sudan be engulfed in a nightmare scenario of country-wide instability.

The EU as a whole will respect the ICC's guidelines and maintain only essential contacts with Sudanese President Bashir. However – and here it is crucial that, as I said before, we maintain dialogue with Khartoum – we should ensure that the Government's reaction to the ICC indictment is as restrained as possible. If we cut off all relations, the hardliners among the Government may retaliate against civilians, humanitarian workers and UNMIS personnel. The recent decision to expel several NGOs is, we think, the first step, which could be followed by many more situations like the present one, and we have to monitor that carefully. A worst-case scenario of a halt in the implementation of the CPA and an attempt by the Government to find a military solution to the Darfur crisis must be avoided.

With regard to the African Union, I can just tell you that we are maintaining contact with them, but I cannot say any more at this stage.

President. – The debate is closed.

14. Voting time

President. – The next item is the vote.

(For the outcome and other details of the vote: see Minutes)

14.1. Guinea Bissau (vote)

14.2. Philippines (vote)

- Before the vote on paragraph 4:

Raül Romeva i Rueda, author. – Madam President, I have two oral amendments. One is on recital B and the other is on paragraph 4.

Concerning paragraph 4 the amendment is in two parts. One is substituting 'Utrecht' with 'Oslo' – that is a technical point but it is important – and the other is adding, after 'bilateral agreements', the words 'for the GMC'. They are small things so that we better understand and everybody can agree.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

- Before the vote on recital B:

Raül Romeva i Rueda, *author*. – Madam President, my second oral amendment is very simple as well. It is simply to delete the word 'Communist' before 'insurgents', and to replace '120 000 lives' with '40 000 lives'.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

14.3. Expulsions of NGOs from Darfur (vote)

- Before the vote on paragraph 1:

Martine Roure, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, I propose an oral amendment to be inserted after paragraph 1: 'Demands the immediate and unconditional release of all the aid workers of the Belgian section of Médecins Sans Frontières who were kidnapped yesterday from the offices of Médecins Sans Frontières Belgium in Saraf Umra, 200 kilometres to the west of El Fasher, the capital of North Darfur'.

Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (PPE-DE). – (FR) Madam President, the word 'yesterday' should not be there because the resolution has to last longer than one day.

Martine Roure (PSE). – (FR) Madam President, excuse me, but I do not understand why there should be a time limit. There is no time limit.

I repeat: 'Demands the immediate and unconditional release of all the aid workers' Is it 'immediate' that bothers you?

President. – Mrs Roure, it is the word 'yesterday'. You said 'yesterday'.

Martine Roure (PSE). – (FR) Madam President, I agree. Excuse me. Remove 'yesterday'. You are quite right.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

- Before the vote on paragraph 2:

Charles Tannock, *author*. – Madam President, my group proposes to delete paragraphs 2 and 6. This is not because we do not support the content but because we do not think it is necessary in this resolution and that, given the delicacy of the situation, it might help get Mr Al-Bashir to reverse his decision and allow the NGOs to go back. So we are calling for the deletion of paragraphs 2 and 6. I understand there will be a similar request from the Socialists and they will also be requesting the deletion of paragraph 5, which we also support for similar reasons.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

- Before the vote on paragraph 5:

Martine Roure, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (FR) I confirm what Mr Tannock has just said and, for the same reasons, we request that paragraph 5 be deleted.

(Parliament agreed to accept the oral amendment)

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Paul Rübig (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, I have a request. Since we have elections on 7 June and we currently have a huge influx of visitors, I would ask if we could look into whether, during the April and May sessions here in Strasbourg, we could have all rooms, including plenary, open to visitors until midnight, so that we can cater properly for all visitors.

President. – I declare the session of the European Parliament adjourned.

15. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

16. Decisions concerning certain documents: see Minutes

17. Forwarding of texts adopted during the sitting: see Minutes

18. Written declarations included in the register (Rule 116): see Minutes

19. Dates of forthcoming sittings: see Minutes

20. Adjournment of the session

(The sitting was closed at 4.20 p.m.)

ANNEX (Written answers)

QUESTIONS TO THE COUNCIL (The Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union bears sole responsibility for these answers)

Question no 6 by Seán Ó Neachtain(H-0052/09)

Subject: Economic crisis

What initiatives is the Czech Presidency putting in place to ensure that the European Union will adopt a united front in the face of the economic crisis?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Czech Republic took over the Presidency of the Council in very difficult times for the European and global economy. As a consequence of the global financial crisis and slowdown in economic growth, we are faced with unprecedented economic challenges to which a swift, adequate and coordinated response is required. The present situation will test European economic and political integration. We are fully committed to ensuring that the EU emerges from this crisis stronger and more united.

The Presidency considers that co-ordination and proper implementation of agreed measures remain key elements for further action. Where rapid economic and financial development opens up new challenges, co-ordination enables immediate exchange of views and concerted action. Where political steps were taken by previous Presidencies, the Czech Presidency focuses on proper implementation and close monitoring of these decisions so that tangible results are delivered.

On coordination, several initiatives have been undertaken in the Council under the leadership of the Czech Presidency with the aim to tackle new challenges.

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Question no 7 by Eoin Ryan(H-0054/09)

Subject: Volunteerism in sport

In its work programme, the Czech presidency emphasised the importance of sports. What concrete measures is the Council taking or will the Council take to assist and encourage volunteerism in sport and to ensure that sports that rely on the input of volunteers for their operation and survival are supported?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

While fully recognising the importance of volunteering in sport, the Council would like to draw the attention of the Honourable Member to the fact that the EC Treaty provisions do not give the EU a specific competence for sport. The Council is therefore not in a position to take concrete measures related to the issues mentioned by the Honourable Member.

The Presidency, on the other hand, plans to continue the regular informal cooperation between Member States in this field. An informal meeting of Directors of Sport will be organised in the Czech Republic in April 2009. Volunteerism in sport, especially in the context of day-to-day sports activities, will be one of the central themes addressed during that meeting.

Visions and concepts of volunteering in sports vary considerably across different Member States. In many of them, volunteers hold positions of information officers and organizers of main sports events – such as

EURO (football), World Cups or Olympic Games. In others, volunteers work regularly as coaches in non-profit sport organizations, guide children, youth, grown-ups and seniors in physical activities etc. The aim of the informal meeting is to cover the whole range of activities of volunteers and to map the current situation in volunteering in the respective Member States. In order to achieve that, we intend to distribute a brief questionnaire, the results of which will be presented in April. The questionnaire was prepared together with the ENGSO and European Commission. At the same time we plan to present best practice examples from national level, including the UK one on preparation of volunteers for London Olympic Games 2012.

Our goal is to support the work of volunteers, to improve its recognition in society and to recommend improvements of legal environment for their work. All of this is in accordance with the efforts to establish the year 2011 as the European Year of Volunteering, which enjoys our full support.

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Question no 8 by Jim Higgins(H-0056/09)

Subject: Funding of Libertas political group

Is the Council concerned at the decision by the Libertas political party to sponsor candidates in all the Member States and is it of the opinion that the EU funding should be made available to Libertas?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Honorable Member's attention is drawn to the fact that the funding of parties and candidates at European Parliament elections is regulated at the national level, and is therefore a matter for each Member State. It is not therefore appropriate for the Council to comment on the decision made by Libertas to sponsor candidates to European Parliament elections in different Member States.

The Council would nevertheless point out that, in conformity with Article 191 of the EC Treaty, the European Parliament and the Council adopted regulation 2004/2003 covering the funding of political parties or political foundations at the European level, which was amended in December 2007.

This regulation sets out the possibility of funding from the EU budget of political party or foundations that, through their activities, respect the principles on which the European Union is founded, namely the principles of liberty, democracy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms, and the rule of law, and attain a certain level of representation in at least one quarter of Member States.

In this context, I would recall that, on the basis of this regulation and in order to receive funding from the general budget of the European Union, a political party at European level has to file an application with the European Parliament and it is for the European Parliament to adopt a decision whether or not to authorise funding.

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Question no 9 by Avril Doyle(H-0058/09)

Subject: Progress at the Tenth Global Ministerial Environment Forum

The Tenth Global Ministerial Environment Forum was scheduled for Nairobi, Kenya, from 16 to 25 February 2009. Could the Czech Presidency please report back on the progress made at this meeting and particularly on the climate change agenda?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The 25th session of United Nations Environment Programme's Governing Council/10th Global Ministerial Environment Forum (GC UNEP/GMEF) took place at UNEP Headquarters in Nairobi (Kenya) from 16 to

20 February 2009, against a backdrop marked by the global economic and financial crisis, on the one hand, and the recent change in US administration on the other hand.

In this meeting, environment leaders acknowledged the need to rethink the economy in environmental terms, as captured in UNEP's motto for that session: "Green is the new big deal."

The most important decision taken was the agreement to set up an Intergovernmental Negotiating Committee tasked with preparations of a global legally binding instrument to control the use of mercury, to start in 2010 with a goal of completing its work by 2013. This instrument will seek to reduce the supply of mercury, its use in products and processes, and also mercury emissions.

The other salient point of the session is in the form of a decision to establish a small group of ministers and high level representatives to examine ways of improving the overall architecture of international environment governance and re-launch the debate at a political rather than technical or diplomatic level. In this framework, it should be recalled that the EU regularly promotes the strengthening of international environmental governance.

Another point that should be underlined is the decision on the confirmation of the continuation of the process to explore mechanisms to improve the science-policy interface for biodiversity and ecosystem services that offers an opportunity to bring the scientific community closer together in order to deliver better options for future international environmental cooperation.

Regarding climate change in particular, it should be recalled that this issue was not on the agenda for this 25th session. Nevertheless, it is important to note the adoption of decisions on developing cooperation and in particular the decision on Support to Africa in different environmental issues. All these decisions were actively supported by the European Union.

The support for closer environmental cooperation was also demonstrated by the EU and African Ministers during the Environment Meeting on the margin of the 25th session of the UNEP, organized by the Presidency, where the climate change was also touched as Africa is, regarding this issue, a particularly vulnerable continent.

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Question no 10 by Bernd Posselt(H-0060/09)

Subject: European flag and anthem

What action is the Council taking to further increase familiarity with, and the popularity of, the European flag and anthem in Member States, and what does the Presidency think of the idea of providing the European anthem, which was first proposed in 1926 by Count Richard Coudenhove-Kalergi, a Czech citizen, with words?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

As the Honourable Member is surely aware, the emblem of a circle of gold stars on blue background was initially adopted in December 1955 by the Council of Europe. Subsequently, the Communities' institutions began to use that emblem on 29 May 1986, following an initiative of the Heads of state and government at the European Council of June 1985.

The same goes for the Beethoven's prelude to the "Ode to Joy", which was adopted by the Council of Europe in 1972 as its own anthem. Subsequently, following the abovementioned initiative in June 1985, it was adopted as the anthem of the European institutions.

Let me stress that the question of increasing familiarity with, and the popularity of the emblem and anthem in each Member State remains entirely under the responsibility of the respective Member State and that the Council has not undertaken any particular action to communicate expressly on this issue. Nevertheless, the Council uses, when appropriate, the emblem and the anthem.

Finally, the question of providing the European anthem with words has never been discussed within the Council.

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Question no 11 by Μαρίας Παναγιωτοπούλου-Κασσιώτου(H-0062/09)

Subject: Family-friendly policies

According to its policy statements, the Czech Presidency is emphasising that each individual not only forms part of the workforce, thereby contributing to society's economic prosperity, but also, as a parent, invests time, energy and money in caring for and bringing up children, the human capital of the future.

How does the Council intend to enhance the quality of family-friendly policies and strengthen the right of European citizens to freedom of choice and autonomy as regards the way in which they raise and educate their children?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Honourable Member has raised a very important question. We all recognise the difficult challenges involved in seeking to balance professional commitments with family responsibilities and private life.

Firstly, I would like to recall that the reconciliation of work and family life is an issue that the Council has visited on a number of occasions. The Czech Presidency is no exception. During the informal meeting of the Ministers for Family Affairs (Prague, 4-5 February 2009), we have opened the discussion on Barcelona targets in the area of childcare for children in the pre-school age, which were set only quantitatively in 2002. The Czech Presidency puts emphasis on the qualitative aspects of childcare as well as the implementation of the so far neglected principles of the best interest of the child and the autonomy of the family pertaining to decisions on reconciliation of professional, private and family life. The Czech Presidency also emphasises the indispensable role of parents in early childcare.

The Council has also already adopted legislation aiming to make the world of work more family-friendly. In this sense, Council directive 92/85/EEC concerning maternity leave guarantees female workers a minimum of 14 weeks of maternity leave. The Parliament and the Council are currently working together as co-legislators on a new Commission proposal to update the maternity leave Directive, the Commission having proposed to extend the minimum period of maternity leave from 14 to 18 weeks, so as to help the worker to recover from the immediate effects of giving birth, while also making it easier for her to return to the labour market at the end of her maternity leave. The Czech Presidency considers this legislative proposal to be one of its priorities and would like to find a consensus of the Member States within the Council in the following months.

The Council moreover looks forward to working with the European Parliament on the Commission's proposal for a new Directive to replace the existing Council directive 86/613/EEC concerning equality between women and men in the area of self-employment. In its Report on the implementation of Directive 86/613/EEC, the Commission concluded that the practical results of the implementation of the Directive were not entirely satisfactory when measured against the prime objective of the Directive, which was a general improvement in the status of assisting spouses.

The Commission has therefore proposed that so-called assisting spouses should, if they choose so, be granted the same level of social protection as self-employed workers currently enjoy. Moreover, personal choice as regards the reconciliation of work and family life is at the centre of the discussion, the Commission having proposed giving self-employed workers the option of enjoying the same maternity leave rights as employees.

As the Honourable Member has said, our children are our future. Reconciling work and family life is one of the hardest challenges faced by working families in Europe today. The Council is determined to play its part in helping our citizens to make their own choices as regards the reconciliation of work and family life.

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Question no 12 by Gay Mitchell(H-0064/09)**Subject: Gaza and the West Bank**

What plans does the Council have for trying to bring peace and humanitarian aid to Gaza and the West Bank?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council takes the humanitarian situation in both Gaza and the West Bank very seriously. Favourable living conditions are crucial to the stability on the Palestinian territories. It therefore agreed on 26 January 2009 that the European Union would focus its support and assistance on the following: immediate humanitarian relief for the population of Gaza, prevention of illicit trafficking in arms and ammunition, sustained re-opening of crossing points on the basis of the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access, rehabilitation and reconstruction and the resumption of the peace process.

The actual delivery of EU humanitarian assistance is a matter for the Commission, which can provide detailed information about its activity and those of its partners, in particular UNRWA and other UN agencies and the ICRC. The EU has called on Israel on a number of occasions to allow for the unobstructed delivery of humanitarian assistance into Gaza. In its conclusions of 26 January 2009, the Council expressed the EU's readiness to reactivate the EU Border Assistance Mission EUBAM Rafah as soon as conditions allow and to examine the possibility of extending its assistance to other crossing points as part of the EU overall engagement. Furthermore, the EU supported and actively contributed to the "International conference in support of the Palestinian economy for the reconstruction of Gaza" hosted by Egypt on 2 March 2009, where the international community pledged almost 4500 million USD, with the EU as a major donor. Here, again, the essential prerequisites for a successful and sustained reconstruction of Gaza were stressed both by the Czech Presidency, speaking on behalf of the 27 Member States, and by the High Representative for the CFSP Mr. Solana. The PEGASE mechanism, presented at the Donor Conference by the Commission (Mrs. Ferrero-Waldner), represents a particular EU initiative aimed at a targeted channelling of the aid to Gaza under the control of the Palestinian National Authority.

As far as the West Bank is concerned, the EU resumed relations with the institutions of the Palestinian Authority in mid-2007. It is the largest donor providing direct financial and technical assistance to the Palestinian Government. Its mission EUPOLCOPPS focuses on advice and training in the fields of security and judicial sector reform. The Palestinian Authority has proved to be a reliable and efficient partner, preventing further escalation of the situation in the West Bank during the Gaza war.

The Council strongly encourages intra-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas, which is a key for peace, stability and development and supports the mediation efforts of Egypt and the Arab League in this respect.

Moreover, the Council is convinced that peace in the region can only be achieved through the completion of the peace process leading to an independent, democratic, contiguous and viable Palestinian state in the West Bank and Gaza, living side by side with Israel in peace and security. In order to fulfil this perspective the Council reiterates its call on both parties to comply with their obligations under the Roadmap and at Annapolis. Considering the Arab Peace Initiative to be a solid and appropriate basis for a comprehensive resolution of the Israeli-Arab conflict, the EU is committed to work with the Quartet, the new US-administration and Arab partners to this end. The Council welcomes the immediate nomination and engagement of the new US-special envoy for the Middle East, Mitchell, in the region and is ready to closely cooperate with him.

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Question no 13 by Δημητρίου Παπαδημούλη(H-0066/09)**Subject: Political, diplomatic and economic sanctions against Israel**

The United Nations (UN) Secretary-General has expressed his shock at the loss of human life and the shelling of the headquarters of the UN agency in Gaza responsible for providing assistance for the Palestinians

(UNRWA). Amnesty International has already called for an inquiry into the Israeli attack on the UN building and its continuous targeting of unarmed civilians asserting that this constitutes a war crime. Concern has also been expressed regarding the use by Israel of bombs containing white phosphorous, a toxic substance which causes severe burns. Its use against civilian population is banned under one of the protocols to the Geneva Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons.

What steps will the Council take to bring Israel before the International Court at The Hague for war crimes against the Palestinian people, notwithstanding Israeli disclaimers? What political, diplomatic and economic sanctions will it bring to bear against Israel with a view to ending the genocide of the Palestinian people and seeking damages for the destruction of EU-funded infrastructures on Palestinian territory?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

From the very beginning of the Gaza conflict the Presidency of the Council has repeatedly expressed its grave concerns about the civilian casualties and has condemned attacks on UN facilities.

The Honourable Members' attention is drawn to the following conclusions adopted by the Council on 26-27 January 2009: "The European Union deeply deplores the loss of life during this conflict, particularly the civilian casualties. The Council reminds all parties to the conflict to fully respect human rights and comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law and will follow closely investigations into alleged violations of international humanitarian law. In this regard it takes careful note of the statement by UNSG Ban Ki-moon to the Security Council on 21 January."

The Council continues to raise its serious human rights concerns with Israel in the framework of all high-level meetings, most recently during the EU Foreign Ministers' dinner with Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni on 21 January 2009. Furthermore the Presidency of the Council, together with the European Commission and the High Representative for the CSFP, have jointly called upon Israel on several occasions to facilitate the access and delivery of humanitarian and reconstruction aid into Gaza.

In general, the Council considers it vital to keep all channels of diplomatic and political contact open and believes that positive persuasion and dialogue is the most effective approach for conveying messages from the EU.

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Question no 14 by Silvia-Adriana Țicău(H-0067/09)

Subject: Promotion of energy efficiency and renewable energies

At the Spring European Council in 2008, the heads of state and government agreed on a future review of the Energy Taxation Directive aimed at promoting an increase in the percentage of renewable energy as a proportion of the total energy used.

Increasing energy efficiency is one of the quickest, safest and cheapest ways of reducing EU dependence on third country energy resources, lowering energy consumption and cutting CO2 emissions and the European public's expenditure on energy bills.

In the light of the need to increase energy efficiency, could the Council of the European Union indicate whether it intends to include on the agenda for the Spring European Council in 2009, the review of the Energy Taxation Directive and the review of the European regulatory framework for VAT and the European framework for the Structural Funds, with the goal of promoting energy efficiency and renewable energies?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The 2009 Spring European Council will be invited to agree on a set of concrete orientations, aimed at enhancing the Union's energy security in the medium and longer term. This will include efforts aimed at

promoting energy efficiency in the framework of the 2nd Strategic Energy Review. However, it is not the intention, at this stage, for the European Council to address specifically issues such as the review of the Energy Taxation Directive, of regulatory framework for VAT and of the framework for Structural Funds.

Regarding the review of the Energy Taxation Directive, the Commission has indicated that it will present a communication and proposals on "green" VAT rates for the beginning of April 2009, after the Spring European Council. The exam of the Communication will start in the competent instances of the Council as soon as the Council will receive it.

As for the regulatory framework for VAT, the Council reached yesterday an agreement on reduced VAT rates that should apply to Labour Intensive Services. This issue will be further discussed at the Spring European Council on 19th and 20th March.

Finally, as to the Framework for structural funds, the Council has reached an agreement on a Commission proposal on the European Regional Development Fund in order to allow additional energy efficiency products to be eligible. Energy efficiency is the most cost-effective way of reducing energy consumption while maintaining an equivalent level of economic activity.

In this context it is imperative to intensify action to improve the energy efficiency of buildings and energy infrastructure, to promote green products and to support the automotive industry's efforts to promote more eco-friendly vehicles.

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Question no 15 by Bogusław Sonik(H-0071/09)

Subject: Disparities in driver blood-alcohol limits in the EU Member States

In 1988 the Commission put forward proposals for changes to permissible blood-alcohol levels for drivers of motor vehicles. Those changes were not, however, adopted. In many Member States – for example, the United Kingdom, Italy, Ireland and Luxembourg – the limit on the amount of alcohol that anyone driving a vehicle may have in their blood has been set at 0.8 mg/l. In Slovakia and Hungary, which do not allow anyone who has consumed even the smallest amount of alcohol to drive, any driver with that amount of alcohol in their blood would be committing a serious offence. In Poland, the rules governing the driving of vehicles laid down in the Road Traffic Act of 20 June 1997 (Official Gazette No 108, 2005, Item 908, as subsequently amended) set the permissible blood-alcohol level at 0.2 mg/l.

Given the current trend towards the standardisation of road traffic legislation within the EU, does the Council intend to take steps to standardise permissible blood-alcohol levels for drivers in the EU Member States?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

One of the main objectives of the common transport policy is to contribute effectively to the reduction of traffic accidents and resulting casualties, and to the improvement of traffic conditions. In its resolution of 26 June 2000, the Council underlined that it was essential to achieve progress on a certain number of road safety measures including ones relating to the problem of drunken driving. In April 2001, the Council adopted conclusions on the Commission Recommendation of 17 January 2001 on the maximum permitted blood-alcohol content (BAC) for drivers of motor vehicles. In these conclusions, Member States were encouraged to consider carefully the measures mentioned by the Commission recommendation, which suggested inter alia to set a maximum blood-alcohol limit of 0,2 mg/ml for drivers who are at much higher risk of accident because of their lack of experience in driving on the roads. At the same time, in the aforementioned conclusions of April 2001, the Council noted that some Member States considered that the maximum permitted blood-alcohol content falls under the principle of subsidiarity and should thus be regulated at national level.

In its conclusions of 8-9 June 2006, the Council agreed on the need to strengthen road safety measures and initiatives at Community or Member States' level to combat drink/drug driving, inter alia through measures

concerning cross-border enforcement of offences. In this context, the Council considered measures to combat drink/drug driving as being particularly relevant.

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Question no 16 by Zita Pleštinšá(H-0077/09)

Subject: Harmonisation of disability cards in the EU

The motto of the Czech Presidency is 'Europe without barriers'. However, there are still different rules within the EU on mutual recognition of identity cards indicating that the holder has a severe disability. The system of mutual recognition does not work in this area. Many disabled citizens experience problems abroad, such as being unable to use disabled parking spaces.

Is the Presidency considering the possibility of harmonising severe disability cards in the EU along similar lines to the European health insurance card?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Honourable Member has raised a very important question. The mobility of our citizens lies at the heart of the European project and the Council is aware of the special needs of persons with disabilities in this area.

As regards the harmonisation of identity cards which may also indicate that the holder has a disability, it is recalled that the question of general identity cards, as such, remains a national responsibility, some Member States not issuing such cards at all.

Medical data and information regarding the holder's disabilities are not contained in the European Health Insurance Card either, as such a card has been established with a view to simplifying procedures, without impinging upon areas of national competence in respect of the organisation of health care and social security.

As the Honourable Member may recall, the Council already took action ten years ago to facilitate the cross-border mobility of persons with disabilities within the EU. Based on the Commission's proposal, the Council adopted a Recommendation introducing a standardised parking card that lends itself to EU-wide recognition. The Council amended the Recommendation last year, to take into account the enlargements of the EU in 2004 and 2007.

The Council's goal has been to ensure that the holder of the standard disability parking card can use disabled parking facilities in any Member State.

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Question no 17 by Justas Vincas Paleckis(H-0080/09)

Subject: Lessons from the economic crisis

The future of the European Union will depend greatly on the priorities of the new financial perspective for 2013-2019, which is currently being formulated.

What is the Council's position on the following important questions for EU countries and for the EU as a whole: how will the lessons of the current financial, energy and food crisis be reflected in the financial perspective? How should the financial perspective be formulated in order to reduce or eliminate entirely the threat of such crises in future?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Honourable Member is of course right in pointing to the need for the European Union to draw the lessons from the financial, energy and food crises.

However, work on the next financial perspectives is not expected to begin until 2011. It is therefore too early for the Council to take a specific position on how exactly they should reflect these lessons.

It should also be borne in mind that the Commission will be producing this year a review of the current financial perspectives and it is most likely that the ensuing debate will touch upon these issues.

In the meantime, the Council, working closely with the European Parliament, has been active in seeking to take appropriate measures to deal with the present crisis as well as to prevent future ones.

In some cases these measures have entailed budgetary support from the Union. For instance we are mobilising additional funds to support investment in energy and broadband infrastructures in response to the economic and energy crises. We also established a "Food Facility" to assist developing countries in boosting their agricultural productivity, in response to last year's food crisis.

But the Union's response to these crises should not be reduced to its financial input, which is necessarily limited in sheer volume.

And indeed, a large part of our action aimed at preventing future financial crises is of a regulatory nature. For instance, the Solvency II Directive, the revised Capital Requirements Directive and the UCITS Directive will contribute to strengthening the rules on the prudential supervision of financial institutions. Another example of our regulatory response, in this case in reaction to the energy crisis, is the forthcoming revision of the Gas Supply Directive, which will increase the Union's resilience to disruptions of gas supply.

In other cases yet, the role of the Union in responding to crises has been focused on promoting a cooperative framework, between the 27 Member States, but also more widely, on the global scene. Whether in response to the financial crisis, to the energy crisis or to the food crisis, the EU has sought to work closely with the international community in order to devise a global response.

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Question no 18 by Marianne Mikko(H-0083/09)

Subject: Declaration on the proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for Victims of Stalinism and Nazism

This summer, 70 years will have passed since the notorious Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939 between the Soviet Union and Germany divided Europe into two spheres of interest by means of secret additional protocols. Declaration 0044/2008 to preserve the memory of the victims of the consequences of this Pact got the support of 409 Members of the European Parliament from all political groups. It was announced by the President of the European Parliament on 22 September 2008 and was forwarded together with the names of the signatories to the parliaments of the Member States. The influence that the Soviet Union occupation had on the citizens of the post-Soviet States is not well known in Europe.

On 18 September 2008, the Bulgarian Parliament adopted a resolution making 23 August the remembrance day for victims of Nazism and Communism. What steps has the Presidency taken to encourage other Member States to commemorate this sad day?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council and its Presidency are aware of the European Parliament's Declaration proposing that 23 August be proclaimed European Day of Remembrance for victims of Stalinism and Nazism. As the Honourable Member herself recalls, this Declaration was addressed to the parliaments of the Member States. Other than the information supplied by the Honourable Member regarding the Bulgarian parliament, the Council has no information on how the national parliaments of the other Member States may have reacted to this proposal, nor has this question been raised in the Council.

The Czech Presidency is very committed to this issue – support for the proclamation of the Remembrance Day for victims of Nazism and Communism is in accordance with its long term effort to strengthen the European dimension of commemoration of the totalitarian past. The Presidency is organizing a Public

Hearing in the European Parliament on "European Conscience and Crimes of Totalitarian Communism: 20 Years After", which will take place in Brussels on 18th March. Totalitarian experience will be discussed by experts from EU Member States, as well as top representatives of the Presidency and the EU Institutions.

The 20th Anniversary of the Fall of Iron Curtain is closely linked to the Presidency's motto "Europe Without Barriers". The Presidency has therefore initiated this theme to become one of the EU's communication priorities for 2009. The Presidency firmly believes that one should not only commemorate the "20 years" as an important milestone of the European history, but also use this historical experience to educate on and promote human rights, fundamental freedoms, the rule of law and other values on which the EU is founded.

Ambition of the Czech Presidency is to reinforce the common European dimension of recalling the totalitarian past prior to 1989 also via strengthening the Action 4 - Active European Remembrance of the Europe for Citizens program, which aims to commemorate victims of Nazism and Stalinism.

The long-term goal is to create at the European level a platform of European memory and conscience linking up existing national activities and promoting joint projects and exchanges of information and experience, preferably with the EU support. This year's 20th anniversary of the fall of the Iron Curtain and the Czech Republic's EU Council Presidency is a perfect occasion for launching such an initiative. Nevertheless, this is almost certain to be a long-term process extending beyond the Czech Presidency.

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Question no 19 by Jens Holm(H-0089/09)

Subject: Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA)

ACTA will contain a new international benchmark for legal frameworks on what is termed 'intellectual property' right enforcement. ACTA is de facto legislation. A spokesman for the US Government has said that treaty language will only be made public after the parties have agreed to the actual text⁽⁵⁾. If this is true, parliaments will not be able to scrutinise ACTA. ACTA will set a precedent of secret legislation, whereas legislation has to be as open as possible in the EU.

I would like to ask the Council the following questions:

Will the final draft be published prior to political agreement in the Council? Will parliaments have enough time to scrutinise ACTA prior to political agreement in the Council? Can the Council ensure that ACTA is not quietly passed during parliamentary recess?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The multilateral Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) aims to establish a common standard for enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights (IPR) in order to combat global infringements to those rights - in particular counterfeiting and piracy - and to provide an international framework that improves the enforcement of intellectual property rights. These goals are pursued through three key components of ACTA: international cooperation, enforcement practices and a legal framework for enforcement of IPRs.

On 14 April 2008, the Council authorised the Commission to negotiate the agreement. However, for matters falling within the competence of Member States, including inter alia the provisions on the enforcement of intellectual property rights in criminal law, the Presidency shall endeavour to conclude a common position with a view to taking forward the negotiations on behalf of the Member States.

The Commission conducts the negotiations in consultation with the competent committees appointed by the Council. The matters falling within the competence of the Member States are coordinated by the Presidency within the competent preparatory bodies before every negotiating Round, to ensure that the views of Member States are reflected in the negotiations.

⁽⁵⁾ <http://ictsd.net/i/news/bridgesweekly/30876/>

The Honourable Member can be assured that, as with all international agreements, Parliament will be involved in the conclusion of the agreement in accordance with the relevant provisions of the Treaty. Since the stage of the final determination of the legal basis has not yet been reached, it is not possible for Council to reply in detail to the procedural questions raised by the Honourable Member.

The Council is nevertheless aware of the adoption by the Parliament on 18 December 2008 of a Resolution on this issue based on a Report by Mr Susta. The Council has taken note of this important Resolution and of the views in general of the EP on this issue.

The Council understands that the INTA Committee of the European Parliament receives copies of all documents sent by the Commission to the Article 133 - Committee and that the Parliament is therefore kept fully informed on the ACTA negotiations.

The INTA Committee is also regularly briefed by the Commission on progress in the negotiations. In addition Minister of Industry and Trade of the Czech Republic Říman addressed this issue, on behalf of the Council, during his appearance before the INTA Committee on 20 January and responded to a number of questions raised by Honourable Members.

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Question no 21 by Kathy Sinnott(H-0093/09)

Subject: Copyright legislation

I and many of my constituents have concerns in relation to proposed legislation on copyright. I was recently informed that these proposals may be shelved due to the opposition they have faced. Could the Council update me on the current situation on copyright legislation, in particular with reference to the proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive amending Directive 2006/116/EC⁽⁶⁾ on the term of protection of copyright and related rights? Will the Council ensure that proposals will not have a negative impact on ordinary individual musicians, actors, artists, etc.?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The proposal for a European Parliament and Council Directive amending Directive 2006/116/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council on the term of protection of copyright and related rights is currently being examined by the Council.

The principal objective of the draft Directive is to improve the social situation of less privileged performers, and in particular sessions musicians.

The Council has taken good note of the opinions expressed by the European Parliament on this proposal, in particular the amendments voted by the Legal Affairs Committee, and will take them into account in future deliberations.

Given that the proposal is still being examined, the Council is not able at this stage to provide a definitive position on the issue.

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Question no 22 by Proinsias De Rossa(H-0098/09)

Subject: EU-Belarus agreement allowing children to travel for recuperation programmes

Could the Council Presidency indicate what action it is taking or planning to take in the light of paragraph 5 of the European Parliament's resolution of 15 January 2009 on the EU strategy towards Belarus (P6_TA(2009)0027), which urged the Czech Presidency to make it a priority to negotiate an EU-wide

⁽⁶⁾ OJ L 372, 27.12.2006, p. 12.

agreement with the Belarusian authorities allowing children to travel from Belarus to EU Member States organising rest and recuperation programmes?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council is aware of the recent problems with regard to Belarusian children travelling on aid trips and holidays to various European countries. The importance of finding a long-term solution to this issue had been raised on a number of occasions in contacts with the Belarusian authorities, most recently at the EU-Belarus Ministerial Troika meeting on 27 January 2009. The Council notes that consultations are on-going between the concerned countries and the relevant Belarusian authorities to address bilaterally the concerns that have arisen in this context, and that several Member States had already concluded agreements ensuring the continuation of such trips. The Council will continue to follow the issue closely, and raise it again – if necessary – in its contacts with the Belarusian authorities.

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Question no 23 by Γεωργίου Τούσσα(H-0101/09)

Subject: Increased incidence of cancer due to the use of depleted uranium shells in Kosovo

Over the last decade there has been a sharp rise in cancer cases in northern Kosovo. More specifically, the incidence of cancer in the Kosovska Mitrovica region alone has increased by 200% during that period compared to the decade up to the NATO bombardment of the former Yugoslavia.

Furthermore, in the few years since the end of the NATO bombardment of the region, at least 45 Italian soldiers belonging to the NATO forces in Kosovo (KFOR) are known to have died, and 515 others of various nationalities have fallen seriously ill with the so-called 'Balkans syndrome', i.e. from contamination of their organism by the depleted uranium shells used in the 1999 bombardment.

How does the Council view the tragic consequences of the use of depleted uranium shells by NATO commanders in Kosovo which are steadily unfolding? Does it take the view that the use of such weaponry constitutes a war crime whose perpetrators must finally be held accountable before the peoples of the world?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council is not competent for the issue and is not in a position to give an opinion on the question raised by the Honorable Member.

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Question no 24 by Jim Allister(H-0103/09)

Subject: John Calvin

Having regard to the immense contribution of John Calvin to Europe's religious, political and social history and to the enlightenment and development of Europe, what plans has the Council to mark the 500th anniversary of his birth in July 2009?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council has not discussed this question, because it is not falling within its competence.

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Question no 25 by Κωνσταντίνου Δρούτσα(H-0108/09)

Subject: Appeal for the immediate release of five Cuban patriots held in the USA

Ten years since they were arrested, five Cuban patriots - Gerardo Hernández, Antonio Guerrero, Ramón Labañino, Fernando González and René González - continue to be imprisoned in the USA on trumped up charges and in violation of the basic rules of law. They are being held in appalling conditions and even their relatives are prohibited from visiting them.

A new international initiative is currently under way to secure their immediate release. An appeal has so far been signed by more than 500 distinguished intellectuals and artists from all over the world.

Does the Council condemn the continued illegal imprisonment of the five Cubans?

What is its position on the appeals of national parliaments, national and international mass organisations and eminent individuals for the immediate release of the five imprisoned Cuban patriots?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council is aware of the imprisonment of five Cuban citizens as well as of the decision by US authorities to grant visa to the overwhelming majority of their family members, while refusing to grant visa to two of them on immigration grounds.

The judgements delivered and decisions on whether or not to grant a visa to individual family members are matters of the internal competence of the United States. As far as the treatment of the Cuban prisoners and their families is concerned, this is a bilateral issue between the US and Cuba, since the protection of the rights and interests of nationals abroad is, pursuant to international law, the individual responsibility of the State concerned.

The Council would like to stress that the United States are obliged to adhere to international human rights law; particularly, as a State Party, to the UN Convention on Prevention of Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment ensuring human rights of people deprived of their liberty.

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Question no 26 by David Martin(H-0109/09)

Subject: Seizure of generic medicines in transit in the Netherlands

With reference to the seizure in the Netherlands of generic medicines in transit, can the Council clarify why the medicines were seized given that the footnote to Article 51 of the TRIPS (Trade Related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) Agreement does not impose an obligation to inspect for alleged patent infringement for goods in transit?

Does the Council consider that this seizure contravenes Article 41 of the TRIPS Agreement, which states that IP enforcement should not create barriers to trade?

Would the Council support the inclusion of similar IP rights provisions in any of the new generation of FTAs (Free Trade Agreements) or other bilateral trade agreements?

What steps will the Council take to ensure that the supply of generic medicines to developing countries is not thwarted by similar seizures in future?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The incident referred to by the Honourable Member was discussed at the meeting of the WTO General Council on 3 February 2009.

At this occasion, 19 WTO members took the floor asking questions or commenting. Following these interventions, the European Commission underlined the fact that

- the consignment had been temporarily detained and had therefore not been seized;
- apparently, an arrangement was made between the rights holder and the owner of the medicines to return the goods to India.

The Commission also explained that the legal basis for the action - Council Regulation n. 1383/2003 concerning customs action against goods suspected of infringing certain intellectual property rights and the measures to be taken against goods found to have infringed such rules - is compatible with WTO Law including of course the TRIPS agreement.

The European Commission reiterated its position to the TRIPS Council on 3 March 2009.

The EU remains committed to ensuring access to medicines and does not see any conflict with WTO rules and its efforts to catch shipments of counterfeits. The representatives of the European Commission stressed that the Dutch actions were both in line with international trade rules and consistent with the Dutch government's responsibility to protect against poor quality medicines and ultimately to the benefit of public health in general.

The European Union is of the opinion that goods control in transit regime must be possible when there is a reasonable suspicion of IPRs infringement. In 2007, of all detained counterfeit medicines, 40% were detained in transit regime.

As to the question of intellectual property enforcement in trade agreements, this matter is currently under discussion within the Council.

As far as the supply of affordable medicines to developing countries is concerned, the European Community has been at the forefront of efforts within the WTO to establish a permanent, legally sound framework for such supply, in particular through the first amendment to the TRIPS agreement. This amendment has been ratified by the European Community and a significant number of WTO Member States. Furthermore, the EU has adopted a number of internal measures designed to achieve the same objective. The EU also participates in many programmes in developing countries enabling these countries to have a wider access to medicines.

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Question no 27 by Sajjad Karim(H-0111/09)

Subject: Israel and Palestine

What measures will the Council take in order to support the cessation of the sale of arms to Israel in parallel with the actions already taken by the EU to prevent arms reaching Hamas?

Will the Council bring pressure to bear on Hamas and Fatah to implement the 'Unity Government Agreement' drawn up with the aid of Saudi Arabia (the Mecca Agreement, February 2007)?

Will the Council support peace initiatives coming from the USA if more positive negotiating policies are forthcoming?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council does not consider that a parallelism can be drawn between the two issues raised by the Honourable Member. The Council has repeatedly recognised Israel's right to protect its citizens against terrorist attacks but equally consistently recalled, most recently in its conclusions of 26-27 January 2009, Israel's obligation to exercise this right within the parameters of international law.

As far as relations between Hamas and Fatah are concerned, the Council strongly encourages inter-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Mahmoud Abbas, which is key for peace, stability, and development. It has supported the mediation efforts of Egypt and the Arab League in this respect, which led to the meeting of all Palestinian fractions on 26 February in Cairo.

The involvement of the new US Administration is crucial for driving the Peace Process out of the deadlock. The Council therefore welcomed the early engagement of the new US Administration, manifested by the nomination of Senator Mitchell as a Special Envoy for the Middle East as well as the recent visit of the new Secretary of State Clinton to the region. The first meeting of the Quartet with the Secretary of State Clinton on the margins of the Donors' conference in Sharm-al-Sheik on March, 2 confirmed the determination of both the EU and US to work together with the other Quartet members and Arab partners towards a resolution of the Middle East Peace Process.

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Question no 28 by Ryszard Czarnecki(H-0113/09)

Subject: Financial crisis and collapse of Member State economies

How is the Council reacting, and how will it react in the future, to the collapse of Member State economies, with particular reference to the situation in Latvia and, to some extent, Hungary?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council remains confident that adequate structures, procedures and instruments are in place to prevent the collapse of Member State economies in the future, and recalls its decision of 2 December 2008 to amend Council Regulation (EC) No 332/2002 establishing a facility providing medium-term financial assistance for Member States' balances of payments⁽⁷⁾ so as to increase from EUR 12 billion to 25 billion the ceiling for the outstanding amount of loans available to Member States outside the euro area under the facility. The Council has already decided to make use of the facility on two occasions in order to address the financing needs of Latvia and Hungary.

Moreover, as the Honourable Member is aware, on 1 March 2009, Heads of State or Government discussed in an informal meeting the current financial and economic crisis and agreed to take action notably along these lines: restore the appropriate and efficient financing conditions in the economy; deal with impaired banking assets; improve the regulation and supervision of financial institutions; ensure the long-term sustainability of public finances.

Heads of State or Government also recognised the clear differences between the Member States in Central and Eastern Europe and undertook to review the assistance already made available. As far as the banking sector is concerned, they confirmed that support for parent banks should not imply any restrictions on the activities of subsidiaries in EU host countries. They also acknowledged the importance of the EIB in providing finance to the region and welcomed, in this context; the recent announcement by the EIB, World Bank and EBRD of a joint initiative to support the banking sectors in the region and to fund lending to businesses hit by the global economic crisis.

Finally, the Council would like to assure the Honourable Member that, working closely with the Commission, it will keep the situation under active review and draw up elements to help countries facing temporary imbalances, if required, on the basis of all available instruments.

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⁽⁷⁾ OJ L 352, 31.12.2008, page 11.

Question no 29 by Laima Liucija Andrikienė(H-0121/09)**Subject: Visit to Belarus by Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the CFSP**

Javier Solana, EU High Representative for the CFSP, visited Belarus on 19 February 2009, where he met President Lukashenko and Foreign Minister Martynov, as well as opposition leaders and representatives of civil society.

How does the Council evaluate the content of those meetings? Do they give insights for future EU-Belarus relations? What are the next steps which Council is planning to take in response to the outcome of the meetings referred to above?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The assessment of the meeting by HR Solana was that it was positive, open and frank. As HR Solana indicated at the press conference after his tête-à-tête meeting with President Lukashenko, "all was said that had to be said, all was criticised that had to be criticised and all was commented that had to be commented". Well-known messages were conveyed and constructive answers received. At the meeting with the representatives of the civil society and opposition leaders, which took place before the meeting with the President and the Foreign Minister, all representatives thanked HR Solana for his visit and encouraged further engagement, to which they saw no alternative.

The Council has now started work on the review of the suspension of the visa-ban, with a view to taking a decision by 13 April. In this context it considers the input provided by the high level visits very valuable in taking forward this work, and will continue to follow closely developments in Belarus. Belarus is considered for a participation in the Eastern Partnership initiative which shall be launched by the Czech Presidency at the Eastern Partnership Summit in the beginning of May 2009.

As agreed at the meeting of HR Solana and FM Martynov, a Human Rights Dialogue will be launched between the EU and Belarus. Work on setting up an exploratory mission to Belarus is underway within the Council's preparatory bodies, and taking into account its outcome, discussions will begin on the modalities of such a dialogue, which then should be approved by the Council.

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Question no 30 by Pedro Guerreiro(H-0124/09)**Subject: Abolition of tax havens**

Has any Member State proposed the abolition of tax havens, especially within the EU?

Has the EU adopted any decision proposing that Member States abolish the tax havens existing within their territory?

What measures will the EU take to put an end to tax havens, combat financial speculation and curb the free movement of capital, especially in the Union?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March I 2009 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The European Community has adopted a number of measures in the field of taxation.

In 1977 the Council adopted Council Directive 77/799/EEC concerning mutual assistance by the competent authorities of the Member States in the field of direct taxation⁽⁸⁾. That Directive recognises that tax evasion and avoidance extending across the frontiers of Member States lead to budget losses and violations of the

⁽⁸⁾ OJ L 336, 27.12.1977, p. 15

principle of fair taxation and affect the operation of the common market. This Directive was a complement to Council Directive 76/308/EEC on mutual assistance for the recovery of claims relating to certain levies, duties, taxes and other measures. In February 2009 the Commission proposed an overhaul of these two directives with a view to ensuring an increased efficiency and transparency in the cooperation between Member States as regards the assessment and collection of direct taxes, especially by removing the obstacles related to the bank secrecy, sharing information from the third countries and setting up a new administrative framework based on time limits and fully electronic communication. Those proposals are under discussion within the Council.

Council Directive 2003/48/EC of 3 June 2003 on taxation of savings income in the form of interest payments⁽⁹⁾ (the Savings tax Directive), which entered into force in July 2005, seeks to prevent individuals from evading taxes on the interest received on their savings, by providing for the exchange of information between Member States. The Savings tax Directive addresses both intra Community and extra Community situations.

– In intra Community situations the Savings Tax Directive provides for Member States to exchange information on the interest received by non resident investors. On 2 December 2008 the Council welcomed a proposal from the Commission to extend its scope of application and called for rapid progress in the discussions.

– In extra Community situations the savings tax agreements which were concluded by the Community with five third countries put in place similar or equivalent measures as those that apply within the Community. The Commission is engaged in talks to extend the savings tax network to other third countries.

In addition to those Directives, the Council has mandated the Commission to negotiate so called "anti fraud" agreements between the European Union and its Members States on the one part and third countries on the other part in order to ensure effective administrative assistance and access to information with regard to all forms of investment, in particular foundations and trusts.

An agreement with Switzerland in this matter is provisionally applied waiting to be ratified by all Member States, and an agreement with Liechtenstein is being negotiated.

Finally, in May 2008 the Council adopted Conclusions concerning the need to reinforce efforts to combat tax fraud and evasion throughout the world by ensuring the implementation of principles of good governance in the tax area such as principles of transparency, exchange of information and fair tax competition. Subsequent to these conclusions the Commission is negotiating the inclusion of good governance articles into the bilateral agreements with 14 countries (Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, Brunei, Philippines, Malaysia, China, Mongolia, Ukraine, Iraq, Libya, Russia, and South Korea) and 8 regions (Caribbean, Pacific, 4 African regions, Central America, Andean Community).

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QUESTIONS TO THE COMMISSION

Question no 37 by Zdzisław Kazimierz Chmielewski(H-0073/09)

Subject: 'Accidental roaming'

During the discussions on the proposal for a common regulatory framework for electronic communications networks and services (COM(2008)0580 – C6-0333/2008 – COD 2008/0187), voters in my constituency (two regions on the Polish-German border) drew my attention to the issue of 'accidental roaming'.

Accidental roaming involves involuntary connection to a foreign network when using one's mobile telephone in a border region. Without crossing the border, inhabitants of such regions can pick up the signal broadcast by a mobile phone operator in the neighbouring country and, as a result, pay much higher call, text and data-transmission charges.

Is the Commission aware of this problem? What steps will be taken, or have already been taken, to put an end to this major inconvenience for mobile phone users in border areas?

⁽⁹⁾ OJ L 157, 26.6.2003, p. 38

Answer

(EN) The Commission is aware of the problem mentioned by the Honourable Member of inadvertent roaming for some users, especially in border regions. In this respect, under Article 7 (3) of the current Roaming Regulation⁽¹⁰⁾, national regulatory authorities are required to be alert to the particular case of involuntary roaming in the border regions of neighbouring Member States.

In that context, at the behest of the Commission, the European Regulators Group has included involuntary roaming in its Benchmark Reports, the latest of which was published in January this year. According to those reports, the issue of inadvertent roaming has been acknowledged by the majority of operators. However, operators claim that it was not a significant problem as only few consumers were adversely affected.

Many providers have adopted a number of mechanisms to deal with inadvertent roaming. Information was generally available on provider websites, and where a particular issue was identified (for example between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland) providers generally took additional steps to ensure consumers were aware of the issue, in some cases even offering specific bespoke tariffs. According to the above mentioned reports, the majority of providers also reported that where roaming genuinely occurred inadvertently, charges may be waived as a goodwill gesture. In addition, the Commission believes that the initiative undertaken by the Irish and UK authorities, who set up a joint working group to examine this issue, provides a very good example for others to follow.

The issue of involuntary roaming was also considered by the Commission in the context of its review of the functioning of the Roaming Regulation, which was presented in a Communication from the Commission adopted on 23 September 2008⁽¹¹⁾. The Commission noted that the transparency obligation introduced in the current Roaming Regulation to inform customers of the price when they are roaming has helped to make consumers aware that they are inadvertently roaming. In view of this situation, and that NRAs and Member States' administrations have also responded by working bilaterally to tackle the issue and several agreements have been reached, the Commission did not consider it appropriate to introduce further provisions in the Regulation in this respect. However, the Commission will continue to monitor the situation to ensure the smooth functioning of the single market and consumer protection.

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Question no 38 by Lambert van Nistelrooij(H-0102/09)

Subject: Problems with contacting the emergency number 112 in border areas

Problems with mobile telephone networks in border areas may exacerbate dangerous situations, since unintentional changes of network may delay or cut off contact with the emergency number 112, and may mean that people unwittingly find themselves connected to a foreign emergency switchboard.

Is the Commission aware that, as things stand at present, mobile users who call the European emergency number 112 from their home country's border areas, not realising they are connected via a more powerful foreign network, find themselves in touch with a foreign switchboard?

Is the Commission aware of the problem that contact may be cut off if the mobile phone finds a more powerful foreign network and then connects to it?

Is the Commission aware that the emergency switchboard does not have a proactive call-back policy, and it may thus for example happen that a caller, explaining his situation in a panic to the Dutch 112 switchboard, is cut off in mid-call and, after ringing again, reaches the German 112 switchboard, with all the potential language problems that entails?

What measures (other than a proactive call-back policy) does the Commission propose to ensure that residents in border areas are answered in their own language when they call the European emergency number 112?

⁽¹⁰⁾ Regulation (EC) No 717/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2007 on roaming on public mobile telephone networks within the Community and amending Directive 2002/21/EC.

⁽¹¹⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the outcome of the review of the functioning of Regulation (EC) No 717/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2007 on roaming on public mobile telephone networks within the Community and amending Directive 2002/21/EC (COM(2008)580 final).

Answer

(EN) The responsibility for the organisation of the emergency services and the response to 112 calls rests with the Member States, including their policy on handling interrupted calls, language capabilities or protocols for handling emergencies in border areas between countries or regions.

The Commission has been monitoring closely the implementation of the EU provisions related to 112 in the Member States, and it has launched 17 infringement proceedings against Member States that have not complied with the relevant requirements of EU law⁽¹²⁾. Thirteen of these cases have now been closed following corrective measures in the countries concerned. In other areas where there are no concrete requirements under EU law, such as the handling of 112 calls in different languages, the Commission has been promoting best practice amongst Member States through different bodies, such as the Communications Committee and the Expert Group on Emergency Access.

The Commission is aware of the potential problem mentioned by the Honourable Member arising from the fact that some mobile subscribers calling 112 in case of emergency may be affected by inadvertent roaming and that a communication with an emergency centre in a neighbouring Member State may be established. While cases of complete loss of coverage and lack of appropriate response should be rare, the Commission intends to raise this issue with the Member States in the Communications Committee and in the Expert Group on Emergency Access, with a view to ensuring that appropriate measures are in place to deal with such occurrences.

In addition the Commission is monitoring the issue of inadvertent roaming in the context of the implementation and Review of the Roaming Regulation. As mentioned in the Commission reply to question H-0073/09 by Mr Zdzisław Kazimierz Chmielewski, according to Article 7(3) of the current Roaming Regulation⁽¹³⁾, national regulatory authorities are required to be alert to the particular case of involuntary roaming in the border regions of neighbouring Member States and to communicate the results of such monitoring to the Commission every six months.

Furthermore, in the context of the review of the Roaming Regulation⁽¹⁴⁾, the Commission noted that the transparency obligation introduced in the current Roaming Regulation to inform customers of the price when they are roaming has helped to make consumers aware that they are inadvertently roaming. In view of this situation, and given that fact that national regulatory authorities and Member States' administrations have also responded by working bilaterally to tackle the issue and several agreements have been reached, the Commission did not consider it appropriate to introduce further provisions in the Regulation in this respect. However, the Commission will continue to monitor the situation to ensure the smooth functioning of the single market and consumer protection.

The Commission ultimately aims to ensure that European citizens in distress can effectively access emergency services in all Member States by using the 112 number.

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Question no 39 by Krzysztof Hołowczyc(H-0118/09)

Subject: Introduction of the European emergency number 112

According to the latest Eurobarometer survey of 11 February 2009, public recognition of the number 112 within the Community is far from satisfactory. The situation is still worse as regards access to that number in the Member States, despite the fact that, under the i2010 programme (Bringing eCall back on track -

⁽¹²⁾ Mainly, Article 26 of Directive 2002/22/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services (Universal Service Directive).

⁽¹³⁾ Regulation (EC) No 717/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2007 on roaming on public mobile telephone networks within the Community and amending Directive 2002/21/EC.

⁽¹⁴⁾ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions on the outcome of the review of the functioning of Regulation (EC) No 717/2007 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 June 2007 on roaming on public mobile telephone networks within the Community and amending Directive 2002/21/EC (COM(2008)580 final).

Action Plan (3rd eSafety Communication) – COM(2006)0723), the number should be generally accessible and usable within the European Union.

What steps will the Commission take to ensure that this project is fully implemented throughout the Community?

Answer

(EN) The Commission has been working very actively in order to ensure that the single European emergency number 112 is available and working effectively across the EU.

The Commission has been monitoring closely the implementation of the EU provisions related to 112 in the Member States, and it has launched 17 infringement proceedings against Member States that have not complied with the relevant requirements of EU law⁽¹⁵⁾. Thirteen of these cases have now been closed following corrective measures in the countries concerned.

The Commission has also been promoting Member States' cooperation and exchange of 112 best practice through different expert bodies, such as the Communications Committee and the Expert Group on Emergency Access, and it is also working to make 112 more accessible for all citizens through the reform of the EU's telecommunications rules and by financing research projects, such as 'eCall' and 'Total Conversation'.

As the Honourable Member points out, the last results of the Eurobarometer survey on 112 have shown that there is significant room to better inform EU citizens, as only one in four respondents could identify 112 as the phone number to call for emergency services across the EU. That is why the Commission has also contributed to raising awareness of 112 by providing information to EU citizens, particularly people travelling within the EU and children, about what 112 is, how to use 112 and how 112 functions in each Member State by means of a dedicated website⁽¹⁶⁾. Last month, the Commission, together with the Parliament and with the Council, declared 11 of February as the European 112 Day. On that day, different awareness and networking activities were organized, and will be organized each year, to promote the existence and use of the single European emergency number throughout the EU.

As regards the implementation of the i2010 initiative, it is well on track and supported by all Member States. The Commission would like to refer the Honourable Member to the Commission reply to written question E-6490/08 for further details. In particular, eCall standards are almost ready and the recently established European eCall Implementation Platform will coordinate and monitor the progress of eCall across Europe.

The Commission acknowledges the interest of the Parliament expressed, among others, by the signature of a Written Declaration on 112 in September 2007 by 530 of its Members. The Commission will continue monitoring closely the efficient implementation of 112 in the Member States, but today 112 is one of the concrete results that Europe can offer to its citizens.

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Question no 40 by Elisabetta Gardini(H-0115/09)

Subject: Delays in adopting UMTS-based services

With more than 115 HSPA networks (HSPA being the latest technology enabling mobile service users to download data at high speed) and over 35 million users in Europe, UMTS technology, which has evolved out of GSM, has a key role to play and consumers appreciate it, not least because it offers many advantages.

If UMTS services are to go on developing, the regulatory framework requires that the 900 MHz GSM band be opened up to accommodate them. However, the revision of the GSM Directive 87/372/EEC⁽¹⁷⁾, is very far behind schedule, and Member States are looking to the Commission, the Council, and Parliament to bring clarity to regulation.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Mainly, Article 26 of Directive 2002/22/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 7 March 2002 on universal service and users' rights relating to electronic communications networks and services (Universal Service Directive).

⁽¹⁶⁾ <http://ec.europa.eu/112>

⁽¹⁷⁾ OJ L 196, 17.7.1987, p. 85.

Given the critical financial situation in Europe, a quick and responsible way should be found to allocate the band in question and reform the related directive so as to support the mobile communications business. All lawgivers therefore have the task of working towards a Europe-wide solution.

What political and technical measures will the Commission propose in order to avert further delays, which could affect the European electronic communications industry as a whole?

Answer

(EN) In reply to the Honourable Members' question, the Commission firmly believes in the importance of opening up the 900 MHz GSM band for other mobile technologies, to benefit consumers and provide an important boost to the EU economy.

In recognition of its strategic importance, the Commission already proposed in mid-2007 to repeal the GSM Directive and to open up the GSM band.

This was fully in line with the "better regulation" policy of President Barroso and gave a clear signal to the mobile industry and the Member States.

Although there was support for our initiative from the Council and the European Economic and Social Committee, it became clear from exchanges between the Commission and the Industry, Research and Energy Committee that the procedure proposed by the Commission was not acceptable to the Parliament.

In view of the need for progress on this urgent issue, and taking into account the concerns expressed by Parliament, the Commission made a new proposal to amend the GSM Directive.

The Commission believes that we must distinguish clearly between this policy measure – making the use of the 900 MHz bands more technology neutral by opening them to other systems, such as UMTS – and the technical measures that clarify the technical conditions for new systems to coexist alongside GSM as well as avoiding interference in general.

This policy proposal is now in the hands of the co-legislator, while the technical measures are carried out using the Radio Spectrum Decision, under which the Commission has already checked the compatibility of UMTS. A technical Decision to this effect, agreed with Member States experts, is ready for adoption as soon as Parliament and Council adopt the amending Directive.

The Commission has shown its commitment to finding a constructive solution by tabling the appropriate policy and technical proposals. It is now up to the Parliament and Council to take their responsibilities and to adopt the amending Directive rapidly.

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Question no 47 by Laima Liucija Andrikiienė(H-0126/09)

Subject: Development of the EU's accession negotiations with Turkey

As European Enlargement Commissioner Olli Rehn said, 'the EU's accession negotiations with Turkey are proceeding at a modest but steady pace'.

What are the most problematic issues on which Turkey must carry out necessary reforms in order to comply with the Copenhagen criteria? Turkey is a country which has the possibility of providing energy security for the EU. What guarantees are there that the Commission will not turn a blind eye to any outstanding problematic issues in Turkey, in particular in the human rights field, during the accession negotiations, in order to solve the EU's energy security problems?

Answer

(EN) Indeed, the accession process continues to be on track.

However, progress on negotiations depends first and foremost on Turkey's ability to meet opening benchmarks and to adopt and implement EU-related reforms.

Turkey's on-going work in the areas of taxation and social policy for instance should be complemented by similar efforts in the areas of environment, competition, public procurement as well as food safety, vet. & phytosanitary policy.

Turkey's political reform efforts need to pick up momentum, including for instance on the freedom of expression or the fight against corruption.

As regards energy, Turkey and the EU have both much to gain from closer energy co-operation. However, under no circumstances, can the EU's energy security prejudice the accession criteria, neither in the area of human rights nor in any other area.

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Question no 48 by Ryszard Czarnecki(H-0114/09)

Subject: EU enlargement and the financial crisis

In the Commission's opinion, could the financial crisis slow down the official accession of the new candidate countries?

Answer

(EN) The European Union (EU) has repeatedly committed itself to the European perspective of the Western Balkans and Turkey. The perspective of EU membership, as well as significant pre-accession support, provide these countries with an anchor of stability, in particular in these times of international financial crisis.

Today's crisis has indeed reached the Western Balkans and Turkey, to varying degrees. The EU has presented a crisis support package for their small and medium-sized enterprises and is ready to consider possible further means of support for certain enlargement countries, would this appear necessary and possible. In this context, it is important to emphasize that a speedy recovery of the emerging market in our neighbourhood is crucial for the EU.

The timetable for joining the EU is set primarily by the pace at which aspiring countries fulfill the established conditions for membership and implement the relevant reforms. The present crisis may even strengthen their motivation to join.

The EU's commitment to the European future of the Western Balkans and Turkey stands. The Commission will continue to spare no efforts to support these countries on their paths towards the EU.

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Question no 52 by Jim Higgins(H-0057/09)

Subject: Production of organically produced foods

Can the Commission indicate if it is prepared to make additional funding available in order to encourage greater production of organically produced foods?

Answer

(EN) The Commission is pleased to answer the question of the Honourable member on organic production.

The Honourable member is asking for additional support for organic farmers. At first it must be explained how organic farmers can benefit from the CAP. Organic farmers benefit from the direct payments under the first pillar like any other European farmer. , The new Article 68 offers the possibility to Member States to pay a specific supplementary aid to organic farmers.

In the second pillar, several measures under the Rural Development Programmes can be used to target organic farmers. In particular agro-environment measures are used either to help the conversion from conventional to organic production techniques or to compensate for supplementary cost deriving from organic production, or both. Almost all Rural Development Programmes for the period 2007-2013 include such measures.

The Commission knows that organic producers were afraid that the rise in food prices in the last year could lead to a decrease of demand for organic products. However, there are no alarming signs on the demand side, the demand for organic products remains strong. The Commission is also active on this front: last year it launched a promotion campaign on organic farming, with a fully renovated web site. This also includes an open competition for a new EU organic logo, which should be used as from July 2010, and which will facilitate the marketing of organic products across the EU.

The Commission's policy for the organic sector was agreed in 2004 around a plan of 21 actions. The Council and the Parliament both recognised that the development of this particular production sector should be demand driven. This means that introducing specific incentives like production subsidies would in fact change the policy for the sector. A move which the Commission thinks is inadequate for the moment. However, the Commission is open to a further strengthening of the measures on organic farming in the Rural Development Programmes.

To conclude, the Commission considers that the current policy mix delivers a balanced support for organic production and that no additional funding is necessary.

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Question no 53 by Justas Vincas Paleckis(H-0075/09)

Subject: Financial instruments in the field of agriculture

The agricultural sector, in common with other business sectors in the EU, is currently facing a credit shortage (particularly for working capital).

The Commission particularly encourages the use of microcredit, credit guarantees, risk capital and other instruments to promote small and medium-sized enterprises. However, agricultural activities are usually ineligible for funding under European Investment Fund (EIF) programmes (counter-guarantees, microcredit).

Does the Commission intend to initiate changes in this area? Does it intend to increase the number of areas where the EIF can provide financial support?

What opportunities might there be to use EU support to offer financial assistance to agricultural operators and businesses in rural areas in the form of financial instruments (microcredit, guarantee portfolio counter-guarantees)?

Answer

(EN) The new regulation on Structural Funds (SF) for 2007-2013 includes provisions to develop financial engineering instruments in the Member States and regions of the European Union. The Joint European Resources for Micro to Medium Enterprises (JEREMIE) initiative has been designed in this context with the view to meet the needs of medium to micro-enterprises as regards access to finance. It is however up to the Management Authorities (MAs) of the SF operational programmes to decide whether to make use of this instrument or not.

If their answer is positive, they have to take appropriate measures to set-up JEREMIE Holding Funds at national or regional level. It is also their main responsibility to decide where the support should go, although they receive assistance from the Commission to achieve the best possible results in the long run.

The Holding Fund Manager may be the European Investment Fund or a national candidate. The Holding Fund should identify financial intermediaries, who will in turn organise Funds (loans, guarantees, venture capital) to provide support to final beneficiaries. Final beneficiaries could potentially include enterprises from the agricultural sector. However, if such case is displayed, a clear demarcation between the supported activities under the JEREMIE programme and the rural development programme should be made.

The rural development policy does provide opportunities to Member States and regions to develop financial engineering actions and ensure in this way better financial possibilities for their beneficiaries under rural development programmes. This covers a wide spectrum of actions such as the co-financing by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD) of expenditure in respect of an operation comprising contributions to support venture capital funds, guarantee funds, loan funds, and even interest rate subsidies for loans co-financed by the EAFRD.⁽¹⁸⁾

⁽¹⁸⁾ According to Article 71(5) of Council Regulation (EC) No. 1698/2005, the contribution from the EAFRD may be made in a form other than a non-repayable direct assistance. This is further elaborated in Articles 49 – 52 of Commission Regulation (EC) No. 1974/2006 where options and conditions for development of a number of financial engineering actions are provided.

Member States and regions have already put in place several financial engineering schemes. Examples could be given with the rural development programmes for Portugal, Saxony-Anhalt (Germany) or Corsica (France). Other guarantee fund proposals are currently under discussions.

The usage of these provisions under rural development programmes can help mitigate the negative impacts of the crisis and provide for better funding opportunities to potential agricultural beneficiaries.

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Question no 54 by Michl Ebner(H-0076/09)

Subject: Integrated EU strategy for the sustainable development and use of resources in mountain areas

In its own-initiative report of 23 September 2008 on the situation and outlook for hill and mountain farming, the European Parliament called on the Commission 'to develop, within its remit, an integrated EU strategy for the sustainable development and use of resources in mountain areas (EU strategy for mountain areas) within six months of the adoption of this resolution'.

What is the Commission's position on this project? How will the Commission ensure that this strategy is integrated into future work programmes?

Answer

(EN) As the Commission has already stated in its reaction to the Honourable Member's report the Commission does not envisage proposing at this stage a specific and integrated strategy for mountain areas as suggested by this report⁽¹⁹⁾.

However, this does not mean that the Commission will just doing business as usual with regard to the mountain farming.

There is evidence of a progressive withdrawal of agricultural management in some areas, particularly on permanent pasture and steeper slopes. Portugal and Italy are among those Member States where such marginalisation could lead to a cessation of agricultural activity.

We have to take these signals seriously. Without mountain farming not only families who over decades dedicated their lives to this farming activity will loose their existence but also the impact on the broader economic activity in these regions will be devastating. In many of the mountain regions' farming is the backbone of the rural economy; if you take this out the existence of the whole region is under threat. Take as an example tourism which needs the mountain farming.

Therefore, the Commission wants to have a closer look together with all interested parties like the Parliament and the Committee of the Regions but also the mountain farmers themselves into the policy framework for mountain farming currently in place. The Commission wants to assess the particular problems, new challenges and the potential for further developments – yes, further developments, because it is convinced that there is still a lot of potential for mountain farming in connection with tourism (production of quality products like cheeses on the farm, local and regional marketing strategies, wellness on the farm etc.).

Once, this is done we can check whether our policy responses are still sufficient and efficient enough. We have actually quite a tool box at our disposal: Direct payments under the first pillar, compensation payment for mountain areas classified as less favoured and agri-environmental payments; following the Health Check Member States are allowed to maintain some of the coupled support schemes in order to sustain economic activity in regions where other economic alternatives are few or do not exist; assistance to regions and sectors with special problems (so-called 'Article 68' measures) may be provided by Member States by retaining 10 percent of their national budget ceilings for direct payments and using these funds for environmental measures or improving the quality and marketing of agricultural products; in addition to the measures mentioned above, under the 2nd pillar of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) hill and mountain farming is supported through aid for forestry, processing and marketing, quality production, diversification (for example in the tourism sector or the implementation of local development strategies by mountain communities).

⁽¹⁹⁾ Follow up fiche to the Ebner report on the situation and outlook for hill and mountain farming (2008/2066(INI)) send to the EP on 29.01.09.

What we have to find out is whether this tool box delivers on the main objective which is to provide a sustainable future for our mountain farming and to strengthen this type of farming. If this is not the case, we have to find ways to adapt the policy framework.

What are now the next steps? On the 31st of March 2009 in Brussels following an initiative of several mountain regions of the EU and tremendous personal efforts of some Honourable Member's of this Parliament we will establish the framework for our discussions. This will be followed up by a conference to be held in the beginning of July 2009 in Garmisch-Partenkirchen where we will present first results of the discussions.

It is important for the Commission that all interested parties play an active role in these discussions in order to get a clear and complete picture about the current situation and what kind of measures are needed for strengthening the mountain farming.

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Question no 55 by Evgeni Kirilov(H-0117/09)

Subject: Bulgaria and Romania deprived of resources for rural development

Does the Commission envisage additional rural development packages for Bulgaria and Romania bearing in mind the fact that these countries do not receive any funds through modulation and that they should be given the same financial opportunities to tackle the new challenges defined in the Health Check discussions as the old Member States?

Answer

(EN) Under the Health Check agreement, additional funds for rural development would be available from 2010 for the 15 "old" Member States. Most "new" Member States would get additional Health Check funds for rural development from 2013, and Bulgaria and Romania from 2016 when compulsory modulation will apply to them due to the full phasing-in of the direct payments. Allow the Commission to recall that the additional modulation funds come from a reduction of direct payments.

The Health Check agreement does in no way exclude that Bulgaria and Romania can utilise the currently available funds under their rural development programmes to tackle new challenges. It is possible to strengthen the actions related to bio-diversity, water management, renewable energy, climate change and restructuring of the dairy sector. They can further modify their programmes to address correctly their needs including proposals for new actions, currently not displayed in their programmes.

In the context of the European Economic Recovery Plan, the Commission has proposed to strengthen the Community efforts in the energy sector, broadband in rural areas and climate change, including the new challenges as identified under the Health-Check of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP).

If the Commissions' proposal is endorsed by the Council and the Parliament, Bulgaria and Romania will receive significant amounts already in 2009, part of which they can spend on new challenges.

In total, €1.25 billion are foreseen for the moment for rural development, of which €250 million for new challenges as identified under the Health-Check of the CAP. This money will be distributed among all Member States and should be committed in 2009.

Furthermore, the Commission would like to remind the Honourable Member that with the Health Check all new Member States (EU12) will benefit from an increase of their financial envelopes for direct payments by a total of € 90 million. This additional money can be made available, within the commonly agreed rules, for specific support, for example for the protection or enhancement of the environment, to address disadvantages in the dairy, beef or goat and sheep sector, or to contribute to risk management instruments.

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Question no 56 by Alain Hutchinson(H-0122/09)

Subject: Export subsidies

In 2001 the EU undertook to move progressively towards eliminating all export subsidies on its agricultural products by 2013. However, the EU spent no less than EUR 2.5 billion in export subsidies for the 2006-2007

period. Although the amount may be decreasing, it is still much too high. In an international context characterised by a food crisis and an explosion in agricultural prices, we should be moving much more quickly towards doing away with these subsidies, which have a dumping effect that is intolerable for millions of small producers in the developing countries.

Can the Commission say, with the help of statistics and a timetable, exactly what its intentions are on this matter?

Answer

(EN) The re-introduction of EC export refunds for dairy products is a response to a dramatic 60% decrease in world market prices over recent months, a result from shrinking demand. And contrary to the current situation in the EU, dairy production increases in certain competing exporting third countries such as New Zealand, Brazil and the United States.

These export refunds have therefore to be considered as a safety-net and certainly not as a setback of the course set out in the 2003 Common Agricultural Policy reform and the subsequent Health Check.

The EU has always respected its international commitments on export refunds and will continue to do so.

The Ministerial Declaration adopted at the Hong Kong World Trade Organisation (WTO) Ministerial Conference on 13-18 December 2005 lays down that: "We agree to ensure the parallel elimination of all forms of export subsidies and disciplines on all export measures with equivalent effect to be completed by the end of 2013." The EC as WTO member will respect its political commitments in the declaration, including on the deadline for the elimination of all forms of export subsidies. This commitment however is conditioned on the successful completion of the Doha Round.

The EC remains committed to concluding the Doha Round and hope that an agreement can be achieved during 2009. Following an agreement the EC will specify in its schedule the details on the elimination of export refunds by 2013.

In 2006/2007 the EC notified to the WTO the spending of €1.4 billion in export refunds and not € 2.5 billion. This is less than one fifth of the agreed WTO ceiling for export subsidies.

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Question no 57 by Κατερίνα Μπατζελή(H-0123/09)

Subject: The USA Farm Bill

The economic recession is affecting producers and economic sectors at European and international level, making it necessary to develop new policies to tackle the problems in these areas. Recently the US Government tabled a new agriculture policy bill (the farm bill), which provides for stronger support measures for farm incomes, coverage of risks and new insurance systems which, together with coordinated and integrated actions (New ACRE and CCP) will make up for farmers' loss of income from any disruption of the markets.

Does the Commission intend, when seeking new support measures for agricultural incomes, to promote similar measures for European producers so that European farmers are not inadequately supported in relation to their counterparts in the USA?

Does the Commission think that the existing CAP mechanisms and WTO agreements currently ensure that agricultural products have permanent access to the international market?

Will the Commission reflect on the fact that American agriculture, despite its different economic and social characteristics, is supported by a larger budget than is European agriculture?

Answer

(EN) The influence of the financial crisis on the real economy has resulted in significant slowdown in economic activity that affects simultaneously all major economies. Although the agricultural sector is generally more resilient than other sectors, it is also expected to face significant challenges, especially in demand growth and farm income. None of these challenges indicate to us that anything in the existing WTO-rules would impede our access to international markets.

European farmers receive a stable level of income support through the Single Payment Scheme. It is an efficient tool for ensuring continuity of agricultural production throughout the EU. It is also a market oriented solution where the farmers make their production decisions based on market signals. American farmers have access to several different kinds of risk management tools, so do the farmers in the EU, but in the EU we have chosen to tackle the issue of dealing with risks differently. This depends on factors such as production structures, budget planning, and the objectives of agricultural support.

We have looked at what an income insurance scheme would imply for the EU both through internal and external studies. The conclusion is that such a scheme would necessitate a harmonised definition of what constitutes income throughout all 27 Member States, it would pose a major administrative burden, and it would be very expensive and variable in budgetary costs, while the CAP has a fixed budget over set budget periods. Besides, several instruments geared to dampen the effects of substantial price or production variations already exist within the CAP, such as disturbance clauses and intervention mechanisms for several agricultural sectors, and in exceptional circumstances state aid for agricultural insurance schemes and for disaster relief payments. In addition, with the Health Check we provide Member States with the possibility of using part of their direct payment envelopes for risk management measures.

As regards the future financial perspective the European Commission is currently undertaking a budget review process. This process aims at formulating the appropriate objectives for the future budget. Once these objectives have been agreed on, a discussion on the actual amounts necessary to meet the set objectives can take place. Naturally, an important aspect for the Commission in this process is the aspect of how to best contribute to European farmers' competitiveness. Farmers' competitiveness is not however necessarily dependent on the level of the budget dedicated to agricultural policies, but is also dependent on the kind of policies that are supported and on the overall environment in which farmers are operating.

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Question no 58 by Εμμανουήλ Αγγελάκης(H-0038/09)

Subject: Creation of a European media organisation and the dissemination in the Member States of information concerning Europe

In a bid to combat the democratic deficit, the Commission has launched numerous EU public information initiatives and sought to increase media coverage of European issues. Laudable efforts to this end are being made on the European website, Europarl TV, Euronews, etc. The current tendency to 'go global' is provoking reactions principally among well-educated eurosceptics with a knowledge of English at least.

Is the Commission envisaging the possibility of 'going local'? Would it consider creating official European media channel or organisation for each of the Member States, responsible to it and disseminating information in their respective languages on exclusively European subjects, and showing how they relate to local issues?

Answer

(EN) A medium term audiovisual strategy was adopted in April 2008 with a view to create the tools allowing better understanding of the audiovisual (AV) market; reinforce the existing AV services for professionals and journalists and develop new services; contribute to the developing of an audiovisual European public sphere by setting up networks of AV operators that would create, produce and broadcast programmes on EU affairs on radio, TV and internet media which citizens already use at local and national level and in the language which they prefer.

The Commission does not envisage creating an official European media channel, as many media, technologies and operators already exist. A new media able to appear on all technological platforms would have difficulties to find its market. Therefore, the policy is to try to be present on existing media, using the various technological platforms to maximise the reach and the audiences of EU information programmes. The Commission has organised the creation of three EU-wide networks (of which two are operational) to better meet citizens' needs at national, regional and local level, while respecting full editorial independence of the participating stations.

The European Radio Network (Euranet), created in December 2007, started to broadcast in 10 EU languages in April 2008, reaching weekly 19 million EU citizens and 30 million non EU citizens around the world every week. Its interactive website www.euranet.eu started to operate in 5 languages in July 2008 and in 10 languages in November 2008. The network is open to new members, being international, national, regional

or local as long as they fulfil quality and independence criteria. It will progressively increase the number of broadcasting languages to 23 during the duration of the contract.

Another network of websites, called <http://www.PRESSEUROP.eu> was created in December 2008 and will be operational in May 2009. It aims to be an interactive website that will daily make a selection of the best papers published in the international press. Its first dossier will cover the European elections. This network will reach at least 3 million unique visitors in ten languages per month and around 1 million readers of the papers that form the network per week.

The EU TV network will reassemble international, national, regional and local TV to produce and broadcast EU information programmes in at least 10 languages at the beginning (up to 23 at the end of the contract). The selection procedure is on course. It is expected to be operational before mid-2010.

Synergies between the various networks and websites are organised to ensure a maximum of visibility and reach citizens, to organised cross-boarders debates and let citizens from the most remote parts of the Union express their opinions, needs and requests

Once fully operational, the three networks together with Euronews will reach between 60 and 90 million EU citizens in all EU languages every week.

All media, although fulfilling the precise mission of informing EU citizens in a participative way, work in full editorial independence with the aim to facilitate access to EU information and democratic debate.

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Question no 59 by Mairead McGuinness(H-0039/09)

Subject: Biodiversity loss in the EU

The Commission Communication, A Mid-Term Assessment of Implementing the EC Biodiversity Action Plan, published at the end of 2008, outlines that the EU is 'highly unlikely' to meet the target of halting biodiversity loss by 2010. The Commission states that an 'effective legal framework for the conservation of soil structure and functions' will need to be put in place. Can the Commission elaborate on this?

At a time when the demand on the productivity of agricultural land is greater than ever, does the Commission have any immediate plans to address biodiversity loss with regard to soil, and not simply wait until 2010 to assess the situation?

Answer

(EN) Soil biodiversity contributes to most of the known ecosystem services, such as nutrient, gases and water cycling as well as soil and biomass formation; hence, without soil biota, terrestrial ecosystems would collapse rapidly.

The Commission has made a proposal for a Soil Framework Directive⁽²⁰⁾, which has the objective of ensuring a sustainable use of soil and protecting soil functions. These include soil as being a biodiversity pool, comprised of habitats, species and genes. Since the first reading of the proposal by the Parliament in November 2007, the Commission has been working with the Council to attempt to make progress towards its swift adoption. Once the Directive will be implemented, an effective legal framework for the conservation of soil structure and functions will finally be put in place across the Community. The provisions therein to combat erosion, organic matter decline, desertification, salinisation and contamination will greatly contribute to the protection of soil biodiversity.

While waiting for the adoption of the Soil Framework Directive, the Commission is actively involved in the protection of soil biodiversity using other existing instruments, such as the possibilities offered in rural development to support appropriate agricultural practices (e.g. crop rotation, buffer strips, ploughing-in of crop residues, organic farming) in the context of agri-environment measures pursuant to Council Regulation (EC) No 1698/2005⁽²¹⁾. Some of the standards of good agricultural and environmental condition under cross-compliance can also contribute to the protection of soil biodiversity, in particular the standards

⁽²⁰⁾ COM(2006) 232, 22.9.2006.

⁽²¹⁾ OJ L 277 of 21.10.2005.

addressing the issues of soil erosion, soil organic matter and soil structure. Efforts are also being made to enhance the profile of soil biodiversity in the context of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity. In addition, the Commission is well aware that there are many knowledge gaps as regards soil biodiversity. To overcome these deficiencies, it is giving increasing attention to soil biodiversity and soil fertility in the Seventh Framework Programme for Research, in particular under theme 2 ("Food, agriculture and fisheries, and biotechnologies") and theme 6 ("Environment"). Furthermore, it has recently launched a 12-month study specifically dedicated to an exhaustive overview of the state of play as regards the level of knowledge on and around soil biodiversity and the link between soil biodiversity and soil functions.

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Question no 60 by Ιωάννη Γκλαβάκη(H-0042/09)

Subject: Competitiveness of the European food industry

In its previous reply (P-5307/08), the Commission confirmed that food imports from third countries were increasing, something which is of great concern to European producers and the European food industry.

Is the Commission envisaging measures to make the European food industry more competitive and does it intend to develop an appropriate support strategy to this end?

Answer

(EN) The Commission aims to maintain the competitiveness of Europe's food industry while taking into account the demands of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) and the EU's international obligations in both bilateral and multilateral trade agreements.

It has set up a High Level Group on the Competitiveness of the Agro-Food industry under the chairmanship of Vice – President Verheugen which aims at addressing the following issues:

The future competitiveness of the Community agro-food industry

The factors that influence the competitive position and sustainability of the Community agro-food industry, including future challenges and trends likely to impact on competitiveness

The formulation of a set of sector-specific recommendations addressed to policy makers at the Community level. The final report will be presented in April 2009.

Moreover, many programmes supporting the competitiveness of industry exist at European level and some are more particularly dedicated to the food industry. Their aim is to improve the competitiveness of this sector i.e. its ability to grow and prosper. 90% of the companies operating in the food industry are small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) and one of the main programmes designed for SMEs is the Competitiveness and Innovation Framework Programme (CIP). The main aims of this instrument are to provide better access to finance, support innovation activities and the use of information and communications technologies (ICT). The programme is in place for the period 2007-2013.

Furthermore, an amount of €26.4 billion from the European Regional Development and Cohesion funds for the period 2007-2013 has been dedicated to SMEs.

The Enterprise Europe Network is another instrument which has been created in order to support businesses across Europe and to promote innovation and competitiveness. It is made up of almost 600 partner organisations in more than 40 countries.

The Commission adopted in December 2008 a Communication on Food Prices in Europe which offers a preliminary analysis of the role and potential problems of the different actors in the food supply chain. In the context of the follow-up to this Communication, further investigation will be carried out concerning the enforcement of competition at EU and national level (with a specific targeting at practices and restrictions that are particularly harmful in this domain), the improvement of the transparency along the supply chain and better information for consumers, as well as further analysis of the functioning of the food supply chain and of the conditions for the competitiveness of the food industry.

The regulatory framework in which the EU food industry businesses operate is a key determinant of their competitiveness, growth and employment performance. The Commission helps businesses to improve their competitiveness by reducing red tape, and by producing better regulation. These actions are an important

part of the EU's Partnership for Growth and Jobs strategy, which reinforces the Lisbon agenda's drive to make Europe the world's most competitive economy.

In line with this, the Commission has proposed a major simplification of the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), based on the improvements brought by the recent CAP reform (Health Check), which aims mainly at creating a more market oriented agricultural sector.

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Question no 61 by Armando França(H-0043/09)

Subject: Illegal betting

Sport today is also a business with a turnover running into millions of euros. The sports betting market has been expanding at an ever increasing rate, and, as a result of the Internet, betting has been making its presence felt more strongly, for instance in football. It is therefore vital to protect football clubs and everyone involved in the sport, since their products are continuing to be exploited without their permission and they are thus being stripped of a legitimate source of income, jeopardising the football industry and its economic viability. The betting market remains unregulated and has yet to lead to tax consequences. Under-age gambling is becoming more rife; consumers are being denied their privacy; there is still no effective data protection; and inside betting is continuing to spread. What plans does the Commission have to regulate this market and when will it act?

Answer

(EN) The Commission has no plans to regulate the gambling market. The Honourable Member may as well recall that Member States and the European Parliament did not favour the Commission's proposal for such a regulation during the debate on the services Directive. The recent exchange of views in the Competitiveness Council on 1 December 2008 also demonstrated that Member States continue to favour national regulation in this area.

The Commission accepts that Member States are free to regulate such activities at national level, but they must do so in conformity with the EC Treaty. In such circumstances the Commission insists that restrictions imposed by Member States must be justified by a valid public interest objective, necessary and proportionate to protect the relevant objectives. It must also be applied consistently both to domestic operators and operators licensed in another Member State who wish to offer their services cross border.

On the broader issue of sport the Commission is planning to launch, in the first quarter of 2009, a call for proposals for a study to analyze differing systems of funding of grassroots sport across the EU. The study will look across the whole spectrum of sources of funding, including direct and indirect financial flows between professional and grassroots sport through the solidarity mechanisms.

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Question no 62 by Brian Crowley(H-0045/09)

Subject: Trading relations with Balkan region

What initiatives is the European Union putting in place to improve the level of exports from the 27 European Union Member States that are sold within the Balkan region? And in general what programmes are in place to improve trading relations between the European Union and countries in the Balkan region?

Answer

(EN) The Western Balkans as a region is a key and valuable partner for the EU. The EU has repeatedly reiterated its commitment to this region's European perspective, leading eventually to EU membership.

The EU is the Western Balkans' main trading partner. Deeper economic ties between the EU and the region are therefore vital for boosting the region's economic growth, to the benefit both of these countries and of the EU and its exporters. Trade liberalisation and integration is a cornerstone in the Stabilisation and Association process. The EU has pursued this objective with the Western Balkans at three levels.

Firstly, the Commission has negotiated Free Trade Agreements as part of the Stabilisation and Association Agreements. These provide for mutual free access of exports to the EU and the Western Balkan country

concerned. These agreements create the conditions for political and economic reforms and set the basis for the Western Balkans' integration in the EU by means of the alignment to the *acquis*. The Stabilisation and Association Agreements were preceded by unilateral trade preferences granted by the EU to the Western Balkans.

Secondly, at the regional level, the Commission acted as a facilitator of the negotiations on the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). It has also provided financial support and technical assistance to the CEFTA Secretariat and to the Parties as to help with the implementation of the agreement. At the same time, the Commission values highly the regional ownership of the agreement and acknowledges that CEFTA is fundamental for deeper regional economic integration, including in preparing the ground for the full participation of the Western Balkans in the EU single market.

Thirdly, at the multilateral level, we have supported the accession of the countries in the region to the World Trade Organisation, as a fundamental step towards effective participation in the globalised economy.

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Question no 63 by Γεωργίου Παπαστάμκου(H-0049/09)

Subject: Television broadcasting rights for football matches

Where are the points of friction between the rules governing the sale of television broadcasting rights for football matches at European level (Champions League) and national level (national leagues) and Community law?

Answer

(EN) The main antitrust issue in the area of sport media rights in recent years has been the question of whether, and under what circumstances, the collective sale of media rights is compatible with Article 81 EC. The Commission has taken in the recent past three decisions involving the collective selling of media rights, namely UEFA Champions League⁽²²⁾, German Bundesliga⁽²³⁾ and FA Premier League⁽²⁴⁾.

In these three decisions, the Commission has consistently taken the view that the collective selling of media rights in the area of sports – i.e. when sports clubs (e.g. football clubs) entrust the selling of their media rights exclusively to the respective sports (league) association which then sells these rights on their behalf – constitutes a horizontal restriction of competition under Article 81(1) EC. However, the Commission has recognized that this practice creates efficiencies and could therefore be accepted under Article 81(3) EC if certain conditions are met.

Such conditions were for instance the obligation for the joint-seller of media rights to organise a competitive, non-discriminatory and transparent bidding process, the obligation to limit the duration and the scope of the exclusive vertical contract, the prohibition of conditional bidding, and the imposition of a no single buyer clause (for the FA Premier League Decision only).

In the White Paper on Sport⁽²⁵⁾ and the accompanying annexes the Commission has outlined its position with regards to the sale of broadcasting rights to sport events as well as the application of the Community Law, and in particular the Competition law, to media rights.

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⁽²²⁾ Commission decision of 23 July 2003, Case 37398, Joint selling of the commercial rights of the UEFA Champions League, OJ 2003 L 291, p.25.

⁽²³⁾ Commission decision of 19 January 2005, Case 37214, Joint selling of the media rights to the German Bundesliga, OJ 2005 L 134, p. 6.

⁽²⁴⁾ Commission decision of 22 of March 2006, Case 38173 Joint selling of the media rights to the FA Premier League, available at: http://ec.europa.eu/comm/competition/antitrust/cases/decisions/38173/decision_en.pdf

⁽²⁵⁾ White Paper on Sport, COM(2007) 391 final of 11 July 2007; Commission Staff Working Document SEC(2007) 935 of 11 July 2007.

Question no 64 by Avril Doyle (H-0059/09)**Subject: Plant protection products and humid countries**

Does the Commission, from an agricultural perspective, have any ongoing concerns with the outcome of the Pesticides package, namely the Klass and Breyer reports? Does it have complete confidence that the cereal, potato and soft fruit industries in humid countries – like Ireland – will continue to have access to all necessary plant protection products for these very important crops?

Answer

(EN) The Commission is convinced that the new Regulation, which might lead to the withdrawal of a limited number of active substances, will not significantly affect the market.

On the contrary, the Commission believes that it is an incentive for the development of new safer products. It also streamlines the authorisation procedure to give quicker access to the market to new pesticides, thus improving opportunities for innovation with new solutions ensuring sustainable plant protection and food safety at the same time.

This Regulation provides for the possibility to approve active substances under restrictive conditions for a limited time in order to control a serious danger for plant health, even if they do not meet the approval criteria for carcinogenicity, toxicity to reproduction or endocrine disruption.

Furthermore, the zonal system for authorisations will increase the availability of pesticides to farmers between Member States and give incentives to industry to develop products for small cultures. It will reduce the administrative burden for producers of plant protection products and the competent authorities. Therefore the Commission is of the opinion that farmers in the EU will also in future have access to all plant protection products which are necessary for a sustainable and economically viable crop production.

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Question no 65 by Magor Imre Csibi(H-0074/09)**Subject: Kozlodui nuclear power plant**

Does the Commission believe that the decision to reopen reactors 3 and 4 of the Kozlodui nuclear plant (Bulgaria) could have any effect on safety in the area?

Answer

(EN) For the European Union, nuclear safety has constantly been a priority issue in the context of enlargement since the 1990s. Kozloduy units 1–4 are VVER 440/230 reactors, on which the Commission's position has remained consistent that these first-generation reactors of Soviet design are considered inherently unsafe by nuclear experts and cannot be economically upgraded to a required level of safety. This position is in line with the G7 multilateral action programme for improving the safety of all Soviet-designed reactors in Central and Eastern Europe adopted at the Munich G7 summit in 1992⁽²⁶⁾.

The closure of Kozloduy units 1–4 was negotiated as part of the conditions of accession of Bulgaria to the European Union and included as such in the Treaty of Accession. Any unilateral decision by Bulgaria to reopen Kozloduy 3-4 would be a breach of the Accession Treaty.

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Question no 66 by Zita Pleštinšká(H-0078/09)**Subject: Harmonisation of disability cards**

Around 50 million Europeans – one 10th of the population of Europe – have some form of disability. Roughly one in four Europeans has a disabled family member. Despite the progress made in terms of social inclusion of persons with disabilities, there are still a number of barriers within the EU, for example regarding mutual

⁽²⁶⁾ <http://www.g7.utoronto.ca/summit/1992munich/communique/nuclear.html>

recognition of identity cards indicating that the holder has a severe disability. Many disabled citizens experience problems abroad, such as being unable to use disabled parking spaces.

Is the Commission considering the possibility of harmonising severe disability cards in the EU along similar lines to the European health insurance card?

Answer

(EN) The Commission is in favour of the mutual recognition of disability status between the EU Member States for the purpose of awarding benefits to people with disabilities. However the absence of an agreement at European level on the definition of disability, the diversity of national practices and the reluctance of some Member States do not make it possible for the Commission to propose, at this stage, an EU-wide identity card for persons with disabilities or the mutual recognition of national disability identity cards for granting special benefits.

With regard to parking cards for people with disabilities, the Commission recalls that Council Recommendation 2008/205/EC⁽²⁷⁾ provides for a standard Community model. Under this Recommendation, the holder of the standard Community parking card issued by a Member State can benefit from parking facilities available to people with disabilities in any other Member States.

However, the Commission underlines that recommendations do not have any binding force in the Member States and that the latter remain responsible for defining disability, setting the procedures for granting the card and defining the conditions under which the card can be used. To facilitate the use of the parking cards across the EU, the Commission set up a website⁽²⁸⁾ and published a booklet⁽²⁹⁾ providing information to citizens and national authorities on the standard Community model and the conditions of use of the parking cards in the Member States.

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Question no 67 by Jens Holm(H-0079/09)

Subject: Fisheries agreement between EU and Morocco

The fisheries agreement concluded between the EU and Morocco in 2006 covers the occupied areas of Western Sahara. The agreement authorises Morocco to sell fishing licences not only in its waters but also in Western Sahara. The UN had already made clear in 2002 that, as an occupying power, Morocco does not have the right to sell Western Sahara's natural resources for its own gain but only in consultation with and for the benefit of the Sahrawi people.

Can the Commission say how many fishing licences have been sold specifically for the Western Sahara region to European vessels since the conclusion of the agreement? What is financial value of those licences? At a very practical level, how, in the Commission's estimation, has the agreement benefited the Sahrawi people?

Answer

(EN) The question of Western Sahara in the framework of the EC/Morocco Fisheries Partnership Agreement (FPA) has been discussed in detail, inter alia the FPAs conformity with international law, during the process of the Agreement's adoption in the Council and in the Parliament.

The EU considers that the issue of the international status of Western Sahara is a complex question that should be solved in a bilateral and multilateral context in the framework of the United Nations. It is for this reason that the FPA does not include any reference to the status of Western Sahara.

As foreseen in the FPA and in line with international law, the Government of Morocco is responsible for the implementation of the fisheries sector policy and for the use of the financial contribution of the Agreement.

⁽²⁷⁾ Council Recommendation 2008/205/EC of 3 March 2008 adapting Recommendation 98/376/EC on a parking card for people with disabilities, by reason of the accession of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, the Republic of Estonia, the Republic of Cyprus, the Republic of Latvia, the Republic of Lithuania, the Republic of Hungary, the Republic of Malta, the Republic of Poland, Romania, the Republic of Slovenia and the Slovak Republic.

⁽²⁸⁾ <http://parkingcard.europa.eu>

⁽²⁹⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/docs/en_bookletparkingcard_080522.pdf

This annual financial contribution amounts to € 36.1 million, of which at least € 13.5 million is to be used to support the fisheries policy and the implementation of responsible and sustainable fisheries. The EU and the Government of Morocco monitor and examine the results of the implementation of the fisheries sector policy in the Joint Committee which has been established under the FPA. Support for the fisheries sector in the Western Sahara is one of the elements of the aforementioned policy and is taken into account in the programming of measures to be undertaken within the framework of the Agreement.

There are no data with regard to the issuing of licences specifically to fish in the Western Sahara region. However, most of the pelagic vessels fishing under category 6 of the FPA are active in this region and make a substantial contribution to local landings. In 2008, landings in Dakhla have accounted for 44% (25,920 tonnes) of the catches of this category.

In Layoune, demersal trawlers and long-liners (category 4) and tuna purse-seiners (category 5) landed 488 tonnes and 13 tonnes respectively. Total licence fees for categories 4 and 6 amounted to € 350,711 in 2008 but, again, there is no breakdown available on the basis of the actual location of the relevant fishing activities.

The European pelagic operators landing in Dakhla estimate that they employ around 200 people in connection with their investments in processing and transportation there and the Moroccan sailors embarked on their vessels are local sailors from Dakhla.

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Question no 68 by Bogusław Sonik(H-0081/09)

Subject: Financial crisis at the Auschwitz-Birkenau museum

The Auschwitz-Birkenau museum is facing a financial crisis. Unless financial resources are quickly found to preserve and protect the buildings of the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, irreversible changes will occur in the coming years as a result of which this place of memory will lose its authenticity and fall into ruin. Within the 200 hectares covered by the museum, there are 155 buildings and 300 ruins, as well as collections and archives at risk of destruction. Until now the museum has been funded mainly from the Polish state budget and its own revenues. In 2008, foreign aid accounted for barely 5% of the museum's budget. Europe has a moral duty to rescue this site and keep alive the memory of the extermination of hundreds of thousands of European citizens.

Given the financial crisis facing the former Auschwitz-Birkenau concentration camp, will the Commission consider tackling this problem through European Union support for museums?

Answer

(EN) The Commission considers that the continuous process of building Europe requires the development of a European awareness amongst its citizens, based on common values, history and culture, and preserving the memory of the past, including its dark sides.

In early February 2009, the Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum received a grant of approximately € 4.2 million from the European Regional Development Fund. The grant was awarded by the Ministry of Culture in Poland under the "Infrastructure and Environment" European Operational Programme.

In this context the Commission draws attention to the fact that the Community Action programme "Europe for Citizens" also supports projects related to preserving the memory of mass deportations during Nazism and Stalinism era. This programme does not provide means for large-scale preservation projects such as the one mentioned in the question, but it offers an important contribution to keeping the memory alive and in transmitting it to future generations.

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Question no 69 by Charlotte Cederschiöld (H-0082/09)

Subject: Crossborder healthcare

The Commission is the guardian of the Treaty (i.e. Art. 49) and has to defend European citizens' rights.

Will the Commission withdraw the whole proposal on patient mobility if patients' rights according to the present *acquis* are not met?

Answer

The Parliament has not yet voted its first reading on the COM proposed Directive on the application of patients' rights in cross-border healthcare⁽³⁰⁾. Discussions are ongoing in the Council, with only a progress report issued by Health Ministers in December.

The Commission is thus not in a position to assess whether the co-legislators' positions are likely to affect in a fundamental manner the objectives of its proposal – and, in particular, the enforcement of patients' rights as recognised by the European Court of Justice.

Patient's rights are directly derived from the fundamental freedom to receive services guaranteed by Article 49 EC Treaty. They have been confirmed on many occasions by the European Court of Justice. One of the objectives of the proposal is to clarify these rights and to provide more legal certainty for patients, Member States and health care providers. The Commission is committed to defend those rights and not to have them reduced or removed, respecting the European Court of Justice jurisprudence and the existing *acquis communautaire*, particularly Regulation 1408/71 on the coordination of social security.

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Question no 70 by Marianne Mikko(H-0084/09)**Subject: Declaration on the proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Stalinism and Nazism**

This summer will mark the passage of 70 years since the signing of the notorious Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 23 August 1939 between the Soviet Union and Germany divided Europe into two spheres of interest by means of secret additional protocols. Declaration 0044/2008 on commemorating the victims of the consequences of this Pact received the support of 409 Members of the European Parliament from all political groups. It was announced by the European Parliament's President on 22 September and was forwarded, together with the names of the signatories, to the parliaments of the Member States. The influence that the Soviet occupation had on the citizens of the post-Soviet states is little known in Europe.

What initiative, if any, has the Commission planned in response to the declaration?

Answer

(FR) The Commission believes that Parliament's Declaration on the proclamation of 23 August as European Day of Remembrance for the Victims of Stalinism and Nazism is an important initiative to preserve the memory of totalitarian crimes and to raise public awareness, particularly among young generations.

The Commission hopes that the parliaments of the Member States, to whom this Declaration is addressed, will implement it in a way that is most appropriate to their individual history and sensitivity.

The Commission is preparing to draw up the report requested by the Council when the latter adopted the framework decision on combating certain forms and expressions of racism and xenophobia by means of criminal law. The Commission will present this report in 2010 so that a political debate may be held on the need for new Community initiatives.

In preparation for this report, a study has been launched to gain a factual overview of the methods, laws and practices used in Member States to deal with questions concerning the memory of totalitarian crimes. This study will be completed by the end of 2009. Furthermore, the Commission's work is also based on contributions received at the hearing of 8 April 2008 that it organised in conjunction with the Presidency. The Commission will also examine how Community programmes can contribute towards better awareness of these issues.

The Commission is committed to pursuing the process under way and to moving forward, step by step, while understanding, of course, that the Member States must find their own way to meet the victims' expectations and to achieve reconciliation. The role of the European Union is to facilitate this process by encouraging discussion and promoting the exchange of experience and good practice.

⁽³⁰⁾ COM(2008)414 final

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Question no 71 by Esko Seppänen(H-0085/09)**Subject: Recreational fishing**

The Commission is drawing up a proposal for a regulation whereby people who fish in their free time would have to report their catches to the authorities if the fish in question weighed more than 15 kg. The proposal is absurd, and those who are drafting it have no understanding whatsoever of life in the northern Member States and its closeness to nature and nature's bounties. Does the Commission really intend to make itself a laughing-stock and at the same time bring the scrutiny of an inquisition to bear on the Nordic way of life by imposing a notification requirement as regards fish caught by amateur anglers?

Answer

(EN) In contrast to what has been widely reported, the Commission has not made any proposals to submit all recreational or amateur anglers to quotas or controls similar to those applying to professional fishermen.

The Commission has proposed to address some recreational fisheries in a Regulation establishing a Community control system to ensure compliance with the rules of the Common Fisheries Policy (Article 47). The draft regulation does not, however, aim to place a disproportionate burden upon individual anglers or on the leisure fishing industry. What is proposed is to subject recreational fisheries on certain specific stocks, namely those subject to a recovery plan, to some basic conditions on permits and catch reporting. The scope of this is to obtain more accurate information to allow the public authorities to evaluate the biological impact of such activities and, where required, to prepare the necessary measures. As is the case for commercial fishery activities, Member States would be responsible for the enforcement and monitoring of such measures.

However, as the member of Commission in charge of Fisheries and Maritime Affairs has already said publicly, the Commission does not intend to submit all recreational fishermen to quotas as is the case with professional fishermen. The Commission's proposal would not cover shore anglers, including those wading in the sea, or anglers fishing from a pier, from a canoe or from a kayak. It would in fact only cover recreational fishermen who fish from a vessel in the open sea and who catch fish, which are under multi-annual plans, i.e. fish that are threatened by extinction. The normal hobby angler who catches an insignificant number of fish when he goes out fishing and uses it exclusively for his private consumption will not be covered by the control regulation, even if he catches fish like cod which is under a recovery plan.

The establishment of the precise catch threshold from which controls will have to apply, whether it be 5, 10 or 15 kilos or some other yard stick, will depend on the kind of fish caught. The member of Commission in charge of Fisheries and Maritime Affairs announced in his speech at the European Parliament on 10 February that this threshold will be determined on a case by case basis after the Commission has received relevant advice from the Scientific, Technical and Economic Committee on Fisheries (STECF), which should provide it with the necessary information with respect to proportionate threshold figures that are fair and just.

It should be recalled that recreational sea fishing is already subject to Member States' regulation by the Member States and there are many cases where permits and catch reporting are currently obligatory. In fact, it is the Commission's hope that this proposal will help harmonise such requirements, and ensure that we have similarly good data on the relevant fisheries wherever they take place.

The Commission welcomes further dialogue with stakeholders on how to further restrict the proposal's application to recreational fisheries which have a significant impact on stocks under a recovery plan. The Commission, of course, wants to ensure that the final regulation adopted by Council achieves a fair balance between, on the one hand, obtaining adequate information on the impact of recreational fisheries on sensitive (recovery) stocks (following a case by case analysis) and, on the other, ensuring that recreational fishers whose catches clearly have a negligible biological impact are not burdened with disproportionate requirements.

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Question no 72 by Bart Staes(H-0086/09)**Subject: Stopping EU financial support for Bulgaria because too little progress is being made in the fight against corruption**

Two years ago the Commission told us that it had obtained full guarantees from the candidate country Bulgaria that financial support from the European budget would be properly administered. This does not, however, seem to be the case. Now Bulgaria is losing EUR 220 million, and another EUR 340 million in financial support for projects that have already been approved is being frozen. All of this while, according to the European Commission, the political will to fight corruption is definitely present in Bulgaria.

Can the Commission explain what these 'guarantees' were made up of and why they seem in the event to have been insufficiently watertight?

Answer

(EN) The Commission takes a close interest in the sound financial management and control of EU funds and the correct execution of the EU budget. The implementation of funds is closely scrutinised by the different services managing EU funds in Bulgaria. The implementation of these funds follows separate legal regulations. The Commission reports to the Parliament annually on the execution of the budget.

As a result of considerable shortcomings in the management of EU-funds in Bulgaria which were identified at the beginning of 2008, the Commission suspended the reimbursement of certain funds under all three pre-accession funds PHARE, ISPA and SAPARD. In addition, the Commission withdrew the accreditation of two government agencies in charge of managing PHARE funds. These decisions remain currently in force. The services of the Commission are at present assessing whether corrective actions by Bulgaria would merit unfreezing funds under certain conditions. It is in particular important for Bulgaria to demonstrate concrete results in addressing irregularities and fraud.

The Commission services are in close contact with the Bulgarian authorities and support them on a continuous basis in their efforts to overcome the current implementation problems of EU funds. The Commission and the Bulgarian authorities share the common objective of implementing EU assistance in full conformity with sound financial management and controls and for the benefit of the Bulgarian people.

Furthermore, the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) has a strong presence and commitment in Bulgaria and works closely with a wide range of Bulgarian authorities (the National Investigation Agency, public prosecutors, the State Agency for National Security, the tax administration, the Deputy Prime Minister, etc.) to discuss measures in order to improve the effectiveness of the fight against fraud and corruption detrimental to EU's financial interests. In particular, OLAF is following with a great interest the on-going judicial proceedings concerning SAPARD cases.

In addition, the Commission cooperates closely with Bulgaria in the context of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism (CVM) which was set up upon Bulgaria's accession to the EU in order to help Bulgaria remedy shortcomings in the areas of judicial reform, the fight against corruption and organised crime. To ensure the efficient absorption of EU funds, Bulgaria must also curb corruption and vigorously fight organized crime.

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Question no 73 by Joel Hasse Ferreira(H-0087/09)**Subject: Discrimination against European workers in the United Kingdom**

The recent incidents involving British workers in the United Kingdom constitute attempted discrimination against workers from Portugal and other Member States and show signs of alarmingly anti-European attitudes. The demonstrators speak of the Portuguese and other European workers in language that cannot be tolerated.

Regarding the investment by Total and IREM in Lindsey, in eastern England, will the Commission take the steps required to ensure full compliance with the European rules in force on free movement of workers, or has it already started such action, working in liaison with the British Government?

Answer

(EN) The Commission is aware of the strike in the UK at the Total plant in Lindsey (Lincolnshire). The Commission understands that Italian and Portuguese workers were brought to Lindsey in the framework of a subcontract awarded by Total UK to the Italian firm IREM.

The situation referred to by the Honourable Member relates to the free movement of services,

which includes the right of undertakings to carry out services in another Member State in the context of which they may send ("post") their own workers temporarily. It therefore appears that the industrial action has put in question the right to provide services.

The Commission is of the opinion that the posting of workers directive is an essential instrument, giving companies the benefit of the internal market, while allowing Member States to take the necessary measures to protect workers' rights.

The Commission is determined to continue to ensure the balance between protection of workers and economic freedoms and avoid unfair competition. Free movement of workers and free movement of services are key conditions to achieve economic growth, strengthen competitiveness and promote living standards and prosperity in the EU.

The Commission understands the anxiety of European workers fuelled by the current crisis. The Commission adopted a European Economic Recovery Plan in November 2008 to limit the impact of the crisis on the real economy and on jobs. Last week, the Commission adopted a further contribution to the March 2009 European Council to help cushion the negative impact of the crisis and prepare the EU for future sustainable growth. An employment and social summit in May 2009 will be a further opportunity to discuss these important issues. As previous experience has shown, the way out of the crisis is not through erecting barriers or pandering to protectionism but upholding the values of openness and free movement.

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Question no 74 by Ilda Figueiredo(H-0090/09)**Subject: Protecting the rights of Portuguese workers in the United Kingdom**

The recent events in the United Kingdom, where several dozen Portuguese workers were prevented from going to work at the Total refinery in Lindsey in northern England, are the consequence of rising unemployment and the feelings of xenophobia that have sought to portray migrants (emigrants and immigrants) as being to blame for the crisis, which is not the case. The causes of the crisis are to be found elsewhere, namely in the capitalist and neoliberal policies promoted by the European Union.

Can the Commission say what steps are being taken to protect the rights of all workers, create more jobs with rights and thereby prevent the spread of racist and xenophobic behaviour?

Answer

(EN) The Commission is aware of the strike in the United Kingdom (UK) at the Total plant in Lindsey (Lincolnshire). The Commission understands that Italian and Portuguese workers were brought to Lindsey in the framework of a subcontract awarded by Total UK to the Italian firm IREM. The Commission also understands that the British employment relations service, Acas, published a report stating that its inquiry has found no evidence that Total, and its sub-contractors, Jacobs Engineering or IREM, have broken any laws in relation to the use of posted workers or entered into unlawful recruitment practices.

The situation referred to by the Honourable Member does not seem to relate to the free movement of workers based on Article 39 of the EC Treaty. Free movement of workers is to be distinguished from the freedom to provide services based on Article 49 of the EC Treaty, which includes the right of undertakings to carry out services in another Member State in the context of which they may send ("post") their own workers temporarily.

It therefore appears that the industrial action has put in question the right to provide services. The Commission is of the opinion that the posting of workers directive is an essential instrument, giving companies the benefit of the internal market, while allowing Member States, in Article 3, to take the necessary measures to protect workers' rights. The Commission is determined to continue to ensure the balance between protection of workers and economic freedoms and avoid unfair competition. In this context, the Commission, together

with the French Presidency of the Council, has asked the European Social Partners to draw up a joint analysis on this subject. The Commission looks forward to receiving the result of their discussions.

The Commission understands the anxiety of European workers fuelled by the current crisis. The Commission adopted a European Economic Recovery Plan in November 2008 to limit the impact of the crisis on the real economy and on jobs. The Commission has adopted on 4 March a further contribution to the March 2009 European Council to help cushion the negative impact of the crisis and prepare the EU for future sustainable growth. Furthermore, the Czech Presidency of the Council will organise an Employment Summit on 7 May 2009. As previous experience has shown, the way out of the crisis is not through erecting barriers or pandering to protection, but upholding the values of openness and free movement.

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Question no 75 by Zbigniew Krzysztof Kuźmiuk(H-0088/09)

Subject: Opening of the German labour market for the new Member States

On 16 July 2008 the German Government decided that the German labour market would remain closed to workers from the new Member States for a further two years (until the end of April 2011), even though the unemployment rate in June 2008 was just 7.5%. In the justification of that decision for the Commission, the unfolding economic crisis was mentioned as the main reason, although the crisis is affecting not just the German economy but the economies of all EU Member States.

Does the Commission consider this justification to be convincing and properly substantiated?

Answer

(EN) The Commission is aware of the German Government's decision to extend the restrictions on EU-8 workers' access to its labour market until 2011.

According to the Accession Treaty, a Member State that wants to continue to maintain labour market restrictions during the period 1 May 2009 to 30 April 2011 can only do so if it notifies the Commission before 1 May 2009 of a serious disturbance of its labour market, or threat thereof. The Commission, in its role as guardian of the Treaties, reserves the right to take the appropriate course of action once it receives and reviews the German notification.

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Question no 76 by Αθανασίου Παφίλη(H-0092/09)

Subject: Pension entitlements of repatriated political refugees

On entry into the EU on 1 January 2007 Romania and Bulgaria agreed to implement Community Regulations (EEC) No 1408/71⁽³¹⁾ and (EEC) No 574/72⁽³²⁾ on the application of social security schemes to employed persons and their families moving within the Community.

Immediately after their entry into the EU, Greek political refugees repatriated from Romania and Bulgaria submitted applications through the relevant social security bodies (IKA, OGA, OPAD and General Accounts Office) to the liaison bodies of these two countries responsible for matters relating to pensions and social security contribution periods at the following addresses: The National Pensions and Social Security Institute, str. Latina 8, Sector 2 for Romania and The National Security Institute, 62-64 Alexander Stabulinsky Boulevard, Sofia 1303 for Bulgaria.

Two years have since elapsed and no pension entitlements have yet been awarded to repatriated Greek political refugees from these two countries.

What are the Commission's views concerning immediate pension payments by these countries to repatriated political refugees?

⁽³¹⁾ OJ L 149, 5.7.1971, p. 2.

⁽³²⁾ OJ L 74, 27.3.1972, p. 1.

Answer

(FR) The Commission is aware of the issue concerning the pension rights of Greek nationals who worked in Romania and Bulgaria and were repatriated during the 1970s.

On the basis of bilateral agreements concluded between Greece and the aforementioned countries, Greek law recognised, under certain conditions, that periods of work carried out in these countries could be considered as having fictitiously been carried out in Greece. This legal fiction was aimed at protecting certain groups of people who risked losing their rights completely with respect to social security. This assistance, which was granted solely on the basis of national law and under the terms specified therein, provided for benefits to be paid up to 1 January 2007.

In effect, since this date, Community Regulations (EEC) No 1408/71 and (EEC) No 574/72 have applied to Romania and Bulgaria. However, Article 94(1) of Regulation 1408/71 stipulates that no right shall be acquired under this Regulation for a period prior to the date of its entry into force in the Member State in question.

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Question no 77 by Kathy Sinnott(H-0094/09)**Subject: M8 Rathcormac Fermoy bypass and N8 Watergrasshill bypass**

I first contacted the Commission in August 2006 on the issue of the M8 and the N8 Watergrasshill bypass. Answers to previous written questions (P-3803/06, P-5555/06 and E-0821/07) were unsatisfactory.

The opening of the new M8 toll motorway on 2 October 2006 resulted in 2.4km of EU-funded roadway (N8) being withdrawn from all free public usage as there is no access or exit point for non-toll-paying citizens. This stretch of road is inaccessible to my constituents unless they pay a toll to a private company. This constituted an unauthorised change of use and a change of ownership. The impact of these changes has been very significant to the village of Watergrasshill and traffic volumes through the village have increased considerably, making it dangerous for people. The situation is ongoing and is causing hardship for many of my constituents.

Will the Commission inform me what it is currently doing about the situation?

Answer

(EN) The Commission has carried out extensive consultations with the Irish authorities, following the various questions posed by the Honourable Member on the subject of the Watergrasshill interchange. Previous correspondence between the Commission and the Member State has, as requested, been forwarded directly to the Honourable Member.

The co-funded Watergrasshill interchange is owned by the local authority. The entire Watergrasshill Bypass will remain in public ownership and be maintained by the local authorities.

The Irish authorities have informed the Commission that certain improvements were put in place to discourage drivers of heavy goods vehicles, who were unwilling to use the toll road, from passing through Watergrasshill village. These included:

A one-way system on the road leading to the village centre from the Watergrasshill Junction;

A three tonne limit on vehicles using the main street;

An improved local village bypass that would direct any untolled traffic to an alternative route, away from Watergrasshill village.

Following the Honourable Member's above-mentioned question, the Commission made contact with the Irish authorities in order to ascertain the latest situation with regard to traffic flows through the village. The Irish authorities have informed the Commission that both the one-way system and the 3 tonne limit were removed in mid 2008 by vote of Cork County Council at the request of the local community in Watergrasshill.

The latest traffic counts subsequent to the removal of the restrictions, as mentioned above, indicate the following:

A total of 19,859 vehicles on the N8 south of the Fermoy bypass;

A total of 13,202 vehicles using the toll road;

A total of 6,214 vehicles using the improved local village bypass (mentioned above).

Approximately 6,600 vehicles go through the main street on a daily basis. This includes village retail and local traffic feeding through the village. The Irish authorities estimate that a significant amount of this local traffic might always be present given the development of housing in the area in recent years.

No figures are available on the number of heavy goods vehicles travelling through the village, but this is likely to have increased since the removal of the one-way system and the 3 tonne limit.

It is worth noting that vehicle flows through the village are considerably lower than the corresponding figure of 10,336 vehicles recorded in November 2006.

In light of the above, the Commission is of the opinion that the Irish authorities have taken all reasonable measures to address the concerns of the residents in Watergrasshill. The Commission trusts that the above information answers the Honourable Member's latest queries on this matter.

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Question no 78 by Κωνσταντίνου Δρούτσα(H-0096/09)

Subject: Dismissals and ban on trade union activity

Retail workers in Greece are mobilising in support of their justified claims for better working conditions, pay and benefits. In addition, they are calling for the reinstatement of a fellow worker dismissed by the 'JUMBO' department store for taking part in a strike action. The government and the employers are seeking to intimidate workers by means of a wave of arrests and reprisals against protesting workers in many Greek towns and cities. In particular, the 'JUMBO' company is seeking to halt all trade union activity, obtain guarantee payments from workers, impose fines and criminal sanctions and ban worker movements in support of the right to work and seeking the reinstatement of those dismissed and stronger trade union and democratic rights.

Does the Commission condemn such actions as infringing the right of workers to strike and exercise their democratic and trade union freedoms?

Answer

(EN) The Commission considers that freedom of association should be regarded as a general principle of Community law. It is therefore to be respected in any situation falling within the scope of the latter. In this connection the Commission would refer the Honourable Member to the Court of Justice's ruling in the Bosman case and to Article 12 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, which provides that everyone has the right to freedom of association, in particular in trade union matters⁽³³⁾.

However, there is no EC legislation expressly providing for the right of association. Article 137(5) of the EC Treaty stipulates that that Article does not apply to the right of association. Furthermore, there is no EC legislation prohibiting discrimination on grounds of membership of a trade union or participation in a strike⁽³⁴⁾.

In addition, the Commission would stress that the Treaty does not empower it to take action against a private undertaking which breaches the right to freedom of association and/or to strike. In such cases, it would be for the national authorities, in particular the courts, to ensure that those rights are respected in their territory on the basis of all pertinent facts and with due regard to the applicable national and international standards.

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⁽³³⁾ The Charter is, however, not legally binding at present.

⁽³⁴⁾ See the Commission's answers to written questions H-0271/07 and E-2091/08.

Question no 79 by Ivo Belet(H-0097/09)**Subject: High bunker adjustment factors since the abolition of the conferences**

Since the abolition of the conferences in mid-October, shipping lines have themselves had to determine the amount to be charged in the form of bunker adjustment factors (BAF), which are imposed in order to compensate for the risks of fluctuations in fuel prices.

In the case of BAFs for maritime freight from Antwerp to Arica, shipping lines are in fact charging the same rates as in July 2008, despite the recent falls in oil prices.

Is the Commission aware of this situation?

What measures can be taken to induce shipping lines to adopt reasonable rates?

Answer

(EN) As the Honourable Member knows, following the abolition of the liner conference block exemption on 18 October 2008 liner companies have to assess themselves whether their business practices comply with the competition rules. To help maritime operators understand the implications of this change, the Commission has adopted guidelines on the application of Article 81 of the EC Treaty to maritime transport services on 1 July 2008. In view of the guidelines and of the current state of the Article 81 case-law, it appears that, on its own, the fact that bunker adjustment factors (BAFs) on the Antwerp to Africa trade are still at their July 2008 levels does not necessarily indicate the existence of anti-competitive practices committed by shipping lines. Indeed, there may be benign explanations for the fact that BAFs are not falling as fast as oil prices (or as fast as base rates), such as bunker hedging and/or market transparency in the shipping sector and in the oil sector. Nonetheless, the Commission has been closely monitoring the evolution of the liner sector since the abolition of liner conferences last October, and will continue to do so. In particular, the Commission will vigorously enforce the competition rules in order to prevent any attempt to compensate the fall in base rates by increasing BAFs and other surcharges and ancillary charges via anti-competitive practices.

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Question no 80 by Proinsias De Rossa(H-0099/09)**Subject: Working hours of junior doctors**

What is the Commission's response to the recent report published by the Irish Department of Health which indicated that some of the 4 500 junior hospital doctors in Ireland are still working shifts of 36 hours or more four and a half years after the Working Time Directive (Directive 93/104/EC⁽³⁵⁾ as amended by Directive 2000/34/EC⁽³⁶⁾) took effect, and which concluded that no hospital in Ireland is fully compliant with EC legislation on working time?

What action has the Commission taken or is planning to take to ensure that Ireland is fully in compliance with its obligations under EC working time legislation?

Answer

(EN) The Commission is aware of the report published in December by the Irish national authorities, about the situation in practice in Ireland as regards the working hours of doctors in training.

Under the Working Time Directive⁽³⁷⁾, working time should not exceed an average of 48 hours per week. The Directive provides special transitional arrangements for extending this limit to doctors in training, who were not covered by the Directive until 2004. But even under these transitional arrangements, working time of doctors in training should not exceed 56 hours per week on average by August 2007, and 48 hours on average by 31 July 2009. Other provisions of the Directive apply in full since 2004 to doctors in training.

⁽³⁵⁾ OJ L 307, 13.12.1993, p. 18.

⁽³⁶⁾ OJ L 195, 1.8.2000, p. 45.

⁽³⁷⁾ Directive 2003/88/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 4 November 2003 concerning certain aspects of the organisation of working time, OJ L 299, 18.11.2003, p. 9.

These provisions include the requirement for minimum daily rest periods (at least 11 consecutive hours per 24-hour period) and, where applicable, special limits to night work.

In the light of these provisions, the Commission views with concern the report mentioned by the Honourable Member, and intends to make contact with the national authorities.

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Question no 81 by Jim Allister(H-0104/09)

Subject: John Calvin

Having regard to the immense contribution of John Calvin to Europe's religious, political and social history and to the enlightenment and development of Europe, what plans has the Commission to mark the 500th anniversary of his birth in July 2009?

Answer

(EN) Along with other important political and religious thinkers, the work of John Calvin has contributed to the shaping of European values and has had a particular influence in certain regions and Member States. However, the Commission currently has no plans to mark the 500th anniversary of his birth.

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Question no 82 by Μανώλη Μαυρομμάτη(H-0105/09)

Subject: Financial support for the media

According to the Commission's answer to Written Question P-0189/09 concerning financial support for the media during the worldwide economic crisis, numerous Member States have notified the Commission of State aid to the press, which it has already approved insofar as it was consistent with the provisions of Community law.

Could the Commission say specifically which Member States have already submitted such requests, which of them have been approved, what sums are involved and for which media they are intended? What are the conditions which make this State aid consistent with the provisions of Community law?

Answer

(EN) The Commission recognises the need for full editorial independence of the media as well as the importance of media pluralism for the cultural, democratic and public debate in Member States and the importance of newspapers in this context. However, running a newspaper is also a commercial activity and the Commission has a duty to prevent undue distortions of competition and trade resulting from public subsidies.

In this respect, various State aid schemes in support of the press have been notified to the Commission. For example, Finland notified subsidies (€ 0.5 million in 2008) granted to a limited number of Swedish-language and minority language newspapers⁽³⁸⁾, Denmark notified a scheme in favour of the distribution of certain journals and periodicals⁽³⁹⁾ (approximately € 4.6 million per year), and Belgium notified a scheme in favour of the Flemish written press⁽⁴⁰⁾ (€ 1.4 million per year).

After an assessment of these schemes under Community law, the Commission decided that such aid could be declared compatible with the common market. In particular, the Commission assessed whether the aid pursued an objective of common interest (such as the promotion of media pluralism and diversity of views)

⁽³⁸⁾ Commission decision in case N 537/2007, Sanomalehdistön tuki, 20.05.2008, see:

http://ec.europa.eu/community_law/state_aids/comp-2007/n537-07-fi.pdf

⁽³⁹⁾ Commission decision in case N 631/2003, Distribution af visse periodiske blade og tidsskrifter, 16.06.2004, see: http://ec.europa.eu/community_law/state_aids/comp-2003/n631-03.pdf

⁽⁴⁰⁾ Commission decision in case N 74/2004, Aide à la presse écrite flamande, 14.12.2004, see:

http://ec.europa.eu/community_law/state_aids/comp-2004/n074-04-fr.pdf

in a necessary and proportionate way. The Commission took into consideration factors such as the duration of the scheme, the number and the activities of the beneficiaries, the amount of the subsidies and the aid intensity.

Amendments to the Swedish press aid scheme were also notified by Sweden in September 2008. The Commission decided in November 2008 to follow the procedure applicable to aid schemes which pre-exist a Member State's entry into the European Union. The case is currently pending.

No Member State has so far notified anti-crisis aid to the press. Member States may, however, use aid schemes approved under the "Temporary Community Framework for State aid measures to support access to finance in the current economic and financial crisis"⁽⁴¹⁾ to the press in the same way as for other sectors of activity.

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Question no 83 by Carmen Fraga Estévez(H-0107/09)

Subject: Natural disasters in January 2009

The storms that occurred in Spain and France in January took an extremely heavy toll in terms of both damage and loss of life. In the Galician autonomous community, it was the forestry sector that sustained the worst damage. The Commission has confirmed that contacts with the French Government have been going on since the start of the storms, with a view to determining the availability of Community funding to make good the losses sustained.

Has the Spanish Government applied for Community assistance under the Solidarity Fund? Has it contacted the Commission to find out what assistance is available under that instrument or under rural development programmes?

Answer

(EN) As far as the European Union Solidarity Fund is concerned, the Commission services in charge have not received an application concerning the storm on 24 January 2009. However, Council Regulation (EC) No 2012/2002 of 11 November 2002 requires an application by the national authorities of the Member State concerned to the Commission only within 10 weeks of the date of the first damage (i.e. in the present case on 4 April 2009).

The European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) can provide financial aid to Member States and countries engaged in accession negotiations to the EU in the event of a major natural disaster if total direct damage caused by the disaster exceeds €3 billion (at 2002 prices) or 0.6% of the country's gross national income, whichever is the lower. The threshold applicable to Spain in 2009 is direct damage in excess of € 3.398 billion. In exceptional cases, if specific criteria are met, the Fund can be mobilised for disasters that do not reach the normal threshold.

It should be recalled that financial assistance from the Solidarity Fund is limited to specific types of emergency operations carried out by the public authorities (as defined by the Regulation), such as reinstating vital infrastructures to working order, cleaning up, providing temporary accommodation or funding rescue services. The Fund cannot compensate for private losses.

As far as rural development policy is concerned, Article 48 of Council Regulation (EC) n° 1698/2005⁽⁴²⁾ provides for a measure aiming at restoring forestry potential in forests damaged by natural disasters. The Rural Development Programme of Galicia for the period 2007-2013 offers this possibility, with a total financing of € 147,799,420, of which € 81,022,302 co-financed by the EAFRD. So far, the Commission services in charge of Spanish Rural development have not been contacted as regards this matter, as the above mentioned measure is directly applicable.

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(41) OJ C 16, 22.01.2009, p 1. Amended on 25 February 2009 (amendment not yet published in OJ)

(42) Council Regulation (EC) n° 1698/2005 of 20 September 2005 on support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (OJ L 277, of 21.10.2005, p.1).

Question no 84 by David Martin(H-0110/09)**Subject: Seizure of generic medicines in transit in the Netherlands**

With reference to the seizure in the Netherlands of generic medicines in transit, can the Commission clarify why the medicines were seized given that the footnote to Article 51 of the TRIPS (Trade-related aspects of Intellectual Property Rights) Agreement does not impose an obligation to inspect for alleged patent infringement for goods in transit?

Does the Commission consider that this seizure contravenes Article 41 of the TRIPS Agreement, which states that IP enforcement should not create barriers to trade?

Has the Commission included or does it intend to include similar IP rights provisions in any of its new generation of FTAs (Free Trade Agreements) or other bilateral trade agreements?

What steps will the Commission take to ensure that the supply of generic medicines to developing countries is not thwarted by similar seizures in future?

Answer

(EN) EU legislation (Council Regulation 1383/2003⁽⁴³⁾) provides for customs to detain goods suspected of infringing certain intellectual property rights (IPR), including patents, even when goods are in transit. Article 51 TRIPs foresees these two situations, but only imposes as a minimum standard that WTO members put in place controls on imports of goods suspected of infringing trademarks and copyrights. It does not prevent Members from extending this to goods in transit. The EU legislator opted for the broader scope of application allowed by TRIPs. Consequently, Regulation 1383/2003 is fully in line with WTO/TRIPs requirements, in terms of scope and coverage of customs intervention.

Under the Customs legislation, it is not the customs officers who decide whether goods are infringing IPR. The general procedure is to detain goods for a short and legally limited period, where there is a suspicion of infringement and to contact the right holder. It is then up to the right holder to pursue the matter or not through a court, under national provisions. Article 55 TRIPs, sets out the time-limit of 10 working days for suspending the release of the goods, as well as the possible extension of a further 10 working days.

In the present case, following a request by a company which has patent rights over the medicine in question in the Netherlands, the Dutch customs authorities temporarily detained the drugs in question whilst in transit. In this case, the goods were finally released after the right holder and the owner of the goods came to an agreement not to pursue the case through court proceedings. The intervention of the customs formally ceased when the goods were released and it is important to note in this regard that the decision to send the consignment back to India derived from an agreement between the two parties, not the Customs Regulation itself, which leaves the owner of the goods the total freedom to dispose of them as he sees fit once the goods have been released.

The Commission considers that the proceedings outlined above comply with Article 41 of TRIPs, as well as with Articles 51 to 60 TRIPs and does not constitute a barrier to trade. The temporary detention of goods is limited strictly in time. Furthermore, should the goods be detained on the basis of an unsubstantiated complaint, the owner of the products may claim compensation. Other members of WTO also apply similar customs proceedings and practices in case of detection of suspicious goods in transit.

Council Regulation 1383/2003 has been in place for more than 6 years and has proven to be efficient in order to protect the legitimate interests of manufacturers and right holders, as well as health, safety and consumer expectations against fake products, including pharmaceuticals. As an example, Belgian customs recently stopped a consignment of 600,000 fake anti-malaria pills destined for Togo. Thanks to the fact that EU customs regulation allows for inspection of goods whilst in transit, the action taken by the Belgian customs administration has preserved potential consumers of the potentially harmful effects of these products. Whilst the policy concerning access to medicines for all is not at all questioned, surely all stakeholders have an obligation to protect vulnerable populations from potentially life-threatening practices.

The approach proposed by the Commission regarding the IPR section in the bilateral agreements is to clarify and complement the TRIPs where it is unclear, is not very developed or simply has been overtaken by IP developments elsewhere. The Customs procedure in place in the EU has proven to be effective, balanced and

(43) OJ L 196 of 2.8.2003.

with sufficient in-built guarantees to avoid abuse by bad-faith complainants. Therefore, the Commission is considering introducing similar provisions in the new generation of bilateral trade agreements. However, it should also be noted that these agreements should also include provisions that stress and reinforce the letter and the spirit of the Doha Declaration on the TRIPS Agreement and Public Health. For example, Articles 139.2 and 147.2 of the Economic Partnership Agreement between the EU and Cariforum make it clear that nothing in the agreement should be construed as to impair the capacity of the Cariforum States to promote access to medicines (see the Commission's reply to written parliamentary question E-0057/09⁽⁴⁴⁾).

The Commission fully understands the concerns expressed by the honourable Member, and many others, as to the need to ensure the fluidity of trade in generic medicines to developing countries and fully subscribes to this objective. The Commission will therefore monitor the situation and remain attentive to any (mis)application of EU legislation that may lead to undue hampering of the legitimate trade in generic medicines or to the creation of legal barriers to prevent movement of drugs to developing countries. However, it is not convinced that the incident mentioned in the Honourable Member's question justifies in itself a review of a legal mechanism that has been in place for several years without problems and that, on the contrary, has fulfilled its role of reducing the global traffic of counterfeits.

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Question no 85 by Sajjad Karim(H-0112/09)

Subject: Negative impact of the EID Regulation

Council Regulation (EC) No 21/2004⁽⁴⁵⁾ introduces electronic identification (EID) of sheep and individual recording of sheep and goats from 31 December 2009. However, the industry has identified the requirement to record individual details of animals that are not electronically identified on movement documents as too burdensome.

Could the Commission identify benefits that electronic tagging and individual movement recording would bring regarding disease control that are not already available through present systems in the Member States, i.e. the UK ID and batch recording system?

Is the Commission aware that the implementation of this regulation will involve additional costs that, coupled with the recording requirements, will force many producers out of business?

Does the Commission recognise the practical problems arising from the use of EID equipment on farms and the difficulties associated with recording the individual identities of the UK sheep flock?

How will the Commission ensure that the objectives of the EID Regulation are met in the most cost-effective way?

Answer

(EN) The current rules on individual identification and traceability of sheep and goats were proposed by the Commission and adopted in Regulation (EC) 21/2004 by the Council after the foot and mouth disease (FMD) crisis of 2001 in the United Kingdom (UK), and the subsequent reports of the Parliament, the Court of Auditors and the report known as "Anderson report" to the UK House of Commons indicated that the existing "batch" traceability system was unreliable.

Electronic identification (EID) is the most cost-effective way to achieve individual traceability and it is now ready to be used under practical farming conditions, even the most difficult ones.

Its costs have considerably decreased. However, these costs should be assessed against the enormous economic losses caused by diseases like FMD as well as the advantages of this system for the daily management of farms. The FMD outbreak in 2001 was dramatically spread by uncontrolled movements of sheep within the UK and from the UK to other Member States and caused a huge negative social and economic impact on the UK farming sector as well as in other Member States. According to the Court of Auditors Report No 8/2004 on the Commission's management of FMD (2005/ C 54/01), the impact on the Community budget was € 466

⁽⁴⁴⁾ www.europarl.europa.eu/QP-WEB/home

⁽⁴⁵⁾ OJ L 5, 9.1.2004, p. 8.

million. According to the so-called "Anderson report" to the UK House of Commons⁽⁴⁶⁾ the expenditure by the UK Government reached £ 2 797 million. All this does not include the huge direct and indirect impacts on the different economic sectors (farming, food industry, tourism) which are difficult to quantify in exact figures.

As already indicated on several occasions to the Parliament and being aware of the impact on farmers of the relevant Community rules, the Commission has adopted a prudent approach on electronic identification and it is doing everything possible to facilitate its smooth introduction.

The Commission will soon publish an economic study that aims to provide guidance on the most efficient way to ensure implementation of the new traceability system. It is also open to Member States, to make funds available to sheep farmers for the introduction of EID within the framework of Community rules on state aids. In addition, the Community budget provides for financial resources that may be allocated by the Member States within the rural development policy.

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Question no 86 by Anne E. Jensen(H-0116/09)

Subject: Consequences of the financial crisis in Central and Eastern Europe

The financial crisis has hit the countries of Central and Eastern Europe hard. Loans in foreign currencies such as Swiss francs, dollars and yen have become a massive burden both for firms and for private households owing to falls in the local currencies' exchange rates. There are cases of families that are no longer able to their pay electricity or gas bills. In the Baltic countries, the economy has shrunk by 10%, and the President of the World Bank has estimated that the countries of Central and Eastern Europe need between DKK 236 billion and 266 billion. In addition, cracks are beginning to appear in cooperation between the Member States.

What does the Commission propose to do to ensure that EU citizens in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe can continue to enjoy decent living conditions?

Does the Commission agree with the President of the World Bank in his estimate of the magnitude of the aid needed?

What does the Commission propose to do to ensure a common European approach to the challenges posed by the financial crisis, creating the will to combat the currency crises and prevent a domino effect in the banking system triggered by the problems in the Central and Eastern European countries?

Answer

(EN) In November 2008, the Commission responded to the financial and economic crisis with the European Recovery Plan (EERP), endorsed by the European Council of December 2008. Solidarity and social justice are the fundamental principles of this Plan. The European employment support initiative contained in the EERP involves both a mobilisation of EU financial resources and the definition of a number of policy priorities for Member States, aimed at lessening the human cost of the economic downturn and its impact on the most vulnerable.

In operational terms, this means that the available EU financial instruments have been strengthened. The revision of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund will allow it to be quickly activated to support workers hit by significant job cuts and their communities. The Commission has also put forward a proposal for adoption by the Parliament and the Council, to adapt the ESF programming to the needs of the crisis through the simplification of its functioning, thus allowing for an immediate increase of €1.8 billion in advance payments.

Since most instruments for cushioning the employment and social implications of the crisis are in the hands of Member States, the Commission is advocating a coordinated approach to labour market recovery, to ensure that measures taken in one Member State do not have negative spill-over effects on other countries. In this respect, the Commission has identified a number of policy guidelines for Member States, aimed at 1) supporting employment in the short-term, notably by sustaining temporary flexible working time

⁽⁴⁶⁾ "Foot and Mouth Disease 2001: Lessons to be learned inquire report", 22 July 2002

arrangements, and at 2) facilitating labour market transitions, by reinforcing activation and providing adequate income support to those most affected by the slowdown, and investing in training and employability, so as to ensure rapid re-integration into the labour market and contain the risk of long-term unemployment. These guidelines have been clearly spelled out in the Commission Communication of 4 March 2009 to the Spring European Council.

The Commission and the Member States have decided to hold an Extraordinary Summit on Employment next May, to agree on further concrete measures to mitigate the social and employment impact of the crisis and help accelerate recovery.

2. Estimates of potential bank losses, emergency liquidity and recapitalisation needs, and short-term external debt refinancing needs are subject to great uncertainty and must be treated with caution. At this stage, one should avoid unwarranted alarmism based on the very preliminary and broad-brush estimates of assistance needs that sometimes circulate. The Commission works closely with other international partners in assessing countries' concrete needs for assistance under the EU instruments (e.g. in calibrating balance-of-payments support for Latvia and Hungary).

3. At the informal meeting of Heads of State or Government on Sunday 1 March, EU leaders sent a message of solidarity and joint responsibility. They also highlighted that each country is different in political, institutional and economic terms and has to be assessed on a case-by-case basis and that the idea that the EU is not doing much for Eastern Europe (propagated by some media and some international institutions) is wrong.

Importantly, from an EU perspective, the available policy measures to support macro-financial stability in Central and Eastern Europe depend on whether a country is an EU Member State, and if not, whether the country is an EU candidate or potential candidate, or if it belongs to the wider EU neighbourhood.

The EU has already deployed a large number of instruments to contain risks across the region. Within the EU, a comprehensive set of measures and vast financial resources have been activated to address difficulties in the financial sector and to support the real economy. These measures include:

provision of ample liquidity by central banks and extensive measures to support the banking sector. The EU framework for national rescue packages ensures that the benefits accrue to both home and host countries;

financial assistance to countries experiencing balance-of-payments difficulties (Latvia, Hungary);

national and EU-level measures to support growth in the context of the European Economic Recovery Plan;

additional commitments by the EIB and the EBRD; and

frontloading of structural funds, which should lead to a marked increase in advance payments to the new Member States in 2009.

For non-EU Member States, instruments to manage macro-financial challenges are more limited but action has been taken both at macro-financial level and in support of the real economy. The Commission constantly monitors the effectiveness of these instruments and has stepped up its surveillance of the macro-economy and macro-financial risk. The international financial institutions (the IMF, the World Bank, the EIB and the EBRD) have a strong role to play in this region. The Commission is in close contact with the IMF and other international financial institutions. The EU supports a sizeable increase in IMF resources inter alia to strengthen its abilities to intervene in Eastern European countries.

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Question no 87 by Γεωργίου Τούσσα(H-0119/09)

Subject: Environmental disaster affecting wetlands in Greece

The competent authorities and environmental organisations condemn the fact that wetlands in Greece have long been subjected to criminal treatment. They claim that, unless measures are taken to protect them, the wetlands are at risk of being irreparably destroyed by industrial activities, illegal waste, intensive tourist development and large-scale installations, lack of essential infrastructure and absence of integrated management. The 10 most important Greek wetlands, such as the deltas of the rivers Evros, Axios, Nestos, Aliakmonas, lakes Vistonida, Volvi and Kerkini, gulfs and lagoons designated of international importance

present a lamentable picture of dereliction. Lake Koronia, for example, is considered to be ecologically dead and the situation is far worse for those not covered by the Montreux and Ramsar conventions.

What measures have been taken to put an end to this outrage against the environment and biodiversity, to protect Greek wetlands effectively, and to repair the serious ecological damage inflicted and prevent its recurrence?

Answer

(EN) Wetland areas which have been designated for the European ecological network Natura 2000 by virtue of the Birds Directive⁽⁴⁷⁾ (Special Protection Areas - SPA) or the Habitats Directive⁽⁴⁸⁾ (Sites of Community Importance - SCI), have to be protected and managed in accordance with the applicable provisions of these Directives, so that the biodiversity values they host are maintained or restored. In that context it is the responsibility of the Member States to implement the necessary measures in order to tackle ongoing threats to wetlands and put in place a sound management framework.

In particular, as regards the Birds Directive, following an application by the Commission the European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruled recently against Greece (case C-293/07) for the lack of a coherent, specific and complete legal regime ensuring the sustainable management and effective protection of SPAs, including the 10 wetlands of international importance mentioned by the Honourable Member. In that context the Commission will now assess the adequacy of measures taken or to be taken by Greece in order to comply with the ECJ ruling.

As regards the Habitats Directive, since Greek SCIs were put on the Community list in July⁽⁴⁹⁾, Greece has six years to designate them as Special Areas of Conservation, define conservation priorities and establish the necessary conservation measures. In the meantime, Greece should ensure that the sites are not subject to any significant deterioration or disturbance and that their integrity is maintained.

As regards water protection, the Water Framework Directive⁽⁵⁰⁾ (WFD) puts in place a management framework to protect and enhance all surface waters and groundwaters, with the objective of achieving good status of all waters as a rule by 2015. The main tool to achieve this environmental objective is the river basin management plan, the first of which is due in December 2009. Since its adoption in 2000, the Commission has followed closely the implementation of the WFD in the Member States, including Greece. As a consequence of the action by the Commission, the Court condemned Greece on 31 January 2008 for non-communication of the environmental analysis required by Article 5 of the WFD (case C-264/07). Greece submitted the environmental analysis in March 2008. In addition, the Commission has launched an infringement procedure for non-communication of the monitoring programmes for all its river basins, as required by articles 8 and 15 of the WFD. The report was due in March 2007 and has not been received yet. The Commission will closely follow the next steps in the implementation of the WFD in order to ensure that the Greek authorities fulfil their obligations.

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⁽⁴⁷⁾ Council Directive 79/409/EEC of 2 April 1979 on the conservation of wild birds, OJ L 103, 25.4.1979, p. 1

⁽⁴⁸⁾ Council Directive 92/43/EEC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora, OJ L 206, 22.7.1992.

⁽⁴⁹⁾ /613/EC: Commission Decision of 19 July 2006 adopting, pursuant to Council Directive 92/43/EEC, the list of sites of Community importance for the Mediterranean biogeographical region, OJ L 259, 21.9.2006, p. 1.

⁽⁵⁰⁾ Directive 2000/60/EC of the Parliament and of the Council of 23 October 2000 establishing a framework for Community action in the field of water policy, OJ L 327, 22.12.2000, p. 1