

MONDAY, 23 MARCH 2009

IN THE CHAIR: MR PÖTTERING

President

(The sitting was opened at 5.05 p.m.)

1. Resumption of the session

President. – I declare resumed the session suspended on Thursday, 12 March 2009.

First, I would like to welcome the new Secretary-General of the European Parliament, Klaus Welle, who is sitting on my left, and to wish him all the best in his endeavours.

(Applause)

On my right is David Harley, the Deputy Secretary-General. He represents, so to speak, continuity within the Secretariat. I would also like to wish him all the best.

(Applause)

2. Statement by the President

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, I have been asked to make the following statement. This week marks the 60th anniversary of the deportation of hundreds of thousands of citizens from the Baltic states. On the night of 24 March 1949, a wave of Soviet deportations began, during which tens of thousands of Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians were forcibly expelled from their homelands. They were robbed of their civil and human rights, and perished as a result of the hard, inhuman conditions they faced in the Soviet prison camps.

Almost every family in Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia, as well as in other former Soviet republics, suffered as a result of the horrific violence perpetrated by the totalitarian, Communist regime. Almost every family had relatives who went missing in Siberia, persecuted by the KGB or who were incarcerated and oppressed. The events we are talking about did not take place in some dark, distant past. They remain vivid memories for many people who, today, are EU citizens.

Thus, it is our duty, on the basis of our common values, and in order to commemorate the many victims of these deportations, to clearly and decisively condemn these abhorrent crimes perpetrated by the totalitarian, Communist regime in the Soviet Union. For we owe it to the victims to assess the past in an objective, in-depth and careful manner, as reconciliation can only ever be based on truth and remembrance.

3. Approval of the Minutes of the previous sitting: see Minutes

4. Composition of Parliament: see Minutes

5. Welcome

President. – Today, it is my honour to welcome a delegation of the Pan-African Parliament to our Parliament. As you all know, the Pan-African Parliament is to the African Union what the European Parliament is to the European Union.

I am particularly pleased to welcome Mr Khumalo and his parliamentary colleagues here today, as it gives me an opportunity to thank him and his colleagues, and thereby also the President of the Pan-African Parliament, Mrs Mongella, for the welcome I received in October 2008, during my visit to the Pan-African Parliament, as well as for the invitation to speak at the plenary session of the Pan-African Parliament.

Once again, I would like to sincerely bid you all welcome. I am very happy that you are here with us today.

(Applause)

6. Lapsed written declarations: see Minutes

7. Action taken on Parliament's positions and resolutions: see Minutes

8. Texts of agreements forwarded by the Council: see Minutes

9. Petitions: see Minutes

10. Documents received: see Minutes

11. Oral questions and written declarations (submission): see Minutes

12. Order of business: see Minutes

(The order of business was adopted)

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Monica Frassoni (Verts/ALE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I have a question for you concerning the European Council. We have heard that at the meeting of the European Council you said that Parliament agrees that the vote on the President of the Commission should take place on 15 July and the vote on the remainder of the Commission should be held once the Treaty of Lisbon has been adopted.

I would like to know whether or not this is true and, if it is true, on what authority you made these statements.

President. – Mrs Frassoni, as you yourself were present, I am sure you will recall that we discussed this matter at the Conference of Presidents. There was only one objection with respect to 15 July, which came from you. All the other group chairmen shared the view expressed in my statement before the Council. In any case, you may read the exact wording I used in my speech. The speech is available to all MEPs and to the public.

13. One-minute speeches on matters of political importance

President. – The next item is the one-minute speeches on matters of political importance.

Erna Hennicot-Schoepges (PPE-DE). – *(FR)* Mr President, I would like to draw the European Parliament's attention to the arrival of the President of Belarus, Mr Lukashenko, in Prague. Is President Lukashenko's arrival in accordance with the values that we stand for? Can the European Union have dealings with a president who holds all powers, without any time limit and without a mandate? What image will the European Union be giving by agreeing to accept the presence of a president who has had several of his political opponents eliminated and limits the rights of his citizens? What image will our Union be giving to the Obama administration, when a US citizen is languishing in a Belarusian jail and is likely to die unless something is done quickly? I think that this invitation should never have taken place.

Antonio Masip Hidalgo (PSE). – *(ES)* Mr President, I would like to talk to you all about El Musel, the major port of my region, Asturias.

It is absolutely essential that the Commission frees up funding for the extra costs of this port. Commissioner Tajani has understood this, as did his predecessor, Mr Barrot; they have both recognised the great functional and environmental challenges of El Musel.

In the midst of the crisis, since works such as those at El Musel are vitally needed, it is time to move beyond drawn-out, excessively bureaucratic obstacles, and time to think big and press ahead with this funding, which is so important for Asturias, for the north of Spain and for European economic recovery, too. Let me say once again, for European economic recovery, in which Spain is so honoured to take part.

Metin Kazak (ALDE). – (BG) The outcome of the last European Council meeting serves as an example of how to put into practice one of the European Union's basic principles: solidarity.

The EUR 5.6 billion in aid will enable the peoples of the Old Continent to overcome the consequences of the global financial and economic crisis. The EUR 105 million approved for Bulgaria, earmarked for safeguarding energy security, establishing broadband Internet, and for agriculture, reflect the support for and growing confidence in the government's programme for tackling the crisis.

It is vitally important for my country that the European Commission approves and the European Parliament supports the extension being sought for compensation until 2013 for the early closure of the Kozloduy nuclear power plant's third and fourth blocks. Bulgaria suffered the most in terms of losses resulting from the recent gas war between Russia and Ukraine. It is therefore important to observe the principle of treating all EU Member States equally.

I am counting on the thumbs up from the President of the Commission, Mr Barroso, and I urge my fellow Members in the European Parliament to allow justice and solidarity in Europe to prevail.

Eoin Ryan (UEN). - Mr President, I wish to raise the issue of the sniping and remarks that are being made in some quarters about the Irish banking and financial system.

The Irish system works within a legal and regulatory policy directive framework dictated by the EU. The system in Ireland is as strong, or as weak, as that EU framework. As we all know, the regulatory system has failed globally. Ireland is no worse, or better, than any other place.

I object to hostile comments about Ireland emanating from London, New York and the German media. All these places have experienced regulatory and banking challenges and problems equal to and, in many cases, far worse than those we have faced in Ireland. The constant sniping from some of our EU neighbours has been based on prejudice rather than objective fact and does little for EU solidarity at a time when Europe is going through enormous financial and economic challenges.

László Tőkés (Verts/ALE). – (HU) The internationally-renowned Roşia Montană Gold Corporation, a Canadian-Romanian joint venture, is planning to develop Europe's largest open-pit gold mine in the Transylvanian town of Verespatak (Roşia Montană). The European Parliament, in its resolution of December 2004, expressed its deep concern regarding the threat of natural catastrophe posed by the project. The 2005 general assembly of ICOMOS, in turn, resolved to protect the historic heritage of the ancient settlement.

The venture, accompanied by a series of scandals, is meant to use the same cyanide technology-based processing method as the one that contaminated the entire length of the Tisza River in 2000. The built heritage of Verespatak (Roşia Montană) has also been destroyed and its population impoverished. It appears that the Romanian Government is preparing to lift its temporary ban on the investment.

I ask the European Parliament to intervene in order to save Verespatak and protect its natural environment. The European Commission, for its part, should contribute to the rehabilitation of the destroyed town and its environment.

Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL). - (EL) Mr President, the next few days will mark:

- 10 years since the dirty war unleashed by NATO and the governments of the European Union, both centre left and centre right, against the people of Yugoslavia;

- 6 years since the criminal war and occupation of Iraq by the USA and its willing allies, a war which has cost the lives of approximately 1.5 million Iraqis;

- 60 years since the establishment of NATO, the imperialist war machine and threat to peace throughout the world which is preparing to mark its 60th anniversary with a celebratory summit in Strasbourg.

In Washington ten years ago, on 23 and 24 April 1999, the leaders of the NATO member states signed a 50th anniversary declaration approving its new doctrine. Thus the new NATO strategy was adopted, which also officially overthrows the basic rules of international law. A series of other criminal interventions by NATO followed in Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran and the Middle East.

In the run-up to the NATO summit, the French authorities have turned the centre of Strasbourg into an off-limits zone and activated the facility provided for in the Schengen Convention in order to prevent peace

demonstrators from entering France. They have mobilised considerable army and police forces to deal with demonstrators. These measures, which blatantly violate basic democratic rights, illustrate how much the imperialists and NATO fear the people.

The people need to respond to the celebrations and 'fiestas' marking the 60th anniversary of criminal imperialist action by NATO by reinforcing the anti-imperialist peace movement, strengthening the grassroots demand that NATO be disbanded...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM). - Mr President, intergroups have a long and distinguished history in this Parliament. In intergroups, MEPs can unite across the political divide to deal with particular issues.

For example, the oldest intergroup – the one on disabilities – vets legislation that goes through this Parliament to be sure that it is disability-friendly and educates other parliamentarians about disability issues.

Despite the valuable work of intergroups they have been marginalised over the last year and, effectively, they are being shut down by in-house parliamentary rules that refuse intergroups meeting rooms and slots in the schedule of the Strasbourg sitting.

I think we need to sort this out quite urgently – before the next term – because, otherwise, intergroups will be a thing of the past; Parliament will be much poorer for their extinction and the people of Europe will not be as well served.

(Applause)

Desislav Chukolov (NI). – (BG) Ladies and gentlemen, in recent years in Bulgaria a despicable practice has been observed known as 'vote buying'.

This is being carried out by every single political group, apart from the patriotic Attack party. Even parties describing themselves as an alternative to the ruling parties are paying voters, as indicated a few days ago by the information from the village of Brest near Pleven.

The forthcoming elections in our country look as if they are going to be the most rigged and underhand elections in Bulgaria's recent history. The ethnic Turkish and anti-constitutional party MRF has earmarked the huge sum of EUR 60 million to help it get the maximum possible number of members of parliament representing Turkey's interests into both the European Parliament and the Republic of Bulgaria's National Assembly.

There is an absolutely real danger that the next European Parliament will have representatives who have won their seats as a result of vote buying. Our message in Attack is: 'No Turkey in the EU', and we call on President Pöttering to urge the Bulgarian authorities to see to it that this move is foiled in the forthcoming elections through the adoption of election laws.

György Schöpflin (PPE-DE). – (HU) The story is obvious: a few hundred metres from the Hungarian border, in an Austrian village by the name of Heiligenkreuz, an Austrian company is calling for the construction of a high-capacity waste incinerator. On the Hungarian side, the city of Szentgotthárd considers the planned establishment unacceptable for reasons of environmental protection, among others.

Over the past two years, there have been frequent protests on the Hungarian side, but the Austrians refuse to acknowledge this. The result is that a growing anti-Austrian feeling is even beginning to affect the traditionally cordial relations between the two countries.

We ask the Austrian party to examine the plan, bearing in mind Hungary's considerations, and to put a stop to its development.

Gyula Hegyi (PSE). - Mr President, in January the Commission attacked the Hungarian moratorium on genetically modified maize MON810. The moratorium is clearly supported by the whole Hungarian scientific community, all political parties and Hungarian society. At the European Council in March, Hungary and Austria obtained a huge majority to maintain this moratorium, despite the Commission decision. Twenty-three of the twenty-seven Member States supported Hungary against the Commission.

This shows that it is high time for us to rethink the method of authorisation of GMOs in the European Union. I think – and, from the Council vote, it is clear – that most Member States think the same way: that the

Member States should have the competence to authorise a GMO or not. I hope that the next newly elected Parliament will create a new regulation on the authorisation of GMOs, based on the spirit of subsidiarity and transparency. The Commission should cooperate with Parliament and the Member States, not dictate to them.

Jean Marie Beaupuy (ALDE). - (FR) Mr President, one of our fellow Members has just spoken about the issue of intergroups.

There are more than 20 intergroups within this Parliament and their work has been obvious throughout the course of this term of office, which is about to end. Countless dozens of texts have benefited from the work of our intergroups; there are tens of thousands of people, Mr President, and hundreds of institutions who have been received in Parliament thanks to the work of the intergroups. If we continue to oppress the intergroups by refusing to give them meeting rooms, there will be more demonstrations.

Mr President, you have a great deal of experience, a very great deal of experience of our Parliament. Do not allow more or less secret sub-groups to meet during the next parliamentary term. We are not afraid of transparency at intergroup level, which is why we are urging you to make an assessment, quite openly, of the intergroups during this term of office. In this way we will have proof of their usefulness.

Mr President, I beg you, do not remain deaf to the demands of the intergroups and to all the letters that have been addressed to you over recent years.

Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN). - (PL) Mr President, there is no denying the demographic crisis taking place in Europe. The resulting shortage of labour poses a threat to the economic development of the EU Member States. The crisis is also undermining the efficiency of the pension systems, and is creating serious problems for European healthcare and social care systems.

In the meantime, the European Commission has failed to understand our efforts to alter negative demographic trends by promoting family development. In particular, there have been objections to the need to lower the VAT on products intended for very young children, such as nappies. The idea of punishing individual countries for adopting these kinds of solutions shows a lack of awareness of the dangers we are facing or, alternatively, it can be viewed as a sign of bad faith. In any case, it is unacceptable.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). - (PT) It is scandalous that the only wholly Portuguese-owned tyre factory has been at a standstill for several months, putting at risk nearly 300 direct jobs in the socially deprived area of Vale do Ave. This area has one of the highest levels of unemployment in the European Union following a series of business closures and job cuts in the textile sector.

The Camac workers in Santo Tirso and the trade union representing them have publicly exposed this serious situation, indicating that the company owes nothing to the banks or to the State, and is in fact in credit to the tune of tens of thousands of euros as a result of VAT withholding. The main creditors are the workers themselves whose salaries have not been paid because the company has failed to cope with the consequences of the falling value of the British pound, which is where almost all its production is exported, and the soaring cost of the raw materials used in the manufacturing process.

Following the company's insolvency application, they are waiting until 30 March for a solution. The Portuguese Government and the European Commission urgently need to respond to the warning and to the discontent voiced by the workers in order to prevent more unemployment and misery in an area where there are no alternative jobs.

Philip Bushill-Matthews (PPE-DE). - Mr President, the revision and reform of parliamentary procedures is now heading up the agenda, and I am sure that this is a subject very much dear to your own personal heart.

Can I please underpin the comments already made by a few colleagues about the importance of intergroups? I am Co-President of the Intergroup on Ageing, and, as you may be aware, over 50% of voters this year – for the very first time – will be over 50 as opposed to under 50. So, ageing issues are not just something that are of interest to people in here but are of interest to people, right outside, amongst our constituents.

I would plead with you, Mr President, to use the qualities of clarity and fairness which are the hallmarks of your presidency to make sure that the work of intergroups can be facilitated and not hindered from here on. Have we got your promise, please?

President. – It is always nice to see the British Conservatives fully on board the European boat, and totally at our side. Thank you so much, and I promise to be on my best behaviour.

Proinsias De Rossa (PSE). – Mr President, I am rising on the issue of breaches of environmental law in Ireland, specifically relating to water quality. The new EU survey of water quality in Ireland indicates that almost two thirds of people say water quality is a serious problem, while half consider that the quality has deteriorated since 2004.

Eighty per cent of people consider that there has been no improvement in the quality of our rivers, lakes and coastal waters over the past five years. For seven years now the Commission has been investigating whether or not the Irish Government is complying with a 2002 European Court of Justice decision that Ireland was in breach of water-quality legislation.

We have to find ways to ensure that the laws that we pass in the interests of the citizens of Europe are in fact applied by the Member States. The Commission, who is the policeman and the policewoman of this Union, must act in a timely way to ensure this compliance.

Kinga Gál (PPE-DE). - (HU) In the new Member States, in times of stress the old reflexes of those in power, unacceptable under the rule of law, still operate. When it was our Hungarian national holiday, political rights were infringed to an unacceptable degree in Budapest. The area around the celebrations was completely closed off, as they were during the dictatorship. A few days ago, demands for a more responsible government and calls for the prime minister to step down were met by police action that included detentions and inhumane, humiliating treatment.

Since the weekend, we have seen that the authorities disregard democracy as well, since they are trying to prevent early elections from being held by shifting around top leadership positions. This is not the kind of democratic state governed by the rule of law of which we, the young generation of the end of the Communist regime, have been dreaming; rather, we feel that this is how soft dictatorships begin.

Similarly, the actions of the Romanian authorities put us in mind of the reflexes of the past when, against the recommendation of the Romanian authorities, the President of the Hungarian Republic travelled to take part in the celebrations of 15 March with the 1.5 million-strong Hungarian community in Romania but was able to do so only as a private person, by car. The reason for this was that the landing permit for the president's airplane was revoked by Romania, on the contrived grounds that the visit would damage the partnership between the two countries. This is happening in 2009 in two neighbouring EU Member States.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE). – (HU) Last week's EU Summit confirmed the basic principles which the European Parliament has also enunciated, namely that the European Union does not tolerate protectionism and does not allow the dismantling of the achievements of the common market. I congratulate the President, since he was present at the European Council meeting.

Very important decisions were taken, including decisions on the matter which Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány of Hungary recommended a year ago and which the Rasmussen report of the European Parliament supported, namely that a financial market and bank supervisory system be set up. A decision in principle was taken on this at the summit, which represents a very important step forward.

It is an important step forward for the entire European Union, but especially for Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states, that banks cannot abandon their subsidiaries situated in that region but must forward the support they receive.

The fact that support to the balance of payments of Member States outside the euro area has been doubled from EUR 25 billion to EUR 50 billion is a very important expression of EU solidarity. This is in the common interest of all of us, and thankfully it is in the interest of the entire European Union.

Aurelio Juri (PSE). - (SL) At our last sitting we adopted an important maritime legislation package which has improved procedures to be followed in the event of maritime accidents.

As we know, the sea brings us many benefits, but it involves risks, as well. When a major accident happens, those who live along the coast pay the consequences. Therefore, the best course of action is prevention, in particular the kind of prevention that regulates the volume and nature of sea traffic according to the sensitivity of the area being transited.

For this reason, I would like to put the following question to the Commission and, in particular, Commissioner Tajani, who is in charge of transport and whom I shall address in his own mother tongue, Italian.

(IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, (...) how the aims of this new law on safety at sea fit with the plans for two methane-producing regasifiers in the Gulf of Trieste, an area of heavy shipping and high urban concentration where the sea is shallow, not more than 20 metres deep, and the seabed must not be touched as it is steeped in mercury. The terminals would, if built, attract one methane tanker per week per installation. We know the risks that these ships bring in areas such as this.

Bogusław Rogalski (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, today I would specifically like to focus on the way in which the Israeli army is attempting to wipe out the Palestinian nation before our very eyes. We should not remain indifferent to this issue.

I listen to Israeli media reports with embarrassment, I listen to soldiers recounting that they were told to shoot at civilians, including old women. The newspaper *Haarec* has published the written command given by one of the military commanders to his subordinates. He ordered his men to shoot at people helping wounded Palestinians. Ultimately, the soldiers have also learnt to show utter disregard for Palestinian lives. Proof of this can be found in the form of macabre T-shirts worn by Israeli soldiers, which show a pregnant Arab woman and bear the slogan 'one shot, two kills'.

We must break the silence which exists in this Chamber regarding this matter. No nation is better or worse than any other. Today, the Palestinian people need our help and support. We should rise to the challenge and address this problem.

Anna Záborská (PPE-DE). – (SK) Two weeks ago, Mr President, you brought us some very sad and horrific news. In Germany a young man killed 15 people and then killed himself. He committed murder and plunged many people, including his own family, into grief and despair. His family too have lost a child and their world too has been turned upside down.

Allow me to quote the words spoken by the German President at the funeral for the victims: 'We are all confronted with a very serious question. Are we doing enough to protect ourselves and our children? Are we doing enough to protect those who are at risk? Are we doing enough for peace in our own lands? We must ask ourselves what we can do better in the future and what lessons we can draw from this event. Let us also help both parents and their children to stay away from danger.'

I would therefore like to call on the European Parliament and the European Commission once again to support the Europe-wide campaign 'Do you know where your children are?' As I have already said in this house, let us do everything we can to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE). – (RO) The European Union is, first and foremost, a social Europe. We need economic development, but we equally need jobs, decent salaries and pensions, access to health and education services, and they must be of good quality to boot.

During an economic crisis many companies get into difficulties and employees lose their jobs.

In Romania at the Arcelor Mittal sites in Galați and Hunedoara, several thousand employees will be made technically unemployed in rotation, receiving just 75% of their salary or will just be made redundant. Similar situations are also going on in other countries and in other companies from different industrial sectors.

I call on the Commission to consider preparing a Council decision with the aim of reviewing the criteria for access to the European Social Fund and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund. This must be done at industry and company level, not only regionally and locally, so that the funds are mobilised quickly to help the workers in crisis.

I believe that Europe can and must do more for employees who are facing difficulties.

Edit Bauer (PPE-DE). – (HU) I would like to draw attention to the methods used by the Slovak Government to repress the linguistic rights of minorities, in violation of the latter's rights. Last week, the government accepted a legislative amendment concerning the national language which, according to the government, does not affect the minorities' language use; however, the bill itself suggests otherwise.

I would like to mention two examples. Paragraph 8(4) of the bill refers to health care and social institutions and states that there are two instances in which individuals belonging to a minority group may use their mother tongue in these institutions: if they do not know the national language, or if the institution is located

in a settlement where the percentage of minorities exceeds 20%. So the doctor will first ask the patient what language he or she speaks, and only after that can he ask what is wrong with him or her, otherwise a breach of the law will, according to the bill, be punishable by a fine of between EUR 100 and 5000.

The situation is no better when it comes to information provision, for radio programmes – with the exception of public service radio – will have to be broadcast first in the minority language, and then once again in full in translation.

Mr President, I have only one question: can minorities count on support from Europe?

Jelko Kacin (ALDE). - (SL) There has been a monument to the first anti-fascists in Europe in Bazovica, near Trieste, a short distance from the Italian border with Slovenia, since as far back as September 1945. Four Slovenian patriots, Bidovec, Marušič, Miloš and Valenčič, were sentenced to death by a special fascist tribunal in 1930, during the First Trieste Trial.

The monument has been damaged and daubed with paint sixteen times to date, most recently just over a week ago. This act of vandalism is one of a series of political, economic, cultural and educational efforts to exert pressure on the Slovenian ethnic community in Italy and on the Republic of Slovenia.

A whole host of acts, involving paint being daubed on Slovenian monuments, on the walls of Slovenian schools and on regional signs bearing names in Slovenian, have deeply hurt the feelings of Italian citizens of Slovenian descent and the Slovenian people of the Republic of Slovenia.

However, no one has yet been called to account for these criminal offences. I find it hard to believe that the Italian police have been so incompetent that they have failed to find the perpetrators, or that there is a lack of political will to find them. When, for the sixteenth time in a row, it seems impossible to track down the perpetrators, that really is too much.

Dimitar Stoyanov (NI). - (BG) Ladies and gentlemen, during the last part-session, in connection with the discussions on Turkey, there was talk of Turkey's failure to acknowledge the Armenian genocide. However, you are unaware of another unacknowledged genocide committed by the Turks over five hundred years: the Bulgarian genocide.

I will familiarise you with a small part of this, which took place over four days in April 1876, through the words written at the time by an American journalist by the name of MacGahan:

'It is all the same to me whether this information is impartial or not, once the terrible figure has been acknowledged of 15 000 people killed in four days. No rounding up of this figure can add further to its horror, which is of colossal magnitude when you take in fully all the pernicious, despicable details of this brutal slaughter. The French consul himself heard how the bashibazouks told their attentive audience with delight that, as they cut the heads off children, they watched with curiosity as their small bodies fell and rolled around like slaughtered chickens.'

These few lines describe just four days out of five centuries of outright genocide inflicted by Ottoman Turkey against the enslaved Bulgarians. We MEPs from Attack want acknowledgement and an apology before any kind of discussion at all is initiated about Turkey's membership of the European Union.

Ioannis Gklavakis (PPE-DE). - (EL) Mr President, in addition to being an agricultural policy and an economic policy, the common agricultural policy, as revised in the years 2003 to 2008, is now very much a social policy and, in my opinion, rightly so. For example, food aid programmes are being strengthened, initiatives are being taken on fruit and vegetables in schools, again in my opinion rightly so, and programmes are being implemented to introduce broadband and invigorate the countryside.

However, a robust common agricultural policy is needed in order to meet today's needs, because with the common agricultural policy farmers receive support and remain in the countryside. So let us unite in demanding that common agricultural policy resources stop being channelled to other policies. Resources for agricultural policy need to be increased:

- if we want safe food, because only safe foods can and should be European foods;
- if we want food adequacy, because only thus will we be able to deal with crises;
- if we want a protected environment, in which case food will have to be grown in keeping with European practices;

- if we want farmers to stay in the countryside, we need to help them;
- if we want healthy consumers, we need to provide them with European foods.

To close, I should like to call on the European Union to increase its budget, because this will give our Europe a future. Also, if we want a robust farming sector, we need to increase the funds for the common agricultural policy.

Chris Davies (ALDE). - Mr President, it is more than a month since you visited Gaza, but the latest figures from the Israeli Government show that nothing has changed: still no materials for reconstruction are being allowed through the checkpoints; no material for schools, no material for industry. The bombing has stopped, but the blockade continues.

Perhaps this would be a good time for this Parliament to try and influence opinion by hosting an exhibition of the T-shirts to which reference has been made by another Member – clothing produced to the design of soldiers, such as the sniper from the Givati Brigade, whose design incorporates a pregnant Palestinian woman and the slogan: 'One shot, two kills'. There are other reports in Israeli newspapers of other designs that are more racist, more extreme, more vile. Such an exhibition might encourage Members to question whether or not we should be continuing with the EU-Israel Association Agreement in the present circumstances.

President. – Mr Davis, at its meeting last Wednesday, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, which I myself chaired, adopted a resolution on the tragic situation in the Middle East. I would like to remind you of this fact. It is worth taking note of this resolution. Thank you for your comments.

Péter Olajos (PPE-DE). - (HU) This is not the first time I have been obliged to speak up in connection with the proposed enormous coal-fired power plant, with a 4-million-tonne annual carbon dioxide emission, being planned for the town of Tóketerebes (Trebišov) in Slovakia. This power plant has met with equally widespread protest on both the Slovak and the Hungarian side of the border, and in spite of this, the parties concerned have restarted the licensing process for the power plant.

On the other side of the border, the Hungarian Government issued a 'Crisis management and growth strategy', according to which, on the grounds of crisis management, Hungary is now seeking to expand by a new 440 megawatt lignite-based block the largest emitter of carbon dioxide, the Mátra power plant, which emits more than 6 million tonnes of pollution per year. I need hardly say that neither power plant will be using CCS.

At the end of last year, the European Union adopted the climate package, and last weekend at the EU Summit it approved the financing for a climate compensation scheme for developing countries. Furthermore, we are preparing full steam ahead for the Copenhagen climate conference in December. Meanwhile, the leaders of two Member States, Slovakia and Hungary – although admittedly the latter just resigned – are going ahead as if nothing had happened, financing climate change out of taxpayers' money disregarding the latter's protests. I hope the European Union will give neither political nor material support to this.

Luisa Morgantini (GUE/NGL). - (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, while in East Jerusalem thousands of Palestinian homes continue to be demolished, even the Palestinian culture is a target of Israeli policy. Sadly, certain Israeli soldiers have made T-shirts with an image of a pregnant Palestinian woman with a bulls eye and the slogan: '1 shot, 2 kills'.

The Arab culture is under attack. The Palestinian Authority has chosen, together with the Arab nations, to make East Jerusalem – not Jerusalem as a whole – capital of Arab culture for 2009. Israel has arrested 20 activists – including international activists – who were simply putting on an event to celebrate Palestinian culture. It is an attempt to destroy any Palestinian presence whatsoever in East Jerusalem.

I therefore ask myself if the international community can do something to ensure that this event can be a success and that Jerusalem really is a shared capital. Let us move to make this event happen.

Alojz Peterle (PPE-DE). - (SL) At the weekend, Slovenia and, in particular, the region of Lower Carniola, was alarmed by Renault's decision to transfer its Clio production from Novo Mesto to France.

I would like to believe the official explanation, that the decision was warranted by increased demand for Clio and Twingo, not by protectionism occasioned by difficulties in the car industry.

Ladies and gentlemen, to whom does the Revoz car production plant in Novo Mesto belong? Is it Slovenian? Or French? The answer is clear: a Slovenian production plant which manufactures French cars is most definitely a European production plant.

I firmly believe that we have to protect the car industry with a European solution, rather than national ones. Otherwise, we will be distancing ourselves from compliance with the four basic freedoms which form the core of the European Single Market.

Milan Horáček (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, at the beginning of March, political prisoners Mikhail Khodorkowski and Platon Lebedev were transferred from Chita, in Siberia, to Moscow, in order to once again face untenable accusations. The first public hearing is due to take place on 31 March. The fifth round of human rights consultations between the EU and Russia was due to take place on the same day. The Russians have now deferred these important talks indefinitely.

Russia is thus making it very clear just how little it values human rights. Rather than administering justice, the judicial system continues to serve the purpose of eliminating opponents of the regime, and the wool is being pulled over the eyes of the EU.

Richard Seeber (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, I would like to address a critical remark to the Commission with regard to the decision to ban the classic light bulb, which was submitted in writing last week. I fully support the energy efficiency requirements and the climate objectives, which we have established, together with the Council and the Commission. It was only the approach that was wrong in this case. It is clear that citizens do not feel included, when decisions are taken behind closed doors, using comitology procedures. Thus, the Commission definitely deserves criticism for failing to involve the European Parliament in the decision-making process and for not following the normal procedure.

Secondly, there was a clear lack of communication. The people are very concerned, as no comprehensive impact assessment was carried out in relation to these measures, especially as we know that these bulbs contain mercury and therefore pose a threat to human health, especially for children.

Thirdly, it would also have been wise to think about the future and promoting new technologies. Therefore, I would ask the Commission to submit a new proposal.

Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE). – Mr President, Estonians, Latvians and Lithuanians would extend their warm gratitude to you for your expression of solidarity on the occasion of 60 years since the 1949 deportations from the Baltic States, which have been universally assessed as crimes against humanity, committed in peace time four years after the end of the war. Two thirds of the deportees were women and children who were sent to Siberia for approximately 10 years. Proportionally, the number of deported persons would amount to half a million had these deportations taken place in three Scandinavian states – Sweden, Denmark and Norway.

However, today it is clear that economic and political enlargement of Europe is not enough to have Europe truly integrated as a 'community of values'. We need a new wave of enlargement: that of Europe's conscience. We acutely need an all-European awareness and will to recognise these crimes and prejudice as an integral part of our common history.

Maria Petre (PPE-DE). – (RO) Many of us have spoken today about the need for solidarity and I too want to continue this theme.

The European Union's energy independence and Member States' solidarity in this matter are more necessary than ever. Our action must be united and consistent in view not only of the risks but also of the need to diversify our resources.

I congratulate the European Council for the agreement it has reached on the Economic Recovery Plan, for the emphasis that has been placed on the energy sector and on financing the Nabucco project.

I urge the European Commission to find quickly and efficiently the methods to guarantee that these finances are effective and produce the required results in both the energy sector and, particularly, in the economic sector, severely affected and threatened by protectionism.

Resorting to protectionism is the worst thing that can happen to emerging and developed economies alike.

Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, a year has passed since the decision of the group for the revision of the European Parliament's rules of procedure made it hard for intergroups to operate by deciding that they should only operate on Thursday afternoons. To all intents and purposes this did away with these intergroups, which were a platform on which to present ideas, generally on issues which do not, for the most part, concern European policies, such as the issue of the family.

I chair the intergroup on the family and child protection and I must convey to you the deep regret of family associations in civil society and of simple European citizens about the fact that they can no longer express themselves through this intergroup.

The group for the revision of the rules has not told us if it has evaluated intergroups and has not provided us with a solution for the future. How can they be replaced?

Nicodim Bulzesc (PPE-DE). - Mr President, I would like to speak about a very important issue related to the European Prize for Literature. The prize is financed by the Cultural Programme of the European Union, and it aims to put the spotlight on creativity in the field of contemporary fiction. I think it is a very good initiative, but I have my concerns about its implementation.

I have been contacted by cultural organisations from my country that are unhappy because Romania is not included this year in the programme. Indeed, out of 34 eligible countries, only 12 are included each year in this programme. The legitimate question is how the remaining countries, including Romania, could take an active part if they are not included at all in the programme. So I would like to bring this problem to your attention, and I hope we will find, together with the European Commission, a convenient way to settle this problem.

Nicolae Vlad Popa (PPE-DE). – (RO) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, this will be a difficult year for Europe. We are facing challenges which are unprecedented in European history.

We must fight against the financial and economic crisis, against the energy crisis, climate change and against terrorism which is threatening everything we have built to date. This is exactly why it is more important now than ever for us to stand united.

We must take a stance against anti-European discourse, against ultra-nationalist elements which are destructive and dangerous. In the current climate, citizens dissatisfied with the worsening crisis, not to mention other problems, can be easily manipulated by ultra-nationalists who are using this unfavourable general climate to attack a united Europe. Let me remind you that the effects of the crisis which we are feeling at the moment would have been catastrophic without the European Union and the euro zone.

I call on those European politicians who are involved in electoral campaigns to adopt a firm stance against the anti-European discourse. I call on them not to use ultra-nationalist and chauvinistic elements or 'head speeches' just to win a few extra votes. Thank you.

Iuliu Winkler (PPE-DE). - (HU) According to the official discourse generated by the global economic crisis, confidence in the international financial system needs urgently to be rebuilt. Nowadays confidence is the keyword, one that is reflected in the documents of the European Union as well.

I would like to suggest another key word, solidarity, for solidarity or cooperation is an oft-repeated fundamental value on which the European Union is based. However, I would like to ask whether we, those outside the euro zone, can speak of a practice of solidarity when we are advised to raise taxes and contributions rather than rely on EU crisis funds and its mechanisms, whereas it is precisely based on the principle of solidarity that the EU operates this fund.

Will the citizens of the Central and Eastern European Member States have to give up hope of catching up to the EU standard of living within a reasonable deadline? I think not. I am certain that the European standpoint, which the EU is proclaiming in advance of the approaching G20 summit, will be a standpoint that will be acceptable to us all.

Csaba Sógor (PPE-DE). - (HU) Hungarian communities in five EU Member States recently commemorated the Hungarian Revolution and War of Independence of 1948-49. Hungarians then fought shoulder to shoulder with Poles, Serbs, Croats, Swabians, Germans, Austrians, Armenians and Romanians for their freedom and for world freedom against the two largest armies of Europe at the time.

We commemorate the event every March, and the presidents of two other countries did so as well. The Romanian authorities dishonourably sought in a manner unbefitting an EU country to prevent László Sólyom, the President of the Hungarian Republic, from travelling to Romania. What would have happened if they had tried to do the same thing with the President of the United States of America, Barack Obama, who also recognised and paid tribute to the 1848 Hungarian War of Independence, had he wished to come to Romania?

It would be good if at last we could all realise that we are living in Europe, where we can respect each other's past and history and can also respect each other's national holidays.

Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE). – (RO) I am an advocate of Serbia's integration into and accession to the European Union. In this context, I urge the European Commission to adopt specific effective measures to guarantee the rights of the people belonging to the Romanian minority living in Timoc Valley.

The European Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages must be applied effectively in Timoc Valley in the counties of Craina, Morava, Pojarevaț and Timoc in eastern Serbia. We are in 2009 and I believe that the time has come for the traditional Romanian ethnic community in Timoc Valley to enjoy the right to proportional representation, as well as to churches and schools in their Romanian mother tongue. Thank you.

IN THE CHAIR: MR ONESTA

Vice-President

President. - The item is closed.

14. Economic Partnership Agreement between the EC and Cariforum – Stepping-stone Agreement towards an Economic Partnership Agreement between the EC and Côte d'Ivoire – EC-Cariforum States Partnership Agreement – EC-Côte d'Ivoire Stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement – Stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and Ghana, of the other part – Interim Partnership Agreement between the Pacific States, on the one part, and the European Community, on the other part – EC-SADC EPA States Interim Economic Partnership Agreement – Economic Partnership Agreement between EC and Eastern and Southern African States – Economic Partnership Agreement between the EC and the East African Community Partner States – Stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and Central Africa, of the other part (debate)

President. - The next item is the joint debate on Partnership Agreements:

– the recommendation (A6-0117/2009) by Mr Martin, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the proposal for a Council decision on the conclusion of an Economic Partnership Agreement between the Cariforum States, of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States, of the other part (05211/2009 – C6-0054/2009 – 2008/0061(AVC)), and

– the recommendation (A6-0144/2009) by Mrs Mann, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the proposal for a Council decision concluding the stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement between Côte d'Ivoire, of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States, of the other part (05535/2009 – C6-0064/2009 – 2008/0136 (AVC)),

– the oral question to the Council by Mr Markov and Mr Martin, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the Economic Partnership Agreement between the Cariforum States, of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States, of the other part (O-0033/2009 – B6-0203/2009),

– the oral question to the Commission by Mr Markov and Mr Martin, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the Economic Partnership Agreement between the Cariforum States, of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States, of the other part (O-0034/2009 – B6-0204/2009),

– the oral question to the Council by Mr Markov and Mrs Mann, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and Côte d'Ivoire, of the other part (O-0047/2009 – B6-0217/2009),

– the oral question to the Commission by Mr Markov and Mrs Mann, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement between the European

Community and its Member States, of the one part, and Côte d'Ivoire, of the other part (O-0048/2009 – B6-0218/2009),

– the oral question to the Council by Mr Markov and Mr Fjellner, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and Ghana, of the other part (O-0035/2009 – B6-0205/2009),

– the oral question to the Commission by Mr Markov and Mr Fjellner, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community, of the one part, and Ghana, of the other part (O-0036/2009 – B6-0206/2009),

– the oral question to the Council by Mr Markov and Mr Ford, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the European Community, of the one part, and the Pacific States, of the other part (O-0037/2009 – B6-0207/2009),

– the oral question to the Commission by Mr Markov and Mr Ford, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the European Community, of the one part, and the Pacific States, of the other part (O-0038/2009 – B6-0208/2009),

– the oral question to the Council by Mr Markov and Mr Sturdy, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the SADC EPA States, of the other part (O-0039/2009 – B6-0209/2009),

– the oral question to the Commission by Mr Markov and Mr Sturdy, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the SADC EPA States, of the other part (O-0040/2009 – B6-0210/2009),

– the oral question to the Council by Mr Markov and Mr Caspary, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the interim agreement establishing a framework for an Economic Partnership Agreement between the Eastern and Southern African States, of the one part, and the European Union and its Member States, of the other part (O-0041/2009 – B6-0211/2009),

– the oral question to the Commission by Mr Markov and Mr Caspary, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the interim agreement establishing a framework for an Economic Partnership Agreement between the Eastern and Southern African States, of the one part, and the European Union and its Member States, of the other part (O-0042/2009 – B6-0212/2009),

– the oral question to the Council by Mr Markov, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the agreement establishing a framework for an Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the East African Community Partner States, of the other part (O-0043/2009 – B6-0213/2009),

– the oral question to the Commission by Mr Markov, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the agreement establishing a framework for an Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the East African Community Partner States, of the other part (O-0044/2009 – B6-0214/2009),

– the oral question to the Council by Mr Markov and Mr Arif, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and Central Africa, of the other part (O-0045/2009 – B6-0215/2009),

– the oral question to the Commission by Mr Markov and Mr Arif, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and Central Africa, of the other part (O-0046/2009 – B6-0216/2009).

David Martin, *rapporteur*. – Mr President, when we are directly involved we always tend to overstate the importance of an issue, but on this particular issue I do not think we can overstate its importance. We are dealing with a series of agreements here tonight that have the ability to affect the lives, the quality of the lives and the health of literally millions of people in the developing world.

Before turning to the substance of my report, I want to pay tribute to my colleague, Glenys Kinnock, who, as Co-President of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, has been at the forefront of making concerns about economic partnership agreements (EPAs) and the development impact of EPAs heard, not just in this

Parliament but giving a voice to ACP concerns throughout the world. As many of you know, Glenys is giving up at the end of this Parliament, and I think we will very much miss the work that she has done in relation to the ACP, and EPAs in particular.

EPAs have a difficult history in this Parliament. There has been real tension between trade and development objectives. Some of that could have been avoided, but some of it is, frankly, intrinsic in the nature of the agreements.

Firstly, they were forced on us by a WTO ruling, and one-way liberalisation, which is essentially what EPAs required, is not easy to negotiate.

Secondly, the artificial deadline that was set for completing the full and interim EPAs meant that negotiations, which should have been between equals, were in fact not between equals, because the ACP side had something to lose if the deadlines were not met.

Finally – and this is not a criticism of them but of the reality of the negotiations – our negotiations were carried out by trade experts. Trade experts by their nature aim to get the best possible deal for the European Union. They did not necessarily aim to get the best development outcome. I repeat: that is not a criticism; that is what they are trained to do. But that is the reality of the negotiations.

We have, as a Parliament, since the conclusion of the negotiations been trying to square the circle between trade and development.

I want to concentrate my remarks as rapporteur for the Cariforum EPA, which of course, at the moment, is the only full Economic Partnership Agreement. As this EPA has been signed, we cannot amend the text, we only have an opportunity to say 'yes' or 'no' to it. I believe that, if the Commission and the Commissioner are able to give us certain assurances and certain interpretations of the text, we could be in a position this week to give our assent to the Cariforum EPA.

Lewis Carroll, the author, had one of his characters, Humpty Dumpty, say in a scornful tone: 'When I use a word, it means just what I choose it to mean, neither more nor less'. Frankly, until recently, trying to understand some of the words in the Cariforum EPA has been a bit like that: trying to get clarity as to what the text actually means has not always been easy.

I would like to hear the Commissioner today reassure us on a number of points.

Firstly, that the review clause in the agreement is a genuine review clause and will be taken seriously by the Commission: that we will look at development priorities, such as the alleviation of poverty, sustainable development, economic diversification and the contribution to achieving the Millennium Development Goals at the five-year point to ensure that EPAs are working in the interests of all these things, not against their interests.

Secondly, I would like to hear the Commissioner reassure us on the finance for EPAs. Calculations suggest that roughly EUR 580 million are available for the Cariforum countries over the existing EDF and other financial framework periods up to 2013. In my opinion – but of course I am no expert on this – this should be enough to meet the demands of the EPAs if they are properly programmed, if the money is all spent, if the Caribbean countries' priorities are met in terms of where the money should be spent. Furthermore, we have to make sure that the Member States deliver their part of the EUR 2 billion that has been promised for 'aid for trade' across the developing world. We also have to look at the post-2013 position; we cannot get any assurances from the Commission on that, because that is for Parliament and the Council, but we have to be aware that the money runs out, the commitments run out in 2013.

The third assurance I want is on the most-favoured-nation (MFN) status. I have said to the Commissioner before that I entirely understand that the European Union should insist on exactly the same terms and conditions that the Caribbean countries give to the United States or another major developed power. But we should not be invoking the MFN clause if the Caribbean countries do a favourable deal with, say, a group of African countries.

Fourthly – and I am coming to a conclusion here – on access to medicines, we need assurance that nothing in the Cariforum Agreement threatens the use of the TRIPS mechanism – the mechanism should be put in no doubt.

I want to hear these assurances from the Commissioner but, even in advance of hearing them, I want to conclude by saying that I firmly believe the Commissioner has changed the tone and the nature of the discussion on EPAs, and I pay tribute to her for the work she has already done in this area.

Erika Mann, rapporteur. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the agreement with Côte d'Ivoire is one which we now have to vote to accept. We only have the choice of voting yes or no. I hope that, one day, this will change and that Parliament will also be able to participate in the mandate negotiations.

That makes it a little more difficult. There are two differences with respect to the Cariforum agreement. First of all, we are dealing with a government that was not democratically elected. Secondly, we are dealing with a provisional agreement, which is initially only to ensure that the old preferences are maintained. The final Agreement will not be negotiated for some time.

What I would like to hear from Commissioner Cathy Ashton are assurances on a number of matters which I know will be extremely important for the Côte d'Ivoire. Last weekend, I was again involved in talks from which it became very clear that assurances from the Commission must be forthcoming, which is entirely in agreement with the assurances which the Commissioner provided in the case of the SADC. Please allow me therefore to name some of the most important points.

The first point relates to significant flexibility. This flexibility must encompass the following points. Firstly, the inclusion of a review clause, which is also flexible, so that it provides not for a five-year timeframe, but one which can be constantly re-assessed at relatively short notice. Secondly, sensitive matters should be discussed only when the country expressly wishes to do so. In particular, this refers to the Singapore topics, but naturally also to the question of how to integrate TRIPS, as well as similar issues.

Thirdly, there is the issue of accepting regional differences when further negotiations take place towards a regional agreement. The Côte d'Ivoire faces a particular problem owing to the fact that the agreement is currently being negotiated and will be signed in isolation, while the aim in the future is to negotiate a regional agreement.

Fourthly, it would be important that at any stage during new negotiations it is possible to raise issues that have yet to be addressed at the current stage and that these topics are approved by the Commission.

In this context, Commissioner, you only really need to extend the concessions that you already made in the case of SADC to the Côte d'Ivoire. Doing so would increase the likelihood of a corresponding positive response from Parliament. We are simply very concerned, and it is a concern that has been voiced by many non-governmental organisations, that especially in the case of the Côte d'Ivoire the Commission initially appeared to show relatively little flexibility and this was the reason why the aforementioned issues were not taken into account during the transition from the provisional to the full agreement. A concession would therefore prove exceptionally helpful and would enable us to approve the agreement.

Moreover, during my discussions with the representatives of the Côte d'Ivoire I understood that they are very concerned that the technical aid will not flow rapidly enough and that here too not all of their concerns have been taken into account. As I understand they are especially interested in the Commission and the international organisations that are providing them with help giving them SME market access so that they can actually make use of the access to the European market. They are exceptionally cautious when negotiations touch on these Singapore topics, when they even discuss them, and are anxious for us to help them develop an understanding of how public goods can be used for society. In addition, they are especially interested in us providing them with help in matters associated with technical standards because for them they often represent real barriers to trade.

My final comment refers to the point concerning Parliament. As I mentioned previously, we only have the possibility of saying yes or no, and that obviously imposes relatively significant limitations on the extent to which Parliament is able to collaborate in shaping the vote. I wish to expressly remind you, and you will also find this reflected in our texts, that a possible approval of the provisional agreement does not necessarily mean that we will also automatically vote in favour of the full agreement. In fact, within the framework of the monitoring procedure, we expressly wish to be included in the continuing negotiations so that to a certain extent, in so far as it is within our power, we can follow up on the points that I have just raised.

Finally, I would like to ask you to say a few words to tell us to what extent the failed Doha Agreement will have an especially negative impact on the Côte d'Ivoire, especially as far as bananas are concerned.

Helmuth Markov, *author*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, Mr Solana, in this debate we are not simply discussing a package of sixteen oral questions to the Council and the Commission, eight resolutions and two reports under the codecision procedure, but also 79 developing countries, with which the EU is renewing its trade relations and mutual cooperation. Trade and cooperation are important tools in the fight against poverty, as well as for building more economically and socially stable national economies. Above all, this process involves providing support for the creation of infrastructure, for healthcare, food sovereignty, a functioning social system, education and cultural exchange.

In the past, our trade relations with the ACP countries were based on a system of non-reciprocal trade preferences, which allowed most of the products made in the ACP States duty free access to the common market. In 2000, it was agreed that a new partnership agreement would be drawn up by the end of 2007. Under this new agreement, unilateral trade preferences were to be replaced by WTO-compatible agreements, which aimed to reduce and, ultimately, eliminate poverty, as well as fostering sustainable development, regional integration, economic cooperation and good governance, helping ACP countries to develop their economic potential and gradually integrating them into the global economy. In addition to this, the production capacity of these countries was to be expanded, and measures were to be taken in order to facilitate private enterprise and investment.

The Economic Agreements before us, especially the so-called Interim EPA or Goods-only-Agreement, are primarily trade agreements, as 90% or more of what they address are issues related to market access and other areas of trade. The aim is the step-by-step liberalisation of trade between the EU and the partner regions or individual states.

What kind of problems have come to our attention during the course of the negotiations?

First of all, it seems rather questionable as to whether the timeframe was sufficient. Of course, the Commission is in a good position. It was able to lead the negotiations, call a vote and involve the Member States. However, imagine that you had been one of the negotiating partners on the other side. Were the negotiations really always held in parallel, so that the corresponding consultations could be conducted between civil society and Parliament in those countries?

There was a lot of criticism regarding the contents. First of all, although there were other expert opinions, the Commission understood WTO-compatibility to mean 80% reductions in customs duties within the next 15 years. Even if the liberalisation commitments are initially asymmetrical, in terms of steps taken towards liberalisation, the outcome will be open markets on both sides, something that the EU can easily afford. Exports from the ACP countries will only make up a small percentage of its imports.

For the ACP States, the abolition of customs duties results in lost earnings from these duties, and a loss of funding needed for urgent public investment in infrastructure, the social sphere, support for economic development and improvement of administrative capacity. Moreover, it means the slowing of the growth of the national economy and, therefore, continued dependence on exports from industrialised countries. This affects foodstuffs just as much as industrial goods and, ultimately, creates a vicious cycle. The increasing food prices in the ACP countries are the undeniable proof of this effect. I have often asked the following question: if 50 years of non-reciprocal trade relations have not fostered any even remotely adequate development, how could this be achieved with the mutual opening up of markets?

A further serious problem, which will be exacerbated by the proposed agreement, is the relationship between the partner regions and countries. Within the East African community, and I am personally responsible for the relevant motion for a resolution, the problem of internal tariffs may be less significant, as a customs union exists, but the trade relations between neighbouring states may become more difficult as a result of the different degrees of liberalisation. In this case, there are, of course, many problems that are linked to the country of origin regulations. There are serious fears in relation to the negotiations on comprehensive EPAs. They reflect certain conflicts within the blocked Doha development round. Many states do not think that they are in a position to deregulate their service, investment and public procurement markets and open them up to global competition. This is not even fully manageable, or even desirable, within the European Community itself. In terms of the lack of control mechanisms for financial markets, we do not need to go into greater detail here.

Serious criticisms were, and are being, expressed concerning the transparency of the negotiations themselves, that is, the extent to which Parliaments and civil society have been involved in the process. Finally, there are also questions regarding Mode 4. If goods are to move freely, should people not be allowed to do so, too?

In this context, our Committee has formulated questions which, irrespective of the background they come from, always touch upon the same issues.

What financial, technical and administrative support measures are foreseen within the framework of re-establishing trade and development partnerships? Will the Commission, during the continuing negotiations, be flexible and take the needs of the partner regions into account, in particular in terms of facilitating export duties for development purposes, protecting fledgling industries, ensuring the freedom of movement of employees and special protection for the public procurement system? In addition to this, is the Commission ready to rethink its position on protecting intellectual property rights, in terms of ensuring that biological diversity and the transfer of knowledge are preserved, and that medical care at a reasonable price will be guaranteed in poorer countries? Are the Council and the Commission prepared to provide Parliament and civil society with adequate information concerning participation opportunities? Finally, is there the readiness to revise the negotiated agreement if it should turn out that certain points have a negative influence on development in the ACP States?

Let me finally make a brief, personal comment. I have now been chairman of the Committee for International Trade for two and a half years. As I am not standing for that post again, I would like to take this opportunity to thank my Secretariat, Mr Rodas and especially Mrs Pribaz, very, very much for their great support, and also to thank my colleagues. The collaboration was successful and I think we have achieved a great deal. It would be wonderful if we could achieve success with the EPA as well. I would like to wish all those who remain here all the best for the next parliamentary term. I am actually very hopeful that trade will begin to play a larger role in this Parliament. Thank you very much.

Christofer Fjellner, *author.* – (SV) Mr President, I am very pleased that we are able to have this debate today. At this time of increased protectionism and with poverty spreading instead of decreasing, it is particularly important for us to keep trade open between Europe and some of the world's poorest countries. This is essentially what the interim agreements are all about. The Economic Partnership Agreements seek to guarantee continued trade and development in some of the world's poorest countries.

These countries are at risk of being the hardest hit as the global recession surges forward and the protectionist arms race looks set to intensify. I cannot, therefore, understand some of the criticism that has been expressed. Some people claim that these agreements go too far and are too comprehensive. Some critics would rather talk of lost customs revenue than of the potential for new trade. I think, on the contrary, that we should be pleased that we have achieved so much. I do not believe that there is an inherent conflict between trade and development as some speakers claim. Quite the contrary: trade leads to development, duties lead to poverty.

I was responsible for the interim agreement with Ghana. I acknowledge, first of all, that it contains a few flaws, such as the continued imposition of EU duties on rice and sugar for a transitional period, but it is, essentially, a very good agreement. It is therefore important for us to ensure that it is signed as soon as possible. The presidential election in Ghana previously presented an obstacle, but now I would like to urge the country's new President, John Atta Mills, to sign the interim agreement. I also hope that we in the EU will be sure to sign the agreement that we have negotiated. It is unacceptable for it to take so long, and it is particularly unacceptable for it to take so long due to the failure of the translation service in the Council to function adequately.

I would like to take this opportunity to urge you all to support the agreement. In these times of uncertainty, the world needs more trade, not less.

Daniel Caspary, *author.* – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, from where I stand, the agreements signed between the economic partners are vital in terms of securing trade relations with African, Caribbean and Pacific states. Cooperation is in the interest both of the European Union and of these countries. We need urgently to avoid supplying the African countries with development aid, as we have done for the last fifty or sixty years. We have to finally let these countries be free mentally too, so that they will be able to take their future in their own hands and so that they can build wealth for themselves, just as other regions of the world have done over the course of the last few decades.

Trade can provide an excellent contribution in this case. I am thinking, on the one hand, of trade between the European Union and these countries, but I am also mainly thinking of trade between these countries themselves, namely with other developing countries. I am quite sure that we might well have to put a certain amount of pressure on governments and states to remove their extremely high customs tariffs in many areas in order to create the necessary conditions for economic growth in this region.

Why do we have to do this? These states urgently need framework conditions that will allow people to create their own wealth. During my discussions with representatives from these countries, I often had the impression that people were grateful that we, as the European Union, exert pressure in a number of areas, and that they were thankful that we make demands in many areas and force national governments to make a little progress in terms of economic policy.

I would be happy if we did not lose sight of this point of view during the coming weeks and months, and especially during the negotiations, so that not just the legitimate wishes of the governments are addressed, but also, at one point or another, our legitimate demands are upheld, and that we represent the legitimate demands of the people from these countries.

In this regard, I hope that our negotiations will be fruitful.

Kader Arif, *author*. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in this lengthy debate here today, I should like to take a few moments, if you would allow me, to reflect on the road we have travelled until now.

Let us remember the initial positions of some Members of this Parliament in the face of increasing concern in the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries, in the face of demonstrations against the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs), in the face of warning signals from NGOs from the North as well as the South, when we were demanding that the priority in these agreements should be development, something that seems obvious today, as the Commission is constantly repeating it. Mr Mandelson, however, at the time, scarcely dared to answer us because, for him, it was primarily a matter of stimulating trade, as if simply removing customs barriers would somehow miraculously bring about development.

People called us idealists, manipulated by the NGOs, and were offended by our demands for instruments for protection, regulation and intervention by public authorities, but what happened? It appeared that we were not being irresponsible. No, the governments of the ACP countries did not accept continuing negotiations under pressure or threats. No, the risks involved in opening up trade are not an attitude of mind, they are real and will have real and immediate consequences: state budgets will be reduced through loss of customs revenues, new industries in the agricultural sector will be weakened and the food security of their people put at risk.

We were expressing these fears a long time ago, before the hunger riots or the financial crisis. So, what is to be said about the situation today? The International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and the United Nations recognise that developing countries, contrary to what was said at the outset, will be seriously affected by the global recession.

Jacques Diouf, Director-General of the Food and Agriculture Organisation, emphasised this recently, asking whether we would dare to say to those we call partners that we are prepared to spend billions to save the global banking system but not to save their people who are dying of hunger.

I want to be completely honest, Commissioner, and I wish this to be quite clear. If you do not make a strong and precise commitment on behalf of the Commission to give us a guarantee that the EPAs will be genuinely pro-development, I will not vote for assent. Words will not be enough and nor will declarations of intent, we have heard too much of those. We want specific commitments and I would like to list them one by one. The EPAs will not be satisfactory agreements unless they promote regional integration and contribute to development in the ACP countries and to the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals.

When we call for the promotion of regional integration, that needs to be translated into practical terms. For example, in Central Africa, Cameroon has been criticised, not to say strongly condemned, by its neighbours, for having signed this interim agreement with the European Union. Out of the eight countries in the region, I note that five are Least Developed Countries, that is, countries that, automatically and fully in accordance with the rules of the World Trade Organisation, have free access to the European market for exports without any requirements for trade concessions in return. I can quite understand their concerns when the Commission asks them to open up to 80 % of European exports.

Therefore, if the Commissioner makes a commitment to promoting regional integration, if she makes a commitment to greater flexibility so as to take into account the different levels of development of our partners, perhaps she can tell us why she does not accept the offer of 71 % liberalisation proposed by Central Africa?

The second fundamental subject for which we are awaiting a response concerns the Singapore Issues. These cannot be imposed in the negotiations against the wishes of the partner countries. On this point, I want particularly to emphasise public procurement. Of course, there must be transparency – I shall always defend

that – but can we deprive our ACP partners of an essential instrument of their sovereignty in supporting their industry and their local services by imposing liberalisation of public procurement?

The third point is services. In our discussions about EPAs with Cameroon, the Commission stressed time and again that our partners wanted to negotiate about services. That may be true, but, nonetheless, beware of those who would use this argument to impose liberalisation of services on all regions and all countries, and especially to justify liberalisation of public services. Commissioner, I expect a firm commitment from you that public services will remain outside the scope of the negotiations, in all regions. We know that the loss of customs revenue will cause a reduction in the budgets of our partners. If revenues are reduced, the first sectors to suffer will be sectors such as education, health or research. It would, therefore, be unacceptable for the ACP governments in this context to lose control of their public services and I call upon the Commissioner to give us her firm assurance on these issues.

The fourth point, and this has already been mentioned, is that food security must be protected. This involves not only putting in place adequate safeguards, but also allowing our partners to sustain their exports in order to remain competitive in global markets. I know that there have been some positive developments in this direction in the Southern African Development Community region. Is the Commission prepared to propose similar measures in other regions?

The last point is that we know that upgrading the economies of ACP States will require a huge financial commitment from the European Union both to protect infant industries from the negative effects of liberalisation and to develop the competitiveness of our partners' economies. Unfortunately, contrary to the repeated recommendations of our political group, it is the European Development Fund that is to be used as the primary source of funding for the EPAs. We know that in the past the Commission has not been outstanding in the way it makes use of these funds, and I must, therefore, stress how important it is for these funds to be used quickly and according to the priorities of our partners.

Finally, Commissioner, these agreements are the image that the European Union will give to the rest of the world, the image that the European Union will give to the poorest countries in the world.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ROURE

Vice-President

Glyn Ford, *author*. – Madam President, firstly can I apologise to the Commissioner and to my fellow rapporteurs for missing the debate until about five minutes ago? I have been delayed getting here and have managed to arrive at the last minute. I hope that I will not be repeating what other people have said, or at least not too much, and can I ask them to bear in mind my apology for that?

I am actually speaking on two issues: I am speaking as the rapporteur on the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement with the Pacific and as the shadow rapporteur on behalf of the Socialist Group on behalf of the Interim Economic Partnership with Eastern and Southern Africa.

The whole debate that we are having this evening was not triggered by any decision of the European Commission or the European Union that we wanted a new trade relationship with the countries of the African, Caribbean and Pacific, but by a decision – a decade or more or so now – of the World Trade Organisation that we were unfairly discriminating in favour of some developing countries at the expense of others. Some people have said that this should be just about development – I am very much in favour of that – but we have to bear in mind that one of the underlying requirements is that it is actually about making our agreements with these countries WTO-compatible. So we have to do that; that it is the first thing.

On top of WTO compatibility, we must do whatever we can to try and improve the situation of these various regional blocks and to try and deal with the particular situations that actually face them. With respect to the Pacific, for which I am the rapporteur, we have a collection of 14 – plus one if you include East Timor – very small nation-states. One, in fact, is the smallest country in the world, with a population that is exactly one million times less than that of China – Nauru. But even the biggest ones are actually comparatively small, and we need to take that into account in what requirements and demands we put on them. We need to make sure that there are adequate transition periods for small and medium-sized enterprises because, quite frankly, apart from some mining enterprises in Papua New Guinea, they are all small and medium-sized enterprises. We need to do what we can about regional trade and in particular to take into account the special relationship that countries of the Pacific have with Australia and with New Zealand.

Only two of the 14 have actually signed up for the Interim Agreement. However, I know from my visit to Port Moresby at the last ACP meeting that there are other Pacific countries that would like to sign a final agreement provided it meets their requirements, which is why, in my case, I am actually in favour of the interim agreement. That is the message I got, both from the governments of Papua New Guinea and Fiji. Not that they are entirely happy – there are issues that they would like to renegotiate – but they see the answer as being signing up and accepting an interim agreement which would lead towards a final agreement which will be more development friendly and will enable more of the Pacific countries to actually engage.

We also need to look at a number of specific issues that apply in particular in Papua New Guinea and Fiji and elsewhere in the Pacific, but may apply to some other of these agreements. We need to look at intellectual property right negotiations that cover not only Western technological artefacts but traditional knowledge; we need to make sure that there is a transparency of government procurement with openness to European contracts triggered at a point appropriate to the needs of the Pacific nation-states; we need to look in the case of the Pacific particularly at working visas to be made available in the European Union to Pacific island nationals for periods of at least 24 months for them to be able to work – not in the higher professions but probably working as carers and in similar occupations.

Can I say, with respect to eastern and southern Africa, that many of these points would apply there? I particularly would like to thank Mr Caspary for working together with me on this and, on the Pacific, let me say the work of Mr Audy.

But with respect to the ESA we need to look at good-governance issues in particular. This includes Zimbabwe. I do not have a problem with an interim agreement but I think a final agreement would be difficult for Parliament to accept unless there was a clear road map in the case of Zimbabwe to see an establishment of a properly democratic regime there and one that could find some way out of the difficulties it is in at the moment.

The last point I would like to make in relation to ESA, apart from to endorse the report of Mr Caspary – with some of the amendments which have been tabled – is to mention the situation of the Chagos Archipelago. It is in there because I tabled an amendment, which was accepted. Normally in these kinds of agreements we actually consult with neighbouring countries and neighbouring territories. The Chagos Archipelago is in the middle of part of this region: Seychelles-Mauritius-Madagascar. These people are currently refugees in Seychelles, and I hope that we will consult with them between now and any final agreement being made as to what the impact might be on them and on their territory should they get the right to return.

Jan Kohout, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (CS) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin first by thanking Parliament for allowing me at this key moment to address this sitting with a matter as unquestionably sensitive as the Economic Partnership Agreements.

I would also like to express my appreciation for the very positive role which Parliament has played in the course of these negotiations through the political debates. I would particularly like to applaud the Committee on International Trade and the Committee on Development for their tireless work and to thank them for their unflagging interest in the discussions.

EPAs have always been a high priority for development ministries at their meetings within the framework of the Council for General Affairs and External Relations. In recent years almost all of these meetings have included discussions with the Commission on the implementation of the Council mandate concerning EPAs, which have often resulted in the adoption of conclusions. When the Czech Presidency presented its programme to this Parliament in January, we said that this was a key period and we promised to put maximum efforts into ensuring further progress. We took the opportunity to respond to many different questions and we have devoted considerable efforts to a range of topics. We continue to regard cooperation and constructive discussion between the institutions as the best way to create and develop the right policies.

Developed and developing countries are facing an unprecedented financial and economic crisis which has gripped the entire world. If asked how the crisis is affecting their economies, developing countries reply that it has brought a downturn in trade leading to lower economic growth, restrictions on output and higher levels of unemployment. The trade downturn and loss of export markets established after many years of effort are very painful for developing economies and for the living conditions and well-being of their inhabitants.

Under these circumstances we must exploit every opportunity within the context of our response to the global economic crisis to make trade the driving force for sustainable development. The EPAs serve this end.

Through gradual regional integration they provide an opportunity for regional trade and the expansion of duty-free and quota-free access to our extensive market, enabling a higher volume of trade with the EU. The EPAs thus operate in a way which conforms to WTO rules. This factor constitutes an important legal aspect distinguishing the EPAs from the previous commercial preferences which were implemented under the Cotonou Convention and which were detrimental to trade between the ACP countries and the EU and caused considerable uncertainty.

Uncertainty is the opposite of trust. Uncertainty scares off investment whereas trust attracts it. We all know that developing countries have seen a dramatic decline in investment since the beginning of the current crisis. In today's uncertain world the EPAs can provide a measure of legal certainty and trust that will assist economic renewal. These agreements are not a panacea but they do represent a positive instrument which can be combined with other instruments.

A series of binding reports have been published in recent months describing how the economic crisis may block progress towards the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals in many regions. We should be very uneasy about this. The EPAs make use of all the flexibility allowed under WTO rules in order to assist development. They ensure for our partners from ACP countries the immediate and asymmetric opening up of markets with long transitional periods, exemptions and regular monitoring, and they also set out commitments to political reforms. The EU has at the same time undertaken that it will not leave its partners to face this challenge on their own. For the operation of these agreements we are also providing specially adapted financial support.

I am delighted that there has recently been a revival of interest in greater dialogue over EPAs on the part of both EU and ACP countries. I would like to take this opportunity to thank Commissioner Ashton for her efforts and for the importance she has attached to listening to the views of our partners from the ACP countries. Following the outline of her approach on EPAs to Parliament in October last year and to the Council in November, there was a strengthening of contacts with our political counterparts in the various ACP regions. Significant progress is now being made in negotiations with various regions. Each region has its own characteristics and is proceeding at its own rate. In the months ahead, we should get a clearer picture based on all of these negotiations.

I believe that the European Parliament will support the EPAs with the Cariforum States and the interim EPA with Côte d'Ivoire. This will send an encouraging signal to all ACP countries. It will be proof for them that patience in negotiations brings results that are acceptable and beneficial to both sides. It will also show that the ACP-EU partnership is capable of reacting to new challenges, whether of a legal, economic or political nature. At this time of unease every new international agreement represents a stronger partnership and a new hope for the future. The signing of the agreements would send a worthwhile political message which will perhaps contribute something to the forthcoming meeting of the two joint bodies of the ACP-EU: the Joint Parliamentary Assembly taking place at the beginning of April in Prague and the Joint Council of Ministers at the end of May in Brussels.

The EU must continue to support its partners, and this means not only the Cariforum region which has shown the way to others by signing the first comprehensive EPA, but also those countries and regions that have taken the first steps and must be encouraged to go further. Among these is Côte d'Ivoire, whose interim EPA also awaits the approval of this Parliament. Further EPAs are being prepared. The Commission is working hard to create conditions for partner countries which will enable them to come together and to plot a course towards comprehensive regional agreements. The Council always emphasises to the Commission and the partners that these agreements are a development instrument and that the advantages for development can be exploited to the full only through comprehensive regional agreements.

The overall political and economic context within which Parliament has been invited to approve the Cariforum EPAs and the interim EPA with Côte d'Ivoire is important, but Parliament has nevertheless asked the Council and the Commission for a number of concrete explanations. This step is an essential and legitimate part of the process and I am trying to make the fullest possible response to questions that fall within my area of responsibility. I am aware that other questions have been raised which Commissioner Ashton is ready to answer. I would like to begin by addressing some of the topics that have been mentioned.

One of the issues you raised concerned the question of whether, when and to what extent reviews would be conducted into EPAs with Cariforum States. Both the Council and the ACP group fully share the concerns relating to this question. I can confirm that comprehensive reviews of EPAs will be conducted no later than five years from the date on which they were signed, which was in October last year. The reviews will of course be supplementary to the routine monitoring of the fulfilment of these agreements, as set out in Article 5.

These reviews are mandatory under the terms of the agreements and they are one of the tasks of the joint bodies, including the parliamentary and advisory committees. Impact assessments will be carried out within the framework of the reviews and these will include the costs and consequences of operating the agreements. If an EPA is amended in any way or if there are changes to the way they are implemented the involvement of the parliaments is guaranteed, either under the laws of the signatories to the EPA or within the framework of the parliamentary committees set up on the basis of the EPA.

The second question that Parliament is interested in concerns the accompanying financial measures requested by the ACP regions and especially our undertakings to support trade. As you are aware, in October 2007, both the European Community and its Member States committed to increase assistance in the area of trade to EUR 1 billion by 2010 within the framework of the EU Strategy on trade assistance. Almost 50 % of this increased amount will be available for needs prioritised by the ACP countries themselves, including needs arising from the operation of the EPAs. All Member State commitments to support trade are supplementary to assistance from the European Development Fund and all our commitments are firm.

Thirdly I would like to reassure Parliament concerning the important matter of access to medicines. In this case I can announce very clearly that none of the articles of the agreements can weaken the ability of the Cariforum States to support access to medicines. We cannot conduct a detailed legal analysis here but from a political standpoint I can assure you again that these agreements do not include any such intention.

With regard to the advancing integration process in the Cariforum States it was natural that you should also draw attention to the compatibility of these agreements with other regional programmes, such as the Single Market and economic space of CARICOM. Besides supporting the development and facilitating the gradual integration of the ACP countries into the world economy the main aim of the EPAs is precisely to support regional integration.

Article 4 of the EPA clearly states that in its implementation it will take proper account of the integration processes in the Cariforum States, including the CARICOM single market and economic space. Special attention will be paid to strengthening the regional integration programmes and ensuring a sustainable future for them. During negotiations the Cariforum States have already ensured that all of the obligations arising from the EPAs would be fully compatible with the regional obligations adopted by the Caribbean states within the framework of their relevant regional integration programmes.

However, the compatibility of the EPA with the regional integration processes is also important for all of the other regions which are at present negotiating comprehensive EPAs. As an example we might mention here the comprehensive EPA intended for the West African economies. A comprehensive regional EPA would strengthen regional integration, boost competitiveness and contribute to the development of the region. The negotiation process has itself already contributed towards increased efforts on regional integration, since the creation of a joint external tariff scale for the Economic Community of West African States is considered an essential precondition for concluding EPA negotiations. It is also possible to say the same about other regions, with due reference to their specific needs and integration processes.

Regional integration will undoubtedly be strengthened as soon as all regions sign comprehensive agreements adapted to their specific requirements. Parliament has repeatedly called for a flexible approach in the transition from interim to the comprehensive agreements. In this context I can only confirm that the Council shares the same view and emphasises the need for a flexible approach. When several difficult questions remained unresolved in the negotiations we called on the Commission in May last year to exploit all of the flexibility and asymmetry compatible with WTO rules to take account of the varying needs and different levels of development of the ACP countries and regions. In addition to these we also took other steps. The Council declared that ACP countries and regions, if they so wished, could depart where necessary from the provisions agreed by other countries or regions during EPA negotiations.

There is a clear need to maintain cohesion between the individual EPAs, especially in the African countries. However, each region has its own specific characteristics which must be taken into account. The EPA signed with the Cariforum States provides an example but definitely not a template.

I hope that my comments on these specific points have helped to clarify them and have provided assurance concerning some of the questions raised here in Parliament. I firmly believe that the Commissioner, who has negotiated these matters directly with political representatives of the Cariforum States and other ACP regions together with her colleagues, will want to address a number of other points in greater detail.

At this moment, in March 2009, when we are experiencing the worst economic earth-tremors for a generation, I would like to emphasise how important it is for us all to appreciate successful results in the area of politics. At a time of declining trade and with increasingly protectionist measures being adopted in this area, at a time of threat that the progress achieved in fulfilling Millennium Development Goals will be lost in some regions, the approval of the European Parliament for the EPA with the Cariforum States and the interim EPA with the Côte d'Ivoire will provide a positive signal in support of regional integration and in support of trade that will assist development. We must respond to the current crisis by establishing further partnerships and not by restricting them. The European Parliament's confirmation of the EPA with the Cariforum States will also bring hope and encouragement to other regions whose negotiations are at an advanced stage and who also need the sense of trust and strong partnership which these agreements can provide.

Catherine Ashton, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, it is a great pleasure to be addressing the plenary of Parliament on an issue, as David Martin described it, of fundamental importance to the European Union's relationship with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) nations.

Before I say anything else, I would like to make one thing completely clear: I have absolutely no interest whatsoever in negotiating agreements with ACP countries that could make these countries poorer. I know that is an obvious statement, but my experience suggests that it is one that I should firmly place on the record and I cannot assume has already been widely understood. When honourable Members come to vote later on, I hope it will be on the basis of the discussion that we have had today and the arguments that have been set out here, rather than on any preconceived ideas you may have.

I believe that today's plenary session is an important step forward on economic partnership agreements (EPAs). You will be asked for your assent on the full EPA in the Caribbean and the interim EPA with Côte d'Ivoire. You have tabled no less than eight sets of draft resolutions and oral questions reflecting, in my view, the strength of parliamentary involvement and opinion on EPAs. I want to pay tribute, and place on record that tribute, to the huge effort that the Committee on International Trade and the Committee on Development have put into the debate on this issue.

Over the months, I have listened carefully to the views expressed, and my aim is to set out the case for EPAs and to dispel the myths around them so that every Member is able to cast an informed vote when the time comes. I believe that what we have before us are good agreements that support economic development and integration in the ACP and provide stability in these economically turbulent times. They are partnership agreements founded on the shared goal of development that make trade the servant of this objective and not the reverse. Most of all, they are agreements that provide the opportunity for ACP States to lift their citizens out of poverty through the dignity of their own labour and the genius of their own ideas.

There is a perception that in EPAs the European Union is breaking with the past and unilaterally trying to redefine the EU-ACP partnership. It is true, of course, that EPAs are different from the Lomé and Cotonou Conventions that embodied the Union's relations with the ACP for 30 years, but the unilateral preferences that characterise those conventions became open to challenge in the World Trade Organisation by other developing countries. The dilemma that we faced was how to safeguard the development requirements of the ACP while respecting international rules and, I would add, moral obligations.

The answer was twofold: 'Everything But Arms' for the least-developed countries, and economic partnership agreements for the developing countries in the ACP. The common theme that stretches all the way back to the first Lomé Convention was trade. Trade has always been the defining factor of EU-ACP relations, and what was once confined to unilateral trade preferences for commodities and raw materials in the early days of Lomé has now been replaced by more diversified trade in manufactured goods, services and ideas in the 21st century.

EPAs offer the ACP the best ever access to EU markets and continue our commitment to provide opportunities for economic development. Regional integration within and between ACP markets has also been a key objective of this process and a subject that has attracted – not surprisingly – a lot of attention in oral questions. Our global economy means that size has become more important, a lesson that we have learnt in the European Union. By simplifying trade rules and replacing the complex maze of bilateral agreements with a small number of region-to-region trade relationships, the ACP can create bigger regional markets that are more attractive to the investment which developing markets need in order to create jobs and growth.

The agreements are of course a two-stage process: interim agreements to ensure we do not face the WTO challenge and to create some breathing space for the second stage, the negotiation of full EPAs. The run-up to the December 2007 deadline for interim EPAs has given rise to an impression of steam-rolling ACP

concerns, but I want to reassure Parliament that these interim agreements are only a temporary solution to safeguard and improve ACP access to European Union markets.

I inherited this file at an advanced stage of negotiation. Since then, I have met a large number of ACP ministers and representatives and other stakeholders in the EPA process. I have heard them and I have listened to them. One thing is clear: all put ACP development at the centre of EPAs. EPAs are, if you like, where trade meets development. And that means development must be the foundation of our trading relationship based on frank and open dialogue.

I firmly believe these partnerships will only succeed if they are anchored in an enduring partnership based on trust and mutual respect. The key test of this partnership is whether we and our ACP partners have a shared vision of the future. In southern Africa, I see a region that took conflict about EPAs and turned it into dialogue, and where we have now settled major issues of concern like export taxes, infant industry protection and food security. In the Caribbean, I see a region that has set down clearly its own ambitions for an innovation-based economy. In West Africa, I see an emerging regional market access position many thought impossible, and in East Africa I see an emerging customs union that did not exist when negotiations started and is now building an EPA around their own integration plans. This looks and feels to me like the beginnings of successful partnership.

Going forward, my vision for the negotiations of full EPAs is one where each negotiation reflects and respects the regional specificity of the parties to that agreement – a flexible process. This means both looking at content – because the EPA has to work for its signatories – but also the pace of negotiations. It also means that EPAs should be dynamic and not static, able to react to future events and to account for different regional interests and needs. In this process, the Commission will, indeed, continue to inform and involve the European Parliament in a transparent way.

While we should be ambitious, there must also be no imposed dialogue, which is why issues like government procurement have already been removed from some negotiations, and Singapore issues only included when they are welcomed and wanted by the countries concerned. We will also take the time and provide the support to build up regional and national regulation as a prerequisite for further negotiation, and 'aid for trade' and technical assistance will be absolutely key in that regard. I can guarantee there will be no opening of public services, no pressure for privatisation. The explicit right of the ACP to regulate their own markets will be recognised and there will be no limitation of access to essential medicines or collecting seed. In fact, we would rather seek to strengthen than limit ACP rights and capacity in these areas.

All of this is overlaid by our commitment that ACP regions can draw on provisions agreed in other EPAs, so that each region can move ahead secure in the knowledge it will not be disadvantaged. So, Côte d'Ivoire can directly ask for and have anything of relevance to it that is part of the SADC negotiations and discussions or those for anywhere else. This is a key aspect of the flexibility that you asked me to provide and of allowing EPAs to replace an all-ACP trade regime with one that matches regional solutions to regional needs without undermining ACP solidarity.

The case for dynamic rather than static EPAs has been highlighted by the current crisis. We began EPA negotiations during a period of unprecedented expansion of investment, goods and services trade and soaring commodity prices. Few predicted that in a few years the global economy would fall into recession, with dramatic price falls, exchange-rate and market volatility and a credit drought that would strangle the trade finance that exporters and importers need.

We do not need a fixed deal that is redundant by the time the ink is dry on the paper. We need an agreement that establishes a relationship where institutions and monitoring can help identify and solve the problems as they emerge.

The specific problem that Erika Mann asked me about on bananas is included in the interim EPA – a guarantee of duty-free, quota-free access in that case.

As these problems emerge, we need to include safeguards and clauses that allow ACP countries to tackle any import surges, food-price pressures and fiscal crises: rendezvous clauses for specific issues, regular review clauses and, as in the Caribbean EPA, a role for parliamentary oversight and monitoring.

To return to where I began, Parliament has an historic opportunity today to give its assent to the first examples of a new generation of agreements that safeguard our special relationship with the ACP; agreements based on genuine partnership, not paternalism; that harness trade as the motor of development; that promote and encourage the regional integration that will help ACP countries flourish in a globalised world; that are flexible

in terms of content, respectful of tradition, and are the latest manifestation of this long-standing trade relationship built on a respect for sovereign states. In short, they are the future and I hope, on that basis, Members will give their assent.

IN THE CHAIR: MR SIWIEC

Vice-President

Robert Sturdy, *author*. – Mr President, my apologies for being late, and thanks to the staff for moving me back up the agenda. Commissioner Ashton, you have basically said most of the things I was going to say, so I am going to just reiterate one or two for this House.

Interim Agreements are goods agreements aimed at preventing disruption of ACP trade and promoting gradual integration. It gives the ACP the opportunity to trade its way out of poverty and I think recognising these agreements include a number of contentious issues: services, most—favoured-nation (MFN) rules of origin, which have been brought to my attention on many occasions. These you will need to redress, I do apologise if I missed you saying that earlier on.

The assent procedure for Cariforum States and Côte d'Ivoire is crucial to realising the potential of these reforms. Approval of these signed agreements will allow for a formal negotiation procedure to progress. This will provide a level of legality essential for protecting ACP markets and securing a more stable environment. With regard to the resolutions on Cariforum – the only full Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) – I call upon Members to support the original text of the Committee on International Trade. It provides for a more balanced trade and development approach and is intended to support a number of the compromises proposed by the rapporteur. I believe these resolutions highlight both the opportunities and challenges facing the negotiating parties in a key step to ensuring parliamentary oversight and approving of the relations with ACP.

Commissioner, you mentioned at the very beginning that trade was so important; I totally agree with you. We also said we are in a particularly difficult financial situation. This is something which I believe you have taken to heart and that you are working extremely hard on. I congratulate you on the way you have handled these – more power to your elbow, as we say in the UK.

We are at a difficult stage and trade will be the only option and not just for these countries but for the rest of the world. It is so important. Thank you for the way you have changed; you took over halfway through at a difficult time. Congratulations, and all power to your elbow again.

Jürgen Schröder, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Development*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would also like to thank you, Commissioner Ashton, for your words, which we certainly should remember for a long time.

A few weeks ago, I attended the most recent regional ACP summit in Guyana. The predominant opinion amongst my colleagues from the Caribbean States was that the time has come to look to the future, to stop crying over spilt milk and to single-mindedly implement the Economic Partnership Agreements.

In order to ensure successful implementation of these agreements, it is vital for the parliaments to control the process by means of their parliamentary scrutiny. It is only if the parliaments are able to verify whether the new system of regulations can achieve what it was designed to do, that the Economic Partnership Agreements can operate as a driving force for development. It is only when the parliaments take on this supervisory function that we can ensure that financial aid reaches the areas where it is needed. This applies to the national parliaments of the Caribbean as much as it does to the European Parliament.

In all of the resolutions before us concerning the Economic Partnership Agreements, there are paragraphs which address the issue of parliamentary control. However, these references are not consistent. The text contained in the SADC-EPA Resolution presents a good compromise. It ensures that the European Parliament's Committee on International Trade and the Committee on Development, as well as the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Committee are involved in the process. As I view this compromise as a success, I have, together with my colleague Mr Sturdy, tabled a number of amendments, which aim to standardise these paragraphs in all of the EPA Resolutions. I would very much like your support for this initiative.

Johan Van Hecke, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on Development*. – Mr President, as rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on Development on the Interim EPA with Côte d'Ivoire, I would like to thank our colleague Erika Mann for having taking into consideration some of the concerns raised in that

committee, such as the urgent need for a democratically-elected government in Côte d'Ivoire and the necessity for that country to receive an appropriate share of EU trade-related assistance.

More generally, I am pleased that both the Committee on International Trade and the Committee on Development came to a compromise on the scrutiny body that would enable the Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA) to play the role it deserves to play in the first place.

It is important that we bear in mind that this EPA is a stepping-stone agreement, which means that it is only a temporary solution.

In order for trade liberation to have a substantial positive effect on the whole region, it is essential that ECOWAS sign a full EPA.

Within this context, the Committee on Development proposes that Parliament give its assent, subject to ratification by the Côte d'Ivoire of the stepping-stone EPA.

Alain Hutchinson, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I had some notes prepared but I will put them aside and speak to you without notes, if you will excuse me, as many things have been said already and I do not want to repeat the words of my fellow Members.

We are on the eve of an important vote, an extremely important, almost historic vote because we are going to vote this week on the first Economic Partnership Agreements in this Parliament. We have been talking about it for a number of years and these discussions have been the subject of many often very heated debates where agreement has not always been the order of the day, nor has consensus.

We can, of course, feel pleased today about the way the situation has developed. The accounts you have given, as well as those given by the Presidency, show that there has been very positive development on this issue, especially since your arrival, Commissioner, it has to be said.

Unfortunately, and this is why I have some misgivings, for some of us there are issues, questions and fears that still remain in relation to these Economic Partnership Agreements.

First of all, we have to recognise that there is only one full Economic Partnership Agreement today. The others are not there yet, we are at the stage of interim agreements while the fundamental approach has been regional integration. There is only one that meets this criterion, and even then, one of the principal countries in this region of the Caribbean, Haiti, has not signed the agreement, which surely says a great deal.

Secondly, on the trade front, as you have pointed out, we have historic ties. For a long time there has been trade between North and South, but look at how it takes place. We plunder everything there is and take all the riches. Of course, we sell the coltan that our companies have extracted from Kivu to sell in the North, but look at the disastrous consequences for the people of the South, and the unequal sharing, to say the least, that we see there.

Aside from that, you add a development policy that we have been employing for 40 years saying that we Europeans are the world's biggest sponsor, but it is a policy that is failing now and has to be reviewed. Most of the poorest countries in the world are doing badly, just as badly as 40 years ago, if not worse. That, therefore, is the reason for our misgivings and our questioning. What guarantees do we have with regard to this? I am not going to repeat what Mr Arif has said but I join him in saying that we would like to have a statement from you, on behalf of the Commission, on a list of points that he has clearly set out, and I should like to finish by speaking about national parliaments.

We have been asked, as Members of the European Parliament, to make a decision about the Economic Partnership Agreements, the consequences of which, if they are badly negotiated, will be tragic for the people of the South, but not for us. No European citizen will be worse off if the Economic Partnership Agreements are a failure. On the other hand, there could be citizens in the South who are going to be even worse off. I shall finish by saying to you quite simply, Commissioner, that we would like the national parliaments of the partner countries to have their say, since they represent the people of the South in this matter, and not only us.

Ignasi Guardans Cambó, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, as others have said, this debate is undoubtedly important; indeed it has just been called historic, among other things because of the number of hours devoted to this work and because of the political debate that has led up to it.

I think it is a good thing that, amidst the commotion that has preceded this debate and to some extent surrounds it now. I say commotion with all due respect for the contributions from civil society, NGOs and the national parliaments that are also involved. In the midst of all this, it is important to understand why and how we have got to where we are today.

We need to understand that negotiating these association agreements with the ACP States is not a political decision taken at will by the European Union, as if it had various options on the table and chose this one rather than others. It is essentially a legal requirement based on the rules of legality laid down by the World Trade Organisation.

It is a necessity born out of the circumstances surrounding our previous legal framework on trade with the countries of the ACP zone. It should also be remembered, right here and now, that those who condemned the European Union's relations with the ACP States were precisely those other developing countries that had perfectly legitimate claims for access to our markets but had been left out, for the simple reason that they were not former colonies of current EU Member States.

Thus the European Union had, and still has to some extent, two yardsticks: one for its former colonies and another for other countries with a similar level of development that do not come under this system. That is what became unsustainable and what those same countries made it their mission to emphasise within the World Trade Organisation.

Apart from anything else, we must consider that the system we are going to replace, first the Lomé Convention and then the arrangement based on the Cotonou Agreements, in no way achieved the desired results. No one can claim that the Cotonou system was entirely satisfactory. If it had been, the figures – the volume of EU trade with those countries – would be far higher than they are today. Therefore we should not claim, either, that we are going to replace something that has yielded results, because that is not the case.

For all these reasons, these Economic Partnership Agreements should be seen as a great opportunity, particularly for all those of us who believe that the development and growth of these countries cannot depend solely on external aid. Clearly, I refer especially to those countries that are party to these agreements but are not among the least-developed countries. In this regard the concept of ownership, of taking control of one's own destiny and not depending exclusively on external aid, lies politically – and I may say philosophically – behind these partnership agreements.

In principle, my group therefore fully supports the negotiation of these agreements by the European Commission and the fact that they should be comprehensive and complete, covering not only goods but also services and the rules of competition; that they should be agreed as a whole.

Another thing to consider is, of course, how these negotiations and the specific topics that are on the table have been handled. On this subject I would refer to what each of the rapporteurs said concerning the different areas, because we are talking about the overall approach, whereas, in fact, each negotiation is being dealt with separately.

There are some points outstanding and there are concerns – for instance, to mention just one example, the situation of the outermost regions, which merit specific attention in the case of the Cariforum – but, as a whole – I mean politically – we fully support both this negotiation and the need for it to continue and for Parliament to monitor this negotiation effectively.

One of the several amendments we have tabled states that parliamentary monitoring of this issue should be carried out uniformly and not in different ways depending on the country in question.

Liam Aylward, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – Mr President, I welcome this debate, which offers the opportunity to once again draw attention to the necessity of including and honouring child-labour provisions in all EU trade agreements.

By this I do not mean merely paying lip-service to the combat against child labour, or putting in place cursory or superficial monitoring systems. All EU countries and an encouragingly ever-increasing number of other states have signed up to the ILO conventions on the minimum age for employment and on the elimination of the worst forms of child labour.

Let us now, in our trade agreements, in our GSP agreements and in our public procurement policies, live up to those commitments. This means ensuring that companies operating in the EU are child-labour-free.

Child-labour-free does not only mean that there is no child labour being used in the parent company or even by its immediate suppliers: a company at the top of the supply chain must have the responsibility to ensure that all steps of, and conduits to, the supply chain are child-labour-free.

Today, over 200 million of the world's children may be working illegally, denying them an education and childhood and putting their physical and mental health at risk.

Putting child-labour concerns at the core of all our trade agreements has to given priority.

(The President cut off the speaker.)

Margrete Auken, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (DA) Mr President, this debate is important because we are, of course, about to take a long break in our work on account of the elections. We therefore need to ensure that the Directorate General for Trade takes note of our sustained criticism of the content of the Economic Partnership Agreements, particularly as the Directorate will soon sign these agreements. In this regard, we need to emphasise the importance of the agreements returning to Parliament to obtain our approval.

On behalf of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, I want to make it clear that what we are most dubious about is the way in which these agreements have been entered into. No account has been taken of the issue of development when negotiations have been carried out with the ACP countries.

I therefore have a couple of specific comments relating to the two agreements that Parliament is to commit to on Wednesday, and I will explain why the Group of the Greens does not support them. As regards the agreement with Cariforum, detailed analyses by the Overseas Development Institute show that the Economic Partnership Agreement with the Caribbean countries is probably the least development-friendly of all of the agreements that have been negotiated so far. It will be a poor model for when other regional agreements are to be negotiated, especially when it comes to the aspect of development. Of course, it is not up to us to decide whether our concern is justified when the governments of the Cariforum states are themselves in favour of these agreements, but it would be perfectly in order for the parliaments of the individual countries affected to be permitted to vote on the agreements before the European Parliament has given its approval.

However, our concerns regarding the agreement with Cariforum, which we are raising here in the EU, are justified in any case. At the current time, when there is a great need for better control of the movement of money on the financial markets, we find it totally unacceptable that the Cariforum agreements allow full liberalisation of financial services with the eight tax havens that currently form part of Cariforum. If you do not believe me, take a look at your documents before you vote on Wednesday. In these documents you can read about the free movement of financial services sold over the counter, in other words what are referred to as 'unregistered speculative derivatives'. You can also read about the right to establish funds for individual inhabitants. This all comes into the EU via our own tax havens, for example Malta and Cyprus. This can happen as long as there is no monitoring or regulation across the EU, and therefore it is simply not the right time to protect these structures, which share a large part of the responsibility for the collapse of our economies.

With regard to the agreement with Côte d'Ivoire, there is, of course, internal conflict going on there, and therefore it might not be the right time to enter into this agreement.

Madeleine Jouye de Grandmaison, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, I am from Martinique and have always lived in the Caribbean.

Believe me, Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the Economic Partnership Agreement between the Caribbean Forum of African, Caribbean and Pacific States and the European Union is a matter of great concern to me.

Martinique, Guadeloupe and Guyana are outermost European regions and therefore the Caribbean as a whole has not been taken into account. In my opinion, this agreement has been negotiated mainly for the purposes of trade, and the Millennium Development Goals have been relegated to second place, once again. The challenge for the Caribbean countries, therefore, will be to make up the losses in customs revenue by increasing the volume of trade with the European Union.

At this time of global recession, that may not be easy. Facts are facts and these agreements have been negotiated primarily by the Directorate-General for Trade and within this Parliament the Committee on Development seems to me to have been somewhat sidelined.

In this agreement, the stated objectives in relation to development and integration at regional level are not in accordance with the measures deployed to achieve them. These measures relate, for the most part, only to trade and competitiveness. As for regional integration, there too, there is a mismatch between the intended goals and the resources used.

I come now more specifically to the regional integration of the outermost regions (ORs) of the Caribbean in their environment. The ORs are at the heart of a 'living basin'. Guyana even has one of its main borders with Suriname. The ORs have more than 35 million inhabitants spread over 40 countries and cover more than two million square kilometres. That is a huge potential market.

This agreement was an opportunity to reduce the impact of certain so-called structural handicaps, such as remoteness, for example, in favour of the closeness between our islands. Why have we dispensed with negotiating a specific interregional market between the outermost regions of the European Union and Cariforum? At a time when the European Commission is concerned about addressing the underdevelopment of the Caribbean countries and establishing EPAs with this group for the purpose of opening up markets and regional integration, the outermost region of the Caribbean is taken into account only to become a part of the Cariforum open market and it remains stuck in the same market principles as were negotiated for the whole of the European Union. These principles can put us at a disadvantage.

This was a chance to promote a dialogue between cultures, the forming of cooperation, exchange of services and bringing the outermost regions...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Syed Kamall (PPE-DE). - Mr President, we all know that there have been many criticisms of Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs). I share some of those criticisms. I agree that EPAs should not be a method for aggressively opening up markets for EU companies only: they should also be of benefit to entrepreneurs and consumers in poor countries. I share Erika Mann's concern over the 'one size fits all' approach to EPAs, which does not take account of the differences between regions and between countries within regions. I welcome the fact that we have actually signed interim agreements only with those countries that have shown an interest in signing such agreements.

I was also concerned at the view expressed by a Commission official, at a meeting of the Committee on International Trade (INTA) a few months ago, that EPAs were more than just about trade and development and that they were about regional political integration as well. I believe, like many of my colleagues in this Parliament, that this decision should be left to the countries themselves, especially those which are democracies that do not want to sit in a regional assembly with dictatorships from the same region.

Despite these concerns, we should welcome the assent of the INTA Committee for these EPAs. For a while I was concerned about some of the anti-trade rhetoric I heard from the Socialists, when they voted against or abstained in committee. EPAs may not be perfect but many of my friends and family in poorer countries are fed up at the lack of access to goods and services and at being forced to rely on state-run monopolies or companies with links to corrupt politicians. That the Socialists wanted to keep it that way is also a matter of concern. Let us not forget that import taxes often mean poor citizens having to pay more for imported food and medicines.

I wish to thank the Commissioner for her determination in continuing the negotiations for the Economic Partnership Agreements. They are not perfect, but we owe it to entrepreneurs and consumers in poorer countries to help them enjoy the access to goods and services that we in the EU currently enjoy.

Glenys Kinnock (PSE). - Mr President, I can confirm, as others have done, that what we have seen since Cathy Ashton became Commissioner has been a sea change not only in style and tone, but also in vocabulary and now increasingly in substance.

I am sure the Commissioner will agree with me and many of us in this room that we still face a formidable task as we try now to build and rebuild trust after years of negotiation which have created enormous amounts of tension and acrimony.

In the almost exactly 10 years since Cotonou was signed, we have to remind ourselves what actually was said in the agreements about the trade prospects between ACP and EU. The wording was 'a new framework for trade which is equivalent to their existing situation and in conformity with WTO rules'. We have to really work much more towards fulfilling those objectives.

The policy of concluding separate deals with separate countries has led to serious inconsistencies, and I can confirm to those who do not know the Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA), and who do not have as much contact with parliamentarians in the ACP as I and others in this room have, that it has created really very difficult situations and severely damaged the cohesion that I perceived amongst the ACP in the past. I know that just a few weeks ago the new President of Ghana wrote a letter on behalf of the entire ACP group to the EU Presidency, and he claimed that the EPA process continued to threaten the very existence of some of the regional integration groupings. That is a recent comment by a new president.

ACP parliamentarians tell us at every single one of our meetings that there has barely been any engagement with them and little, if any, consultation with them. I would like the Commissioner to tell us what she might think is appropriate in the future on this.

I am pleased to see what has happened in the SADC negotiations, but clear commitments on the modification of texts, transition periods for tariff regularisation, safeguards, rules of origin etc. are now up for grabs there with SADC, and hopefully you will confirm that they are options for all the ACP countries who will be continuing to negotiate.

Will you tell us please, Commissioner, that you will insist on precise commitments in an EPA to development programmes and that trade liberalisation has to be linked to development benchmarks? If that is the case, how will you do it?

Will you see to it that there are legally binding commitments in EPAs to the provision of time-scaled and predictable funding?

Commissioner, I think the ACP countries, as you said to us earlier, face a period of slower growth and, for the first time in 25 years, efforts to reduce poverty are being brought to a close. I have just two final quick points, one on the CARIFORUM EPA: it is not a perfect outcome but it still needs safeguards.

On Côte d'Ivoire, we need to have the reassurances that Erika Mann asked for and which Mr Van Hecke asked for. That is very important for us.

(The President cut off the speaker.)

Fiona Hall (ALDE). - Mr President, if we take a step back to the start of the EPAs process, the Cotonou Agreement of 2000 established that the EU has a legal obligation to take developing countries' interests into account in all policy areas that are likely to affect them. In 2005, the Commission identified this policy coherence on development as being key to the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals.

I regret the spat that has taken place between the Committee on International Trade and the Committee on Development over which has the lead role on EPAs, because Parliament itself could have reacted more coherently at certain points when the EPA negotiations were in practice, losing sight of the promise that these were development instruments.

Finally, I was glad the Commissioner mentioned services, because I am concerned about the opening-up of banking in particular. Western countries failed to regulate properly the big international banks operating on their own territories, so you have to ask whether it is really wise to open up the banking sector in countries where there is much less of a regulatory regime in place, and when the WTO rules do not require such a move. Opening up the banking sector may help big companies, but it can drive local banks to join the pursuit of high-value customers and ignore small businesses, leaving them with even less access to credit than before.

Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE-DE). - (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, Mr Kohout, President-in-Office of the Council, ladies and gentlemen, first of all I must congratulate my fellow Member, Mr Ford, for the quality of his report and his sense of compromise. We were able to work on this issue in Papua New Guinea during the Joint Parliamentary Assembly of the African, Caribbean and Pacific States, and of the European Union. I saw him working with members of national parliaments and I am, therefore, happy about that.

I want to join, Commissioner, in the congratulations that have been addressed to you on these Economic Partnership Agreements which have been negotiated with the aim of avoiding any disruption in trade between the ACP States and the European Community. These negotiations resulted in the Interim Partnership Agreement with the Republic of Fiji and Papua New Guinea, the only States in the Pacific regional grouping that have agreed to the provisional agreement, and we recognise the work needed to conclude full regional agreements.

This agreement includes all the measures necessary to establish a free trade area. The resolution emphasises that the Economic Partnership Agreement must contribute to strengthening economic growth, regional integration, economic diversification and the alleviation of poverty. It is important to remember that a genuine regional market represents an essential basis for successfully implementing the Interim Economic Partnership Agreement and that regional integration and cooperation are essential for the social and economic development of the Pacific States.

This agreement is an opportunity to give new impetus to trade relations and guarantees access to the European market with exemption from customs duties and without quotas for most goods. I should like to insist on the aid of EUR 2 billion to be provided by 2010, and in conclusion, I should like to add that it is very important that there should be no infringement, on the economic level also, of patent rights or of intellectual property rights which affect trade. With regard to human rights, I am amazed that we have dealings with Papua New Guinea when this country still penalises sexual orientations. Finally, on the political front, it is important for us to have an alliance with the ACP States within the framework of the World Trade Organisation.

Georgios Papastamkos (PPE-DE). - (EL) Mr President, the successful completion of negotiations on the conclusion of Economic Partnership Agreements between the European Union and APC countries is the ultimate challenge for European trade and development policy.

What we need are agreements which are compatible with the European Union's international obligations, given that the unilateral preferential treatment which the European Union has granted APC countries compared with other developing countries has, as you know, been found to be incompatible with WTO rules.

However, over and above the legal question, the challenge consists primarily in achieving agreements which will promote the development of the countries in question through the strengthening of their trading capacity, the diversification of their economic base and regional integration.

The new trading regime which will govern relations between the European Union and APC countries should ensure that all these countries are integrated into the international trading system, into the global economy, an economy which is going through an unprecedented crisis, a crisis which is affecting both developed and developing countries and emerging economies.

We all agree that the opening of APC countries towards the European Union must be asymmetrical and gradual, with adequate flexibility in terms of quotas in sensitive sectors and effective safeguarding clauses. As you know, the objective of the negotiations was to cover sectors such as services, investments, intellectual property rights and reinforced work on commercial matters, as well as access to the goods market.

We therefore support the extension of the scope of the agreements to the extent deemed beneficial to the APC countries themselves. It is absolutely vital to include development provisions in Economic Partnership Agreements and to provide adequate aid for trade.

Glenys Kinnock (PSE). - Mr President, I just want to touch on two issues as far as assent is concerned. I mentioned CARIFORUM. Everyone is feeling very comfortable and optimistic about the CARIFORUM Agreement, but of course there is still a need for certain safeguards. Certainly, at the recent meeting in Guyana, that was made absolutely clear by the President and others in that country, as well as Members of Parliament.

The issue of bananas was raised. Baroness Ashton, you said there will be duty-free and quota-free access, which is fine, but the issue is that the agreements that have been signed with Central America, and subsequently with Mercosur and the Andean Pact countries, will reduce the tariffs for them, and nothing we do is going to make it possible for banana producers in the ACP to remain competitive. That is a critical issue, and the agreements have been reached before the ink has even dried on the CARIFORUM Agreement.

There are also deep concerns in the Caribbean about the implementation units, which have still not been set up. There are still problems caused by the tensions that have been created between the various countries in the Caribbean. There is also the issue of Haiti. The Donors' Conference did not produce as satisfactory an outcome as we would have liked, and there are some concerns about whether the EPA can be fully agreed or worked upon as long as Haiti is not involved.

As regards Côte d'Ivoire, we would like very clear assurances. It is a country which has experienced a great deal of turmoil, uncertainty and instability over many years, and it is very important that we give assent, but also that we have assurances that you will indicate, in the form of a letter to the negotiators in Côte d'Ivoire

and to the Côte d'Ivoire Government, that we remain committed to negotiating in good faith for a decent outcome for the people of that country.

Marie Anne Isler Béguin (Verts/ALE). - (FR) Mr President, Mr Kohout, Mrs Ashton, I have listened to what you have said.

Mr Kohout, you spoke about economic sustainability. The question I am asking myself today is what that means, apart from words. Indeed, what does that mean at a time of economic, financial and environmental crisis? What guarantees can we give? Despite the reassuring words of the Commissioner, I am asking whether, since these agreements were discussed in another world, is the project we are proposing to our African, Caribbean and Pacific partners actually still appropriate in the current situation?

Personally, I do not think so. We meet with NGOs, we meet with SMEs. We were in Guyana recently where the president said to us: you are asking us to diversify, but tell us what goods can our small country produce that can compete with Brazil or Venezuela?

Today, therefore, I think that we must not close our eyes. You speak on the one hand about flexibility and on the other about WTO rules. I am sorry but the two terms are absolutely contradictory, because they would require restructuring and we know very well that restructuring causes greater poverty in these countries.

I do not think, therefore, that what we are proposing today and what we proposed in the past are at all appropriate. Have we looked at the results of the development model that we have set up over the last 40 years? It is a failure and I think that has been said already. This failure then, I think, will now continue; the situation will get worse with these partnership agreements because they are absolutely not appropriate to the global economic, social and environmental situation.

Daniel Caspary (PPE-DE). - (DE) Commissioner, following the comments made by both the previous speakers, I would like to ask a question. Do you agree that there are countries in the world which have, over the last twenty years, managed to significantly improve their level of prosperity without an EPA, and that perhaps the EPA could also represent an opportunity for these countries?

Jan Kohout, President-in-Office of the Council. - (CS) Thank you Mr President and thank you first and foremost members of the European Parliament for the constructive and interesting discussion. Allow me to respond to two of the points that have been raised. The first concerns flexibility. I have seen from the speeches made by some MEPs that there is a desire to ensure the necessary flexibility when negotiating Economic Partnership Agreements.

I would like to stress that the Council is very aware of flexibility at two important levels. The first of these is flexibility in the sense of fully exploiting the options for asymmetric arrangements, timetables and protective measures within World Trade Organisation rules. I therefore cannot agree either with the opinion or with the sweeping conclusion that 40 years of assistance to developing countries has been a catastrophe. I believe that the situation would have been much worse without aid from the EU and other countries. At the same time I think that the rules we have allow such a degree of flexibility that every one of these countries – and in this I have faith in the Commission and the Commissioner – should be capable of finding a solution which matches their needs and interests.

The second kind of flexibility is the one that we are offering in the transition from the interim provisions of EPAs to full regional agreements in the interests of supporting regional cooperation. The second point I would like to respond to from the debate concerns the question of the development dimension of EPAs. There is no doubt in my mind that the agreements are not conventional trade agreements as they have an intrinsically strong development dimension. The agreements establish lengthy interim arrangements of up to 25 years and they also include exemptions – up to 20% of goods coming from ACP countries can be exempted from liberalisation. The agreements make provision for monitoring and reviews that will involve Parliament. Their implementation will be supported by the Aid for Trade financial package. I consider all of this to be proof of the developmental nature of these agreements.

At the same time I would like to say on behalf of the Czech Presidency and the Council that we will be closely monitoring the progress of negotiations over EPAs and I would like to express my support for the Commission and also Commissioner Ashton for the efforts she has made to date to fulfil the mandate that the Council gave her. During the course of the Czech Presidency we will be focusing on EPAs at the May meeting of the Council for General Affairs and External Relations within the format of ministers for development cooperation. If agreement is reached between us and our partner-ministers from the ACP countries then this issue will

also be on the discussion agenda for the joint meeting of the ACP and EU Council of Ministers in May. During the Czech Presidency, the Council also welcomes the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly in Prague at the beginning of April, just a few days from now. I am certain that EPAs will form one of the main topics of discussion and that the discussions will prove highly important precisely because they are taking place in a parliamentary context.

I look forward with personal interest to your vote tomorrow. In my view this is a key moment in the development of EPAs. As we have heard, negotiations are still continuing in many regions, but in the Caribbean region important and good results have already been achieved. As far as Côte d'Ivoire is concerned, we have reached a key point in respect of further progress. Many countries await the approval of the European Parliament and with it the culmination of several years of difficult negotiations and I firmly believe that Parliament will give a positive signal to the world which is much needed at this point in time. I believe and I am sure, even in the current crisis that has been referred to several times here, that this is an instrument that will really help, even during this great uncertainty that we all feel. We all know that it will help the development of these countries.

Catherine Ashton, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, allow me just to refer to some of the comments that have been made.

Mr Guardans Cambó, Mr Hutchinson and Ms Hall, you all in different ways talked about the past and our need to do better. I agree with that. I may not completely agree with the analysis, but I do agree that this is an opportunity to look forward, and part of that is about looking forward to the involvement not only of this Parliament but also of parliaments across the ACP. Of course, it is up to individual nations how they involve their own parliaments. We have to be very careful – and I know honourable Members would want me to be – in not imposing what I think upon any other country. Let me say to Mrs Kinnock, that I look forward to the meeting with the Joint Parliamentary Assembly (JPA).

Mr Martin in particular, but others too, talked about the need to have our reviews and, again, I agree, particularly in this economic climate, it is absolutely essential that we monitor and review. I will be very interested to continue the dialogue with honourable Members about how we engage Parliament in that, but also your ideas on how we can make this monitoring and review really effective and make those countries that are working with us feel very positive in that direction.

Mr Sturdy and Mr Martin, 'most favoured nation' is, as has been said, designed to capture in a sense those large countries that have not supported the process we have been involved in. It is not about damaging South-South trade or damaging in any way, shape or form the opportunities and the sovereignty of those countries that wish to open up trade. That is why we have a ceiling on the amount of world trade that a country must be involved in before this particular provision kicks in. I have to say we are always looking for any flexibility we might have within that too.

Concerning customs revenue: Mr Arif and Mme Jouye de Grandmaison, until 2013 the EDF covers this and we are interested in making sure that economic growth and fiscal change can also support nations so that they are not reliant upon this revenue solely, but actually find new ways of supporting their economies.

Whatever happens on bananas, the preferences will continue to be better for those countries than anywhere else. But we are very mindful of preference erosion and, as we explore agreements which we have waited for many years to try and sort out, we need to take that on board, and I intend to that.

Mr Van Hecke, Ms Mann and Mrs Kinnock: what one gets, the other gets. Let me be absolutely clear: I am happy to write to anybody anywhere, but certainly to Côte d'Ivoire to say that the flexibilities that we have been in discussion with the Southern African Development Community (SADC) will apply to them because there are one or two things only specific to that region that they would not want, but those that they wish to have they can have. I am very happy to put that in writing anywhere, any time to anyone. So please just tell me what you want me to do.

Mr Ford and Mr Fjellner talked about the importance of trade generally and I agree completely with that analysis. I think Mr Fjellner said that more trade rather than less trade is what we need in this economic climate, and I completely agree with that.

Mr Caspary, freedom to take on their own future to take into their own hands – I agree completely. And those countries that have developed economically without EPAs – well, India and China would be two examples, I suppose.

Mr Kamall, too, echoed this theme that I think is very important, that we allow nations to develop and grow and allow them to do so by developing their economies and supporting them through development and trade linked together.

Mrs Kinnock, the development link is very important, but the binding aid commitment is in the Cotonou Agreement – it is already there. What this is about, for us, is using EPAs to enable the preferences, the priorities on development to be established on a joint basis, which is extremely important.

Finally, I want to just do something I do not often get a chance to do, which is to pay tribute to the team who are working with me. Our chief negotiator sits behind me. He has been doing all the work with SADC. My colleagues are here and I just wanted to make sure that you recognised that they are extraordinarily supportive and absolutely committed to the agenda I have spelled out.

For me, I hope that you will vote in the spirit in which I have put before you what I am trying to do. I give you my full commitment to continue it, but I really hope I can get your support to take forward the agenda in the way that I have described. That would be of enormous importance to me and I hope you are able to do so tonight.

David Martin, *rapporteur*. – Mr President, firstly let me say that this has been a very good debate. We have had very positive contributions from both the Council and the Commission.

I want particularly to pick up on what the Council said about the CARIFORUM being an example, but not a template, for other EPAs. I absolutely agree with that. It could be the basis for others, but each EPA has to have its own individuality, and we have to learn the lessons from the CARIFORUM negotiations as well.

Secondly, I was delighted that the Council was able to make a commitment on aid for trade, to the effect that the Member States intend to deliver on that aid.

I was pleased that both the Council and the Commission gave reassurances on access to medicines and that both the Council and the Commission reassured us that the five-year review will be a real review that looks at development objectives to make sure that they are being met.

I was delighted that the Commissioner said she believed that regulation had to be in place prior to any liberalisation and opening-up of financial services. For some of us in this Chamber, that is also extremely important. She indicated – as we already knew, but it was important to have it on record – that nothing in these agreements forces privatisation of services in any of the Caribbean countries and that there is no expectation, through this agreement, that privatisation of public services will take place. I was pleased that she also made commitments on most-favoured-nation status.

Based on the fact that what the Commission has said and what the Council has said are now on the record in this House, I would, as rapporteur, be delighted to recommend to the House that it should give assent to the Caribbean EPA.

Let me turn to a separate issue, which is the resolution. A couple of my Conservative EPP colleagues have made comments about this. For the Socialists, there are still red lines in terms of the current state of the resolution, which is different from the assent vote. Actually, all the things that the Council and Commission have committed themselves to are our red lines. So if the House is supporting the Council and Commission, I see no reason why it should not support our compromises and compromise text and get those into the Parliament resolution.

I hope that, at the end of the day, we can vote both for assent and for a consensual resolution that both opens up trade and makes very strong development commitments.

Erika Mann, *rapporteur*. – Mr President, I would like to thank the Commissioner and the Council. What you have agreed on today is to give to Côte d'Ivoire what Parliament has been requesting for quite a time and I think the country will be more than happy. Commissioner, please could you make sure that you will send someone – or go yourself – to Côte d'Ivoire as soon as possible to give this very positive message and confirm this by letter as early as possible? This is an agreement which really fulfils what we are asking for.

I would like to comment on a few things which you have not really dealt with in detail. We would love to see monitoring. I know that this is complicated and that we will need the Council's help. We would like to see monitoring between the European Parliament, the Council and the Commission taking place during the phase from interim to full agreement. That is the only way we can understand what you are going to negotiate.

Otherwise, you will just send us a draft at the end of that period which we will have to agree or disagree with. That is something we do not want to see.

We do not want to be part of the negotiating process but we would like to monitor what you are doing. You do not have to do this today – although it would be helpful for us if you could give your agreement today – but I am happy, with my colleague, to negotiate the process with you. We have done this before with different agreements and in different circumstances, but I am sure that – if the Council is willing – we will find something we can agree on.

My last point to the Commissioner – and to the Council as well – is to ask for an assurance that that they will do their best to secure the kind of achievements agreed during the Doha Development Round. This was the case regarding bananas and on cotton for other countries. There are other aspects involved which are important for developing countries. I know you cannot say 'yes' today, but please give us your assurance that you will try your best to secure those kinds of agreements.

My final thanks go to two colleagues, firstly to Glenys Kinnock, because she was more than helpful and I am more than pleased to hear that she recommends assent on the case of Côte d'Ivoire. I know how complicated it is and I am very grateful that she is helping me in this matter. I would also like to thank my colleague Syed Kamall because he also helped as much as he could regarding the resolution. I know that sometimes it is against his beliefs with regard to trade. He is for open trade so it is not easy for him to come to an agreement. That is why I am pleased to thank both colleagues and give my thanks again to the Commission and to the Council.

President. - I have received nine draft motions for resolutions⁽¹⁾, tabled in accordance with Article 108(5) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Wednesday, 25 March 2009.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Mary Lou McDonald (GUE/NGL), in writing. – The International Economic crisis should lead us to re-examine and to change EU policy concerning liberalisation and deregulation, not only in the EU, but in relation to developing countries.

But the Economic Partnership Agreements which are in front of the Parliament are instead proposing an intensification of this failed approach.

These agreements have been negotiated by the EU exerting strong pressure on governments of developing countries and without taking due consideration of the views of the people in those countries who would most suffer from their implementation.

Vague promises to be flexible in the implementation of the agreements are no substitute for concrete commitments.

15. Cosmetic products (recast version) (debate)

President. - The next item is Mrs Roth-Behrendt's report, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on cosmetic products (recast) (COM(2008)0049 – C6-0053/2008 – 2008/0035(COD)) (A6-0484/2008).

Dagmar Roth-Behrendt, rapporteur. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I will probably not need the four minutes that are allocated to me at the start of the debate, as it is really a very simple and very pleasant matter that we are discussing today. We are discussing a new version of the Cosmetics Directive, which is now a regulation. This Regulation will, in fact, be brought up to date, and we would very much like to update it, improve it and make it more coherent.

We have three minor improvements in mind. On the one hand, the Regulation ensures that the use of carcinogenic substances in cosmetics has indeed been banned, but we have to keep a sense of proportion,

⁽¹⁾ See Minutes

so that substances which are permitted for use in foodstuffs are not banned for use in cosmetics, such as vitamin A or alcohol. This is something that the Commission has correctly recognised and taken into account in its proposal.

The Commission also rightly recognised the fact that new technologies, such as nanotechnology, need special attention, in particular when we are dealing with microscopic particles which may be able to pass through layers of skin. We simply want to ensure that they present no danger. Here, too, I am satisfied that we have achieved a compromise which I can wholeheartedly support.

Finally, Mr President, there is something else we have to address, namely the product claims. We also ought to examine them and bring them up to date. If we got here today, having rushed to get here, and if our deodorant promised us this morning that we would be sweat-free for 14 hours, but we are nevertheless totally covered in sweat this evening, then we are likely to be very surprised and say that there is no truth to the claim at all. Claims that deliver what they promise are an important part of an honest, credible product. We have legislation to ensure safe products and, at the same time, to ensure genuine and clear products.

I am very grateful for the excellent cooperation with the Czech Presidency. I would particularly like to thank Mrs Popadičová, who cannot be here today, but who really has done her best, something that has not always been easy in this Council.

I would also like to offer particular thanks to the Commission, whose cooperation was extremely constructive and successful. That, too, is not always the case in this Chamber. Moreover, I would like to thank my colleagues, namely my female colleagues who have been working on this issue for a long time. I would like to thank Françoise Grossetête, Margret Auken, Hiltrud Breyer and also Frédérique Ries, who cannot be here today, for their cooperation. We did not always agree on issues such as how to deal with notification in relation to nanotechnology and what should be done in terms of labelling, but we managed to reach an excellent compromise. I am very pleased about this.

I would just like to say something about the issue of labelling. I think that certain delegations, perhaps even my own delegation and my own Member State, need to take note of a few things. Labelling has nothing to do with warning signs. Labels allow consumers to make free and informed choices. Consumers have a right to be informed about nanotechnologies and to know that a specific substance contains particularly small, even microscopic particles. They have the right to decide whether they want to use sun lotion and whether they want to use the sun lotion on their children. Consumers have the right to decide. I myself would happily do it and would be happy to use the products myself. Others would not. However, it is important for us to make sure that all people are in a position to make these choices.

I know that you, Commissioner Verheugen, are going to make a statement today on the whole issue of preventing the counterfeiting of medicines. I am very grateful and I hope that you will also address the matter of the threat posed by, or the opportunities related to, internet trade. If you do this, then tomorrow when we vote on the version of the compromise which the Council already voted on last week will be a better day for some of my colleagues, who generally support this compromise, but would like some additional assurances. Thank you very much.

Günter Verheugen, Vice-President of the Commission. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the rapporteur, Mrs Roth-Behrendt, and her two shadow rapporteurs, Mrs Ries and Mrs Grossetête, for their constructive and intensive collaboration, which helped us to reach consensus at first reading.

This is a regulation, which has three important consequences and achieves three important steps forward. We are ensuring greater security and greater transparency for consumers and we have achieved a significant simplification of existing legislation. The issue of security has, in particular, been at the core of our work.

I should just like to address a few points. We are now, for the first time, really creating a mechanism that I would like to describe as a 'cosmetic watchdog', namely a constant monitoring of cosmetic products. This is something we already have for pharmaceutical products. We are increasing the level of market surveillance by the Member States and creating a system to ensure the compulsory traceability of cosmetic products. All of these apply to all manufacturers, from the amateur to the wholesalers and retailers, in other words all of the stakeholders throughout the distribution chain.

Mrs Roth-Behrendt has already spoken on the subject of nanotechnology. We have found a solution in this case, which I would like to describe as a model, as this same solution will be used again later this week with regard to other important pieces of legislation. The specific provisions concerning the nanomaterials used

in cosmetics introduce a mechanism for providing the necessary information before the materials are made publicly available on the market. This ensures that relevant data on safety has to be presented and the authorities have time to take any necessary safety precautions.

There has been a long, intensive and fruitful debate on whether materials that are classified as carcinogenic, mutagenic or reprotoxic could be used in exceptional cases. I am very pleased that the Council and Parliament have agreed with the Commission that we should retain the general ban on these substances in cosmetic products. The minimal exceptions that the Commission has proposed are only intended to avoid discrepancies in relation to the legislation on foodstuffs, as it is not immediately clear that one can drink alcohol but not use it in cosmetic products.

In addition to ensuring product safety, the proposal improves the level of information provided to consumers. An example is the addition to the list of ingredients of information on which substances appear in nano form. Moreover, the legislation provides for a specific inspection of the information provided by manufacturers. I am quite happy to confirm that the Member States and the Commission, through their close cooperation on this matter, wish to prevent the possibility of consumers being misled.

As I said, this regulation is also part of our simplification programme. In this way, ambiguities and contradictions will be removed from a directive which is already 33 years old and which, during that time, has been amended 55 times. There are probably few people around who could really understand it. That is why we have come up with a significant simplification of EU legislation.

I would also like to point out that the creation of a central system for reporting of cosmetic products before they are put on the market in the EU will result in savings for the industry.

I have already indicated that the European Parliament, Council and Commission have worked closely and constructively together. On behalf of the Commission, I am able to agree to all of the amendments tabled by the rapporteur, Mrs Roth-Behrendt.

The Commission has also provided the explanations requested by Parliament with regard to it being a regulation instead of a directive, regarding internet sales, counterfeit products, transitional provisions and the timeframe for entry into force of the regulation and with regard to the issue of the definition of nanomaterials. In order to save time, I would like you to consent to all of the explanations being passed on to the conference services, as the contents are already known to Parliament.

Commission statements

The Commission takes note of the concerns of Member States on the recasting of directives into regulations.

The Commission considers that, where the existing provisions of a directive are sufficiently clear, precise and detailed, they may be capable of conversion into directly applicable provisions in a regulation by way of recasting. This is true more particularly where the provisions at issue are of a technical nature and have already been fully transposed into national law by all Member States.

The Commission accepts, in the light of the different opinions expressed, that the specific case of the Cosmetics Regulation will not be used as a precedent for the interpretation of the Interinstitutional Agreement on this point.

The Commission commits to clarifying the situation regarding Internet sales of cosmetic products prior to the date of application of the regulation.

Like the European Parliament, the Commission is concerned by the fact that the cosmetic sector may be affected by counterfeiting which may increase risk for human health. Therefore, the Commission will take action in order to enhance cooperation between national competent authorities in order to fight counterfeiting.

The Commission will draft an explanatory note regarding transitional provisions and dates of application of the Regulation (in particular in view of Articles 7, 8, 10 and 12a).

On definition of nanomaterials the Commission notes that work towards a common definition of nanomaterials is still evolving. The Commission therefore confirms that in future Community legislation progress on the common definition should be taken into account and notes that the comitology procedures contained within this proposal also allow for the updating of the definition within this proposal.

Françoise Grossetête, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, allow me, first of all, to warmly congratulate not only the Council but also the rapporteur, of course, Mrs Roth-Behrendt, the European Commission, my fellow shadow rapporteurs and, in particular, Mrs Ries, for this work that we have done. There have sometimes been some sharp exchanges between us, but in the end we have achieved a result that is very satisfying and that strengthens, on the one hand, the safety of cosmetic products for the benefit of consumers and, on the other hand, reduces the administrative burdens which had become pointless for our European industry.

This regulation was necessary because clarity needed to be restored to the legislation, which has been amended almost 50 times during the last 30 years. Transposition of the directive was causing problems in the 27 Member States. There were some legal uncertainties and the text had become very heavy and much too costly for our businesses in terms of implementation. I recall also that cosmetics companies in the European Union are world leaders in this sector with more than 3 000 cosmetics manufacturers. It is a highly innovative industry that represents a market of EUR 65 billion and directly or indirectly generates more than 350 000 jobs. Therefore, it is important to be concerned about cosmetics.

This new regulation strengthens safety, as I have said, and the manufacturer's responsibility through monitoring of the market, while at the same time reducing bureaucracy. It ensures better traceability of cosmetic products, identification of the person responsible, an information file with a description of the cosmetic product and the method of manufacture.

We have, in fact, had much discussion about nanomaterials, which are used in cosmetics, particularly in sun protection products, and which must be subject to very strict requirements in relation to safety, but without standing in the way of innovation. A product containing nanomaterials will therefore have to be notified by the person responsible and not the nanomaterial as such.

In conclusion, I should like to draw your attention to the fact that we really have to fight against counterfeiting of cosmetic products, because that is still a real danger. We still have much to do in that area.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (RO) Safe cosmetic products are particularly important to European consumers, which is the reason why we must focus appropriate attention on them.

I regard as timely the initiative to review the directive and its replacement with a proposal for a regulation from the Commission. This will allow inaccuracies and inconsistencies of a legal nature to be eliminated and discrepancies to be avoided between transpositions into national legislation.

In circumstances where experience at a European level has demonstrated that the 'ingredient by ingredient' type approach is neither viable nor adequate, in my view, our priorities are to make manufacturers more accountable and to enforce tight control on the internal market.

The use of nanomaterials is a promising solution in this area, but they are to be assessed and declared safe by the Scientific Committee for products intended for consumer use, while the use of alternative methods is an initiative which must continue to be supported.

I believe that the involvement of the Committee which I referred to is vital with regard to the use of substances classified as carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic in order to verify their use in the manufacture of cosmetic products.

In order to implement this regulation effectively, I believe that Member States must carry out adequate checks and, in the event of non-compliance, submit a report on a regular basis to the Commission.

Chris Davies, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, Parliament is coming to the end of its term and some of us are starting to make preparations for the elections. In the United Kingdom, at least, I see us faced with a sea of Euro-sceptics and Europhobes wishing to criticise everything we do at every opportunity. And the history of this legislation will give them some ammunition: 55 significant changes over the past 30 years, making it more cumbersome and confusing and hardly helping the industry or consumers.

Yet, I find that the critics often tend to stop short. They do not tend to actually look at what the European Union is doing to try and improve upon the existing situation and to put benefits into practice. They assume we are always static. So, here we have a piece of legislation that in practice has ensured that existing arrangements are simplified, that red tape is cut, that the legislation is clarified for all. And we have a directive turned into a regulation. Now back in my country that is terrible – that takes a way a bit of freedom for manoeuvre for Member States – but the reality is, as we have seen with REACH, as we now see with this,

industry does not want 27 different interpretations of a European rule, it wants the facility of knowing exactly where it stands across this market, the greatest market of its kind in the world.

Will the critics stand up and say, 'We were wrong to insist that CMRs be banned'? Will they stand up and say, 'We were wrong'? Will they say what we *should* be putting into cosmetics, products that we would not put into foods, despite the fact that some of these cosmetics we put on our skins, in our eyes, even taking in our mouths? Will they oppose proper assessments being made of cosmetics or the centralised information service which the Commissioner has rightly said will actually save industry money? I do not think they will do any of these things.

My colleague Frédérique Ries, who cannot be with us tonight, wanted to ensure that steps were taken to try and avoid the marketing of counterfeit products, to strengthen product traceability and to tighten up restrictions on the making of false claims about the beneficial effects of these products. She wanted to support clear labelling of products about the content of nanomaterials. We have made progress on all these areas. So, on her behalf, I would like to thank the rapporteur, the shadow rapporteurs and Commissioner Verheugen. I think it is a good piece of legislation and I for one, as I go into this election process, will be very happy to hold this up as an example of what the European Union can do well.

Roberta Angelilli, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the European cosmetics industry is a very important sector in terms of the economy and employment. As has been said, it represents a turnover of more than EUR 35 billion and more than 350 000 jobs among sales, distribution and transport. It is a high-innovation sector, but I too would emphasise that a high level of protection for human health and a high standard of consumer information must be guaranteed.

It is on precisely these grounds that I congratulate the rapporteur on her excellent work, and I would like to highlight certain points I believe to be of particular importance. It is right to subject products to a safety assessment that also gives distributors a responsibility for completing the necessary checks before marketing the goods. The ban imposed by the new regulation on more than 1 000 substances used in cosmetics that have been classified as carcinogenic or toxic is also a good thing.

Another important aspect is the list of permitted colourants, preservatives and solar filters, and greater clarity in labelling on the function of the cosmetic, its shelf life, specific warnings for its use and a list of ingredients in descending order by weight is also essential. Most importantly, the label must feature words, marks or images that attribute realistic characteristics and functions to the product and not characteristics or functions that it does not possess.

It will therefore be necessary to guarantee product traceability, not least because we must prevent the worrying phenomenon of the counterfeiting of cosmetics and so-called 'parallel imports'. I will finish, Mr President, by pointing out that in Italy alone, EUR 120 million of cosmetic products, including perfumes and toothpaste, in fact come from the parallel market, with potential serious effects on health.

Hiltrud Breyer, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, protecting human health is also the primary objective when it comes to cosmetic products. We are making history with this vote. This is the first time that specific regulations have been drawn up for the use of nanomaterials in cosmetic products, and we are breaking new ground. I am, of course, particularly pleased to be able to say that it was an initiative of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance that led to this groundbreaking event. We Greens were the driving force, we placed it on the agenda, and I would like to wholeheartedly thank the rapporteur, Mrs Roth-Behrendt, for her clear and unwavering support. I am also pleased to be able to praise the Commission for changing its mind. Until now, it had continually stressed that the existing legislation was sufficient to guarantee the safety of nanomaterials. Now, it has clearly stated that we do indeed need specific regulations.

This does not apply only to the Cosmetics Regulation, but also to the regulation which we have yet to discuss this week on new foodstuffs, as nano-technology has, until now, been a kind of black hole. It was brought onto the market without sufficient explanation of the risks. This is, therefore, a good day for health and consumer protection, even though I find it regrettable that the definition of nanomaterials has not been made sufficiently comprehensive, but has merely been restricted to insoluble and bio-persistent materials. However, it is nevertheless important and, for us, vital that nano-specific regulations have been adopted.

I also hope – and would already like to ask for your support in this matter now – that a regulation on new foodstuffs also proves successful this week, as that case does not have such broad support from the Commission. We need consistency – and not just concerning the matter of alcohol – when it comes to both

cosmetics and foodstuffs. The same generally also applies in the field of nanotechnology. There, too, we need consistency between cosmetics and foodstuffs. I also sincerely hope that we will finally have an open debate on the purpose and uses of nanotechnology. I am also pleased that we have not watered down the ban on CMR substances, agreed in 2008, which was proposed by the Greens.

Eva-Britt Svensson, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (SV) Mr President, my group and I welcome the compromise that the Council and Parliament have managed to achieve in this recast of the Cosmetics Directive.

The biggest stumbling block in the negotiations with the Council was precisely nanomaterials. This relates to the use of extremely small structures to make new materials, which attain new properties or functions precisely because the particles are so small. For instance, the material may become harder, firmer, thinner, water-repellent, heat-retaining or obtain some other characteristic. In fact, we still do not know very much about it. Some make-up and creams contain nanoparticles and it is possible that these particles may penetrate damaged skin and find their way into the body, where they absolutely should not be.

Should we, then, allow an active substance in cosmetic products with absolutely no means of control? The answer, of course, is no. More knowledge and information must be obtained on nanomaterials. I am therefore pleased about this agreement that we are to vote on tomorrow. It is a step in the right direction.

The agreement will entail better protection for European consumers when nanomaterials are used in hair dyes, UV filters and so on. They will undergo a safety assessment before the products are allowed onto the market and the cosmetic products industry will also need to notify the Commission of the use of nanomaterials in any of their other products and the Commission, in turn, will be able to consult with the Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection as to whether there are any suspicions that the nanomaterials pose a health risk.

I would like to say a big thank you to the rapporteur responsible and to the Commission for producing such a good recast.

Irena Belohorská (NI). – (SK) I would like to thank the rapporteur. Bravo, Dagmar, for your work on the draft of the European Parliament and Council regulation presented to us by the Commission. It is a highly important document for protecting consumer health. We all no doubt use cosmetic products, as these include not just beauty products but also so-called cosmetics for everyday use, such as toothpaste, deodorants, shampoos, products for the hair and nails, lipstick and so on.

It is now 33 years since the last directive and that is a long enough time, in spite of the amendments. After all, developments in chemistry and in cosmetics itself have brought enormous and fundamental changes. I am referring here to the use of nanomaterials, so frequently mentioned here. These can have both positive and negative effects on human health. I therefore agree with the opinion that all materials used in cosmetic products which have a carcinogenic effect should be banned. We should also think very carefully about using materials whose mutagenic and toxic effects cannot be ruled out.

Consumers often purchase cosmetic products on the basis of misleading advertisements or incomplete information so through our European agencies, including now the European Chemicals Agency and the European Office for Food Safety, we must try to draw up the directives and guidelines for monitoring. We must not forget that cosmetic products are the most frequently counterfeited products and this only increases the likelihood of harmful materials being present. Besides these warnings we should try to inform consumers of the potential risks to health even from products made by well-known firms.

Horst Schnellhardt (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in my opinion, the decisive point in the report before us is the change to the legal basis. Although the Member States of the European Union have developed at different rates and there are still large differences between them in terms of development, we will only achieve more legal certainty if the regulation is the preferred method of choice and remains so in the future.

There are directives that have caused more damage to competition and more injustice than was previously the case as a result of the different ways in which they have been implemented in the Member States. Therefore, it is right that, in this report, the directive and the national implementation have been concentrated in one comprehensive regulation. In this way, there is, naturally, an increase in the level of legal certainty, which is extraordinarily important especially for companies in this sector that are also involved in research. Of course,

the Commission's commitment shortly to reduce 25% of compulsory registrations is also very welcome. We have taken the first step with this regulation. Congratulations, Commissioner.

The present report also makes it clear how quickly new products can appear on the market and force the legislative authorities to act. We addressed the issue of changing the Cosmetics Directive as recently as a few years ago. The use of nanomaterials has forced us to address the issue again. Within the framework of preventive consumer protection, the decisions concerning labelling are welcome, while the opportunity of provisional acceptance, in view of the state of scientific discoveries is also acceptable. At this point, I would also like to warn against panic-mongering, as has happened in the case of other developments, and would instead advise a scientific examination of the whole matter.

With the requirements we have implemented, namely that advertising claims and labels only reflect the true features of the product, we are acting as advocates for the consumer. However, the case of the deodorant which Mrs Roth-Behrendt mentioned, is a different matter. It works on one person, but does not work on another. Sometimes the same substance works on me one day, but does not work the next. Therefore, we should not take the matter quite as seriously.

I only hope that the legal approach will not be diluted by the Commission as a result of far too many measures within the comitology procedure. Therefore, I ask you not to prolong this procedure too much.

Margrete Auken (Verts/ALE). - (DA) Mr President, we all use cosmetic products. They are not luxury goods that are only relevant to a particular gender or only to adults. Soap, shampoo, toothpaste, lotions, deodorants, suntan lotions – they are all around us and affect us all. It is important for them to be safe and for all countries to have sound, clear rules, and that is what we have achieved with this proposal. I would like to take this opportunity, like everyone else, to say thank you to Mrs Roth-Behrendt for her fine work.

We are happy that our prohibition on CMR substances has been retained, but made more appropriate. If ethanol had been prohibited in cosmetic products it would probably have created problems and at the same time it would have seemed a little strange, as we drink it in relatively large amounts. However, it is good that the Council did not succeed in weakening the provisions. Derogations from the prohibition are now to be restricted to substances that are approved in food and have so far not been shown to cause problems and that vulnerable groups, such as small children and pregnant women, are able to tolerate. However, the most important thing is that nanomaterials have at last been included. This has been a tough fight. It is as though the industry has tried to stifle the debate on the safety of nanomaterials. They would be very pleased if we would just accept these substances as unproblematic and wonderful. There has been no hint of the public concern that there has been surrounding GMOs, for example.

We, in the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, are proud that nanomaterial has now been included. It is to be tested, labelled and, where a number of products are concerned – UV filters, dyes and preservatives – it will now be the producer who has to guarantee safety, while the Commission is to provide detailed information and find time to monitor the rest. Finally, we have also managed to include labelling so that consumers can see what they are buying and putting on their skin. We have also included a provision concerning revision, requiring the Commission to ensure that both the definition of nanomaterial and the safety procedures are satisfactory. Finally, it is a good thing that it is to be impermissible to advertise a product as having properties that are beyond what it can offer. It will be interesting to see how all of the anti-wrinkle cream that we put on our faces, and which clearly does not work, will be sold in future.

Péter Olajos (PPE-DE). - (HU) In the cosmetics industry, as in many other sectors, a revolution is currently underway. A few years ago, nanotechnology began to conquer this branch of industry as well, and, as a result, unprecedented opportunities and prospects have now opened up. Of course, nanotechnology is far from being a new invention: human beings have been using the technology for four thousand years, albeit it is only in the last twenty years that we have become aware of it.

At the same time, it is important that we handle this matter with due caution; without delaying new discoveries and their implementation, we should nevertheless pay attention to the health risks as well. We must protect our citizens from these potential dangers, notably by means of a differentiated, risk-based approach.

There are nano-applications and products intended for direct consumer use, such as clothing and food, including cosmetic products, in the case of which an inadequately circumspect approach may result in people experiencing, literally in the flesh, the potentially harmful consequences.

It is precisely for this reason that it is important for people to know what kinds of preparations they are using; appropriate and detailed labelling is therefore indispensable, and the responsibility of the manufacturer is essential. We are talking about a gigantic, and ever-growing sector, for the EU cosmetics industry generates annual revenues of EUR 65 billion. One of the leading European cosmetics firms – one of the 3000 – spends EUR 450 million per year on research and development alone, and employs nearly 3000 scientists and researchers.

According to the European Commission's estimate, in 2006, 5% of cosmetics contained nanomaterials, a figure that may even have doubled by now. In order to overcome some of the global problems that we have caused, we need nanotechnology, and so I will vote in good conscience in favour of this legislative resolution, but we must not forget that every coin has two sides.

I congratulate Mrs Roth-Behrendt, Mrs Grossetête and Mrs Wallis, who have tabled the motion for a resolution – they have done an excellent job.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE). – (CS) Mr President, the introduction of minimum standards for the safety of cosmetic products marks an important step towards ensuring substantially higher levels of safety for European consumers. This modern regulation at the same time reduces the administrative burden for European producers employing more than 350,000 people. The extensive discussion here has focused mainly on labelling because this often misleads consumers, and I therefore warmly welcome the fact that new claims about the effects of products must be documented. There has also been a very lively discussion here – and not only here – on licensing nanomaterials and of course the elimination of carcinogenic materials from cosmetic products. I do not agree that messages about the content of nanomaterials in products should take the form of warnings. It is important for us to have a list of licensed nanomaterials that are not harmful but improve the quality of a product. There is, of course, no point in scaring consumers. Minimum standards should ensure consumer safety. I certainly consider counterfeiting to be a serious problem and I would also like to draw attention to the limited capacity of monitoring bodies at national level to actually monitor everything.

I am delighted that the text includes a uniform definition of nanomaterials and I also welcome the fact that we will be able to amend it so that it keeps up with the latest scientific developments. I also welcome the fact that the directive will actually become a regulation and will have greater legal emphasis. I therefore welcome this piece of work and I congratulate all of the rapporteurs for managing to reach a consensus over an issue as sensitive as the introduction of cosmetic products onto the European market based on scientific developments.

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE-DE). - (FI) Mr President, the compromises made at first reading during the last legislative year have very quickly become commonplace, owing to pressures of time. Besides, that suits the small groups, as the agreements made at the negotiating table make them more powerful than befits their size. If this practice spreads, however, it will gnaw away at the credibility of parliamentary democracy in this House.

This time, however, democracy won, because the biggest groups found common ground and the result achieved has the genuine support of the majority.

It was obvious that the Cosmetics Directive needed to be redrafted. Its provisions needed clarifying and bringing up to date, and the guideline directive had to become a regulation, and nothing less, to be able to guarantee high levels of protection of human health everywhere in the EU as well as the workings of the internal market. These principles follow on logically from the work that was started when REACH was being discussed.

Obsolete legislation in the cosmetics industry poses a special threat to health and the extent to which we can rely on the law. Claims about nanoparticles and cosmetic products are a good example of this. Whereas the positive characteristics of nanomaterials are more or less familiar, the risks are largely uncharted. Similarly, the special characteristics of cosmetic products, which have a direct effect on the decision to purchase them, have been impossible to verify with any certainty.

That is why it was important to establish a common policy among the three largest political groups, to be able to take account of considerations of health, the environment, commerce and society, so as to make possible the agreement with the Council. Accordingly, I value highly the work that my colleague, Mrs Grossetête, has done as shadow rapporteur. She, in cooperation with Parliament's rapporteur,

Mrs Roth-Behrendt, and her liberal colleagues, ensured that there was a majority position, which made this final result possible. Real democracy listens to everyone, but reflects the majority view.

President. – No-one has expressed a wish to take the floor. Thus, before I give the rapporteur the floor, I would like to inform you that, so far, fourteen Members have spoken, eleven of whom were women.

Günter Verheugen, Vice-President of the Commission. – (DE) Mr President, I was going to briefly comment on your last remark, but I have decided not to. Men are also interested in cosmetics – more and more so, in fact. In any case, they are interested in ensuring that our cosmetic products are safe.

There is only one thing left for me to do at this point. I would like to sincerely thank you for your agreement and support. As Mr Davies said, we have really provided a good example of what European legislation can achieve.

If I may personally give you a piece of advice, Mr Davies, it is the following. In your homeland it is perhaps also worth noting that we in Europe have regulations on cosmetics which do not exist elsewhere, namely the prohibition of the testing of cosmetics on animals. That is not permitted in Europe. Moreover, a few days ago, a regulation came into force which stipulates that products that are tested on animals cannot be placed on the European market. Given that the British are well known for being a nation of animal lovers, this is an argument that you, too, may be able to use.

Dagmar Roth-Behrendt, rapporteur. – (DE) Mr President, thank you very much, Commissioner, thank you very much, ladies and gentlemen. I am particularly grateful to Commissioner Verheugen for once again highlighting the ban on animal testing, as it has reminded me that this is now the third revision of the cosmetic products legislation that I have had the privilege to be involved in, these revisions being the sixth amendment, the seventh amendment, and now the change to a regulation.

We have, indeed, succeeded in banning animal testing. We have, for example, managed to ensure that consumers know the shelf life of a product, by means of a small box containing a number which tells them how long a product can be used for. I am also addressing these comments to certain colleagues, such as Mrs Roithová, who unfortunately were not able to be present at the start of this debate. Labels have never, at any point, been warnings. If a product is not safe, it should not be brought onto the market, it should not be marketed. All products on the European market have to be safe and harmless. However, labelling allows consumers to choose. That is what democracy is all about, and that is what freedom of choice is all about.

We have an excellent piece of legislation. I have tried to make the process very transparent. I have tried, as Mrs Grossétete has said, to bring together various opinions. This is because I wanted to ensure that we draw up legislation which is good for everyone, namely for the consumers in the European Union, for industry, which will have to work with this legislation, and, finally, for everyone who benefits from it.

I would just like once again to say to Mr Schnellhardt that yes, deodorants work differently on different people, but the claim is nevertheless made that they 'keep you sweat-free'. That is why it is important that the claims concerning the deep rings around my eyes after a week in Strasbourg are, to a certain extent, true and reliable.

Once again, I would like to thank the Commissioner, particularly for the explanations he has given, as well as my colleagues and my co-workers, who have done most of the work. Thank you very much.

President. – It was an extremely fruitful and interesting debate.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow, Tuesday, 24 March 2009.

16. The placing of biocidal products on the market – New biocides revision proposal (debate)

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

- Mrs Sârbu's report, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 98/8/EC concerning the placing of biocidal products on the market as regards the extension of certain time periods (COM(2008)0618 – C6-0346/2008 – 2008/0188(COD)) (A6-0076/2009), and

- the Commission statement on the new proposal for a revision of the Biocides Directive.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu, *rapporteur*. – (RO) I would like to emphasise that I regard as a success the agreement which we have reached together with the Commission and the Council on extending the period for evaluating active substances until 2014 in order to create in good time a regulated market for biocidal products.

This has also been reflected in the result of the vote taken by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety. This is why I would like to thank my colleagues who supported this compromise between the three institutions.

Extending the transitional period is extremely important for guaranteeing that all biocidal products containing active substances will be placed on the market legally.

I felt that it was essential for the review of this directive to be carried out at first reading so as not to risk going beyond the 10-year period for the systematic examination of biocidal products and, by implication, avoid the risk of their withdrawal from the market as from 2010.

The extension of the period will ensure that Member States have sufficient time to evaluate these substances up until 2014 when the substantive revision of the Biocides Directive will most likely come into force.

Another item proposed in the draft report is to limit to a maximum of two years the possibility of further extending the deadlines for the remaining dossiers through comitology in order to avoid the possibility of endlessly delaying the whole process. This measure is essential for the situation if the revision of the directive is not completed by 2014.

We hope that the aspects linked to data protection and the practice of 'free riding', whereby companies use the information registered by other companies as part of a national scheme, will be addressed during the substantive revision of the Biocides Directive.

I would like to mention that the amendments adopted within the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety form part of an agreement with the Commission and the Council as they feature in the final draft due to be voted on in plenary tomorrow. Once the vote has been completed in the plenary, we will have the Council's support to reach an agreement on first reading.

Stavros Dimas, *Member of the Commission*. – (EL) Mr President, I should like to thank the rapporteur, Mrs Sârbu, on her diligence and efforts to achieve agreement at first reading on the proposal to amend Directive 98/8 on the placing of biocidal products on the market.

I should like to say that the European Commission is prepared to accept the compromise package, especially the point relating to the need to extend the transitional period by four years instead of three and the point relating to the two-year limitation on any further extensions, in order to facilitate the review programme.

Christa Kläß, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner Dimas, ladies and gentlemen, we can be proud of the fact that we have achieved such high health and hygiene standards in the European Union. The use of biocides has made a significant contribution to these achievements. When used as disinfectants and pesticides, they protect us from dangerous diseases, or as the case may be, from their carriers. Biocides are indispensable. They have to be harmless to humans and to the environment, and that is why we now need a review of all biocidal agents.

Safety requires time, and the review is now taking longer than initially planned. We cannot run the risk of losing important products because their registration has not been completed. That is why I welcome the fact that Parliament, the Council and the Commission have, at the first reading, agreed to a quick extension of the deadlines for the Biocides Directive, until – I think, Commissioner, – 2014.

However, why has this proposal appeared so late? The danger that substances might fall by the wayside due to expired deadlines, was something we could see coming for a long time, and our discussions in Parliament now have to take place under greater time pressure.

Commissioner, we have been waiting for some time now for a proposal from the Commission on the revision of the Biocides Directive. Important areas now have to be urgently harmonised and regulated. Examples include the definition of the approval criteria, the length of the approval and, most importantly, data protection. Manufacturers need clear regulations and certainty. Regulations are also needed when it comes to the use and handling of the products. The testing of an active agent costs several thousand euros, and this investment can only be recovered if the results, at least for a certain period of time, are not accessible to other

applicants. No-one wants us to lose our high hygiene standards. We must keep them in order to meet new challenges.

I hope, that the Commission will present a clear and well-founded report that meets all of these requirements and I hope that it does so as soon as possible.

Vittorio Prodi, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, thank you, Mr Verheugen, for coming and giving us the opportunity to discuss this document together. With regard to the proposal to amend the directive concerning the placing of biocidal products on the market, Parliament has agreed on the need to grant certain extensions to the review period required to correctly assess the main active substances of certain biocidal products, in view of the specific nature of the necessary tests and market requirements. However, you should be aware that we are awaiting the more thorough revision of Directive 98/8/EC on biocidal products to express our views regarding the content. I would therefore like to suggest some ideas for the Commission to think about.

First and foremost, it would be beneficial to make the transition from a directive to a regulation, a legislative instrument that would enable the same provisions to enter into force simultaneously in all Member States, thus regulating the sector uniformly. One key point will be the sharing of data, in accordance with EU guidelines, and, as already implemented with REACH, testing on vertebrates should be avoided or significantly reduced for biocidal products also, thanks to the mandatory sharing of data obtained through such tests among those who register the same active substance, thereby avoiding any duplication of studies.

Data sharing would allow for greater efficiency in the file evaluation system and would cut the cost of drafting these files, which would be significant both for small- and medium-sized enterprises and the national authorities responsible for examining applications.

Emphasis must be placed on simplifying procedures and applying mutual recognition of authorisation for a given product and its use among the different Member States, in order to speed up both procedures and the placing of the biocidal product on the market in the aforesaid States. Following this, the scale of charges and common time periods for examining applications in the different countries should be harmonised, and the authorisation process should be simplified in the case of formulations with minimal differences or variations in colour, for example, thus avoiding extra specific tests requiring further evaluation by each Member State.

Lastly, we must avoid discrimination between European producers of goods treated with biocidal products and extra-Community goods containing such products. I leave it up to the Commission to come up with a solution that the new Parliament, we hope, will be able to support.

Urszula Krupa, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (PL) Mr President, harmonising the legislation on biocidal products in the European Union seems all the more necessary given that regulations in specific countries are very varied. The lack of common legislative provisions poses a danger to people's health and lives, as well as being an environmental threat, especially under free market conditions.

However, the proposal contained in the initial version of the text, namely a ten-year implementation period for the legislation, seems to be unrealistic, in view of the extremely complicated and expensive registration procedures for the chemicals used in these products. These procedures, which were intended to ensure a high level of safety, could, ironically enough, contribute to reducing the level of control, which is all the more problematic if we consider the fact that, in some cases, national regulations controlled the biocidal products introduced onto the market.

However, removing these mechanisms and introducing less efficient and expensive assessment procedures may restrict the sales of biocidal products. A central, European register of active substances used in biocidal products will not ensure safety, either, especially in view of the fact that biological agents are extremely variable and are resistant to active agents. Having a limited choice of effective compounds will only serve to increase resistance levels. Moreover, the high costs and complicated procedures involved will push small companies out of the market, leading to the market becoming monopolised by large companies working in this sector.

The proposal to have an extended, 14-year transitional period, which could be extended by another two years, has become all the more invaluable due to the fact that it will not be possible to register active substances or transpose these regulations into national law before 2014.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE). – (CS) Mr President, I would like to put a question to the Commissioner as I have rather a different opinion. I find it regrettable that the EU cannot manage in ten years, in other words by 2010, to complete a review and registration of the 900 or so disinfectants, preservatives and pesticides that are sold on the European market. It surprises me that we need a further three years for this, and the rapporteur has added another year on top of that. This means delays in harmonisation and therefore in greater protection for the market in respect of these harmful materials. Apparently we had no choice but to announce a postponement because otherwise many products would have to disappear from the market. Permit me, however, to offer a reflection. It might be beneficial if some of the products imported from uncontrolled Asian markets would have to leave our market. That would accelerate the development of alternative safer materials. I would be interested to hear whether the Commission has tried to cooperate with test centres and institutions in the Member States and to make use of their resources in order to achieve the original shorter deadline. Can the Commission or the rapporteur give me an answer to that question?

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, due to the specific nature of this legislation, and potential danger of any incorrect interpretation of it, we should pay particular attention to the issue of biocidal agents.

I agree with the rapporteur, who spoke about the fact that it is vital to extend the transitional period, for assessing active substances used in biocidal products, until 2014, in order to use EU legislation to regulate the market. If we were not to take this step, would the national provisions – which expire in 2010 – result in the sale of a significant number of biocidal products becoming illegal, which would lead to a variety of paradoxical situations?

During the transitional period, national legislation should be used to monitor strictly this specific section of the market. It is worth adding here that we should be particularly careful when dealing with any legislation concerning biocidal agents, and remember that these products are intended to destroy and repel harmful organisms and that they contain active chemical agents. Any carelessness on our part may have irrevocable consequences.

Stavros Dimas, Member of the Commission. – (EL) Mr President, I should like to thank the speakers for their constructive observations and to say that the evaluation of active substances will in fact ultimately require more time than was initially and optimistically foreseen. In 2000, when the legislation was passed, the evaluation programmes did not start immediately; approximately four years were spent on various preparatory procedures and the evaluation procedures which the national competent authorities are indubitably using only started in 2004. Although very notable and important work has been carried out to date, it will not be possible for many of the active substances to have passed through evaluation by May.

Given that the directive stipulates that biocidal products which contain active substances not included in Annex 1 or 1A to the directive must be withdrawn from the market by no later than 14 May 2010, it was judged necessary to extend the deadline for completion of the evaluation procedure; otherwise, if we withdraw some of these substances because they have not passed through the evaluation procedure, then both health and the environment in the European Union may be jeopardised and, indubitably, trade will also be obstructed.

On the matter referred to by Mrs Klass, I should like to say that this matter concerns the protection of data submitted for the evaluation of active substances. This applies more specifically to cases in which companies which were not involved in efforts to produce the said data, ‘free riders’, can nonetheless keep their products on the market until expiry of the transitional period.

The Commission is in the final stage of processing the proposal for a substantive revision of the Biocides Directive and this matter was clearly signalled during the consultations carried out when the said proposal was being formulated and drafted. Many of the comments made by Mr Prodi and others will doubtless be taken into account.

The Commission will address the aforementioned issue within the framework of the substantive review of the directive. A Commission statement on this will be sent to the European Parliament secretariat for insertion in the Minutes of today’s sitting.

Similarly, numerous other matters highlighted by Parliament will also be addressed in the said proposal, such as the extension of the scope to goods and materials processed using biocides, improved approval procedures for biocidal products, the introduction of compulsory data exchange during product licensing and during approval of the active substance in accordance with the principles of the REACH regulation and alignment with best practice in other legislative acts, such as that passed recently on plant protection products.

To close, the Commission expresses its satisfaction with the outcome of the negotiations. The Commission is in a position to accept the compromise amendments in full and promises to take account, during the main review of the directive, of the concerns about data protection expressed both by the Council and by Parliament here today.

Commission Statement

The Commission notes the issues concerning data protection, data sharing and 'alleged free riders' that have been raised during the discussions on the proposal for the extension of certain time periods under the Biocides Directive. The Commission will consider appropriate solutions to the identified problems in the framework of the substantive revision of the Biocides Directive.

IN THE CHAIR: MR COCILOVO

Vice-President

Daciana Octavia Sârbu, *rapporteur*. – (RO) I would like to thank again my colleagues, the shadow rapporteurs, with whom we cooperated very well. We were very efficient in completing this report, although this is not as important as the actual revision of the directive will be.

As you have seen, all my colleagues have talked about this revision and less about the report which we are discussing today because it is a revision that we are waiting for.

We have heard here, admittedly, that this extension of the transitional period from three to four years is not desirable, but I believe that it is much more important for us to guarantee that all products will be placed on the market legally and that a proper evaluation of these products will be carried out.

Thank you once again and, as I was saying, we are waiting for the revision of the Biocides Directive as soon as possible.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday, 24 March 2009.

17. One year after Lisbon: the EU-Africa partnership at work (debate)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0079/2009) by Mrs Martens, on behalf of the Committee on Development, on One year after Lisbon: The Africa-EU partnership at work (2008/2318(INI)).

Louis Michel, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would first of all like to thank the Committee on Development and its rapporteur, Mrs Martens, for this report which makes a first assessment of the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership one year after the Lisbon Summit.

It is, of course, with great satisfaction that I note the number of positive elements underlined by this report and the progress that has been made during the course of a year, which is relatively short for such a vast and, above all, politically ambitious exercise. To mention just one of these, we have this afternoon had a meeting between Parliament's ad hoc delegation for relations with the Pan-African Parliament of the African Union and the Pan-African Parliament of the African Union's ad hoc committee for relations with the European Parliament on the role of parliaments in implementing and monitoring Africa-EU strategy.

That in itself is a concrete result. A new institutional architecture between the two continents is being put in place and I wish to congratulate the two presidents for the work that they have completed.

Rather than elaborating on the positive aspects of the Martens Report, I would like instead to touch on three key points that the report highlights for improving the EU-African Union partnership. The first point is on the role of parliaments. You know how much of a believer I am in the role of the parliaments, both as actors and as scrutineers of the democratic process. It is in this twin capacity that the European and Pan-African parliaments are invited to take part in the Africa-EU Strategic Partnership.

I can therefore assure you of my total support for the proposals made in the European Parliament and Pan-African Parliament joint proposal and repeated in the report. These consist firstly of participation at the appropriate level in the joint panels of experts relating to the four thematic partnerships which concern you.

Secondly, involvement in drawing up the annual progress reports. Thirdly, participation in the joint taskforce, and fourthly the participation of the presidents in the Africa-European Union Summit.

Some of these proposals have, I might add, already materialised, or are in the process of doing so. As regards civil society and non-state actors, I am more convinced than anyone that the principle challenge for 2009 consists of speeding up the achievement of tangible results before the mid-term assessment planned for autumn 2009 and achieving the ambition of a partnership centred on people outside of institutions.

In this context, non-state actors are being brought in to play an important role ahead of becoming involved in the joint panels of experts for each of the eight thematic partnerships. On the European side, a civil society steering group has already been established last spring to monitor and participate in the implementation of the partnership. On the African side, a civil society steering group has also been recently put in place under the aegis of the Economic, Social and Cultural Council of the African Union.

European and African civil society should meet in a forum at the end of April 2009 to draw up concrete proposals for commitment to the joint Africa/European Union ministerial Troika.

As regards strategic partnerships, and specifically the one dealing with governance and human rights, I welcome Parliament's move towards a notion of government that is very dear to me: the good execution of the executive functions and the powers conferred by public law by a state that is impartial and capable of meeting the needs and aspirations of its citizens.

It is, therefore, with this in mind that two years ago we set up the EUR 2.7 billion governance section for all the ACP countries. This approach is based on three principles: dialogue, incentivising reforms and ownership of these reforms by the partner country. However, the report expresses doubts and concerns, particularly as regards the governance profiles: how they are drawn up, how they are used and their possible negative impact on the African Peer Review Mechanism.

I would remind you that the governance profiles that cover all dimensions of these – that is the political, economic, social, institutional and environmental dimensions, and so on – were only the starting point and in no way guided the programming of this section.

Moreover, the results and conclusions of this analysis were discussed with the government of the partner country during the programming dialogue. On the basis of this, the government was encouraged to explain its own reform plan or, if need be, complete it or go into more detail; to demonstrate the relevance, ambition and credibility of these reforms on the basis of three evaluation criteria, which then allowed the level of financial incentive for each country to be determined. In this context, particular attention was given to countries which are committed to the African Peer Review Mechanism and which have completed the review, showing their desire to continue along these lines. This exercise threw into stark relief the very different situations of each country; the respective needs for reform as well as the different capacities for drawing up and proposing a governance plan. Flexibility and pragmatism have therefore been necessary when apportioning the governance incentive fund. In January 2009, the Commission published an interim report on the incentive fund process and sent it to all the institutions of the European Union, for whatever purpose it may serve.

Maria Martens, *rapporteur*. – (NL) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, we are discussing the report 'One year after Lisbon: The Africa-EU partnership at work', which is to say the implementation of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy for the development of Africa, as set out at the EU-Africa Summit in December 2007.

That Summit was a momentous occasion. It was, in fact, the first time that the European Union and the African Union had together laid down a strategy on the basis of shared values and principles and mutual respect, that they had reached agreements to achieve the Millennium Development Goals together and to find solutions together to common challenges in the areas of, for example, security, migration and the climate.

We are all aware of the criticism in our own countries, where people wonder whether it really makes sense to continue investing money in Africa, especially in these times of economic crisis. I would like to emphasise once again how important our efforts continue to be for the development of Africa, and that applies to both continents. Commissioner Michel was spot on when he said, in a meeting in this regard just a short while ago that the more poverty there is, the more instability there is. This is also important from the point of view of demographic trends. Before long, Africa will account for 20% of the world's population, while Europe will account for just 5%. We have common problems, we face common challenges. When people lack

opportunities in Africa, it is only natural that they will seek them in Europe. Africa deserves our support, and not only for that reason.

Today, we are discussing the implementation of the agreed strategy and we have an action plan. We must continue to act together in order to realise the strategy and the action plan. I am pleased with the results that have been achieved so far in relation to the partnerships. In my previous reports I have always expressed concern about the lack of a clear specific role for the parliaments when it comes to the implementation of a joint strategy. In 2007, the Pan-African Parliament and the European Parliament issued a joint statement which actually quite pithily sums up what is involved. I will now read it in English.

'As institutions representing the peoples' will, our parliaments must see to it that their needs are satisfied, their concerns heard by decision-makers, and that their wishes are reflected in the policies proposed by the institutions that govern them. Our parliaments have an essential part to play in shaping the debate on the joint priorities for the future of our continents; they reflect the various currents of opinion in our societies, and are therefore the place where the debate must be conducted, and where differing views can be reconciled and compromises sought.'

(NL) I am therefore pleased that, at this meeting, we agreed what the role of the parliaments would be. It is also thanks to Mr Gahler, our colleagues in the Pan-African Parliament and all those involved that an agreement has been reached on the role of the parliaments. It is about participation in the group of experts in connection with the eight partnerships and the coordinating task force. The parliaments are to give their input in the annual progress reports and the presidents of the European Parliament and the Pan-African Parliament are to be invited to give their visions at the Africa summits. That is an important detail.

I will conclude with one more question for the Commissioner. We know that the definitions of ODA will shortly – in April – be on the agenda again in the EU-SEDAC talks and that the European Commission will be involved. Can the Commissioner tell us what his vision for this discussion is and what the input of the European Commission will be?

Filip Kaczmarek, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (PL) Mr President, development policy, one of the most important areas of EU policy, aims to resolve global problems. It was fortunate, and by no means an accident, that the first joint partnership strategy was created for Africa, and involving Africa.

One of the reasons for the great importance of development policy is the fact that it has become an instrument of historically-oriented policy. In this context, the fundamental aim of cooperation on development issues is to counteract past processes and mechanisms. Jomo Kenyatta, the father of Kenyan independence, described this in a vivid, albeit simplified, manner. I know that the Commissioner is familiar with this famous quotation. Mr Kenyatta once said: *'When the missionaries arrived, the Africans had the land and the missionaries had the Bible. They taught us how to pray with our eyes closed. When we opened them, they had the land and we had the Bible.'*

Historically-oriented policy is not, however, the only reason for Europe's involvement in development-related problems. There are also more pragmatic reasons. Africa remains the poorest continent in the world. Nevertheless, for the first time in 30 years, it is experiencing a period of economic growth. In any case, we may add, this economic growth is higher than in Europe. There are, of course, African countries which, as a result of the work of inept governments, have indeed managed to destroy their own economies. Generally speaking, we can state that Africa is a continent with untapped potential. I am pleased that the EU is helping to revive and activate this potential.

That is why one of the aims of the strategy is to ensure broader dialogue and cooperation, in fields other than those typically related to development issues. The strategy covers a wide range of policies, including security, energy and climate change. It is worrying, however, that little progress has been made in most of these areas. We must also admit that certain EU Member States have not been as committed to the partnership with Africa as others have. I am convinced that the second year of partnership will be better and that we will be able to achieve our goals more rapidly.

Alain Hutchinson, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, for a year we have been celebrating the development of this new process, this new agreement between the European Union and Africa. This being the case, you will allow me to be less reserved than usual, Commissioner. I believe that on the occasion of its first anniversary, a certain number of acknowledgements must be made.

Down there, there is a shortage of everything. There is a shortage of managers, doctors, teachers and technicians. Here, there is talk of managed immigration, yet we still have not taken the measures necessary

to allow diasporas, for example, to put themselves at the service of their states. Down there, they do not even manage to feed their populations. Here, we are renewing the export subsidies on our agricultural products and promoting biofuels, which leads to huge monocultures down there.

Down there, everything continues to fall apart, destitution spreads, disease kills and water is short. Here, we talk a lot, we make promises, we debate and we vote on resolutions; but what is happening in practical terms for the people of Africa? I think – as do you for that matter, and I know that you are firmly convinced of this – that it is time to bring together the parliaments of these countries, and thus to bring together their peoples. I believe that no process between the European Union and Africa will succeed as long as we remain at the level of politicians and technicians. The peoples of Africa must be brought together and it is through their parliaments that we must do it.

I am delighted to hear that there is a will to develop this special relationship at parliamentary level. However, I have my doubts, Commissioner, because just before this debate we had a long debate with your colleague Mrs Ashton about Economic Partnership Agreements. Bizarrely, it is almost impossible to achieve the involvement of the parliaments of partner countries in those agreements. We are not managing to convince part of this House, but also the Commission, that it would really be necessary for their parliaments to have their say first, before asking us – the European Parliament – our opinion on issues that will directly affect the lives of people down there. That being the case, I hope that things will change in this regard.

Likewise, I believe that it is important – thankfully, you also emphasised it – to involve NGOs and African civil society in the process a lot more and a lot better; I also mentioned diasporas, but that relates to here. I do not know what practical things have been done with respect to this, but in any case I think that they give the process which you have set in motion a chance of success.

Toomas Savi, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – Mr President, the year 2007 was unfortunately the second year in a row when contributions to official development assistance decreased in the developed world. I am therefore glad that the rapporteur has reiterated the need to urge the European Union Member States to uphold their commitments.

I find that the Member States ought to revise their current assistance to target countries, as the 2008 Millennium Development Goals Progress Chart indicates that Sub-Saharan Africa is the only region lagging seriously behind the progress expected. I would like to use this opportunity to encourage Member States to increase their contribution to Sub-Saharan Africa, which is the least developed region in the world. Also, target countries are not always too receptive towards the conditional nature of EU assistance. We should continue with the efforts to involve those countries more intimately.

The global economic crisis burdens us all, yet we must not forget or ignore the fact that the least developed countries are also the most vulnerable now. Furthermore, with the stagnant situation in Africa, Europe is more and more intimidated by flows of immigration that might become strenuous to the welfare state. It is much wiser to deal with the problems of the people of the developing countries before those problems spill over to concerns that we need to address here in Europe.

Wiesław Stefan Kuc, on behalf of the UEN Group. – (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, once again we are discussing Africa in the European Parliament. Today, we are not talking about war, human rights or aid for developing countries. Instead, we are trying to sum up the current state of play regarding the partnership between Africa and the European Union. Unfortunately, this partnership is virtually non-existent.

To be fair, we do have lofty aspirations for achieving understanding and cooperation between the African Union, the Parliament of the African Union and the Commission of the African Union. However, Africa still remains the poorest continent on our planet, where people have the shortest life expectancy in the world, where there is famine and disease on an unprecedented scale, while the level of education and health, especially in poor urban areas and villages, is almost zero.

The positive impact of the African Union on the economic situation is so small that, in practice, it is merely a sham organisation, with no influence in terms of solving everyday problems. It is an organisation of politicians, who use it to participate in global political life. Africa is a continent with rich natural resources, which are used by the whole world. However, this has had no positive impact on the living standards of the population or in terms of reducing poverty. Various organisations are trying to tackle the problem of poverty, but progress is barely noticeable. The rapporteur, Mrs Martens, has clearly stated this fact.

We really do not know how to help Africa, and the report does not provide a solution, either. Let us remember how a peaceful Kenya became drenched in blood within the space of a few days. How can we ensure that financial aid from different countries is properly distributed? This is an issue we discussed a few months ago. We also spoke about the steps China is taking. Perhaps China has found the right path? We should examine this path carefully.

Luisa Morgantini, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the joint EU-Africa Strategy is first and foremost a great challenge, a time for us to show that we are capable of taking a fresh look at ourselves and our policies. I believe we still need to think through relations between our two continents, and our development strategies, very carefully.

It is a long process; we cannot expect to solve everything at once, and it is also very complicated, but primarily it must, in my opinion, be an inclusive, participative process built from the bottom up: a partnership between equals.

The Lisbon Summit was not able to achieve this in full, perhaps because of the haste with which it was concluded, and neither the European Union nor the African Union wanted or was able to give a structural role to parliaments and civil society, in Africa or Europe. It is now a year since the summit and, as the Martens report strongly emphasises, our Parliament, the Pan-African Parliament and civil society still do not have a real say in determining the strategy.

It is therefore vital – not least in order to meet the Millennium Development Goals on overcoming poverty and disease and on agricultural and educational development – that these should be included, along with all the topics that have been raised, from desertification to climate change and energy.

It is essential to have complete ownership and a democratic partnership open, therefore, to the public and not confined solely to governments and committees. We, as the European Parliament, have enhanced our relations with the Pan-African Parliament and there is no doubt that these steps forward have had a positive impact on the joint EU-Africa Strategy.

A number of doubts emerged back in 2007, however, regarding funding. Will the funds be found to achieve this joint strategy? What is the future for the ACP States and the Cotonou Agreement? What will be our relationship with international organisations – the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the WTO? Let us work together to make these institutions more democratic.

To conclude, I believe that we should take heart and press ahead with this challenge because Africa – as we have learnt in recent years – is a continent rich in human and economic resources; a genuine partner. It is fantastic to see – Commissioner Michel, whom I know well, is aware of this – that there is great wealth and not just death, destruction and war, although we must, of course, work on those areas to build peace and democracy.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (NL) Mr President, first of all, I would like to thank the rapporteur, Mrs Martens, for this solid report. It is good that Parliament not only welcomes the announcement of a partnership, but also really does monitor the tangible results. That is what Africa needs: The foundations for a successful partnership with Africa require good governance and human rights. This is essential in a continent where mayors can overthrow presidents and where another president has been crippling his own population to carry out witch hunts. The Council and the Commission should make this a key priority.

When I mention good governance I am also thinking of the role of China, which is only mentioned in passing in this resolution. It strikes me that there is a failure to sound any critical note about the sometimes disastrous consequences of China's involvement in Africa. The European Union can perhaps learn a lesson from the EUR 2 billion that the China-African Development Fund invests in Africa. The fact that Beijing also invests in countries such as Zimbabwe says it all about China's contribution to long-term democracy and good governance in Africa.

I also have a comment to make to the rapporteur. In paragraph 46 she refers to African food security and food sovereignty. What I believe is lacking in this resolution is any text going into a problem that has been around for a number of years, namely the lease or even purchase by outside states or companies of large areas of agricultural land, with the harvest going to foreign investors and therefore not benefiting the malnourished local population. Such situations are really quite distressing. Furthermore, these investments do not provide any jobs. It is a shame that the resolution does not address this specific problem, which is currently receiving a lot of attention in the media once again.

Michael Gahler (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, as chairman of the Ad-hoc Delegation for Relations with the Pan-African Parliament, I would like to take the opportunity today to thank the many people involved. First of all, I would like to thank Maria Martens, who has prepared an excellent report on progress made regarding the agreed EU-Africa Strategy. Secondly, I would like to thank the institutions involved. We have managed, within the framework of a hexalogue – that is, involving six interlocutors – to reach an understanding between the two Parliaments. Both Commissions have agreed, as have the two Parliaments as well as the two Councils. As far as the Council is concerned, I would specifically like to single out the legal service, which is always particularly important when it comes to such matters, as common positions sometimes fail here. However, following the first meeting in Addis Ababa, we have managed, in our second meeting today, to implement and finally agree on what we had agreed concerning the involvement of the two Parliaments.

I would like to comment on what Mr Hutchinson said. What is really happening? Yes, many bad things are happening in Africa. However, my impression – and perhaps this is coincidental – is that, since the agreement of this common strategy, Africa has reacted differently to coups. In Mauritania, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and Madagascar, Africa has reacted by suspending the membership of these countries. That did not happen in the past. Back then, it would have been business as usual.

In this regard, I would also like to state that we, as European governments, should also take these facts into account. If this partnership is based on common values, then the Europeans also have to react when Africans react when something goes wrong in Africa. That is why I am confident that if we, as Parliaments, are more involved in the implementation of this strategy in the future, we will be able to deliver added value to this partnership.

Ana Maria Gomes (PSE). – (PT) I want to congratulate Mrs Martens on this important report and point out how vital this Parliament's role is in monitoring the implementation of the Joint Africa-EU Strategy and the respective Action Plan.

Some important steps have been taken with regard to several of the eight partnerships involved in the strategy, particularly the establishment of joint expert groups and implementation teams and the commencement of dialogue in the context of these partnerships.

However, I regret that, by the end of the first year, some partnerships are still in the process of defining working methods and have not yet established deliverables, timetables or budget allocations.

I hope that the next joint annual progress report will be much more specific than the first in its presentation of the results and in its indication of the financial envelopes. It is particularly important that we are vigilant in terms of honouring the commitments made by the European Union and its Member States with a view to selecting the Millennium Development Goals. We must also ensure that the global recession, which is affecting everyone, does not disproportionately penalise the countries and peoples of Africa, given that they are already the most vulnerable.

Development and democratic governance in Africa must form part of the crisis exit strategy for all of us. In this respect, we also need to see more significant progress in all the partnerships, including those which are politically more sensitive, as is the case with governance and human rights.

The European Parliament's role in this process must be reinforced by officially giving it monitoring functions and involving it in the work of the strategy implementation teams. It is also vital to ensure the involvement in this process of actors representing both European and African civil societies, particularly national parliaments, NGOs and the media.

Zbigniew Krzysztof Kuźmiuk (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, I would like to draw attention to three issues in this debate. First of all, in December 2007, the European Parliament adopted a new EU-Africa Strategy, which aimed to ensure equality between the two sides. The main issue at the heart of this Strategy was to reduce poverty in African countries. However, not much progress was made in this field last year.

Secondly, the continuing financial and economic crisis may, unfortunately, worsen the situation facing African countries. The leading global financial institutions are making the following predictions for 2009. The IMF estimates that global GDP will shrink by 1%, while the World Bank estimates a fall of 2%. The WTO predicts a decrease in the value of global trade of as much as 9%. It will be the first time that this has happened in 50 years. The crisis facing the most developed countries will, according to the IMF, go on to affect developing

countries, including those in Africa, while rising unemployment and poverty might cause civil unrest and, in some cases, may even lead to war.

I hope that, in view of this crisis and its repercussions, which will continue to be felt during the next few years, the EU-Africa Cooperation Strategy will be amended in an appropriate manner, in order to prevent this kind of civil unrest, or perhaps even armed conflict, being caused by the global economic crisis.

Juan Fraile Cantón (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, in Lisbon in December 2007, the Heads of State or Government of the European Union adopted the Joint Africa-EU Strategy and the first Action Plan for its implementation.

There were three facts that brought about this strategy. The first was the fact that, on the African continent, peace processes and the gradual consolidation of democratic systems coexist with persistent conflicts such as that in Darfur, high levels of poverty and the emergence of situations such as the massive waves of illegal immigration.

The second fact is that sub-Saharan Africa is the poorest region on the planet. The population has low life expectancy, low levels of education and literacy and high demographic growth. Three hundred million people live on less than EUR 1 a day.

The third fact is that Africa is the physical location of the big pandemics, the place where more than two thirds of those infected with AIDS live and the site of 90% of deaths caused by malaria.

In the last year we have made little progress on the targets we set ourselves and, given that the action plan covers the period up to 2010, we must take immediate action in two important areas. Firstly, we must cooperate on democratic governance, the strengthening of institutions and enhancement of the role of civil society, with particular attention to gender policies. Secondly, we must cooperate to address basic social needs, the fight against hunger and the launch of development programmes in education, health and access to basic resources such as water.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, the partnership we are discussing today is the answer to Africa's needs, as it provides support for the process of democratisation in African countries and for human rights and, at the same time, it ensures strong, bilateral involvement in the fight against climate change and in the field of energy security.

Today, in view of our growing global co-dependency and shared responsibility, we also need commitment from potentially weaker partners. Let us take the fight against climate change as an example. Although Africa contributes the least to polluting our atmosphere, it feels the repercussions most acutely. That is why we need to include African countries in the fight against climate change, especially in terms of making the broadest possible use of the renewable energy sources which are at these countries' disposal.

Certain countries are aiming to draw African countries into their sphere of influence. This should not happen. Africa does not need to be controlled. Instead, it needs our help and support. At the same time, we should also treat Africa as an equal partner, rather than simply as a recipient of financial aid. Being on an equal footing fosters a greater degree of commitment.

Louis Michel, Member of the Commission. – (FR) Mr President, I would like to thank the various speakers.

I am pleased that there is satisfaction with the first results, but it goes without saying that this is not yet enough. We must understand that things have only been in place for one year and that we should be moving up a gear in 2009.

I accept the essentials of the various speeches and the issues raised correspond perfectly to my convictions. It is obvious that there can be no development if there is no ownership, as Mr Hutchinson and Mrs Morgantini were saying. It is equally obvious that the role of the national parliaments and that of civil society are eminently important.

Moreover, I regret that it was not possible to conduct a thorough reform of the institutional mechanisms governing Parliament's responsibility for development policy. I remember that you asked for the country strategy papers to be debated not just here but also in partners' national parliaments. The European Council did not allow me to do that, which is why I sent the country strategy papers to the joint parliamentary assembly. Through that channel, you sent them on to the various parliaments of Europe, but all that does not add up to any sort of institutional rule, as I sincerely wish were the case. As a reminder, I add that that will continue to be one of my absolute priorities, because we would make enormous progress if the European

Development Funds were included in the budget. While this will not be included in the budget, we will still have poor reasons for not letting Parliament play the role that it should, and as a result the commissioner in charge of development will sometimes be powerless. It would be far simpler if I could discuss the priorities, programmes and projects here in Parliament; I could move forward, strengthened by this backing. Unfortunately, that is not yet the case. I hope that we will get there.

I do not want to skip over issues that do not seem right to me either. I would remind you that last year, at European level, we spent the contribution of the Commission and Member States, knowing that each one put in EUR 46 billion. However, we are EUR 1.7 billion behind on the programme or, shall we say, on the objective that had been set. I am not at all satisfied with that and I think that we will have to fight for it in the future. Parliament will need to be a true ambassador for this message and exert pressure. We will need all our available strength at political level simply to hold Member States to respecting their 2005 commitments. It will not be easy. I still remember the struggle for the billion for the food facility. That was not easy, but we obtained good conditions. We got an additional billion, however it was spread over three years instead of two. Fortunately though, the projects are moving forward and their implementation is progressing in a positive way. I am therefore, naturally, entirely in agreement.

We do not intend to reopen DAC issues. There are some adjustments *à la marge* under discussion, for example peacekeeping missions.

(FR) Therefore we have no intention of reopening that debate. Moreover, I must say that I am very cautious. I am not particularly in favour of reopening this debate, because if we do that you will even see certain Member States participating in order to include anything and everything in the budget for this.

I must tell you, Mr Cook, that I do not agree when it is said that we have lost our ideals. I do not think that is the case. I think that you only have to hear the voices in this House to realise that we are still extremely committed to defending developing countries. It is not true to say that we are not contributing to the solution. Obviously, we cannot be expected to be able to solve everything, but I shudder to think how poor the world would be without European aid.

It is not enough, I fully agree, but it represents 57% of aid worldwide. Unfortunately, I do not think that we can discuss that now, but the issue of knowing whether European aid from our Member States or from the Commission is still achieving its goals or is still effective – whether it is a good way of working – is another matter. I would like this debate to return to the issue of the establishment, or not, of budget support and conditionalities because, like you, I am very unsure about the latter.

That said, we still need to know what we want. If we want to get a government to make approaches to civil society or get its population – or its parliament in some cases – to participate, we must all the same accept that we must impose conditions. This is because it is sometimes not enough to simply say to a government ‘we hope that you are going to do that’, to make impassioned pleas or simply friendly suggestions. The issue surrounding conditionalities – I do not like the word conditionality and prefer to talk about criteria – is still important. When you talk, for example, about profile, I believe that it is still quite normal to be able to set one up. That profile has not been used to set the budget for the initiative. It is still quite normal for us to analyse the governance profiles of each country when we are getting ready to grant them up to an extra 25 or even 30% in financial incentives. All of these debates are still open. I do not wish to close them, but I do hope that we are able to do so at some point.

I shall miss out everything to do with China. Obviously I think that it is a good discussion. I think, naturally, that developing countries have the right to put the cooperation that they want out to tender. Africa is no longer the exclusive territory of Europe and that is very good. This is something I consider important.

It is indeed advisable to question the quality of the development policies set up between China and Africa. We cannot criticise them for doing it, but we can wonder. I have, for example, been receiving reports for several months of Chinese contracts in the Democratic Republic of Congo. I am not saying that these are bad contracts. I am simply saying that a whole series of issues merit responses. We are busy responding to them at the moment, particularly the issue of the state guarantee because it is an agreement that is made with a private enterprise. We are also dealing with the percentage of loans compared to gifts, the fact that they did not go out to tender and the fact that it is almost the same amount as the country's debt to the European Monetary Fund. These are all issues to which a solution must be found, but not by denouncing this type of relationship. African countries have the right to make partnership agreements with the Chinese too. I will not return to this point.

I think, Mrs Morgantini, that you have put your finger on some issues which had already been raised by Mr Hutchinson. It is clear that the real problem will always be in ensuring that the relationship between us and the developing countries is a genuine partnership. I think that the Lisbon Summit was a considerable step forward because we at least forged in the texts the beginnings of a new philosophy of equal partners in terms of rights and responsibilities.

However, we are obviously still not fully there and this is one of the issues that is linked to ownership and to – where possible – budget support. It is linked to ownership by civil society and by debate at parliamentary level. I believe that you are right and that these are the areas we must work on.

You asked another question which is of real concern to me and which is, in my opinion, an essential subject for debate. It was 'how can we achieve better harmonisation: getting people to work together better, dividing up the work better, supporting global development policy better between the various partners; the role of the World Bank, the World Trade Organisation, the International Monetary Fund, the Commission and all the large-scale donors?'

It is true that for the moment – as was said in another meeting – there are superimpositions and duplications. There is even competition and it is not always useful competition. I can tell you that a lot of progress has been made in the last two years, particularly with the World Bank. I can tell you that seeing the new message, strategy and philosophy that I detect at the World Bank makes me quite optimistic. There is therefore room for another type of cooperation; for collaboration between the various partners, and I think that you have really put your finger on a fundamental point, which we will need to take a close look at.

Of course, good governance is a major element; it is the reason why we made provision for the governance package.

Mrs Gomez broached the important subject of the effects of the financial crisis on the economic and social situation in developing countries. Pretty much all the experts are currently in agreement in saying that there will be at least a 2% reduction in growth, which represents up to 50 million more poor people. We must be very aware of that.

As far as we are concerned, I will already be very pleased if the Member States keep the promises they made in 2005. I assure you that together we will have to fight extremely hard to force the Member States to do so.

Secondly, I am busy preparing a communication – the April package that I promised – which goes beyond public development assistance. It will attempt to mobilise a whole series of the Commission's sectional budgets for development policies. I must tell you that there are some really interesting leads. I am also working with the European Investment Bank on that package, particularly regarding supportive infrastructure to try to develop them quickly and have quite a quick impact. I will come to Parliament with that in April. I would just like to say that I still have one more very important issue to cover, which is the role of civil society and national parliaments.

I will finish with that. Mr Hutchinson once suggested that some experiments could be carried out with Members of this House, and perhaps members of the parliaments of Member States, to go wherever it were possible to do so, and hold debates on the country strategy papers. I have had the opportunity to do so in three different countries. It worked very well, but it is obvious that it worked well because in those three countries we had the support of their governments, because without such support on this issue it is extremely difficult. I therefore think that you are right: mobilising parliamentary action is certainly one of the priorities. In any case, believe me that I will do everything in my power to ensure this.

Maria Martens, rapporteur. – (NL) Mr President, I actually do not have much more to add. This is the first debate about the implementation of the strategy. We have made a start, but we are still at the beginning. There is still an exceptional amount left to do. Africa remains the poorest continent. You have all pointed out where our concerns lie and what challenges we face, be it in relation to peace and security, economic growth, good governance, building capacity or the role of the parliaments and civil society. The Commissioner has made the necessary remarks in that regard.

I would like to thank you, my fellow Members, the Commissioner and our colleagues from the Pan-African Parliament. We will continue to follow this process.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday, 24 March 2009.

18. The MDG contracts (short presentation)

President. – The next item is a short presentation of a series of reports, eight in total, therefore I would kindly ask all Members to adhere strictly to their allotted speaking time for this particular procedure, and I would also ask the Commission to please keep their answers to the point, otherwise we will have problems in keeping to the agenda. This will also assist the interpreters.

The next item is the report (A6-0085/2009) by Mr Hutchinson, on behalf of the Committee on Development, on MDG contracts (2008/2128(INI)).

Alain Hutchinson, rapporteur. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, for almost three years the European Union and the Member States have been committed to improving the effectiveness of our cooperation with developing countries. Things have been done, but there is strong resistance, above all within the Member States, and therefore there is enormous progress that has yet to be made.

Access to healthcare and basic education is just a dream for millions of people, many of whom are women. Every day, 72 million children – mainly girls – do not go to school. Every minute, a woman dies from complications linked to pregnancy or in childbirth, while a child dies every three seconds from a disease that a doctor could have easily prevented.

From a geographical perspective, it is sub-Saharan Africa, as we just recalled as a matter of fact, which continues to experience the most catastrophic situation and, with things going as they are, the risk is that this will continue for many more years.

In this context, it is true that budget support – that is, financial aid directly included in the budget of beneficiary countries – could usefully contribute to providing more predictable aid that is targeted at priority sectors and is therefore more effective. That is why the Commission has come up with the idea of concluding Millennium Development Goal (MDG) contracts, which it intends to propose to certain countries in order to commit funds for a six-year period and put in place annual monitoring that emphasises the achievement of results regarding health and education.

Our report stresses the importance of such an initiative, but it also raises a series of questions that require clear answers. What criteria, for example, will the Commission propose that developing countries must meet in order to aspire to concluding this type of contract? What will the lifespan of such a project be and what will be the conditions for carrying it out? We would also like to emphasise that the Commission has not yet published any official communication on the subject; if you wish to know more there are currently no internal documents to which to refer, only the basic information available on the Committee on Development's website.

Although the Commission's budget support has several positive features, such as being linked to the achievement of results regarding health and education, or generally being planned over three years, you should know that it is far from perfect. For example, I remind you that the Commission, just as with the majority of other aid providers, will only grant budget support to countries that have implemented an International Monetary Fund programme. This situation is particularly problematic when we know that such programmes can limit the government's capacity to invest in development and when overly ambitious goals are set, particularly as regards inflation and the budget deficit.

Then, even if the Commission decides to provide budget support in the long term, there is nothing to guarantee that this aid will not itself become the object of bureaucratic procedures that, as we know, lead to significant delays in disbursement.

Finally, budget support suffers from a serious lack of transparency and ownership by the countries involved and their populations. Financing agreements are only rarely made public, nor does the Commission include as a matter of course civil society organisations and members of parliament in its dialogues with the governments of developing countries, as we mentioned earlier.

Nevertheless, it is widely recognised today that for the sake of effectiveness, development must be fully in the hands, not just of the governments, but also of the peoples of developing countries.

In summary, the MDG contracts project will only be an opportunity to improve the effectiveness of our aid if it is defined very clearly, along with its conditions of eligibility, execution and evaluation. Our report

therefore stresses the initiative's importance, whilst urging caution and stressing the need for the Commission to be far clearer about its intentions and respond to the specific questions raised in the report.

I do not want to finish without touching for a moment on the Court of Auditors' recent Special Report on European Commission Development Assistance to Health Services in Sub-Saharan Africa. The report's conclusions are worrying. From a financial point of view, we see that public aid contributions to the health sector have not increased since 2000. Furthermore, it appears that budget support has been very little used for the health sector in sub-Saharan Africa. Consequently, Commissioner, you understand why in our report we return to the idea that it is absolutely essential for us to be more focused on the health sector, but also that there is nothing to guarantee that it is the MDG contracts that will enable us to achieve this.

Louis Michel, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I wish first of all to thank the Committee on Development and its rapporteur, Mr Hutchinson, for this report which returns to a number of issues and concerns that we completely share.

More and better development aid is necessary if we want to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) by 2015, but also aid that is far more predictable and less volatile, as your report very rightly reminds us.

These efforts will obviously be made using a combination of multiple instruments. However, from my point of view, in the countries that allow it, budget support, whether general or sectional, remains the best adapted and most appropriate instrument.

Budget support is the best way of strengthening national systems and processes, increasing ownership by the countries, facilitating harmonisation, reducing transaction costs and so improving the management of public expenditure, and accelerating the achievement of development goals.

The Commission has already greatly increased the use of budget support and will do so again over the course of the next six years, within the framework of the tenth European Development Fund (EDF). It is to make this instrument more effective and more predictable and so the Commission has, in consultation with the Member States and other stakeholders, devised a longer-term form of budget support, which we have called the MDG contract, for countries that meet certain criteria: good past performance, reliable public finance management, appropriate sectional policy, and so on. The MDG contract is the natural evolution of general budget supports, not just because it is more predictable but above all because it is focused on results and can have a response that is graduated according to performance. These are partner states that commit to focusing their policies, and consequently their spending, on the MDG.

The MDG contract offers the following key elements: a six-year commitment, that is six full years as opposed to the normal duration of three years for general budget supports; a guaranteed, fixed payment of at least 70% of the total commitments, provided that there is no breach of the conditions in which payments become due or of the essential and fundamental elements of the cooperation; a variable component of up to 60%, intended to reward performance with a view to achieving the MDG and linked to results indicators, mainly in the fields of health and education, as well as progress in public finance management.

Countries are eligible if they have already put budget supports into practice in a satisfactory way as part of the ninth EDF, as well as those that demonstrate a strong commitment to ensuring the monitoring and achievement of the MDG. This is to improve the budgetary resource management of countries where donors have their own coordination.

After evaluating 10 countries, the Commission awarded MDG contracts in seven of them: Burkina Faso, Ghana, Mali, Mozambique, Rwanda, Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia. These programmes were presented to and awarded by the Member States last December. Three contracts have already been signed: Zambia and Rwanda – which I signed personally – as well as Mali. The others will be finalised in the next few weeks. Collectively, these seven programmes represent approximately EUR 1.8 billion. In other words: some 50% of the overall general budget support and some 14% of the tenth EDF's total for national indicative programmes.

It is understood – in fact, your report encourages this – that we will seek to extend this measure to other countries, including non-ACP ones, according to experience gained from these first countries. Obviously, other approaches will have to be devised for countries that are still not eligible for budget support, but the MDG contract already constitutes an important contribution to improving the effectiveness of aid and the acceleration of progress towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

President. – The presentation is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday, 24 March 2009.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Toomas Savi (ALDE), in writing. – The MDG contracts promise to constitute a significant shift towards a clearer road map for achieving the Millennium Development Goals. It is of course important that the potential of those contracts will not be diminished by excessive administrative procedures of the Commission, as the rapporteur has pointed out.

The conditional nature of the EU development assistance could only prevail if the EU operated in a monopoly, being the sole provider of development assistance. At the moment our efforts in Africa for example are to quite some extent in vain as the People's Republic of China is exercising 'political dumping', when providing aid with no requirements for transition to democracy, rule of law and respect of human rights.

Some governments in Africa might cut the Commission red tape by disregarding our offer of development aid, which is extremely dangerous, since by that we lose our opportunity to guide those countries in the right direction.

I would like to ask the Commission to address this concern by simplifying procedures while retaining sufficient control over the disbursement of the resources that are provided.

19. Social Responsibility of subcontracting undertakings in production chains (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0065/2009) by Mr Lehtinen, on behalf of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, on the social responsibility of subcontracting undertakings in production chains (2008/2249(INI)).

Lasse Lehtinen, rapporteur. – (FI) Mr President, Commissioner, subcontracting chains are commonplace in business. They help organise work efficiently and flexibly. They are essential for the internal market to function properly and constitute a necessary economic and logistical network.

For the sake of the viability of the markets and consumer protection, however, it is crucial to use legislation to establish the key responsibilities of contractors and subcontractors. In this report the Commission is urged to establish a clear-cut legal instrument introducing contractor's liability at European level, while respecting the different legal systems in place in the Member States and the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality.

Eight Member States already have legislation along these lines in place, but we also need to be able to regulate relationships between subcontracting chains at Community level. Common European problems have to be solved with common rules. Otherwise, those countries that have not regulated this area of business can distort competition at the expense of the others.

This is therefore not just a matter of the protection of workers, but of safeguarding the competitiveness of companies that respect the rules. In a word, it is about prevention of the grey economy. As long as subcontracting chains are a surreptitious way to keep wages down and avoid paying tax and social contributions, the burden will fall on the taxpayer and competing companies, most of which are small- and medium-sized enterprises. The subcontractors too, which are frequently small firms, need clear rules when they are working for very big contractors.

We have already seen how country-specific systems also act as preventive forces. The threshold for neglecting employers' obligations will be higher if people can expect to be punished for criminal activity.

It is in the interests of all Europeans to adhere to minimal conditions of employment and clear rules. Then the workforce can confidently move from one country to another, businesses can trust contracts, and consumers can be sure that the cost of a product or service is the right one and has been transparently determined. It is no coincidence that the report talks specifically about the social responsibility of undertakings.

Louis Michel, Member of the Commission. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the Commission very much welcomes this report.

However important subcontracting may be for increasing productivity and competitiveness, we fully recognise the need for effective measures to ensure that it neither encourages nor facilitates non-compliance with employment conditions, particularly where there are long subcontracting chains. Adequate, effective, deterrent penalties are needed to ensure that subcontractors meet their legal and contractual obligations in full, in particular in relation to workers' rights. Greater transparency in the subcontracting process will lead to greater overall protection of workers' rights, an issue to which the Commission is – and will remain – very attached, as you know.

Whilst I might approve of your general principle, according to which European problems require European solutions, I would be more prudent in relation to the conclusion set out in paragraph 14 of the report, which says that the problem can only be resolved by introducing a clear-cut legal instrument that introduces joint and several liability at European level.

The report also seems to go in this direction in paragraph 15, where it calls for an impact assessment on the added value and feasibility of such a Community instrument. As regards the call for the Commission to guarantee effective compliance with the directive on the posting of workers, made in paragraph 25, I would like to point out that we have recently set up a high-level working party on the posting of workers. This working party consists of representatives from the Member States and the social partners and is aimed at improving the practical application of the directive and, in particular, administrative cooperation among Member States. It will hold its first meeting on 25 March.

In this regard, I would like to mention a study entitled 'Liability in subcontracting processes in the European construction sector', published in 2008 by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, which highlights both the major differences between the national joint liability systems and their level of effectiveness. This study also highlighted the fact that there would appear to be no universal solution and recommended further debate and research, particularly in relation to cross-border issues.

The problem that we are trying to solve is of a social nature, but the solution proposed clearly has implications that go well beyond the social domain. We therefore need to study its economic and legal repercussions in detail.

I fully agree that this problem deserves more complete research and that, before presenting draft legislation, we must study carefully various non-regulatory methods for dealing with some of the issues raised in the report, in other words: improved cooperation and coordination among national authorities, inspection and other national enforcement authorities; an awareness of good practice within companies; current guidelines and standards; initiatives on social responsibility; and transnational company agreements, into which are already built innovative provisions relating to risk assessment procedures and the supervision of subcontractors.

President. – The presentation is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 26 March 2009.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Proinsias De Rossa (PSE), in writing. – The rise of sub-contracting in Europe has had far-reaching consequences for labour relations. It is not just labour that is subcontracted. The associated legal and financial obligations, such as, observing standards on wages and working conditions, and, the payment of taxes and social security contributions are also thereby externalised to subcontractors and employment agencies. Worryingly, subcontracting may increasingly be used as a way of reducing direct social responsibility.

Thus, the idea of 'joint and several liability' is crucial for ensuring that companies are responsible for their sub-contractors' practices. Clearly, the enforcement of legal obligations becomes more difficult in long and complex chains of interconnected companies. This is especially so across borders where various levels of contractors can be established in different Member States and subject to different rules. At the moment only eight Member States have national legislation covering the responsibility of subcontracting undertakings.

I strongly support this ETUC endorsed report which calls on the Commission to establish a clear-cut Community legal instrument introducing joint and several liability at European level, and, also requests the Commission to launch an assessment of the feasibility of an instrument on chain liability as a way of increasing transparency in the sub-contracting process.

20. An EU-India Free Trade Agreement (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0131/2009) by Mr Karim, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on an EU-India Free Trade Agreement (2008/2135(INI)).

Syed Kamall (PPE-DE), *deputising for the rapporteur.* – Mr President, I spend a lot of my time in this Parliament telling people that I am not Mr Karim and that I am, in fact, Mr Kamall. It must be confusing for people to hear Mr Kamall speaking on a Karim report. I am speaking on his behalf as, owing to unforeseen circumstances, he cannot be here tonight, for which he apologises.

His report effectively covers trade in goods, services, investment and intellectual property, and development issues. A joint alternative resolution by the PPE-DE, ALDE and UEN Groups has now been tabled, because it was felt that the original committee decision was the upshot of a rather unrepresentative vote, which left the report with several protectionist clauses intact. The alternative resolution better highlights how important a trading partner India is for the EU and the benefits that the liberalisation of trade can bring to both countries.

The EU and India launched negotiations in June 2007 on what is termed a free trade agreement, but what many would probably more correctly call a preferential trade agreement. The report calls for the conclusion of a comprehensive, ambitious and balanced free trade agreement between the EU and India, which should improve market access to goods and services, covering substantially many areas of trade, and including provisions on regulatory transparency in areas relevant to mutual trade investment, as well as things like sanitary and phytosanitary standards, intellectual property protection, trade facilitation and customs.

The main points of the report indicate that, if you look at trade in goods, India's average applied tariffs have decreased to levels that are now comparable with other countries in Asia – notably India's average applied tariff, which is now 14.5% compared to an EU average of 4.1%. It also notes India's concerns about the implications of REACH, costly certificates for exporting fruit to the EU and costly conformity procedures for the EC mark, and stresses that those issues must be resolved in the preferential trade agreement.

The report also points out that services liberalisation must in no way hinder the right to regulate services, including public services. However, it should also be recognised that quite often the state is unable to provide so-called 'public' services, and we should recognise that there is a role for non-state actors – the private sector – in providing essential services to the poor, especially when the state itself cannot do this on its own, quite often owing to a shortfall in income.

Trade in services between the EU and India is relatively unbalanced, with the EU exporting 1.5% of its services to India, while India exports 9.2% of its services to the EU. The report also encourages India to develop appropriate data protection legislation to ensure that, in our trade in services, we can have confidence in the ability of Indian companies to handle large amounts of data, since there are concerns about data protection.

The report also recognises that the investment chapters have often come accompanied by a commitment to liberalising capital movements and renouncing capital controls. So we ask the Commission to refrain from including such clauses, given the importance of capital controls, especially for poorer countries, to mitigate the impact of the financial crisis.

The report goes on to welcome India's commitment to strong intellectual property protection and to the use of TRIPS flexibilities to meet certain public health obligations. Once again, we should all be aware that too many obligations on public health can often leave citizens in poorer countries unable to access medicines, because there is no incentive for pharmaceutical companies to develop medicines for those countries.

Finally, the report recognises that a substantial development chapter is an essential part of any trade agreement, and that we should ensure trade and foreign direct investment. It also recognises that there is concern, particularly in this House, over issues such as environmental standards and core labour, occupational health and safety legislation. We should also recognise that, in seeking some sort of balance between trade issues and environmental protection, ILO standards etc, the pendulum can often swing too far one way and we end up with these taking precedence over trade and condemning poor countries to even more poverty because we make it difficult for entrepreneurs in those countries to develop capacities.

Louis Michel, Member of the Commission. – (FR) Mr President, I would like to thank the European Parliament for the keen interest it has shown in our negotiations on a free trade agreement between the European Union and India.

In particular, I am grateful to Mr Kamall and the Committee on International Trade for the excellent work that they, along with the associated Committee on Foreign Affairs and Committee on Development, have done in preparing the report on the EU-India Free Trade Agreement. The exchanges with Parliament have been very comprehensive, and the draft motion for a resolution deals with almost all possible aspects of the negotiations on a free trade agreement between the European Union and India. The opinions expressed are a useful tool for our negotiations on free trade agreements.

When we talk about the European Union-India free trade agreement, it is important to take into account the general context and complexity of our strategic relations with India, including the 1994 Cooperation Agreement and the Joint Action Plan, to mention but two of the major initiatives and dialogues that we have established with India.

We are convinced that it is extremely important to work with India to bring to a successful conclusion negotiations on an ambitious free trade agreement that will allow both parties – the European Union and India – to emerge as winners.

The more ambitious the free trade agreement, the greater the economic benefits that will accrue to each party – the European Union and India. That is one of the main conclusions of the impact and sustainable development study that has been carried out by an independent consultant, in parallel with the negotiations.

The objective of the impact and sustainable development assessment was to analyse the economic, social and environmental impact of the future free trade agreement and to identify any necessary support measures.

The impact and sustainable development assessment is currently in its final phase and should be available in April, in other words, in time to support the negotiations under way.

Allow me to give you a brief progress report on these negotiations. Six negotiating sessions have been held since the launch in June 2007, with the sixth session taking place last week in Delhi, from 17 to 19 March. We are expecting to convene two extra sessions this year, ideally after the Indian elections in April and before the European Union-India Summit in November.

As for the substance of these negotiations, progress has been made on all issues pertaining to the free trade agreement, but much work remains to be done.

More specifically, we have exchanged tariff proposals, we have had good discussions on several key service sectors and we have made progress in discussions on texts in almost all areas of the agreement. However, we are still far from an agreement.

Before concluding, I would like once again to express the Commission's gratitude to Parliament and to the rapporteur. The Commission eagerly awaits other opportunities for effective cooperation with Parliament.

President. – The presentation is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 26 March 2009.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Kader Arif (PSE), in writing. – (FR) On Wednesday, our Parliament expressed its opinion on the future free trade agreement between the European Union and India. Thanks to the work of the socialists, the text adopted in committee points out the economic and social fragility of India, a country in which 80% of the population lives on less than USD 2 per day. To confront this reality, the Socialist Group in the European Parliament has tabled a number of amendments pointing out that any strengthening of the EU's trade relations with India should be accompanied by a strict framework, to prevent any liberalisation of public services, to guarantee access to public healthcare and essential medicines, and to protect the interests of the most vulnerable people and sectors. Unsurprisingly, the right in Parliament has formed an alliance to propose a much more liberal text in plenary, calling in particular for the liberalisation of banking, insurance, postal services and public procurement. In Wednesday's vote, I will be defending the socialist vision of fair and equitable trade and I will oppose any attempt by the right to go back on these principles.

Rovana Plumb (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The EU's trade in goods with India has more than doubled in value between 2000 and 2007. Exports rose from EUR 13.7 billion to EUR 29.5 billion, while imports rose from EUR 12.8 billion to EUR 26.3 billion. In 2007 India accounted for 2.4% of EU exports and 1.8% of EU imports, and was the EU's ninth most important trading partner.

I welcome this report because it calls for the conclusion of a comprehensive, ambitious and balanced Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the EU and India which will improve market access for goods and services, covering substantially all trade, including provisions on regulatory transparency in areas relevant to mutual trade and investment, as well as conformity standards and assessment, SPS, IPR including enforcement, trade facilitation and customs, public procurement, and trade and competitions, as well as trade and development and the human rights clause as an essential element of the FTA.

I want to stress that the FTA must help:

- achieve growing bilateral benefits for an ever-increasing number of citizens
- achieve the Millennium Development Goals, including those for preventing environmental degradation and observing social standards.

Bogusław Rogalski (UEN), in writing. – (PL) India is a country of contrasts. Its global image has been influenced by overpopulation, poverty (80% of the Indian population live on less than USD 2 a day) and disease. Recently, progress in the field of economics has helped to turn India into a leading global economy. However, India's contribution to progress in the fields of medicine, technology and space research is in contrast to the shortages of food and clean water which affect the country.

The EU is India's biggest foreign investor and trade partner. In 2007, EU investment amounted to 65% of all investment in India. India's investment in the EU has also risen, many times over, during the last few years. The EU should focus on ensuring a multilateral trade system, based on certain principles, as set out by the WTO, which offers the best opportunities for fair and honest international trade.

However, we should stress the fact that India needs to combat the large-scale problem of hunger in terms of global hunger indicators, India ranks 66th out of 88 countries. India, which is a global nuclear power, has not signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, either. Another worrying issue is the problem of child labour, with children generally having to work in dangerous and unhealthy conditions.

Clauses concerning human rights and democracy should constitute a fundamental part of any free trade agreement signed with India. We must also ensure that social and environmental agreements and standards are respected.

21. Food prices in Europe (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0094/2009) by Mrs Batzeli, on behalf of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, on the Food prices in Europe (2008/2175(INI)).

Katerina Batzeli, rapporteur. – (EL) Mr President, I should like to start by thanking the shadow rapporteurs in the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the four jointly competent committees of the European Commission with which we collaborated in depth in order to produce this report.

Commissioner, I should like to start by asking a very simple question: when consumers go to supermarkets to buy milk or yoghurt, why do they buy it? For the milk and the yoghurt or for the bottle and the tub? I put this question to you because the perception and attitude have been skilfully conveyed to consumers that they are buying a foodstuff where the industry that processes it, markets it and transports it is now more important than the agricultural product, the raw material itself. About 15 years ago, agricultural produce accounted for approximately 50% of the final value of the product; today it does not exceed 20%.

Farmers, both arable and livestock, are now 'anonymous' persons for consumers. Their bargaining power, on the question not only of the final price but also of the preservation of the qualitative and nutritional elements in the final product, lags behind the role which they should have.

We are not attempting to draw dividing lines, to classify the productive sectors in the supply chain, the farmers, manufacturers, wholesalers and retailers as 'the good', 'the bad' and 'the ugly', because I do not believe that we are living in a 'Wild West' society and economy; I believe that we are living in an economy based on the regulations of the internal market of the European Union, a market which provides opportunity for growth and competitiveness when it operates transparently, but which ousts or eliminates producers and economic activities when unfair and opaque functions penetrate it.

The question we therefore have to deal with here today and in the future has two aspects:

- firstly that of a rapprochement between consumers and producers through a quality policy in the food sector and by strengthening and jointly formulating ways of giving consumers more direct accessibility to productive agricultural areas and agricultural producers;

- secondly that of safeguarding – and I do not mean determining – the income of producers and consumers through a transparent pricing policy which will include mandatory arrangements for controlling and supervising intermediate productive sectors along the entire supply chain.

Obviously here we mainly mean the small and medium-sized enterprises at local and national level, as well as the large parent and subsidiary companies based in Europe and the workers, which must operate on the terms of a transparent internal market and not on the terms of economic offshoots such as cartels and oligopolies.

Today, therefore, where (among other things):

- real producer prices are falling dangerously;

- consumer prices are nearly five to ten times farm gate prices and, despite the reduction in inflation, consumer prices remain very high;

- the degree of concentration in the retail trade and in other processing companies has quadrupled over the last five years and the concentration will increase as a result of the economic crisis and the bankruptcy of small- and medium-sized and local enterprises, a state of affairs that will make negotiations between producers, companies and consumers ever more difficult;

- the malfunctions in the supply chain and its practices are evidently putting terms of healthy competition at risk,

it is absolutely vital for there to be a coordinated European plan and integrated interventions in the food sector, from the farm to the fork. It would not be an exaggeration if the Commission's next intervention after the regulation and supervision of the financial system were to be in the food sector which, moreover, is also directly linked to the speculative moves of the said sector.

Citizens have the impression that it is the supply chains, the manufacturing industry and the retail trade which regulate the housewife's shopping basket and not the income policy of the state and of the European Union.

I therefore believe that, in voting for the report by the Committee on Agriculture and waiting for the final proposals of the European Union on this matter, we shall address the perennial problems of the operation of the food market, which in turn must also operate impartially for the benefit of European citizens, European farmers and developing countries and create a sense of security in the laws of the market and the institutions.

Louis Michel, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) First of all, I would like to thank Mrs Batzeli and the members of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, who drew up this report. We are discussing it at a time of major difficulties, at a crucial time for the European Union food supply chain.

As you all know, the recession has led to a sudden slowdown in activity in most economic sectors in the European Union. The agricultural sector has seen a real collapse in market prices, something which puts a serious question mark over farm incomes. The situation is particularly serious in sectors of high added value, such as meat and dairy products.

In this context, it is essential for the food supply chain to work effectively if we wish to mitigate the effects of the crisis on farm incomes and ensure that consumers enjoy food products at more modest prices. That is why the food supply chain and the issue of food prices remain at the forefront of the Commission's concerns.

In addition, analysis of the structural factors leads us to fear a further escalation of prices of agricultural raw materials in the medium and long term. By improving the operation of the food supply chain, it ought to be possible in future to avoid such high rises in food prices and to curb the instability of consumer prices. I share most of the concerns raised in the report in relation to the need to improve the overall operation of the food supply chain. In particular, there is a need for increased transparency all along the chain, in order to offer consumers better information and to improve the way added value is shared out along the chain.

Since last year, the Commission has introduced a series of initiatives aimed at improving the operation of the food supply chain. As a result, the High Level Group on the Competitiveness of the Agro-Food Industry

has just drawn up a set of strategic recommendations. In addition, a Green Paper on Agricultural Product Quality was presented last year.

In the communication on food prices adopted in December, the Commission also proposed, in the form of a road map, several solutions for improving the operation of the food supply chain in Europe. It is absolutely essential to make progress in the implementation of this road map. In particular we must make progress in the introduction of a permanent European Observatory on the food supply chain and food prices. By supplying reliable information on prices from one end of the chain to the other, we will be able to help combat the lack of transparency, whilst improving our understanding of how the chain operates.

We must also make progress in analysing how added value is shared out along the chain. I attach particular importance to this issue. As is recognised in the communication on food prices, imbalances between the negotiating power of agricultural producers and the rest of the chain are having a serious effect on producer margins in the agricultural sector. It goes without saying that an effort to bring clarity and understanding to the question of how added value is shared out would be a first step towards restoring the balance of negotiating power all along the chain. In this regard, it should be stressed that the competitiveness of the European Union's food chain cannot be built to the detriment of some of its component parts. It is essential for food producers and retailers in the agro-food sector to be able to continue to rely on a sustainable, competitive agricultural production platform within the European Union.

I am convinced that once it has been fully implemented, the road map proposed by the Commission will allow us to answer most of the questions and concerns raised in Mrs Batzeli's report.

President. – The presentation is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 26 March 2009.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Roselyne Lefrançois (PSE), in writing. – (FR) The report on which we must reach a decision on Thursday attempts to respond in practical terms to the difficulties of millions of our citizens who are suffering increased food prices.

In a context of decreased purchasing power in Europe, it was important that Parliament reach a decision on a problem for which the solutions are, nevertheless, known. In fact, the difference in prices between the beginning and the end of the food supply chain can be as high as a one to five ratio and, even if the liberals still refuse to admit it, the problems of the market need tackling to ensure reasonable prices for consumers and decent revenues for farmers. I myself have proposed that the importance of market-regulation instruments – more necessary than ever in the face of the crisis that we are going through – be reaffirmed in the text.

However, to ensure that 'accessible price' does not become another way of saying 'poor-quality product', I have also asked for the notion of incentives for organic sectors to be inserted into the report. It is desirable for consumers to be able to access quality products at reasonable prices, and this thanks to an ambitious policy of financial incentives aimed at this type of agricultural production.

Maria Petre (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) Food prices have seen a very sharp rise recently. There are two reasons for this: firstly, the global agricultural and food product crisis and secondly, market concentration, which has increased from 21.7% in 1990 to over 70% at the moment.

The prices paid by consumers are on average five times higher than those paid to producers. Supermarket chains very often impose unfair conditions and make it difficult for farmers and small suppliers to access the market.

I support the European Commission's idea of creating a European market monitoring system. I also support the idea of a European competition network.

The funds from the Rural Development Programme should provide larger allocations in favour of producers.

The idea of revamping the 'local products' concept and more effective support for traditional food markets are solutions which I strongly support.

Theodor Dumitru Stolojan (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I welcome the Batzeli report which highlights the large discrepancies between the prices of food products in supermarkets and the prices paid to producers.

This is, unfortunately, the reality too in countries with a standard of living far below the European average, like Romania.

If we reject any proposal for price controls, we cannot then fail to notice that the supermarkets' negotiating power is excessive in relation to the producers. This is also an area where we can take more firm action as part of the policy for protecting competition and consumers.

22. Artistic studies in the European Union (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0093/2009) by Mrs Badia i Cutchet, on behalf of the Committee on Culture and Education, on artistic studies in the European Union (2008/2226(INI)).

Maria Badia i Cutchet, rapporteur. – (ES) Mr President, although artistic education is now a mandatory subject in almost all Member States, there are substantial differences in the way it is taught.

Historically, artistic studies were linked to education during the earlier years. Today, however, the lifelong learning approach and the development of new information and communication technologies (ICTs) have expanded the area traditionally devoted to art and culture, and have generated new forms of access and display for the sector.

The constant advance of ICTs has also favoured the promotion of a knowledge-based economy, in which intellectual capabilities and creativity occupy a pre-eminent place.

The motion for a resolution, which we will vote on tomorrow, is based on the idea that artistic education forms the basis for vocational training in the field of the arts and promotes creativity, as well as physical and intellectual development in that sphere; it considers artistic education to be an essential component of learning in childhood and adolescence and argues that teaching it in schools will lay the foundations for truly democratising access to culture.

In addition, it values training as a very important factor for the success of professionals in the artistic and creative sector, since artistic studies that focus on developing a career and profession require of the students, in addition to talent, a solid cultural basis that can only be acquired through multidisciplinary and systematic training. This increases the opportunities for access to employment in the sector in so far as it provides a general education, a research methodology, entrepreneurial abilities and business knowledge, as well as skills in various areas of activity.

Also, in a very special way, it recognises the economic and employment potential of creative, cultural and artistic industries in the European Union, which make a greater contribution than other highly recognised industries such as both the chemicals and the foodstuffs industries.

What is more, we should not forget that schools and centres for art and design education help to create new artistic styles and movements and to open up different cultural worlds, which strengthens the European Union's image in the world.

The draft report considers that artistic education should be a compulsory element in syllabuses at all school levels and encourages the Member States to coordinate their policies with regard to artistic education at European Union level and to promote mobility of both students and teachers in this sector, paying increased attention to the recognition of qualifications among Member States.

We are also calling on the Council, the Commission and the Member States to define the role of artistic education as an essential pedagogical tool in enhancing the value of culture, to establish joint strategies for the promotion of artistic education policies and policies for training teachers specialising in this subject, and to recognise the important role played by artists and creativity in our society, as demonstrated by the European Year of Creativity and Innovation.

Lastly, the report emphasises the importance of using the resources provided by new information technologies and the Internet as channels for modern teaching geared to contemporary practice when introducing the artistic dimension into school curricula, and recommends that a European portal for artistic and cultural education be developed jointly in order to safeguard the development and promotion of the European cultural model.

For all these reasons, I would ask for majority support for the report, which will send out a clear message of support to professionals, students and businesses in the creative and cultural sector.

Louis Michel, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like, first of all, to thank Mrs Badia i Cutchet for her own-initiative report on artistic studies in the European Union.

This issue is occupying an increasingly important place at European level. In fact, we all agree that culture and the arts form a fundamental part of education. They help to develop sensitivity and self-confidence, essential qualities not only for our role as citizens but also for the role of economic operator that is in each of us. There can be no doubt about this. Artistic education is a vector of well-being, creativity and social integration. It is essential that it be promoted in Europe's education systems from as early an age as possible.

We share this vision and we are glad that your report refers to a number of significant initiatives taken at European Union level, such as the European Year of Creativity and Innovation.

The importance of the arts and artistic education in building a better society goes hand in hand with its impact on economic life. According to recent estimates, the contribution of the cultural and creative industries to the creation of economic wealth is estimated at 2.6% of European GDP. In addition, any economic activity can benefit from the arts and cultural education. Innovation encourages the creation of synergies between traditional areas of activity and more innovative ones. Today we must combine technology and design, whilst integrating the principles of sustainability and economic viability. This combination requires a redefinition of the ways in which knowledge is transmitted and acquired.

These different issues are set out in the European Reference Framework document that defines key competences for lifelong learning in 2006. In this framework, it is stated that artistic and cultural expression is essential to the development of creative competences, which are so useful in the context of working life.

The European Agenda for Culture has introduced new methods, particularly the structured dialogue with civil society and, recently, new open methods of cultural coordination. The implementation of these methods has been made possible thanks to an initial three-year work plan, adopted by the Council on 21 May 2008, which defines five priority action areas. In this framework, a working group made up of experts from the Member States was set up around the theme of synergies between culture and education. This group will be drawing up recommendations to identify good practices at national level and will also make a number of recommendations to the Member States and the European institutions. In addition, it will provide methods for assessing the progress achieved in the policy areas that fall under its mandate. Finally, this group should make a valuable contribution to the European Forum for Culture scheduled to take place on 29 and 30 September 2009, in Brussels.

I have just been reading an answer from my fellow commissioner, Mr Figel.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday, 24 March 2009.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Marusya Ivanova Lyubcheva (PSE), *in writing*. – (BG) The European Parliament report on artistic studies in the EU is part of the continuing efforts to develop intercultural dialogue and is vitally important in the context of the European Year of Creativity and Innovation.

Greater and more specific attention must undoubtedly be focused on artistic studies. It is important that it is a compulsory part of the education programme and from the earliest age too, because it stimulates emotional and cultural development in the young generation.

Giving these studies a stronger practical purpose and including interactive teaching would result in a deeper understanding of national and European cultural values. Providing greater mobility for students, teachers and professionals employed in this sector is the direct way to create an awareness of European identity and foster cultural and religious tolerance.

Member States must invest in creating better opportunities for informal and independent artistic studies and prevent a drop in the number of programmes in this area. Their support for artists' professional life will increase the general interest in different forms of artistic studies.

Public-private partnerships in this area will help modernise the education programmes and encourage more active integration of new technologies in the teaching process. The majority of resources for a coordinated European policy on artistic studies take the form of investments for boosting Europe's cultural influence globally, for creativity and, indirectly, for the EU's economy.

23. Active dialogue with citizens on Europe (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0107/2009) by Mr Hegyi, on behalf of the Committee on Culture and Education, on Active dialogue with citizens on Europe (2008/2224(INI)).

Gyula Hegyi, rapporteur. – (HU) Europe is the promised land for people from distant continents or the Balkans who wish to join Europe. At the same time, Europe is in many respects the symbol of disappointment, of boredom or of bureaucracy for those who are already inside the gate: EU citizens, whether opinion-shaping intellectuals or ordinary citizens.

When I received the report, I began to read it with great enthusiasm. I must say, my enthusiasm declined to some extent by the end, since I myself realised how many obstacles there are to engaging in active dialogue with citizens, and how far removed the bureaucratic machinery of the European Union is from the daily lives and wishes of its citizens. In any case, I realised thanks to the report that – perhaps unsurprisingly – the lower the educational level or status of our citizens, the less they understand integration and the more eurosceptical they are.

I think, therefore, and this is the most important part of my report, that beyond young people – who can easily be won over to the cause of European integration via educational means – we should primarily target those whom we have so far not been able to reach. This includes inhabitants of small villages, the working classes, pensioners, and generally those of more modest means and circumstances. We need to try somehow to communicate to them the idea of Europe and the values of European unity.

In my report I recommend that many more students be enabled to obtain an Erasmus scholarship than is currently the case; a separate proposal to this effect has been drawn up by the youth branch of the Hungarian Socialist Party. Only a small percent of Hungarian university students are able to take advantage of this student exchange programme, although it would be desirable for everyone who obtains a university degree to have spent at least half a year studying abroad.

My own idea was that there should be a unified, one-year common European curriculum in history teaching. Students should study the same European history in all 23 official languages and all 27 Member States for at least one year. The Commission did not lend much support to this proposal, and included a watered-down version of it in its text.

I suggested, based on the recommendation of Hungarian university teachers, that we create a European open university, in other words a sort of ‘Volkshochschule’, a popular community college. European citizens should be able to enrol anywhere in Europe, regardless of their school certificates or diplomas, for a relatively freely structured training programme that offers education in the history of the European Union and of its creation and workings.

It has long been the wish of Members of the European Parliament, their desire but one might also say their demand, that Euronews, which is funded – at least in part – by EU money, should broadcast programmes in each Member State’s official language. There is something absurd about the fact that Euronews broadcasts in Arabic or Russian but not in Hungarian or in some other Member States’ languages. I am sad to report, by the way, Commissioner – I presume that you are hearing this for the first time – that cable television packages in Budapest have dropped the English-language Euronews, and are offering a Chinese-language programme instead, for unfortunately there is more demand for Chinese television than for Euronews, given that the latter is not broadcast in Hungarian, whereas there is a considerable number of Chinese people living in our country now.

There was much debate, and I would like to inform the Commissioner, if he is present, that I would also have liked to recommend that European Union officials be able to communicate with the media more openly than has hitherto been the case. The problem, however, is that often there is no one who can competently explain the Commission’s position, and therefore only the opinion of its opponents is heard.

Finally, as my time is up, my last sentence is that I recommended that local non-governmental organisations become involved in EU campaigns, for these are much better acquainted with local communities, and know the language in which they can reach their populations.

Louis Michel, Member of the Commission. – (FR) Mr President, allow me just a small but completely personal digression that has nothing to do with the question that my colleague asked. I do not fully understand your

desire to see NGOs participate in the election campaign. I do not understand, but I will pass on this request to my colleague.

The current political and economic situation is obviously increasing the need for an active dialogue with the citizens. The latter must be informed of the changes to the European Union that have a direct or indirect effect on their daily lives and in which they must be able to be involved.

This has formed the basis of the Commission's work during the last four years. I very much welcome the report by Mr Hegyi entitled 'Active dialogue with citizens on Europe'. We are striving to give the citizens of the 27 Member States of the European Union a wide range of basic information on the European Union, so that they can not only understand how the European Union could help to respond to the major challenges facing Europe and the world today, but also exchange and share their opinions on this issue.

We are also looking to create many more accessible forums in which to pursue this debate, using all the resources and all the technologies available today: in on-line forums, via the media and at local level.

Whilst agreeing with a number of the recommendations set out in the report, my colleague is unable to support the idea that communication has not worked up until now. She also says that, whilst our communication has certainly improved over recent years, we still have to be realistic about what can be achieved with a budget of only EUR 100 million for 27 Member States, 23 languages and almost 500 million people.

In addition, the Commission can certainly not be alone in communicating with the citizens on the issue of Europe. A collective effort from all the institutions and all the Member States is needed. This is why we have negotiated an agreement with the Member States and with Parliament for joint communication on Europe. This political agreement entitled 'Communicating Europe in Partnership' was signed on 22 October 2008. This is the first time that the institutions of the Member States of the European Union have made a common commitment jointly to communicate on Europe with the citizens of the European Union. It is important for us now fully to implement this agreement. I am in complete agreement about the importance of the process for consulting the citizens and about the need to extend the dialogue to all levels of society.

Regular dialogue between the Commission and representatives of civil society began over thirty years ago. It takes account of the policy of openness and inclusion that the Commission has been applying for many years and illustrates the great variety of fields of action and the diversity of the parties involved.

I would like to stress that cooperation between the Commission's delegations and Parliament's information offices in the Member States is working very well overall.

The forthcoming European elections are a very good example of the political will of these two institutions to cooperate in order to establish joint communication priorities.

As regards the need for information at local and regional levels, aimed particularly at young people, first-time voters and women, I note with satisfaction the congratulations the Commission has received for the choice of projects under Plan D.

I will take this opportunity to announce that the Commission also intends, in the context of the European elections, to run special activities in the framework of the Debate Europe Plan D initiative. As for the creation of a new website and the establishment of links with local television stations, I would like to say that the Commission is in the process of creating networks of radio and television operators that will broadcast programmes on European issues. Once they are all up and running, these networks, together with *Euronews*, will reach between 60 and 90 million citizens each week in all the languages of the European Union.

As for the importance of introducing courses in European law and European history into the school curriculum, the Commission shares the opinion that young people should be taught the essential facts about the European Union at school. We hope that the Member States will follow up this suggestion on this important issue.

There are many other interesting recommendations that are worthy of our attention, but unfortunately we have only a limited amount of time.

Allow me to conclude by returning to an essential aspect of the framework of efforts made by the Community institutions: effective communication is possible only with the close cooperation of all the parties involved. The Commission appreciates the unfailing support it receives from Parliament. For my part, I applaud your personal commitment as a member of the European Parliament.

President. – The presentation is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday, 24 March 2009.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

John Attard-Montalto (PSE), in writing. – This is one of the most important issues which needs to be addressed. The European population doesn't feel that they are European citizens. The concept of citizenship of the EU is still unclear whilst the citizenship of the individual nationality remains predominant.

Most citizens do not feel part of the process and they view the European Union as an institution apart. Positive reconnecting includes enhanced dialogue between the citizens and the European institutions, the need to ratify the Lisbon Treaty, the importance of a consultation process and joint open debates.

A year ago in April 2008 we came up with the idea 'Debate Europe' which gives an opportunity to break the often artificial divide between national and European issues.

At the end of the day, however, the citizens of Europe must have a clear idea of the direction which the European process is to take. There are two approaches which cannot continue to exist in parallel. A choice has to be made. Are we for a fully integrated Union or are we for a fine running of the present status quo. When citizens see their governments wavering from one to the other, who can blame them if they feel alien to the process itself?

Magda Kósáné Kovács (PSE), in writing. – (HU) Gyula Hegyi's report sheds light on an important contemporary problem. The ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, which is a guarantee of a more effective, democratic European Union, was rejected by the Irish in a referendum. Since then, this has been the source and origin of uncertainty and disorientation in Europe.

We must make it possible for European citizens to have a more effective voice in shaping European Union policies. To do so, appropriate education is needed, for there is greater opposition to integration among those with low levels of education. For instance, it is essential to provide education in general EU and citizenship knowledge in open universities or as part of secondary school curricula. It is important for people to know their rights, to know that the EU is not working above their heads, but with them. We need to ensure that appropriate information sources are made available in the less developed regions. The guarantor of a functioning democracy is not the bureaucracy but the citizens themselves – this is the core of democratic culture. It is indispensable that the media help develop communication between institutions and citizens, as well as communication among citizens.

We cannot expect responsible decisions, or any decisions at all, on the part of citizens, if we do not provide them with suitable information. Providing information is our responsibility and our duty, whereas decision making is the citizens' right. This May it will be five years since Hungary joined the European Union, and we can already see that the European Union is not faceless, but that the EU is us, the sum of all individual citizens. We need to know that decision making is in our hands. So let us take advantage of this opportunity.

Sirpa Pietikäinen (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FI) My thanks go to the rapporteur for an excellent job. To his credit, he raises many important aspects and problems associated with the interaction between the EU and its citizens.

The EU is not the number one favourite with the people in any of the Member States of the Union. The Irish referendum last July seemed to show that the Irish, at least, did not want more Union. For some reason the negative messages and fears of the state getting swallowed up by a faceless Brussels get across better than any news about all the good the Union has achieved. The great unknown is always too easy a threat, and it is easy to join that particular chorus.

A stronger commitment on the part of individuals and NGOs to all the activities of the Union would make it more acceptable. With regard to legal issues in particular, individuals and organisations should be given more scope for having an influence and expressing their opinion at all stages of the legislative process.

The rapporteur also mentions an interesting fact in regard to the most recent EU referendums: that women voted against the EU more often than men. Obviously, for some reason women in particular feel the EU is somehow alien to them.

One reason is obvious: the Union has a very male face. The President of the Commission is a man, as are almost 70% of the Commissioners. Likewise, it is a man that strikes the gavel of the President of the European

Parliament and a man that is Chairman of most of the parliamentary committees. It is important that gender equality is implemented as much as possible in the forthcoming term when 'top' posts in the EU are being filled. At least one woman should be appointed to these.

Active dialogue with civil society is the most important way to bolster the Union's legitimacy.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (PSE), *in writing*. – (RO) As always, the approaching European Parliament elections make the issue of the level of information provided and deficiencies in the dialogue with citizens, specifically at a European level, very topical.

In this context, I welcome the motion for a resolution for active dialogue with citizens, which underlines the importance of involving European institutions, the trans-European education system and the mass media. The rejection of the Constitutional Treaty in France and Holland and Ireland's opposition to the Treaty of Lisbon expressed through a referendum have highlighted that initiating a campaign targeted at citizens with a lower level of education is a viable and necessary strategy, which I fully support.

Given the increased level of Internet access in the European Union's Member States, we should deploy this tool and use it to make dialogue with citizens more effective. This could allow people's opinions to be recorded, which would be evaluated later on and incorporated as part of our decision-making process. I also think that the EU's history, the way it works and citizens' rights should feature as basic components in the curriculum at European level.

I therefore strongly believe that the conditions can be guaranteed for a coherent dialogue with citizens, which will deal with Europe and the European Union from a different perspective, based on accurate information and knowledge.

Dushana Zdravkova (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (BG) Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to congratulate Mr Hegyi on his wonderful report which I am sure will make a vital contribution to initiating civil dialogue in the European Union.

The successful achievement of the European institutions' overall communication priorities in partnership with Member States will be an important step towards making the European Union's citizens better informed. Only well-informed Europeans can make use of the opportunities offered to them and take part in an active dialogue on Europe. We have all witnessed the consequences resulting from the problems with ensuring people are kept informed: 'No' votes in referendums and the blocking of European development.

As chairwoman of a citizens association in Bulgaria, I strongly believe that getting citizens involved in the decision-making processes will give them the opportunity to contribute directly to the political process at EU level. I believe that this is one of the important areas which must be quickly reformed and improved.

I believe that this report will enable the European Parliament to give the necessary guidelines and recommendations to the other institutions, but also to the civil organisations because citizens are the key element in Europe's future development. Without their cooperation and involvement, it will be impossible for us to achieve the objective which we have set ourselves.

24. Combating female genital mutilation in the EU (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0054/2009) by Mrs Muscardini, on behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, on combating female genital mutilation in the EU (2008/2071(INI)).

Cristiana Muscardini, *rapporteur*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I think it is particularly fitting that Commissioner Michel is taking part in our debate. As we know, he always pays great attention to human rights issues and tragedies in Africa. In fact, Mr Michel's presence gives me hope that the Commission may give serious consideration to an issue that today not only affects 28 African countries and various countries in the Middle East and neighbouring countries, but is now a particularly distressing problem within the European Union itself.

The mass immigration that has taken place in recent years has brought this tragedy to EU countries. Tens of thousands of girls and young women are at risk every day of suffering a terrible practice that injures them irreversibly from a physical point of view, but also does extremely serious psychological damage. That is why – although Parliament has already condemned this practice on several occasions in previous years and in fact gave funding through DAPHNE to 14 projects to combat female genital mutilation – that is why today

we again find ourselves discussing this topic, because the phenomenon has unfortunately not become less prevalent, but remains on the increase.

We must have the courage to adopt a more appropriate serious method of prevention through cultural campaigns able to make immigrant women, but also the fathers of these girls, understand that following a tribal rite, which has nothing to do with religion, is no way to integrate or create a future for their daughters.

Consider a girl who attends a French, Italian or Belgian school and suddenly, after having socialised with her peers, finds herself snatched from normality and forced to suffer a tragedy that will mark her for life. This girl is not only physically mutilated, but it is impossible for her to resume a normal relationship with other people; she feels diminished, different, and in our society we do not want people who are different. We want people who, no matter what their religion, skin colour or geographical origin, can work together to build a better Europe, closer to its citizens.

For this reason, Mr President, Commissioner, we as Parliament – and I would like to thank all my colleagues from the committee who helped me draft this report – want the laws of all Member States to be harmonised so that female genital mutilation is classed as an offence. We do not want palliative proposals such as ‘pricking’. We want women to be truly equal with men; we do not want initiation rites, but real integration instead. We want NGOs to be able to carry out their work, we want a prevention policy that involves immigrant women’s associations, we want to punish anybody who seeks to mutilate girls and drag them into a perverse spiral of desperation and marginalisation.

The report covers many areas and I think Members have had the opportunity to examine and evaluate it. I believe everyone should join in this call for a purposeful Europe that combines the efforts of its three institutions to combat this horrible crime that violates human rights.

Louis Michel, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, both on my own and my colleague’s behalf, I would like to thank Mrs Muscardini for her speech, as I believe that she has put her finger on what is both a tragedy and a scandal. I would really like to thank Mrs Muscardini for her excellent report on this major issue of the fight against female genital mutilation in the European Union.

The European Commission has very clearly denounced, both within the Union and in third countries, the unacceptable nature of traditional practices that seriously undermine the fundamental right of women and young girls to respect for their physical and mental integrity. We are obviously in full agreement with the report. We think that all the Member States of the European Union should take strong measures. I would say much stronger measures should be taken to put an end to these practices, both within the European Union and in third countries, because it is totally unacceptable and quite incredible that this can still go on within the European Union. We must also ensure, in the framework of all the political dialogues that we hold with third countries, that the latter fully understand our position. I would like to move away from the text for a moment to say that I can assure you that this issue is always on the agenda in all the political dialogues that we hold with developing countries.

Just recently, President Compaoré of Burkina Faso called me and said that they were just about to adopt a law to prohibit these practices, although this will be no easy matter. It should be pointed out that there are obviously some clans and some tribes that still carry on this practice, and it is quite a sensitive subject in the country, but he really had a desire to make progress and that, I believe, is important.

You will also be aware that the Commission regularly releases Community funding to support projects in Europe and third countries that aim to prevent and eradicate female genital mutilation and to give help to the victims and young girls at risk.

In Europe, our main instrument is the DAPHNE III programme, which supports European non-governmental organisations and local and regional public institutions and authorities in their fight against female genital mutilation. Since its launch in 1997, DAPHNE has cofinanced 14 projects specifically dedicated to this issue, providing a total amount of around EUR 2.4 million. The DAPHNE projects have enabled us to implement community training and support programmes, to carry out awareness campaigns, to analyse national legislation, to gather information and statistics, to develop tools and to establish best practices for use by the actors on the ground, and to recommend policy directions to European and national decision makers.

We are evidently determined to maintain our support for such actions and to continue to deal with the issue within the European Union, not only in the context of violence prevention and victim support, but also in the areas of immigration, asylum and criminal justice.

I am going to turn my attention away from the text again for just a moment. I have to tell you that I am somewhat shocked by a certain kind of cowardice on the part of our governments and some politicians who consider this to be part of culture and therefore untouchable. I am sorry: the minimum we should expect of people who come to Europe is that they comply with the rules in force. I believe that there can be no two-speed justice; there can be no concept of two speeds. This has no effect on the capacity of a European country to welcome incomers, rather the contrary. This is a debate that I myself have experienced in my own country in the past. I must say that I am shocked that some people, on the pretext of respecting the culture of migrants, basically refuse to penalise this type of thing. I think that if we want at least to sort out this issue within Europe, we must reach the stage where we penalise these practices. We need to have this political courage, and I do not think that it would hamper a country's ability to welcome incomers if we were to say: 'This is our constitution, these are our rules, these are our human values, and you must comply with them. If you do not comply with them, you will be acting outside the law and you will be punished.' That is the end of my aside, but I am glad I have said these things because I fully share your irritation regarding this issue.

In the framework of its external aid to third countries, the Commission is also applying three policies to combat female genital mutilation. First of all, as I told you, it is making the issue of the emancipation of women, their human rights and their health an integral part of any political and strategic dialogue it conducts with the partner governments.

Secondly, it is supporting actions that argue and lobby for improved national legislation as well as for the creation of national policies suitable for promoting and protecting women's rights and for banning all harmful practices.

Thirdly, it is supporting initiatives intended to strengthen the scope for action of political leaders, along with awareness campaigns aimed at all sectors of society. The multiannual Hague Programme, covering the various actions that will be carried out to develop the area of justice, freedom and security, comes to an end in 2010. We are going to present the new Stockholm programme 2010-2014 in a communication in Spring 2009. I can confirm to you that this programme will lay great emphasis on the aspect relating to the protection of fundamental rights and of victims, including the promotion and protection of children's and women's rights.

Although the Commission has not yet drawn up a specific strategy for combating female genital mutilation, we are determined to continue our support for actions aimed at preventing it, and we intend to carry on raising this issue within the framework of the Union's internal and external policies.

President. – The presentation is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday, 24 March 2009.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Véronique Mathieu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) Each year in Europe, 180 000 migrant women suffer or are at risk from suffering genital mutilation. It is important to remember that these mutilations constitute a violation of human rights that has very serious physical and psychological consequences. These practices cannot be justified on the grounds of cultural or religious traditions. In order to put a stop to them, the Member States must enforce compliance with the prohibition laid down in their criminal law, and the practice of mutilation must be considered a criminal offence. At the same time, actual or potential victims must be given access to legal and medical assistance.

The EU must increase its support for those NGOs that are doing remarkable work on the ground in the areas of prevention and assistance. At national and European levels, targeted information and education campaigns would remove the taboos associated with these practices whilst informing families of the criminal consequences of such mutilations. It is therefore important for the EU to tackle this problem by defining joint preventive actions to prohibit the practice of mutilation in the EU and by referring to this prohibition in all cooperation agreements concluded with third countries. Genital mutilation is a social problem that concerns us all.

25. Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0092/2009) by Mr Graça Moura, on behalf of the Committee on Culture and Education, on Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment (2008/2225(INI)).

Vasco Graça Moura, rapporteur. – (PT) The Commission Communication entitled 'Multilingualism: an asset for Europe and a shared commitment' follows on from an already long series of documents produced by Parliament, the Commission, the Council, the Committee of the Regions and the European Economic and Social Committee, in which the issue of multilingualism is tackled from various angles.

In my report, I reiterate the positions previously adopted by the European Parliament and generally endorse the Commission's view that the linguistic and cultural diversity of the EU constitutes an enormous competitive advantage and that there is a need for full support for language teaching and exchange programmes in the educational and cultural spheres, both inside and outside the Union.

I also highlight the importance of language as a factor of social inclusion. I confirm the importance of dialogue with other regions of the globe, paying attention to the specific links existing in terms of language, history and culture between the countries of the EU and third countries. I indicate the need for policies supporting translation, both literary and technical. I tackle the issue of multilingualism in the audiovisual sector, the need to support language teachers, and the extension of language competence indicators to all the official EU languages, without prejudice to their also being extended to other languages spoken and studied in Europe, including classical Greek and Latin.

With regard to the teaching of languages, both at school and in adulthood, I maintain, among many other aspects, that education in the mother tongue is fundamental to all other teaching. Parents and guardians must be able to choose the official language in which their children are to be educated in countries with more than one official language or where an official language and regional languages coexist. I also maintain that no schoolchild should be deprived of education in the official language of the state.

I would underline that at no point in my report is the importance of regional or minority languages disputed. I clearly recognise and respect these languages and at no point try to obstruct them. There is not one aspect of my report which is incompatible with these languages. However, an alternative proposal has been tabled by Socialist, Liberal and Green Members, which quite simply omits the three points that I have just mentioned.

As a result, principles which are connected with fundamental rights and people's freedoms and which for a long time have been enshrined, accepted and practised in the European Union are about to be eliminated due to pressure from Galician, Catalan and Basque nationalists. If this alternative proposal is adopted, the European Parliament will have given way.

These intentions are perfectly clear. In today's edition of the Spanish newspaper *El País*, you can read on page 37 that, just three months ago, the Supreme Court decided that a box should be included on the pre-enrolment form, asking parents in which language they want their children to receive their primary education, which is something that the Catalan Government has not done.

I do not feel that this alternative should be accepted. In contrast to the points made in my report, it results in unacceptable protection of extreme nationalist tendencies and also unacceptably contradicts our fundamental rights and freedoms and even the principle of subsidiarity, not to mention that this alternative is also contrary to principles that are already enshrined in previous texts of the European Parliament and the Council and that have never been called into question.

I therefore urge this House to be very careful. The alternative tabled must be rejected and my report must be adopted, as occurred in the Committee on Culture and Education on 17 February, with 20 votes in favour, 3 against and 8 abstentions.

Mr President, the European Union must be a place of respect for democracy and pluralism, not a place of exclusion or unreasonable curtailment of fundamental rights and freedoms.

Louis Michel, Member of the Commission. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like first to thank Mr Graça Moura for his own-initiative report on multilingualism.

This report supports the Commission's approach and lays emphasis on the quality of language teaching and teachers, on an integrated approach to reach all strata of our society, on linguistic diversity, whilst facilitating our understanding of the role of the media and of literary translation, and on linguistic and cultural links with third countries.

I share the rapporteur's opinion that multilingualism has a major impact on the daily lives of Europe's citizens, given the abundance of communications, growing mobility and migration, and increasing globalisation.

The principle of mother tongue plus two and foreign language learning at an early age are the reference points of our multilingualism policy. Our approach is based on this established right. It reinforces the importance of lifelong learning, and its objective is to include the most vulnerable groups in our society. I am referring in particular to those people who have abandoned their studies, immigrants and those who speak only one language or who are linguistically less competent.

In addition, we wish to increase our efforts in relation to apprentices, adults and older people who are no longer in education and who may miss out on the development.

I welcome your support for our approach. To reach these groups, individual motivation and the implementation of appropriate teaching methods are essential. New technologies, such as the Internet and interactive audiovisual media, offer many possibilities to reach these groups and to develop and adapt teaching methods to their specific needs and abilities. At European level, our lifelong learning programme promotes all languages: the official languages of the European Union, regional and minority languages, and the other languages spoken around the world. This is a reflection of the new reality in the Union and also of the linguistic needs of our citizens.

In a context of increasing mobility and migration, it is essential for people to master the national language or languages if they are to become fully integrated into society. However, I would like to point out in this context that it is the Member States that are the main decision-makers as regards language policy, including regional and minority languages whose framework is laid down in the Council of Europe's European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

I welcome the general support Parliament has given to our approach to multilingualism.

President. – The presentation is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday, 24 March 2009.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Corina Crețu (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The linguistic and cultural diversity of the EU's 27 Member States is beneficial to understanding and cooperation, as well as to cross-border labour mobility and the assimilation of European values. It is important to constantly improve EU policies aimed at encouraging education in the mother tongue and guaranteeing full mutual intelligibility between languages. We need cooperation between national authorities and the European Commission to implement practices as efficiently as possible in order to achieve integration through accepting linguistic differences.

Romania is one of the EU Member States which guarantees a level of protection and support above the European average for minorities, promoting education in their own languages. The Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca is an outstanding example of the promotion of multilingualism.

Unfortunately, demonstrations have been organised, even at the European Parliament, and initiatives have been launched which have called for the dismantling of the Babeș-Bolyai University on the grounds of wrongful discrimination based on ethnic separation. This is why I wish to draw your attention to the danger posed by the deterioration in the tone of the debate on ethnic matters. Respect for minorities' rights and the promotion of multilingualism must not be perverted by being turned into smokescreens behind which actions are being carried out against the European spirit and interethnic harmony. Multilingualism must be a common denominator, not a factor of division for the European Union.

Gabriela Crețu (PSE), in writing. – (RO) There are practical arguments supporting multilingualism: it reduces the risk of unemployment, increases the chances of finding employment, helps increase the quality of the services provided and labour productivity, and facilitates mobility. We all know what they are, and opinions tend to agree from this point of view.

I would like to stress at this point the importance of another reason for upholding multilingualism and related measures.

Multilingualism contributes to the affirmation of values and attitudes which are essential for the European social model: mutual understanding, trust and solidarity. It can help achieve unity effectively in a world of diversity.

In this respect, we also insist on the need to preserve linguistic diversity in Europe. One way to achieve this objective would be to learn as a second foreign language languages other than international languages. The languages of neighbouring countries can be learnt, or of ethnic minorities in one's own country, as well as languages spoken in emerging economies with which relations are flourishing.

I would like to express the belief that the positive effects of such a policy can be demonstrated later on in everyday life.

Silvana Koch-Mehrin (ALDE), in writing. – (DE) Linguistic diversity is important. It is part of the day-to-day reality in the European Union and is gaining increasing significance in the relationships between the Member States, in the way in which our multicultural societies live together and in the common policy measures taken by the European Union. However, the decision-making power on matters of language policy lies primarily with the Member States. It is not the responsibility of the European Parliament to lay down requirements and recommendations for language policy. The fact that the EU has a Commissioner for Multilingualism makes it clear that reform of the Commission is urgently needed and that there must be fewer Commissioners than there are Member States.

Iosif Matula (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I would like to congratulate my colleague, Mr Graça Moura, for the way in which he has successfully combined in this draft report general, regional and even local interests.

I personally suggested that citizens belonging to an ethnic group speaking a minority language should properly learn the official language of the state they live in. This would certainly provide an advantage for finding a job and in terms of good social integration. Unfortunately, the relevant amendment was not approved in the competent committee, but I still strongly believe that this would be very useful.

On the other hand, I suggested that officials who, as part of their work, come into frequent contact with citizens from other Member States should be encouraged to learn a second European language. I feel that this would be beneficial, taking into account the migration of labour across the whole of Europe, as well as mobility for the purposes of tourism.

This is the only way in which we can encourage communication and intercultural understanding, which are basic values of the European Union.

26. Agenda for next sitting: see Minutes

27. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting was closed at 11.05 p.m.)