

THURSDAY, 11 MARCH 2010

IN THE CHAIR: MRS KRATSA-TSAGAROPOULOU

Vice-President

1. Opening of the sitting

(The sitting was opened at 09.05)

2. Investing in Low Carbon Technologies (debate)

President. – The next item is the oral question to the Council and Commission (O-0015/2010 – B7-0011/2010) by Herbert Reul on Investing in the Development of Low Carbon Technologies

Herbert Reul, author. – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, President-in-Office of the Council, this question relates to the fact that, in 2007, the Commission brought forward a plan with the objective of promoting technologies in the field of energy with low CO₂ emissions so that they could come into use quickly. Proposals were made for very specific measures: European industrial initiatives, above all in the fields of wind energy, solar energy, bio-energy, carbon capture and storage, electricity grids and nuclear fission, the creation of a European Energy Research Alliance, the sustainable conversion of European energy infrastructure networks, constantly updated European energy technology systems and the establishment of a steering group on strategic energy technologies.

At that stage, one crucial question was left unanswered, namely the issue of funding. The Seventh Framework Programme for Research provides for EUR 886 million per annum for energy research. It is clear to all, however, that that is not enough. In 2009, the Commission brought out its communication on the funding of low-carbon energy technologies, in which it described the need to treble the funding for energy research over the next 10 years. That would mean that EUR 50 billion would have to be invested. The communication described how the money for the most important low-carbon technologies should be apportioned so that Europe can move away from its heavy dependence on fossil fuels to a stronger reduction in CO₂ emissions. The final plan estimates EUR 6 billion for research into wind energy, which, according to the Commission, could make up a fifth of EU energy provision by 2020; EUR 16 billion for solar energy, in order to develop new photovoltaic concepts and a major industrial concentration of solar energy facilities; EUR 9 billion for bio-energy research, in order to cover 14% of the EU's energy needs. In order to integrate renewable energy sources into the energy market, electricity grids would receive EUR 2 billion so that half of the grid would be able to operate on the basis of a 'smart grid' principle. Apart from renewable energy sources, a further EUR 13 billion is envisaged for up to 12 projects in the field of carbon capture and storage, while nuclear research would receive EUR 7 billion. The funding proposal also envisaged a further EUR 11 billion for the 'smart cities' programme so that appropriate answers can be found in this field, too.

The Commission suggested at the time that public-private partnerships are the most credible way of funding energy research but was unable to spell out precisely how the funding burdens in such arrangements would be split between the two sides. At present, the split in the field of energy research is 70% private and 30% public, excluding nuclear research. The EU argues that there is a need for a significant increase in public funding. In projects in which the risks are higher, public funding should play a major role, the Commission stated. In order to optimise the level of the intervention, the Commission called for the institution of EU programmes particularly in areas where there is a clear added value at EU level, such as where programmes are too expensive for the Member States individually. At present, 80% of public investment in non-nuclear energy research is funded at national level. This communication, too, ultimately leaves open the question of where the money is to come from. The Commission calculates that there is a need for an extra EUR 75 to 80 billion.

That is the reason why we concentrated, in our committee, on obtaining a little more clarity on a few issues in this area of funding. I would like to just remind you of the questions. Firstly, how does the Commission intend to set its priorities for the 2010-2020 roadmap to support the financing of low-carbon technologies? When will industrial policy initiatives to that effect be introduced? Secondly, how does the Commission intend to make additional EU budget resources available? How, specifically, is the Commission committed to ensuring that funds will start flowing in advance of resources from the Eighth Framework Programme?

Will the Commission ensure that the budgets identified for the various industrial initiatives will be respected? Last but not least, how will the Commission – and, of course, this will also always apply to the Council – make additional funding from the EU budget available for the funding of technological options other than those specified in the communication, including storage technologies, ocean energies and so on. There is no need for me to read out all the questions. We have introduced the questions here, and we ask for answers from the Council and the Commission.

Pedro Luis Marín Uribe, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (ES) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to begin my speech by stressing the importance of the strategic energy plan and the necessary contribution it will make to speeding up the development and application of technologies for clean, sustainable and efficient energy.

Without this plan, it will not be possible to achieve the goals we have set for 2020, nor to carry out the transition to a low-carbon economy on the scale we would like for 2050.

I am pleased to see that there is broad consensus between Parliament and the Council with regard to the importance and necessity of both the objectives of the plan and the resources that need to be made available.

The Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council intends to adopt conclusions on the Strategic Energy Technology (SET) Plan in its meeting this coming Friday 12 March. These conclusions will be an important point of reference for the spring European Council meeting to be held on 25 March, since the subject of climate change will feature on the agenda.

The draft conclusions to be debated at the Council meeting will include the subject of financing, although this matter will be approached with due caution. We do not want to preempt the negotiations that will have to take place on this subject within the context of the next financial framework.

I will now set out the main elements of the draft conclusions. Firstly, the time has come to move from technological roadmaps to the operational implementation of European industrial initiatives. We should do so step by step, but as quickly as possible.

Secondly, our approach to future cooperation in energy research within Europe should focus on using public resources effectively and building flexible, public-private partnerships with industry. We therefore urge the Commission to establish a platform that includes all of the interested financial organisations so that they can share information and best practices and, at the same time, coordinate their actions as deemed necessary.

Thirdly, given the scale of medium-term public-private financing needed in order to support major demonstration projects in particular, it may be necessary to increase the proportion of public investment at EU level. We will therefore need to take that into account both when revising the budget and when negotiating for the next financial framework.

Fourthly, we should support the governments of the Member States and encourage them to give adequate incentives and consistent signals in order for this policy to be implemented. If necessary, they should also make significant increases to public financing for the development of low-carbon technologies.

The fifth point to mention is that the European Commission and the European Investment Bank are already working together to improve the coordination and continuity of financing for demonstration projects in the sector of energy involving high technological risk. They are also working to mobilise and make available other sources of financing, both public and private.

Finally, the Commission and the European Investment Bank are looking into optimum financial packages for major demonstration projects, and so we also urge the Commission to analyse new ways of combining resources from different sources and to develop an *ad hoc* tool for financing the commercial launch of low-carbon technologies.

Ladies and gentlemen, all of these elements constitute a clear message on future investment for the development of low-carbon technologies. Despite the severe budgetary restrictions we currently face, the message that the Council will send out in its meeting on Friday will be one of commitment, using positive terms to express the significance of this matter at European level and the vital importance for each Member State to invest in low-carbon technology.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, although I am replacing my colleague Günther Oettinger today, it is a real pleasure to discuss with you the future of low-carbon technologies.

I personally was closely involved in the development of the European Strategic Energy Technology Plan (SET Plan) in the last Commission and I believe strongly that the development of these technologies is one of the cornerstones of the energy policy we have to develop jointly in the years to come.

Parliament's report on the SET Plan of June 2008 was very clear in proposing an appropriate level of ambition. We should not now lower this ambition. Today you have asked three clear questions and I will respond to them in turn.

First, regarding our priorities for 2010 to 2020 and the launch of the European industrial initiatives, those six initiatives really match our priorities – wind, solar bio-energy, sustainable fission, smart grids, and carbon capture and storage are priorities that were strongly endorsed by Parliament and the Council.

At your request, we have also prioritised energy efficiency by developing a new dedicated initiative – 'Smart Cities' – to unlock the market potential of energy efficient technologies in cities and regions. To prioritise activities within this initiative, the Commission has developed, together with the stakeholders, technology road maps for the period 2010-2020. These road maps establish concrete objectives as well as the activities needed to achieve them. The initiatives are mature for launching this year, 2010. Smart Cities are planned for the following year.

Your second question concerns the need for predictable, stable and adequate budgets for the SET Plan in the current financing period and post-2014. Our estimate of the public and private investment needs for the development of low-carbon technologies in the SET Plan is EUR 8 billion per year. Today about EUR 3 billion are being invested annually in the European Union, which means that a further EUR 50 billion is needed for the period 2010-2020. Bridging this gap should be one of the key institutional discussions over the coming years. Effort must be focused where intervention is most efficient, avoiding duplications and fostering the greatest potential impact in the market.

It is clear that EU level investments – coming either from the Seventh Framework Programme or the European Energy Programme for Recovery – will not be enough. Nor will the potential funds from the 300 million emissions trading allowances set aside for the demonstration of carbon capture and storage and innovative renewable technologies. At current prices this is approximately EUR 4 billion. Major efforts are therefore required, both by the private and public sector; the public sector includes both the European Union and of course also the Member States. To be blunt, the bulk of the money will have to come from where the bulk of the money is.

Thirdly, you asked if the Commission intends to finance other technology avenues and propose additional industrial initiatives. Other technologies that deserve European-level intervention will certainly emerge over time, so the SET Plan must remain flexible, as we have already shown with the new initiative on energy efficiency – Smart Cities – which we expect to launch, as I said, in 2011. We will closely monitor the most promising technologies through the SET Plan information system. SETIS, as this is called, is already working on storage and ocean technologies to assess their potential and identify the best opportunities for European intervention. We have also encouraged the establishment of a new technology platform on renewables, heating and cooling, that should help the sectors involved better to define their technology transfer.

I am very pleased to see this file getting the support it deserves. It is a key file for achieving our energy policy goals, a key file for Europe and for our future.

Jean-Pierre Audy, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, Minister, Commissioner, I am delighted to see you back here, Mr Potočník, in your post as Commissioner for the Environment. You are standing in for our Commissioner for Industry – thank you for that, and thank you also for your speech.

I welcome the question put by my colleague, Mr Reul, who is right, Commissioner, to question you on how the Commission views this crucial issue of noncarbon energies and of the financing of new technologies. The world's population is growing. We will need 40% more energy in 2030, and I would add that 80% of this consumer demand will come from countries outside the OECD.

In the face of these major challenges, the solution is not to adopt the ideology of decreasing our energy use or to take refuge in thoughts of the past. The European Union therefore has a duty to intervene, and I would like to say a word about an issue that may divide us, within our political groups, and that is nuclear energy.

When it comes to nuclear energy, we have Member States that have a long tradition in these matters. That does not make the European Union privileged, but it does mean that we have a duty to contribute to the debate and to the financing. Nuclear energy, as we know, is a noncarbon energy, and we need financing,

Commissioner, and particularly that accrued from carbon credits, to invest in research, development and training on all these areas.

We are proposing some amendments to you with the specific aim of improving the resolutions that have been tabled, and I will conclude by saying a word about nuclear byproducts, which are a source of great concern for our fellow citizens. There are two options in the world: longterm storage, which is the United States' chosen option, and we, the European Union, have to choose a different approach, which is recovery by means of recycling. That is the option chosen by Russia, Japan and France.

It is in this context that we who are responsible for safety and security must put our faith in science and in knowledge where all these subjects are concerned.

Teresa Riera Madurell, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (ES) Madam President, Secretary of State and President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, we are all aware that there is already clear consensus over the idea that the faster we establish a green economy, the faster we will emerge from the economic crisis.

A number of studies have calculated that if we achieve the goal of a 20% share of renewable energy sources, it will mean that 2.8 million European workers will be employed in the sector by 2020. Furthermore, it is estimated that two thirds of the new jobs will be created within small and medium-sized enterprises. The key to this, ladies and gentlemen, lies in the development of green technologies.

In order to make this a reality, my Group is in favour of three main objectives. Firstly, we need a real commitment to earmarking resources for the Strategic Energy Technology (SET) Plan. It is not enough to simply regroup and rename the support programmes we already have. We agree that we need to transform our goal into a real increase in the resources devoted to research into renewable energy and energy efficiency. We should do so straight away, in the next review of the financial perspectives and, of course, in negotiations over the new financial perspectives.

Secondly, if we want to create the jobs our economy needs in order to emerge from the crisis, it is vital that we boost the demonstration stage of innovative technologies and make it easier for them to be put into operation in the market.

Finally, the potential creation of green employment cannot be steered in the right direction if we do not have a highly qualified workforce. We need to invest in education and awareness in order to strengthen the ties between the business world and the academic world, and we should promote qualifications of excellence in research and development and in innovation so as to be able to cover any potential gaps in the renewable energies job markets.

Fiona Hall, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Madam President, we can set all the targets under the sun for tackling climate change but we will not reach them, especially the longer-term targets for 2050, unless we invest deeply and systematically in developing and improving sustainable low-carbon technology.

The US is rightly criticised for its failure to sign up to greenhouse gas reduction targets, but the EU is nowhere near the level of investment that the US is at at present. Without proper investment, the EU's sustainable low-carbon investment programme will stall, and that means that hundreds of thousands of jobs which could be created here in the EU, and in regions like my own, the North-East of England, which are already starting to make that transformation to a low-carbon economy, without investment those jobs will go elsewhere to the US and China.

I am disappointed that the Commission drew back from an earlier draft of the SET Plan, where the sources of the identified necessary investment were clearly indicated. Will the Commission now be more explicit, especially about the EUR 1 billion per annum shortfall that the Commissioner has just mentioned?

Finally, it is, of course, important to achieve improvements in nuclear technology, especially with regard to safety of operation and waste management, but my Group takes the view that 'sustainable nuclear fission' is a contradiction in terms. Will the Commissioner rename the sixth European industrial initiative simply the 'nuclear energy initiative'?

Claude Turmes, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Madam President, I think this SET Plan is basically an empty box because there is no money behind it. We really have to think about where the money could come from. What is worse is that the instruments the Commission had – the NER300, the Recovery Plan and certain funds available today at the European Investment Bank – are more prioritised for those so-called low-carbon technologies that are the least efficient and present the highest risk.

In 2008 and 2009, more than 70% of all investments on the market in Europe were already in renewables: wind, solar, biomass. So how can it be that we are designing a SET Plan – and earmarking money at EU level – that basically gives a lower share to renewables than the market is already uptaking today, while diverting the money to carbon sequestration and to nuclear fusion, which is not addressed in this paper but which receives by far the largest share of EU money?

Our problem is that, because of certain lobbies, we do not have the courage to set the right priorities, and I think that even the IEA, which is not a green grass-root organisation, is extremely clear about the priorities. Fifty-five per cent of all CO₂ reductions will come from energy efficiency. Why did we allocate zero euro to energy efficiency in the EU recovery package? Thirty to thirty-five per cent of CO₂ greenhouse gas reductions will come from renewables, while at best only 10% will come from carbon sequestration and 10% from nuclear. That is according to the IEA, not a green grass-root organisation. So, even in Europe, in terms of how we allocate money we are behind what the IEA is telling governments.

The only way out is to set clear priorities. Number one: energy efficiency; number two: renewables, because they reduce carbon without posing a risk; and then the other technologies.

Giles Chichester, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Madam President, I have to express some regret at the obsession on the left side of this Parliament with nuclear energy, which has meant that we have two resolutions before the House today, most of the content of which has much in common except for this issue of nuclear energy, particularly when it is the only proven technology to supply large volumes of ultra low-carbon electricity in Europe.

If we are to wean ourselves off fossil fuels – especially oil and coal – we will need all the low-carbon energy technologies we can get. Many of them are still more potential than production, and we must be realistic about how successful we have been in achieving target levels of energy from renewable sources. The EU has a record of setting very ambitious targets and a 100% record of failing to achieve them. We must do better.

In the mean time we must lose no time in increasing the share of European electricity supplied by nuclear energy. It already produces the largest amount of electricity, but, as we switch to and develop alternative and new technologies, we will need base-load electricity to keep the lights on and, for example, to power electric vehicles.

There is huge potential in new green technologies such as solar thermal from the Sahara and wind farms from the North Sea, not to mention carbon capture and storage and basic improvements in energy efficiency, where – at least on that point – I agree with my Green colleague across the floor, but all of this requires massive investment, and that is the fundamental point about these questions today.

Marisa Matias, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (PT) Madam President, Commissioner, President-in-Office of the Council, we are here to discuss the reinvention of a European energy system through investment in low-carbon technologies.

I think it is one of the most important challenges, as mentioned in the communication. It is one of the challenges we must focus on, but there is no clarification here, so it is important to ask these questions and to seek clarification. It seems that not only is there no financial clarification, but there is also no political clarification.

We speak of energy efficiency, of carbon capture, nuclear energy, bio-fuels, solar energy, and we speak inclusively of energy efficiency as the cheapest way to reduce emissions. It strikes me that there are other, much cheaper ways to reduce carbon emissions which are not even mentioned in this communication, such as, for example, reducing energy consumption, micro-generation, distribution and different forms of distribution, and different projects, which do not just have to be large structures, and access to energy. I believe that here we would certainly contribute towards enhanced financial clarification to select the cheapest plan.

Therefore, as part of this political clarification and this financial clarification, we need to discuss what, in my view, is a vitally important matter, which is that the emphasis is always on public-private partnerships, as if they were the solution to everything.

When we ask where the money comes from, the Commission tells us it comes from wherever it is. I confess that I do not feel more enlightened by being told that the money will come from wherever it is, without saying exactly where it is.

Therefore, in terms of counting on public-private partnerships, which is what systematically happens when we talk about low-carbon technologies, we surely have one certainty: not knowing where the money comes from and knowing that there are public-private partnerships, we know, from the outset, who will pay. It is taxpayers who will pay in the beginning, consumers who, incidentally, are ultimately taxpayers, too. We also know that those that pay less are institutions and private organisations – that they are those who make investments, are paid for it but, in the end, keep the profits for themselves.

Without this clarification, it seems to me that, once again, we are systematically leaving future generations to foot the bill for changing the European energy model.

Christian Ehler (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, in principle, we all agree that the SET plan is to be welcomed. We agree about large tranches of the content, but we have two problems. On the one hand, we will not be able – and I very much address this point to Mr Turmes – to build up pressure together on the Member States and on the Commission if we continue to hold an ideological debate where the subject is always nuclear energy. That is the sticking point in today's votes. We have reached a compromise on the SET plan, and that compromise is that we have specified the criteria according to which we want to support this, and those criteria are clearly defined, namely sustainability, competitiveness and security of supply. We have said that we want to work without limitation to specific technologies and we are again having an ideological debate about nuclear power, which is a discussion that can be held, but which ultimately makes no sense in the context of the SET plan.

I concede to you in respect of the question of what the SET plan can actually achieve. Has the question of to what extent the Member States are prepared to find a coherent energy policy approach actually been resolved? What the Council has put in place today is a series of platitudes. The problems, really, are not so much what we lay down in the SET plan, but how the assorted funds for research, innovation and the money from the SET plan, the issue of demonstration facilities, the issue of the transposal of European directives at national level – how all of this interacts. We are currently at a point where we have to say really clearly that we can produce another SET plan and that we can adopt another SET plan, but what we need now are tangible measures. That being the case, we should not always be arguing over the details. We should increase the pressure on the Commission and the Member States so that something happens in terms of implementation.

Marita Ulvskog (S&D). – (SV) Madam President, wishful thinking is not enough to bring about a changeover to sustainable, renewable energy sources and to a climate-friendly society. Substantial investment is also needed. The private sector must, to a large extent, share the responsibility for funding the basic research and the Member States must also make a greater commitment. In addition, more money needs to be made available from the EU budget.

The budget must quite simply be adapted to conform with the political priorities relating to solar and wind energy, energy efficiency and so on. We need to reprioritise and redistribute funds within the EU budget. This is the only way in which the SET plan and the Members of this House can maintain their credibility.

Chris Davies (ALDE). – Madam President, it is three years since the Council set itself a target of having up to 12 CCS demonstration projects in operation by 2015, and we have not got much to show for it yet.

Yes, we have identified a source of funding and we have now got a draft decision from the Commission, which is awaiting confirmation by Parliament, as to how to use that funding, but it will not be until the end of next year before we are able to identify a project which will qualify for this funding. So the timetable is very tight and meeting that 2015 deadline becomes more and more difficult. There is slippage at every step of the way.

Can I ask the Commission to consider these things. First, that timetable needs to be examined. Can days, can weeks be shaved off it at all? And, in particular, can we put as much pressure as possible on the European Investment Bank to keep within the allocation it has been given in the draft decision?

Second, once Parliament's comitology procedure has been concluded, the Commission should make an announcement about the timetable. It should publish this. That will help ensure that there is a minimum amount of slippage. It will keep everyone working towards a series of set deadlines.

Finally, remember that the biggest single delaying factor is likely to be the application that project developers have to go through to get planning permission for the pipelines and the like to take away CO₂. That could be very lengthy. It could blow the deadline completely out of the window.

So can I ask for a statement from the Commission, insisting that developers seeking European funding start applying for planning permission now. Let them put their money where their mouth is.

Konrad Szymański (ECR). – (PL) Madam President, the resolution which has been presented illustrates very well the dominance of climate policy over energy security in the European Union. It also illustrates clearly the antinuclear prejudice of part of this House. It so happens that nuclear energy is the only commercially proven low-carbon energy source, but in spite of this it is very severely criticised in the resolution. The European Union's limited financial resources are to be invested in select energy sources just because they are sustainable, and this represents a strong market intervention. This policy will certainly limit expenditure on strategic large infrastructure projects which are already needed today, and on support for interconnectors. There simply will not be enough money for energy security. This is why we cannot endorse this resolution today.

Arturs Krišjānis Kariņš (PPE). – (LV) Madam President, Minister, Commissioner, we all know very well that drug addicts are very dangerous, for they will stop at nothing to get their next fix. In fact, we know that any form of addiction is an unwelcome phenomenon that must be eradicated. In the European Union, our economy is addicted, and this addiction is fuelled by imported oil and gas. This is the situation we must alter. We must increase investment in technologies that will directly increase the use and exploitation of solar, wind, water and biomass in the European Union. What is more, there are several powerful arguments why it should be these particular technologies. Firstly, if we do not invest in these technologies, our addiction to oil and gas will only grow and the situation will get worse, for these resources will become ever scarcer throughout the world and prices will go up even more. Secondly, by making these investments, we shall at the same time be able to encourage SMEs in particular, if we give them certain advantages in applying for financial resources and funds. Thirdly, by investing in new technologies, we shall directly overcome the current obstacles to balancing electricity grids with the variable quantities of electricity generated from sun and wind. Ladies and gentlemen, it is time for action. We must lessen our addiction to imported oil and gas, and we must support investment in precisely those technologies that will increase and promote greater use of solar, wind, water and biomass energy resources.

Thank you for your attention.

Britta Thomsen (S&D). – (DA) Madam President, we have reason to be pleased with the SET Plan. Without the EUR 59 billion which are now being invested in sound energy projects, we will not reach our renewable energy target of 20% by 2020. Investment in real and sustainable renewable energy accounts for two thirds of the SET Plan funds. This applies, for example, to photovoltaics, wind turbines and biomass. However, the SET Plan is not only important and right because it ensures us cleaner energy. The SET Plan is also critical to our attempts to put the social and economic crisis behind us. With these massive investments in modern energy technology, we will be able to create hundreds of thousands of new green jobs. We will also be able to make the EU a centre of knowledge when it comes to green and sustainable technology. Let us not forget, however, that these investments come with a responsibility: a responsibility to ensure that many of the people who are currently employed in the energy sector are given the opportunity to retrain and upskill themselves. That is why investment in technology must go hand in hand with investment in people.

Liam Aylward (ALDE). – Madam President, there are two brief points I wish to make. The first relates to the importance of investment in low-carbon technologies and the second to carbon capture in agriculture.

Firstly, in realistic terms, it is essential that the EU focuses its attention and budget towards the Strategic Energy Technology Plan. For the EU to reach its 2020 target figures, there is no doubt that increased targeted investment in low-carbon technologies is essential.

Secondly, there must be increased research and investment in carbon capture and storage as a practical way of combating climate change. Here agriculture can play a key role in carbon sequestration and can contribute to the 2020 targets.

Soil biomasses and natural carbon sinking – carbon in soil – could bring added benefit for farmers by reducing erosion and fertiliser inputs. Further research and investment is required in order to fully utilise agriculture and agricultural land to capture carbon and assist in reaching 2020 targets.

For measurable results to be delivered, innovation and research in low-carbon technologies must be adequately and effectively supported.

Vicky Ford (ECR). – Madam President, I welcome the initiative to talk about investment in low-carbon technology but more specifically about energy-saving and providing more secure and diversified energy supplies. I would like to look in particular at the use of EU funds.

The region I represent already has an EU fund of over EUR 250 million for low-carbon economic growth. Whilst its ambitions are worthy, the performance of this fund in actually making meaningful investments has fallen well below expectations.

The East of England, including Cambridge University, is also home to leading research facilities, and over 250 contracts have been signed in my region for Framework 7 grants. I have seen some excellent innovative research, but there are great questions about complexity, especially for SMEs, bureaucracy, and inflexibility when adapting to developments and science. In some cases there are appalling stories of late payments by the EU itself.

When considering how taxpayers' money is invested in the future, we should look at the lessons of what has already happened and make sure we spend it better in the future.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE). – (RO) Achieving the climate targets set by the European Union depends on devising a strategy supporting a gradual transition to low-carbon industry and the use of sustainable energy.

The use of new technologies can cut energy consumption in buildings by up to 17% and carbon emissions from transport by up to 27%, while introducing smart metering could reduce energy consumption by up to 10%. A standard methodology is required for measuring energy consumption and carbon emissions in order to achieve the optimum public and private energy consumption. With this in mind, we need to have common minimum functional specifications and interoperable smart networks at European level.

The Commission must cofinance as many large-scale projects as possible in order to facilitate the use of smart metering and smart networks as standard, including in Member States which still do not have these technologies.

I would like to ask whether the Commission is intending at the moment to provide additional resources from the EU budget for encouraging SMEs to develop technologies for producing low-carbon, sustainable energy.

Thank you.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) We need an ambitious and smart industrial policy, enabling the European Union to retain both its global competitiveness and jobs and production within the EU. The investments in the development of low-carbon technology will help the European Union overcome the economic crisis and may create roughly 2.7 million jobs by 2020.

The European Union must invest in European initiatives promoting renewable energy sources and their introduction into the European electricity grid, as well as in biofuels and green transport. Rapid results may be achieved through investments in intelligent cities and in energy efficiency in buildings, especially homes.

I urge the Commission and Member States to increase the budgets allocated to residential energy efficiency and, when carrying out the mid-term review of the use of the Structural Funds, to adopt the measures required to ensure a better absorption of the 4% ERDF rate for residential energy efficiency. This will make it possible to increase this rate in the 2014-2020 period.

Thank you.

Zbigniew Ziobro (ECR). – (PL) The discussion on investing in low-carbon technologies is a discussion about methods of adapting the economies of Member States to the requirements for limiting greenhouse gas emissions. Regardless of how climate and weather conditions for the last few months in our continent have been tending to supply arguments to those scientists who are calling into question the influence of man on climate change by CO₂ emissions, we should, none the less, when talking about low-emission technologies in this context, ask the following question: how can the means necessary for the development of clean technologies be ensured, to achieve the maximum effects in the shortest possible time?

I think the system which is being created for support of research and development should be as flexible as possible, to enable resources to be managed in a way which is appropriate to the dynamics of scientific

research. The question arises as to whether, and in what way, it is planned to create suitable mechanisms of support for investment in low-emission technologies?

Finally, I would also like to add that no matter what significant arguments can be found in favour of investing in the development of low-emission technologies, this should not take place at the expense of cohesion policy.

Bogdan Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (PPE). – (PL) Madam President, in the Communication from the Commission of 23 January 2008 entitled ‘Supporting early demonstration of sustainable power generation from fossil fuels’, which is part of the climate and energy package, it was stated that the European Union would support the construction of 10 to 12 carbon dioxide capture and storage demonstration plants. At the end of 2008, the European Parliament took up this matter, too, in a resolution. Item 11 of this document stated that the measures which had been unveiled by the Commission were not sufficient to provide the desired incentives for constructing at least 12 demonstration facilities by 2015, while in item 18 it was considered imperative that at least the 12 demonstration facilities earmarked for assistance should cover all possible combinations of the three carbon dioxide capture and storage technologies.

The financial means are supposed, however, to come from the sale of 300 million allowances for CO₂ emissions in the New Entrants’ Reserve, or what is known as NER300. Consequently, the sum intended for support of construction of the demonstration plants is going to depend on the market price of the allowances. It is estimated that this will be from EUR 7–12 billion. From the proposed decisions of the Commission contained in the motion it can be gathered that support under NER300 will cover six carbon dioxide capture and storage projects in power generation and two in industry.

Does the Council, in cooperation with the Commission, want to support the construction of a further two to four plants, and if so, how?

Roger Helmer (ECR). – Madam President, we have heard a lot of nonsense today about green jobs. The fact is that our obsession with renewables is already driving up the cost of electricity and forcing European citizens into fuel poverty. Higher energy prices mean that energy-intensive businesses in Europe will simply give up and go away, to more favourable jurisdictions. Higher energy prices mean lower growth and higher unemployment, and they cost jobs. I have only seen one formal study into this question of green jobs. That was in Spain, and it demonstrated that, for every single job created in the green sector, 2.2 jobs were lost elsewhere.

If we are really serious about low-carbon electricity, there is only one solution and that is nuclear power. Across Europe we are starting to talk about new nuclear capacity, and that is good. If we want to keep the lights on, we need a nuclear renaissance, and it we need it fast.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE). – (PT) Research and technology play a fundamental role in the development of a low-carbon society. It is crucial to invest in radical social change based on the sustainability of cities, decentralised energy production and the competitiveness of industry. This is an essential policy for a prosperous and sustainable society that is prepared for the challenges of climate change, energy security and globalisation, and that is a world leader in the sphere of clean technologies.

The Strategic Energy Technology Plan aims to contribute to precisely this goal. I welcome the essential guidelines presented in the communication on how to organise the logic of intervention between the public and private sectors, between Community, national and regional financing.

It is, however, essential to increase public funding for scientific research into the field of clean technologies. Europe also needs to create conditions that foster greater private investment in this field. We urgently need to move from words to deeds.

The priorities of the future Financial Perspectives of the EU and the Eight Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development will have to be energy security, the fight against climate change, and the environment. This is the only way we will be able to maintain the competitiveness of our industry, promote economic growth and create jobs.

Patrizia Toia (S&D). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, this is not just a routine debate but it is supposed to be very specific and to ask clear and precise questions – what resources are there and where to get them – and I hope that Parliament is expecting equally clear and precise answers, today and at the forthcoming Councils on 12 and 25 March.

We want to tell the Commission and the Council firmly that the European Union, which has flown the flag for the fight against atmospheric emissions and climate change in front of the world, now has to be consistent if it does not want to lose credibility. It must do everything it can to achieve these goals. We must be well aware that talking about a low-emission economy means a kind of Copernican revolution for the production system; it means changing many things, having clear priorities and political will but, above all, sufficient resources and instruments.

We also know that this Copernican revolution is vital for our production system, European industry, to remain competitive. In many countries, in many research centres and in many universities, the intellectual resources are ready, the capabilities are there and the will is there: it is now time to set things in motion. Everyone has to do it, as the Commissioner and the Council have said: the Member States, entrepreneurs and the private sector have to do it. I believe, however, that the vital task of putting this complex partnership together belongs to the European Union.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE). – Madam President, we all agree that greater energy efficiency is the first step in the chain, but I want in my contribution to draw your attention to the political confusion and anxiety surrounding bio-energy.

I think that this House in particular and the Commission, and Europe in general, ran away from parts of bio-energy when we had the food price hikes of 2007 and 2008. Few of us are talking about the realities for most farmers across Europe now, which is a crisis of confidence because prices have collapsed. Yet there is no coherent political message to them on land use and using their land to grow energy crops.

In Ireland in particular we have the Government running away from this area. Look, what industry needs is political certainty; what politicians fail to deliver is that certainty, and we have reaped the reward for it.

If we are talking about investing in research and there is no uptake of the research because we will not make the right political decisions, we are wasting our time.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (S&D). – (HU) Madam President, Commissioner, financing the changeover to green low-carbon technologies will be particularly difficult in the case of the new Member States. One potential and very important source for Central European and Baltic States would be the use of the emission credits accumulated under the Kyoto Protocol's emissions trading system, thereby profiting from these countries' climate resources. The condition for doing so, of course, would be the creation of a post-Kyoto system or support from the European Council and the Commission in our efforts to get proper value for our remaining climate resources. As rapporteur for biogas, I am well aware of the cost of new technologies, and thus that technological development would be very important. It is very important to pursue this point within the framework of the common agricultural policy, for instance by altering the composition of livestock feed, by introducing ploughing methods other than deep tilling and introducing new, innovative technologies.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE). – (PL) One of the most important priorities enshrined in the long-term strategy of the European Union should be to create an innovative economy, for example by transforming the present energy system using a low-emission model, particularly one that is based on clean carbon technologies. Around 80% of primary energy used in the European Union comes from fossil fuels. Over the past few decades, networks and chains of supply have been perfected in terms of supplying society with energy coming from these very sources. Economic growth and prosperity have been built on oil, coal and gas, and it is difficult to change this from one day to the next.

The European Strategic Energy Technology Plan, which is a pillar of European Union policy on energy and climate, is a good step in the direction of shifting the European Union to an innovative economy, provided, of course, that it takes into account the financing of clean carbon technologies. If Europe wants to achieve ambitious reduction goals economically, it is essential that it increases expenditure on research in the field of clean, sustainable and efficient energy technologies and coordination of the combining of forces, potential and resources in both the public and private sectors.

Industrial revolutions in the past have shown that technology can change our way of life permanently. Currently, we have an unrepeatable and feasible opportunity to change our model of energy production. However, investing in the development and promotion of sources of clean, renewable energy can only be realised as long as the Community ensures a sufficient level of finance and includes these investments in the list of the European Union's strategic goals.

Fiorello Provera, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, in the debate on the European Union's energy choices, one thing is certain: the most significant, cheapest and most sustainable energy source available to us is saved energy. For natural, historical, cultural and economic reasons, mountain regions are a model for reducing energy consumption, in line with the demands of modern life, and they lend themselves to large-scale experimentation with the use of renewable energy sources with low-carbon emissions.

Mountain regions produce almost all of Europe's hydroelectric energy. To give an example, the province where I come from in Italy alone produces 12% of the hydroelectric energy of the entire country. Furthermore, in mountain areas there is historical experience of constructing buildings that are more efficient in terms of saving energy. We have managed to build homes that are completely self-sufficient in terms of both electricity and heating and that even supply more energy than they use, obviously with the use of advanced technologies. The mountains are often a testing ground, and so are the ideal environment for experimenting with better use of biomass, solar energy, geothermal energy, heat pumps and, above all, for overhauling energy distribution systems.

Commissioner, the mountains are full of energy, clean energy: we just need to take it. For this reason we ask the Commission to involve mountain regions in its strategy, to look carefully at their experience and to recognise their right to receive fair compensation for all the renewable energy already supplied by these regions. Article 174 of the Treaty of Lisbon recognises the role of mountains, which is why we are anxiously waiting for an initiative from the Commission to implement this article and for a European mountain policy also in the field of energy.

I therefore call on the Commission to follow the recommendations of the Durnwalder report, in the Committee of the Regions, and to include in the assessment of European territories the energy issues and the production capacity of mountain regions in terms of renewable energy and passive construction.

Mountains, which make up 40% of European territory and are home to 90 million people, have, up to now, been seen as disadvantaged areas: by implementing innovative and consistent energy policies, these regions can overcome this handicap and provide a vital stimulus to achieve the objectives set in the 20-20-20 strategy, showing that energy self-sufficiency is possible, at an acceptable cost, if the firm political will is there.

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE). – (RO) European agriculture is frequently blamed as a major source of global warming. Of course, this perception is not entirely correct. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the contribution which agriculture can make to cutting carbon dioxide emissions.

This topic has certainly been raised already by other speakers. Carbon storage, biomass, as well as investments in reducing the quantities of fertilisers used are just some examples of the way in which agriculture is affected by this problem. This is why, in the context of the discussions on investments in low-carbon technologies, I think that agriculture must be among the priorities and not be completely neglected, as has happened, for instance, in another European strategy. I am referring to the EU 2020 strategy.

Thank you.

Karin Kadenbach (S&D). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, President-in-Office of the Council, I am speaking on my own behalf, and I would like to say to my opposite number: in my view, nuclear technology is no solution and is also not, as far as I am concerned, a renewable energy source.

Our job here is to put in place measures that will benefit our children and our future over the long term. It is therefore very important for us to reduce CO₂ emissions, although such a reduction must not be at the expense of the environment – in other words we must pay very close attention to which measures are funded and which measures are invested in. We must not save CO₂ whilst at the same time ruining our environment.

2010 is the Year of Biodiversity, and it is very important that we also put on record in these papers that all investments, all measures, must also be seen in the light of conserving our environment for our children, for our future and for biodiversity.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Madam President, Commissioner, the debate on the transition to a low-carbon economy must not allow us to forget this fact. The transition will hardly be a smooth process. In a few years we will be confronted with the effects of the shortage and the progressive depletion of the primary source of energy on which we depend: fossil fuels. These fuels also serve as raw materials for many extremely important industries, such as the chemical and pharmaceutical industries.

It is absolutely necessary for mankind that the world's remaining oil reserves be managed very wisely, which means, first and foremost, very sparingly.

It is in this context, that the adoption of the plan called the Oil Depletion Protocol, presented in Uppsala in 2002 and in Lisbon in 2005 by a group of scientists and specialists from several countries who are part of the Association for the Study of Peak Oil and Gas, would be crucial in introducing a plan that prioritises a good and fair management of these resources, the mitigation of their shortage and a controlled transition to other primary sources of energy.

Alajos Mészáros (PPE). – (HU) In my opinion, nuclear energy has not received the place it deserves in this report. The solutions aimed at developing alternative, bio-, wind and solar energy are all lengthy and not at all certain to pay off in the end. Yet we have to move fast in our energy strategy if we recall the effects of last year's gas crisis and the threat of climate changes. Nuclear power is the greatest carbon-free energy source within the European Union, and currently provides one-third of our electricity needs. Its further safe development is simply unavoidable. It would be helpful if we all realised this.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – (GA) Madam President, I listened to the debate and it was very interesting. I have read everything I could about this subject.

I just want to make two points. Number one: the question has been asked, where is the funding going to come from? Number two: how is the research and development to be coordinated?

It seems to me there is an opportunity here for the three institutions of the European Union – experts from Parliament, from the Council, from the Commission – to come together as a steering group. Number one: to source the funding that is required in the public/private partnerships, with possible targets for each country; and number two: to oversee and coordinate research. It should be R&D&D – research, demonstration and delivery – and with some of the funding certainly dependent on a successful outcome, otherwise every professor around Europe will be trying to do research, and it will be uncoordinated at the end of the day.

Zoltán Balczó (NI). – (HU) We have heard beautiful words from the representative of the Council and the Commission about low-carbon technologies, but he failed to address the key issue: where will the financing come from? A certain group of Member States does have a ready source: the former socialist countries have by far exceeded their Kyoto commitments. That is why the European Union could hold its head high at the Copenhagen conference. These countries are entitled to cash in on their carbon dioxide quotas. Yet the Commission and the 15 original Member States want to prevent them from doing so. In the case of Hungary this amounts to several hundred billion forints. In Copenhagen, Hungary and Poland agreed to use these sums for green infrastructures. So these, then, are the sources. So far, this proposition has fallen on deaf ears, indicating that it is true after all: new Member States do indeed count as second-class members of the European Union.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). – (RO) One of the main objectives of the European Union is to develop a low-carbon economy. The intention is that 20% of the total amount of energy produced will be based on renewable sources by 2020.

Romania has a more ambitious target of 24%. According to studies, the Dobrogea region in south-eastern Romania is the number two area in Europe in terms of wind energy potential, after northern Germany. At the moment, the largest wind park on land in Europe is being developed here, which will have 240 wind turbines and generate 600 MW of renewable energy. The first phase of this project will be completed during this year, when the 139 installations will be put into operation. The whole project will be completed in 2011 in the Fântânele and Cogeaşca areas of Constanţa County.

The implementation of this project is important for Romania's energy security as it will help cut energy resource imports.

Thank you.

Antonio Cancian (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that we completely agree on a couple of points, going on what I have heard this morning: efficiency, savings, renewables and new technologies. It is not enough though, ladies and gentlemen, if we do not decisively deal with another two issues.

The first is nuclear: just the word, merely broaching the subject, frightens us. Let us conduct research and try to be responsible in this research. The second is funding: we are afraid to talk about PPPs, as I have heard

this morning. The mere thought that the private sector could play a part in any initiative with the public is almost seen as something alien, shameful and suspicious.

It is unavoidable, ladies and gentlemen, with the financial resources to which we have to refer. Furthermore, it is important for the public to interact with the private sector, since the public must learn to act in a business-like way and in accordance with a sustainable policy.

Christian Ehler (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, I will keep my question short. In the groups, we had hackneyed debates – but justified ones – about ideological issues in the context of technologies. Let us for once, however, come up with a question together that the Council and the Commission must answer. We discussed the SET Plan for a long time. What are the instruments to implement it? What are the time frames? What undertakings are there from the Member States?

Claude Turmes (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Madam President, I am not going to deal with the issue of ideology at this point – we can do that another time – but I do think that the ideologists, really, are on the other side of this Chamber.

The Commission will have two tangible instruments in its hands over the next few weeks. The first is the Risk-Sharing Finance Facility, which still has some money in it. This money could now be used for a renewed push for renewable energies and energy efficiency. I have been told that the Commission's Directorate-General for Research is blocking the money – it does not want to spend this money on energy but would rather spend it on ICT and other areas. Perhaps the Commissioner has something to say in this regard?

The second instrument consists of the 15% – at least – of the funds that are apparently still left in the Economic Recovery Plan, and we, as Parliament, have established that this money must be spent on energy efficiency, in particular on Smart Cities. Can you also tell me anything about this, Commissioner?

Iosif Matula (PPE). – (RO) The fact that we are having a debate today in the European Parliament about investments in low-carbon technology highlights that the European Union wishes to confirm its leading role not only in reducing energy consumption and making it more efficient, but also in ensuring a healthy environment. I believe that our role now is to promote areas such as research and innovation, in order to identify solutions which will provide the foundations for a sustainable European energy system. We must therefore establish the funding requirements in this area, with the aim of increasing the European Union's competitiveness globally.

I think that it is vital for us to focus attention on the specific potential of green energy at regional and local level. The region I come from in Romania offers significant potential for geothermal energy, which is not being utilised sufficiently at the moment. There are various reasons for this, but I think that we must give local authorities an important role in this to encourage them to develop public-private partnerships.

Thank you.

Pedro Luis Marín Uribe, *President-in-Office of the Council.* – (ES) Madam President, I have taken due note of this morning's debate and I am pleased to confirm that many of the concerns voiced by Parliament are shared by the Council. I trust that the conclusions we will adopt tomorrow will allow us to establish a solid basis that meets the concerns expressed and enables us to make immediate progress in the launching of industrial initiatives.

I think we have clear consensus over the fact that those initiatives are fundamental if we are to reduce our energy dependence, improve our efficiency, continue to make technological progress – thereby giving a further boost to European technology – and, of course, meet the challenges of climate change.

These initiatives are also necessary to maintain European competitiveness and create employment. I think I can reassure Mr Helmer: there are other studies apart from the one he has read, some of which were carried out by the Commission itself, showing the positive impact on employment – an effect that will be even greater in the long term.

We therefore propose that a set of common principles and practices be applied, giving direction to existing industrial initiatives. This will, of course, among other things, require us to establish financial tools and public intervention criteria that are needed to support the development of these technologies.

A great deal of emphasis has been placed on financial aspects, and this is also a concern shared by the Council. However, the Council cannot commit to reassigning funds without respecting the Commission's right of

initiative and the powers shared by Parliament in this area. Therefore, in the meantime the current financing agreements will have to be applied.

Nevertheless, we need to insist on the importance of increasing our budgets in order to develop these new technologies, and on the fact that prioritising those increases must be a fundamental element in future discussions within the European institutions, particularly this Parliament.

I can also assure you that the Council has done and will continue to do everything it can to guarantee that the Strategic Energy Technology (SET) Plan has proper funding, within the context of both the current financial framework and future frameworks.

As the Commissioner has already said, I would like to recall that, in general terms, private initiatives – private sources of funding – also have an important role to play; this is an area in which we need to work hand in hand in order to maximise the impact of public financial resources. We need to achieve a large-scale, multiplying effect that enables us to successfully implement these initiatives which are vital to the future of Europe.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, first of all I would like to thank you for this discussion. I followed it very closely and there are many things which we will certainly take into consideration when developing our future work.

Let me start with a short story. After the 1970s oil crisis we saw enthusiasm for innovation adding a competitive edge, even respecting the environment, on an unprecedented scale, but this was short lived. After oil prices had fallen consistently for long enough, investment in R&D and deployment was dropped, market case for new technologies removed, shifting consumption patterns, and we were pushed into a period of tricky comfort where we depended on cheap foreign energy. It was a period with the illusion of sustainability.

By the way, energy R&D investment immediately after the oil crisis was approximately four times higher than currently or some years ago.

And where are we today, after that period of reluctant and irresponsible development lacking a proactive approach? Reacting to climate change threats and trying to solve energy security dependence, so I do believe that a proactive vision is a realistic and necessary approach and not a daydream.

In this context – the things underlined in the paper we adopted a few days ago: the European Union 2020 Strategy – we see no alternative to green growth. We need more clean industries, not more cleaning-up industries. We need incentives, prices, costs and the right signals. We need to focus on energy efficiency; we need to focus, if you like, on resource efficiency, which is one of the major things included in EU 2020.

I shall turn now to the second issue, which is the SET Plan that we are discussing. All the estimates presented in the SET Plan for the financing required are based on technology road maps. This was a very serious piece of work. If you look at the proposals, what we envisage, how we estimate the financing needed for the future, you will find the following figures: wind: 6; solar: 16; bio: 19; CCS: 13; nuclear: 7; smart grids: 2; fuel cells and hydrogen: 5; Smart Cities: 11; European Energy Research Alliance: 5, and basic research: 1. If you add that up, it comes to 75.

I would remind you that there is a figure of 7 for nuclear. I have to be fair. Fusion is not included, and fusion is, again, a serious figure which should come, but if we look at this picture I think that our message from the Commission side on where we should put the bulk of our investment is pretty clear.

The next issue is the sources of finance and the road maps. The main sources, as I said in my introduction, will have to come from where the main sources are, and that is industry and the Member States. This means the European Union budget, current and future financial perspectives, the European Energy Programme for Recovery, the European Union Emissions Trading Scheme and, of course, use of the other instruments that exist, and the European Investment Bank especially should be considered in this respect.

There is a serious question of the structure of the investment for the various initiatives proposed. I think it is obvious that the internal structure of public and private investment will not be the same because of the market proximity, because of the market failures you face in various types of technologies, which would need to be addressed, but I do believe that what is in front of you is a serious case, especially when you start discussing the next financial perspective, and that we have to rethink what our priorities are and how we should invest in the future.

The next thing I would like to mention is that we will start all but one initiative – the Smart Cities, which came later, on your initiative, and which talks predominantly about resource efficiency – during 2010, but do not think that the things we are talking about here are not ongoing already: they are, especially in research. The Research Alliance has been working for a few years on this item already.

The last thing I would like to mention is that, with the SET Plan, we are actually starting something very specific at European Union level. You know that, during my previous mandate, I fought very hard for a European research area. At European level we deal with approximately five per cent of research money, so unless we join our forces at EU level – meaning Europe level – and avoid duplicating our efforts, we cannot count on real success. Do not look only to the European budget. We should put the money together to step up our research capacity.

The SET Plan is the best example we currently have of joint programming at EU level. Other activities are also coming, and rightly so, but I think we should not underestimate what is happening here. Here we are talking about public-public-private partnerships, which are very necessary and one of the issues to which I would draw your attention for the future. There is also the Financial Regulation where you will discuss it. It has to allow risk-taking if we seriously want these questions to be addressed.

I think we are behind one of the major new developments in Europe when we talk about the SET Plan, about joint programming, which is behind this. We have here the European Energy Research Alliance – the best research organisations opened outward – which is already working together today on all these major issues.

My final message is that I think it is our major duty to put our political weight behind this programme.

President. – I have received two motions for resolution⁽¹⁾ in accordance with Rule 115(5) of the Rules of Procedure to wind up the debate.

– The debate is closed.

The vote will take place at 12.00 on Thursday, 11 March 2010.

Written Statements (Rule 149)

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), in writing. – (PT) Although I acknowledge that this Commission communication aims to speed up the development of new technologies with higher potential for low-carbon emissions through greater energy efficiency and the utilisation of renewable energy, I regret that the European regions still lack a more defined role in this strategy.

It is necessary to guarantee regional authorities the correct financing, for example ensuring financing during the testing phase of pilot projects, or investment during the research and testing phase of renewable energy projects.

I believe that it is important to include, for example, geothermal energy. This is a renewable energy source with great potential for expansion in volcanic regions, that is particularly important for remote and island regions of the Union, and for which no goals have been set.

In this context, public and private investment must be increased by developing energy technologies so as to reach the desired goals of a low-carbon economy and also to help overcome the market failures referred to in the climate and energy package.

András Gyürk (PPE), in writing. – (HU) I think it is significant that the European Commission, when drawing up its Strategic Energy Technology Plan, took into consideration the amount of support needed for research and development of green technologies. This is all the more true because, at the present stage, solar energy, bio-energy and hydrogen technology are in most cases not yet commercially profitable. As Steven Chu, the United States Secretary of Energy rightly pointed out, research advances of Nobel Prize calibre are needed in order to make green technologies competitive with traditional fossil fuel technologies. However, the serious flaw of the green technology plan is that we have no idea what EU funds will be used to carry it out. Looking at the cost of EUR 16 billion deemed necessary for solar energy research, or the EUR 5 billion estimated for hydrogen-related technology, this cannot be a minor consideration. At this point there are no indications that the next seven-year financial framework will provide increased resources for research in green technologies. We are well aware that support from public funds is no substitute for the efforts of private

⁽¹⁾ See Minutes.

investors. Nevertheless, the European Union and Member States must boost the funds devoted to green technology research. The eventual revenues from an emission trading system may serve as a good basis for this. The stakes are not negligible. We cannot allow the plans for energy policy and climate protection to suffer the same fate as the Lisbon Strategy with its contradictory outcomes.

Jim Higgins (PPE), *in writing*. – To make Carbon Technology a practical reality we need to address the shortage of engineers and other high-skilled personnel designing and producing advanced technologies. We can do this by setting up or intensifying training schemes or scholarships to ensure that workers' skills are upgraded in time for economic recovery. We need to ensure a supply of highly qualified and well-educated workers with the right combination of both theoretical and practical skills. We also need to tackle persisting barriers to mobility within the EU, in particular for researchers and highly skilled people and to address the issue of EU-wide recognition of engineers' qualifications. Financial markets & institutions tend to be cautious about investing, particularly where SMEs are concerned number of EU schemes supporting innovation, although they need to be better synchronised and coordinated from both supply and demand perspectives. We need to facilitate cooperation between SMEs and research institutes, promoting IPR (Intellectual Property Rights) and technology transfer. EEI businesses themselves need to become more proactive in supporting cluster initiatives and joining clusters. We also need to stimulate research and innovation through tax incentives or innovation vouchers, and by improving the conditions for risk capital investment, for instance for business angels or cross-border venture capital.

Wojciech Michał Olejniczak (S&D), *in writing*. – (PL) Global climate warming caused by human activity is a fact. Combating this process and its negative effects is the need of the hour. One way of dealing with these problems is to use clean and renewable energy sources. However, for these energy sources to play a significant role in the European energy system, two conditions have to be met. Firstly, we need an increase in funding available for research into their development. Secondly, we need an increase in funding for investments which implement the latest low-emission technologies. Investing in the development of the low-emission technologies contained in the European Strategic Energy Technology Plan is important from the point of view of the entire EU. In particular, however, it is important for countries whose energy industry – for historical reasons – emits large amounts of CO₂. One such country is Poland. Improving and developing technologies for carbon dioxide capture and storage (CCS) is a matter of vital significance for the whole of the Polish economy.

3. Effects of the Xynthia storm in Europe (debate)

President. – The next item is the Commission statement on the effects of storm Xynthia in Europe.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, only two weeks after the dreadful disaster on Madeira, the Commission was again shocked and saddened by the death and devastation caused by storm Xynthia in France and other European countries.

I wish to express my personal sympathy to all those that are suffering as a consequence of the disaster. The Commission's condolences go in particular to the families and friends of those that have lost their lives.

Through the monitoring and information centre for civil protection, the Commission has been monitoring the events caused by storm Xynthia closely and has offered to set the mechanism for EU assistance in action. Fortunately, the French rescue services were able to respond to the disaster with their own means and did not request the activation of the mechanism.

Together with the relevant authorities in the Member States, the Commission is now exploring all the possibilities and instruments that could be available at EU level to assist financially in overcoming the disaster and to help return to normal living conditions as soon as possible.

Two days ago, Commission President Barroso met French President Sarkozy to discuss the situation. Yesterday he also met with a number of Members of this House from different countries. One week ago my colleague, Mr Hahn, Commissioner responsible for regional policy and the Solidarity Fund, visited the most hard-hit regions in France – La Rochelle and l'Aiguillon-sur-Mer – and met with national and regional authorities.

On Madeira, where disaster struck two weeks earlier, the authorities and rescue services have been able to make enormous progress in combating the effects of the flooding disaster. Commissioner Hahn visited Madeira during the past weekend to get a first-hand impression and to discuss with the local authorities the way forward.

The European Union Solidarity Fund was set up in 2002 specifically as the instrument at EU level to financially assist EU Member States affected by major natural disasters, if certain conditions are met. France has already declared its intention to apply for assistance from the Solidarity Fund. I should point out that the Regulation governing the Solidarity Fund normally allows its mobilisation only for what are known as 'major disasters', where the damage at national level exceeds the threshold of 0.6% of gross national income, or EUR 3 billion at 2002 prices. For France this currently means the damage would have to exceed approximately EUR 3.4747 billion at current prices.

However, in exceptional circumstances and if specific criteria are met, the fund may also be used for smaller 'extraordinary regional disasters', in particular where they concern outermost regions like Madeira.

The French authorities are currently carrying out an assessment of the damage and of its repercussions for the economy and the living conditions of the population.

These are the essential elements for the application, which has to reach the Commission within 10 weeks of the disaster. That means before 9 May. After it is received it will be examined by the Commission as quickly as possible. The Commission services, in particular DG Regional Policy, are granting all possible assistance and guidance in preparing the application. Contacts at expert level are well established with the French authorities, thus allowing effective progress.

Please be aware, however, that aid from the Solidarity Fund cannot be paid out immediately. The Solidarity Fund should not be misunderstood as an emergency instrument. It is a financial instrument to help bear the financial burden of emergency operations. As such, a possible grant could be used retroactively for emergency operations from day one of the disaster.

The funding for the Solidarity Fund is raised through an extra effort of the Member States outside the normal European Union budget. It has to be approved by Parliament and the Council through an amending budget procedure.

As you know, the whole procedure – from the moment the application is made to paying out the grant – inevitably takes several months. The Commission is, however, making every effort to keep this time span as short as possible.

As regards the Structural Funds, in particular the ERDF, this can of course not be used for immediate emergency operations. France and the Commission have, however, started discussing the options and possible necessary programme modifications which might be instrumental for longer-term reconstruction and for investment in businesses affected by the flood.

One last point, which Members of this House already raised during the debate on Madeira two weeks ago. The Commission will use the current political momentum to attempt to unblock the proposal for an amended Solidarity Fund regulation at the Council. Parliament widely supported this proposal, and I feel this is the right moment to take common action vis-à-vis the Council again.

Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, during the evening of 27-28 February, storm Xynthia hit the coasts of Charente-Maritime and Vendée, my region, particularly hard. Fifty-three people died, a dozen people are unaccounted for, and hundreds of people have lost their homes.

These are significant losses, and they are compounded by serious problems in relation to infrastructure. I am referring in particular to the dams, to the railway lines, to the sewage networks, to the electricity networks, to the telecommunication networks and to the entire system of small and medium-sized enterprises, in particular in the maritime sector, in the aquaculture sector and in the agricultural sector, with 45 000 hectares submerged by salt water, since this was a flood that originated in the sea.

This is damage on a significant scale. This is damage of which the consequences will continue to be felt over time, since some farming land will now be unfit for use for several years.

I therefore call here for the European Union to show solidarity and, of course, for this European Union Solidarity Fund to be made available in the best possible conditions and in the quickest possible time, because we cannot tell our fellow citizens that the funds will wait and that the problems cannot be resolved here and now. Together, we need, after the visit by the Commissioner – whom I sincerely thank for going and seeing for himself the scale of the disaster, and I know that he too has been deeply affected by it – unite our efforts to improve the use of this fund, so that progress can be made more quickly. We are always complaining that

Europe is too far removed from our fellow citizens; let us show them here, today, that we are capable of reacting quickly. I regret that the Council is not here to help us with this regulatory amendment. In any case, rest assured that we need it and that our fellow citizens are expecting it.

IN THE CHAIR: MR ROUČEK

Vice-President

Edite Estrela, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (PT) Mr President, on behalf of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, I would like to extend our heartfelt condolences to the families of the victims of the natural disasters that have hit Portugal, Madeira, France and Spain.

Last week, a delegation from my Group went to Madeira, visited the areas most affected by the catastrophe and met with the regional and local authorities and business, industrial, trade and farmers' associations.

We retain striking images and messages from what we saw and heard. We learnt of entire families who died in their own homes; we heard dramatic testimonies about people being pulled under the water, never to be seen again. Entire houses moved from one side of the street to the other, and cars still containing their passengers were swept away from the streets into the sea.

However, the courage of Madeira's people in overcoming adversity was equally striking. I will never forget the pictures of determination of those who, despite losing their businesses, their homes and their possessions, refused to give up. On the contrary, they got straight to work, ready to start again from scratch. In just a few days, tonnes and tonnes of stone, earth and other debris were removed from the centre of the city of Funchal.

The national, regional and local authorities joined efforts so that life on the island could go back to normal. Therefore, it is important to announce that tourists can return to Madeira. Its natural beauty and the warmth of its people await us.

The people of Madeira are now also awaiting the solidarity of the European institutions to be able to rebuild the roads, bridges and public buildings that were destroyed. The tradesmen, industrialists and farmers also need our support in rebuilding their lives and contributing to the economic development of the region.

I am greatly pleased, Commissioner, to hear that the Commission, as well as Parliament and the Council, is determined to unblock the Cohesion Fund – the new proposal that has already been adopted by Parliament – so that new rules that are better adapted to the real needs of the public can be implemented.

As you know, Commissioner, it is also necessary that the other structural funds are restructured and redeployed to the most affected areas, because special situations require special solutions.

Giommaria Uggias, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe would like to join with the declarations of sympathy for the victims of storm Xynthia, which has affected several areas of Europe. We must take action and in this regard I appreciated the serious declarations made today by Commissioner Potočník, whose expertise I value and whose commitment I must acknowledge. In this regard, I call on him to make the necessary amendments to the Solidarity Fund, reminding him though that Parliament already adopted the measure by a large majority in 2006. Given these situations and given these deaths, we can only reiterate how critical it is to adopt measures such as this.

However, at the same time, Mr President, we must act on several fronts and firstly review all the development and regional planning programmes and update them in view of their environmental impact, also including an assessment of the effects on the ground. We also need to invest substantial sums to establish long-term action aimed at implementing a disaster prevention strategy. This is not an optional or fanciful choice, but a necessary choice if we want disasters such as those we are discussing today not to have such tragic consequences.

However, there are also economic reasons, if we want to limit ourselves solely to this aspect, which oblige the institutions to take action in terms of prevention. While we are claiming in the resolution that it is necessary to pledge substantial amounts to repair the damage, we must shift our attention and our action to investments and initiatives for environmental protection, reforestation and the protection of vegetation, given that these will reduce the costs of repairing environmental damage.

We must learn from disasters of this kind – modern man must learn from them – that not everything can be controlled but that everything can be limited if adequate precautions are taken. We must do it, Mr President, also in memory of victims such as those who, in recent days and in recent weeks, unfortunately, throughout Europe have characterised the reality of our regions.

Raül Romeva i Rueda, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (IT) Mr President, I would also like to express my deepest sympathy – my own and that of my Group – and my solidarity with the affected regions, while regretting the serious economic consequences of these disasters and offering in particular our condolences to the families of the victims. It is also important to emphasise the need for national, regional and local authorities now to focus on effective prevention policies and to pay more attention to adequate practices and legislation relating to land use.

It is precisely for this reason that there are two amendments that we tabled as a group, because, in our view, they are missing in the joint resolution. The first states: whereas in France construction has been authorised on flood plains and on natural wetlands; whereas building speculation has encouraged the construction of buildings in vulnerable areas. For us this is a vital aspect to make progress.

The second amendment calls for cofinancing by Community funds for implementing these plans, in particular the Structural Funds, the EAFRD, the Cohesion Fund and the European Solidarity Fund, to be subject to sustainability measures. For us this is vital in ultimately deciding whether or not we will vote in favour of the resolution.

João Ferreira, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (PT) Mr President, our first words can only be of condolence and solidarity for the families of the victims of this catastrophe. We welcome the European Union's words of solidarity for the affected regions and towns. It is important now to make this solidarity tangible, by quickly mobilising the necessary means and resources to relieve the damage caused by bad weather.

In the past years, the Member States have been hit by a considerable number of catastrophes, as demonstrated by the 62 requests to mobilise the Solidarity Fund, made by a total of 21 countries, in only its first six years of existence.

The damage caused by these catastrophes is hard to assess, particularly because of the loss of human life. In any case, the economic and social costs are almost always very significant.

It is in this context that prevention will have to play a more important social role, and become an increasingly important phase in the catastrophe management process. It is important to develop cooperation and solidarity in this area within the European Union. First of all, by creating a financial framework suitable for prevention that will support the implementation of protection measures for the public, the environment and the climate by the Member States.

The recipients of special aid must be, amongst others, such actions as the correction of potentially dangerous situations, the protection of the most risk-prone areas, the reinforcement of early warning systems in the Member States and the establishment and reinforcement of existing connections between the various early warning systems.

As it has already been said here, the sensible utilisation of land, economic and social development that is in harmony with nature, and strengthened cohesion in the European Union are also vital factors for the prevention of catastrophes.

Bruno Gollnisch (NI). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, several European regions have been hit by some exceptional natural meteorological phenomena, which have resulted in huge material, economic, agricultural and environmental damage, and have sadly claimed too many human lives.

I dare to hope, Commissioner, that beyond your due condolences, the European Solidarity Fund, a European activity that in this case is useful, will be able to be implemented quickly and flexibly in both France and Madeira, just as it has been – as someone said – in other European countries, to help my compatriots in Vendée and Charente-Maritime restore their vital infrastructure and services.

It is my understanding from what you have said that the French Government has not yet referred this matter to you, and I am very surprised at that. However, I must say that there are some aspects to the way in which certain people are exploiting these events that I find quite intolerable.

Firstly, this compulsive need to link the natural disasters that we are suffering to so-called global warming. No matter what political or pseudo-scientific claims we may be fed, they will not dictate the weather and the tides any more than they will prevent earthquakes.

The second is the systematic search for culprits and easy scapegoats. The Xynthia disaster in the west of France is due to the very rare combination of two events: the storm itself, of course, and some unusually high tides, which led to the collapse of the dams.

Controversy has erupted over the building permits granted by the mayors, who have been made personally responsible for the deaths that have occurred in their municipalities. However, no one – not the *département*, the region, the public services, the town planners or the architects – objected to these building permits requested by individuals.

The elected representatives of the region, and in particular in the small municipalities, are quite rightly held in high regard by their fellow citizens. They shoulder a great deal of responsibility for virtually nothing, they have a remarkable sense of the general interest, they are coping with ever more complex duties, for which Europe is partly responsible, and they have also been completely abandoned by the public authorities, and I was anxious to point this out here.

Lambert van Nistelrooij (PPE). – (NL) Mr President, the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) endorses the resolution and advocates that we convey appropriate expressions of condolence and solidarity and take direct action. There are a few points I would like to add to that. First of all, I think it is excellent that the Commission has stepped into the breach and that Mr Hahn is also considering how he might be able to alter his operational programmes. That also bodes well for the short term.

However, the actual problem lies in the Solidarity Fund. How has the Council been able to get away for years with holding up action by Parliament to make the Solidarity Fund more flexible? In my opinion, it is really a very good thing that Mr Potočník has been so unambiguous about the fact that the Commission will now be taking the initiative. The Spanish Presidency really ought to be here today in order to confirm that. Now is the time to act and Parliament is extremely unhappy about this hold-up.

However, there is also a second dimension to this issue. I come from the Netherlands. Most of the Netherlands is situated below sea level. As the spring flooding of 1953 is still very vivid in our memories, we know that it is vital to look ahead. We know that safety and preventative measures have to go hand in hand with development in these regions, that is, development of any activities that have an impact on the coast. And that is definitely an achievable aim. We in the Netherlands have now come up with a plan, a delta plan, to reinforce our coastal defences and we are also looking into other matters where it is imperative that we link safety with economic development.

By way of conclusion, let me add that in 2008 an initiative was taken in the French coastal town of Saint Malo to assemble all coastal regions under the auspices of the United Nations, in conjunction with the OECD. The United Nations now has a disaster prevention plan for coastal regions and it is that world-wide perspective that is so very important. The European Parliament has a pilot project for the 2009-2010 period and we have supported our regions' participation in it, by providing funding, amongst other means. The world-wide dimension is something that we have to get on the agenda here in the upcoming period.

Bernadette Vergnaud (S&D). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to begin by expressing my deepest sympathy and solidarity with the victims of the Madeira floods and of storm Xynthia.

The necessary questions must be asked about the worrying increase in these destructive meteorological phenomena, and about the role played by climate change and the urgent need to find solutions. For now, it is a case of providing urgent solutions to the populations rocked by these disasters. Of course, public and private insurance providers must be responsive but, when it comes to the destroyed infrastructure and rebuilding the areas concerned, European solidarity must be expressed.

That is why the French Government has requested aid from the EU Solidarity Fund, created in 2002, which I hope will be granted quickly and meaningfully. This is the thrust of the two letters that I have sent to the Commission since 1 March in my capacity as an elected representative for the west of France region and which I had the opportunity to discuss, last Thursday, in La Rochelle, with Commissioner Hahn, whom I sincerely thank for being so responsive.

Commissioner Hahn agreed that the mechanism was complex and difficult to implement. Well, we have to conclude that it could have been made more flexible if the Council had not incomprehensibly blocked the review of the operation of this fund as adopted by a very large majority of MEPs in May 2006. I therefore hope that the Spanish Presidency will break the deadlock on this text so that the system can be made more effective.

In more immediate terms, I call on the Commission to authorise a oneoff increase in cofinancing via the ERDF and ESF regional funds for projects in the regions affected, within a time frame that will enable their economies to recover by summer.

Lastly, this aid should not be used to rebuild in such a way that the same tragic environmental and town planning mistakes are made; rather, it should be used in a considered way, so as to prevent as far as possible a repeat of such tragedies.

François Alfonsi (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, following the disaster that has struck the French coast only a few weeks after Madeira, our group has tabled some amendments so that our Parliament, as well as expressing its solidarity, will denounce those responsible. For European citizens have not died and others have not lost everything in these disasters simply because the elements were unleashed. This also happened because some very grave mistakes were made in allowing the coastlines and riverbanks to become built up. These mistakes are the fault of the Member States, of their laws, which are very inadequate, of their authorities, which are too lax, and of their governments, which are too unaccountable.

Having allowed building to take place in flood zones is no less serious than having permitted and encouraged the consumption of tobacco or asbestos over the years, even though people were dying and it was very clear that that was the reason why. Before Xynthia there was Madeira, and before Madeira there was Sicily; tomorrow, there will be other disasters. If the European Parliament does not raise its voice, it in turn will be accountable for the disasters of the future. The European Union must show its solidarity, but it must also demonstrate a sense of responsibility.

Patrick Le Hyaric (GUE/NGL). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, like everyone here, our thoughts are first and foremost with the populations, with the bereaved families and with those who have lost everything as a result of storm Xynthia.

One of the lessons to be learnt from this disaster will have been, once again, the usefulness of the services of the Member States, of the municipalities, of the departments, of the regions, including the public services and the civil protection services, which have demonstrated their effectiveness. As we all agree, today we must urgently help the families to repair and to rebuild, but we must rebuild in a different way, by taking account of nature and of human beings. To do so, we must encourage the insurance companies, which are swimming in profits, to reimburse people for the damage caused.

On the other hand, given the exceptional nature of the disaster that has hit these regions, the European Union, in cooperation with the Member States, must take action on a much greater scale and more quickly, not least by harnessing the European Solidarity Fund, and it must do so in a more flexible manner than the one you have certainly just described, Commissioner. Indeed, the destruction of homes and businesses, and the sterilisation of farming land are probably impossible to quantify using our traditional criteria.

On the other hand, we will also have to combine the regional funds and the ESF Fund to help the regions get back on their feet. Beyond that, it is important to learn every lesson from what has just happened and to take action to prevent such disasters or to limit the damage of such climatic phenomena. The issue of building in flood zones and of combating real estate speculation along the coastline must be completely reexamined in connection with the balances of nature, farming activities, aquaculture, oyster farming and fishing, which European policies all too often destroy.

That is why I propose that the European Union, in cooperation with the Member States and the regions, should establish a consistent sustainable reconstruction and development plan that takes account of the geography, environment, biodiversity and activities along the coastline.

Lastly, there must be an opportunity to establish a common prevention, monitoring and warning system by which swift, solidarity-based assistance can be provided to the populations.

Maurice Ponga (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, as my colleague Mrs Morin-Chartier and the other Members have said, on 27 and 28 February the violent storm Xynthia battered several French regions, claiming 53 lives and causing huge material damage.

The storm was exceptionally intense; it caused devastating floods along the French coast. After Madeira, Europe has once again been affected. Brittany, the region of my colleague and friend, Mr Cadec, has been severely affected. A state of natural disaster has thus been declared in three French regions: Brittany, Poitou-Charentes and Pays de la Loire.

In the face of these disasters, the European Union must demonstrate its responsiveness and express its solidarity. Words and a resolution alone will not enable us to support the victims of these disasters; we must also and above all provide financial aid.

I therefore call on the European Commission – and my colleague Mr Béchu supports my request – to swiftly release the EU Solidarity Fund so as to help the disaster areas cope with the damage.

This disaster shows that Mr Barnier's proposal to create a European civil protection force is relevant. Europeans must take action together, since more and more disasters are occurring and they are affecting our European territories and, in particular, our most isolated and vulnerable regions, such as the islands in the Indian Ocean and the Caribbean islands.

Ricardo Cortés Lastra (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would first of all like to express my solidarity to the families of the victims affected by storm Xynthia.

Last week, I had the opportunity to visit Madeira with a delegation from the Committee on Regional Development of Members from the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament. It was the first time that a European delegation had had the opportunity to be there on the ground and to meet the authorities and people from the island.

The storms that hit Madeira killed more than 40 people and wounded or displaced hundreds more. Economic losses are estimated at EUR 100 million with 900 businesses and more than 3 500 workers directly affected.

The priority now is to rebuild infrastructure, ensure that the situation returns to normal and, above all, rebuild Madeira's image abroad and regain people's trust in its tourism industry, thereby stimulating its economy and development.

A number of adverse weather conditions, particularly storm Xynthia, have also affected Spain, especially the areas of Andalusia and the Canary Islands, as well as western France and other countries.

These major disasters have caused enormous economic damage and require an urgent, speedy and efficient response from the European Union; we therefore need to mobilise the necessary tools in order to tackle this kind of disaster.

Commissioner, this is an extraordinary situation that requires extraordinary measures.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE). – (RO) The incidence and extent of the calamities and natural disasters which we have been facing recently are alarming. The time has come for the proposal made in 2006 by Michel Barnier about creating a European civil protection force to be put into practice.

There is also an urgent need to find a solution for kick-starting the review of the European Solidarity Fund Regulation. Based on its position in 2006, Parliament has approved the amendment to the regulation with the aim of creating the opportunity for a rapid, effective response, when a request is made by Member States. The lowering of the threshold for mobilising the Fund and the provision of a rapid payment based on a preliminary assessment are extremely important measures included in the revised form of the regulation.

Therefore, I ask the Council to unblock the dossier on the review of the European Solidarity Fund regulation, to request its immediate review and not to reject the new regulation.

Thank you.

Karin Kadenbach (S&D). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, in October last year I had the opportunity, as part of a delegation from the Committee on Regional Development, to see all the wonderful things that are being done with EU funds on Madeira, for which reason I, too, feel personally very affected by this disaster. I want to express my sympathy to the family members affected, but also to those who, in the space of just a few hours, lost everything that they had spent their lives building up.

At this time in particular, the European Union is under the microscope, and the Solidarity Fund was set up for precisely this kind of difficult situation, as the people of Madeira and France now need not only our sympathy but also, more than anything, our financial assistance.

The disaster in France and on Madeira has also been intensified by the fact that people have perhaps been too ambitious in their attempts to control the natural world and have attempted to lead their lives by overruling the laws of nature. The fact that that is not possible in the long term has been demonstrated very painfully here again.

What this means is that all funds must be used in such a way that they guarantee security, prevention and sustainability, and there must be special attention paid to this.

Agustín Díaz de Mera García Consuegra (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, firstly I would like to express my solidarity and condolences to France and Portugal, particularly to La Rochelle and Madeira; secondly, may I express my solidarity with my own country, particularly Andalusia and the Canary Islands, which have been affected by these major storms. However, I must make a severe criticism of the European Union Solidarity Fund.

The Solidarity Fund is obsolete and has not taken account of this Parliament's resolution of 2006. It no longer has any value whatsoever. The figures given – 0.6% of GDP and EUR 3 billion – do not correspond to what this situation demands, for this is no longer just an emergency but also a reconstruction effort. We have faith in the Spanish Presidency and we therefore call on it to provide the impetus needed to reform the Solidarity Fund.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE). – (PT) Mr President, I will start by expressing my most heartfelt condolences to all the families of the victims of Xynthia, especially in France and Spain. Nobody would have expected that just a week after what happened in Madeira this storm would hit the coasts of France, Spain and, especially, the Canary Islands with such violence.

Last Saturday, I had the opportunity to accompany Mr Hahn, who was in Madeira visiting the most affected areas and was able to see for himself the level of destruction that took place on the ground. Tomorrow, the President of the Commission, Mr Barroso, will do the same. The fact that they are doing this, and personally witnessing the level of destruction, makes them privileged witnesses of what happened and focuses people's attention on what is most important now: urgent aid.

It is essential that Parliament be able to commit itself to working quickly to review the structure of the Solidarity Fund, simplifying it and sending aid faster so that we can quickly provide relief to people from whom we cannot request more time.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE). – (RO) I welcome the initiative supporting the European Parliament's resolution on the major natural disasters which have taken place in the autonomous region of Madeira and the effects of the storm Xynthia in Europe. Allow me to express my sympathy to those who have been affected and my appreciation to all those who have helped provide the intervention after these disasters.

I believe that Europe's regions must be given far more financial support to help implement the measures for preventing these disasters. The European Union can make improvements and develop complex systems for analysing the causes of disasters in order to devise the most effective measures for preventing them. I think that measures specifically aimed at this can be included for every macro-region in Europe. I am thinking at the moment, even though it is not specifically referred to in this resolution, of the EU's Danube Strategy, given that this river has been a source of natural disasters in the recent past, in 2002 and 2004.

Furthermore, the complementary use of all the resources available in the most accessible manner possible will facilitate the establishment of economic, social and territorial cohesion, providing a platform for acts of solidarity in the event of such disasters.

Thank you.

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I come from a small village, with approximately 500 inhabitants, which was severely hit by floods just two years ago. It was actually a pure miracle – or, if you wish, lucky – that there were no human casualties. At that time we benefited greatly from the same Solidarity Fund that we are talking about. I fully understand the feelings of the people on the ground. They are also looking for solidarity from all around the European Union – solidarity which is fast and efficient.

That is why I think it is of the utmost importance that we focus on the Solidarity Fund Regulation. As you know, the Commission proposal for an amendment to the European Union Solidarity Fund Regulation dates back to 2005. This proposal concerns mostly the extension of the fund to disasters other than natural ones. However, it also includes elements that might have been relevant in the case of Xynthia as well – a proposal to lower the thresholds and the possibility of paying advances of the expected aid.

There have been signals from several Member States lately – including from France – that they may reconsider their negative position. Together with Parliament, the Commission intends taking a new initiative very shortly vis-à-vis the Council and its Spanish Presidency, to unblock the dossier.

I also agree with the remark that we should do our utmost to be better prepared. The frequency and intensity of disastrous events is clearly increasing, and this is worrying. So I think that being better prepared is of the utmost importance. In this context, the Cohesion and Structural Funds should play their role also. There are also other possibilities which can be explored. I have already mentioned the Structural and Cohesion Funds. Also the Rural Development Fund can be redirected but of course only at the request of the Member State.

I would like to thank you for your support and I would also like to thank you in the name of my colleague, Johannes Hahn, who has responsibility for this area.

President. – The debate is closed.

Written Statements (Rule 149)

Alain Cadec (PPE), in writing. – (FR) On 27 and 28 February, the violent storm Xynthia battered several French regions. It claimed 53 lives and caused huge material damage, including, in particular, serious flooding. After the disaster in Madeira, Europe was hit once again. My region, Brittany, has been severely affected, and a state of natural disaster has been declared in three departments, just as it has in the Poitou-Charentes and Pays de la Loire regions. I should like to express my full solidarity with the families affected and with the victims of the disaster. The European Union as a whole must show its responsiveness and its solidarity by means of a financial aid package and support measures aimed at reconstruction. Mr Béchu joins me in requesting emergency aid. Today, the financial resources of the Solidarity Fund seem difficult to implement. It must be acknowledged that Parliament has been calling for more effective and swifter use of the EU Solidarity Fund since 2005. The Commission and the Council must facilitate the swift release of this fund for the affected regions. This disaster shows that the Barnier report on the creation of a European civil protection force – EuropeAid – makes perfect sense and would enable us to develop a more effective response to disasters.

Diogo Feio (PPE), in writing. – (PT) In recent weeks, two natural disasters of tragic proportions hit Europe and its Member States, leaving behind a trail of death and destruction and causing damage costing tens of thousands of euro.

We will not forget the dramatic images from Madeira at the end of February – which I watched with particular sadness, because it was a tragedy affecting an island that I know well – or the dramatic report of the path of Xynthia through several areas in Europe.

On this occasion, besides expressing my sincere concern for all those who were affected by these tragedies, I urge the Commission to act swiftly in the relief effort to the most affected regions. This must be done not only by mobilising the European Union Solidarity Fund as urgently and flexibly as possible and with the greatest possible funding, but also by utilising all the instruments and mechanisms made available by the Cohesion Fund to assist the affected regions in overcoming this terrible tragedy.

I would also like to take this opportunity to express my solidarity with all the efforts made by Madeira's local authorities and its people.

Veronica Lope Fontagné (PPE), in writing. – (ES) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, unfortunately we are having to deal with this sad and now customary matter once again. I would like to express my respect and gratitude to all the professionals and volunteers who have contributed to the rescue and reconstruction effort in the affected areas, and I would like to express my particular condolences to the families of the victims. We need to provide help to the victims and pave the way so that the affected areas can recover quickly. We also need to continue working intensively in the area of prevention. Finally, and most importantly, I would call on the Spanish Government to use its current Presidency of the European Union to provide the impetus needed to modify the current European Union Solidarity Fund Regulation – a request already made on a number of occasions by the European Parliament – in order to achieve faster, more flexible and more efficient access to it.

Iosif Matula (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The incidence of global natural disasters is alarming. We can see today the consequences of our irresponsible actions in the past as we are faced with a new challenge: combating the effects of climate change.

It goes without saying that the cost of the operations involved in rebuilding the areas affected by natural disasters are incomparably higher in relation to the efforts required for prevention. At EU level we have instruments available for dealing with such situations, which supplement the projects carried out by regions. For example, in the Western Region of Romania, which I represent, a project is being promoted for improving the capabilities and quality of the intervention system deployed in emergency situations. The financial instruments available, including the Structural and Cohesion Funds, as well as the Fund for Rural Development, must be reviewed so that they offer greater flexibility in emergencies.

With regard to the Solidarity Fund, the lowering of the threshold for mobilising the fund and the possibility of making advance payments of the relevant amounts would speed up intervention and reconstruction efforts and make them more effective.

Last but not least, we will have to give due attention to an older initiative, namely the rapid reaction force, which will cover the entire territory of the European Union, because natural phenomena affect neighbouring regions, and this creates the conditions for solidarity and cross-border action.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE), in writing. – (PT) I would like to join with the many declarations of sympathy for the victims of the torrential storm that battered Madeira on 20 February, as well as the declarations of solidarity with all those who are suffering the pain of grief for lost family and friends and lost possessions. I would also like to stress the constant need to consolidate the European Union's capacity to provide help to populations affected by natural disasters. By losing personal property such as their homes, their livelihoods and their jobs, these populations could fall into a desperate situation. In these cases, social justice is only achieved through solidarity, not forgetting that all of society benefits from each of its citizens having decent living conditions. Therefore, it is not too much to insist on the need to enlarge the European Union Solidarity Fund and make it more flexible. In this context, I would like to declare my total support for the resolution on Madeira adopted today by the European Parliament.

Richard Seeber (PPE), in writing. – (DE) The recent storms across Madeira, parts of Spain and France took a heavy toll with over 40 deaths on Madeira, another 60 in France, countless missing persons and extensive property damage. Managing natural disasters is an opportunity for Europe to prove its added value. Rapid and uncomplicated cooperation between European partners is required in order to counter the dramatic consequences of the storm Xynthia and the devastating torrential rains. The Solidarity Fund and other EU financial instruments can at least make it possible to tackle the economic damage of the disaster more quickly. However, the organisation of disaster prevention must always remain in the hands of the Member States, who are best placed to deal with their national circumstances and thus to react most rapidly in emergencies. In order to prevent future storm damage, the Commission should support the Member States in their efforts to produce effective emergency plans and tables of risks. With the march of climate change and the dislocation of water cycles that that promotes, it will not be possible to completely fend off even fiercer storms in the future. However, the damage that such storms cause can certainly be reduced with better prior planning.

Dominique Vlasto (PPE), in writing. – (FR) Storm Xynthia is another tragic and painful demonstration of the climatic disturbances that are intensifying the violence and the frequency of what are, nonetheless, natural phenomena. Nowadays, the European Union is confronted too often with such natural disasters to make do with its existing policies, and I believe that it should strengthen three areas of intervention in order to better protect its citizens: prevention, which is addressed in the 2009 White Paper on adapting to climate change, for which I was rapporteur for the opinion and which specifically emphasises the vulnerability of coastal and mountain areas; rapid intervention, by finally creating this European civil protection force, about which we have done nothing but talk and which only needs a proposal to become a reality; and repair, by permitting the emergency mobilisation of the Structural Funds – if necessary outside the regional framework of the planned areas of intervention – and of the Solidarity Fund, the regulation of which must be amended so as to speed up and simplify its mobilisation. It is clear, then, that I endorse this resolution, but I regret that our House should be obliged once again to call for measures that could have been proposed following one of the too numerous natural disasters that have plunged Europe into mourning in recent years.

4. Major natural disaster in the Autonomous Region of Madeira and effects of storm Xynthia in Europe (motions for resolutions tabled): see Minutes

5. Situation in Chile and EU humanitarian aid strategy (debate)

President. – The next item is the Commission statement on the situation in Chile and the EU's humanitarian aid strategy.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission.* – Mr President, I make this statement on behalf of my colleague, Kristalina Georgieva, Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response. Why instead of her? It is pretty clear and obvious. Commissioner Georgieva arrived in Chile yesterday, 10 March, to visit areas affected by the recent earthquake and to follow the work of European humanitarian and civil protection experts there on the ground.

Immediately after arriving in Chile's capital Santiago, Commissioner Georgieva travelled to the area most affected by the earthquake and tsunami, including the coastal region around Constitución, Talca, and Concepción.

During her field visit she met representatives of ECHO partners working in the area, visited the monitoring and information centre base camp in Penco and had bilateral contacts with Chilean authorities in the region.

Commissioner Georgieva will also represent President Barroso during the inauguration of President Sebastián Piñera in Valparaíso later today.

The massive earthquake and subsequent tsunami that struck Chile in the early hours of Saturday 27 February are a terrible tragedy. The latest official figures indicate that at least 528 people have been killed, and that number is expected to rise. More than two million people are affected. The damage to infrastructure has been enormous and half a million homes have been seriously damaged.

The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission, Cathy Ashton, called Chile's Foreign Minister, Mariano Fernández, the same day to express our condolences to the families of the victims and indicate our readiness to provide assistance and support.

As soon as news of the earthquake broke, ECHO's emergency response system was mobilised. The EU civil protection mechanism immediately issued a pre-alert message to the participating states. The crisis room of the monitoring and information centre (MIC) operated throughout that first weekend, obtaining reports about the scale and impact of the earthquake, identifying civil protection assets that could be available for rapid deployment. Commissioner Georgieva went to the crisis room during the day to direct operations.

A number of European Union Member States have notified the MIC of assistance deployed or offered. This includes personnel and equipment already sent to Concepción from Spain, Germany, France and the United Kingdom, funding pledges from Finland, the United Kingdom and the Netherlands, and offers of bridges, tents, field kitchens and generators from Bulgaria, Slovakia, Sweden and Austria.

The Chilean authorities have signalled their acceptance of offers of help made by the European Union Member States.

The Commission's emergency humanitarian response system was launched simultaneously in Brussels and in ECHO's Managua regional office covering Latin America.

Potential partners for fast-track funding with the capacity to provide immediate relief assistance were contacted and ECHO field experts were mobilised to travel to the earthquake zone at the first available opportunity. A three million primary emergency decision was adopted early on Sunday morning. Humanitarian grant agreements have now been concluded with four partner agencies: Telecom Sans Frontières from France to provide emergency telecommunications services; the Pan-American Health Organisation and the Spanish Red Cross to help re-establish health services, and the German Red Cross to supply shelter, safe water and basic household essentials.

ECHO deployed a team of two humanitarian aid experts who arrived in Chile on the morning of Monday, 1 March to carry out needs assessments and to meet with the authorities and potential implementing partners. Two more members of the team arrived the following day and they were joined by a fifth some days later.

An EU civil protection mechanism, a team of six experts, is also now in Chile. Four are working in the earthquake zone near Concepción, while two are currently based in Santiago to liaise with authorities and coordinate the response of European Union Member States.

The ECHO humanitarian experts and the EU civil protection team are undertaking joint assessments with OCHA and several UN agencies in the most affected areas.

Michèle Striffler, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, as has been said previously, the earthquake in Chile, which was more intense than the one suffered by the Haitians and which was also followed by a tsunami, was nonetheless much less deadly, thanks to an early warning system that worked, to populations that were better prepared for disasters and to a robust state that was able to react.

I welcome the rapid reaction of the European Commission and the Member States. The European Commission's Monitoring and Information Centre was activated immediately, an emergency humanitarian decision was adopted to allocate EUR 3 million to respond to the immediate needs, and experts from the Directorate General for Humanitarian Aid (DG ECHO) were deployed in the disaster areas to carry out a needs assessment.

I would like in particular to applaud the immediate public reaction of Commissioner Georgieva, who arrived in Santiago yesterday to visit the areas concerned.

Most natural disasters are unexpected events. In order to preserve lives in areas vulnerable to natural disasters, it is vitally important to reduce the risks by being better prepared and having buildings that are fit for purpose. It is also important to ensure that development cooperation incorporates disaster risk reduction, that is to say, preparation for disasters, the mitigation of their effects and, above all, their prevention.

María Muñiz De Urquiza, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (ES) Mr President, first of all, on behalf of the delegation within the EU-Chile Joint Parliamentary Committee, I would like to express our solidarity with the Chilean people, Parliament and Government following the disastrous earthquake that occurred on 27 February and the more than two hundred aftershocks that have taken place so far.

At least 500 people, including two Europeans, have been killed and 2 million Chileans have been affected by the earthquakes. The Mapuche people have been the worst affected, for their lands lie in three of the four southern regions of the country.

I would also like to express our gratitude to all the people who have worked selflessly and to all the professionals who assisted the victims. The Chilean people have shown themselves to be capable of meeting the challenges of a very complex situation. I would like to congratulate President Bachelet for the immediate relief effort her Government launched in order to contain the situation caused by the terrible earthquake that has destroyed housing and infrastructure.

The Chilean Government acted quickly and showed seriousness and responsibility in identifying the specific areas in which support was needed; there has also been a show of solidarity from the international community, which is a testament to Chile's excellent relations with its neighbours and strategic partners.

I also wish to congratulate Sebastián Piñera's new Government which takes office today, and to encourage him in the reconstruction efforts for which I hope he will be able to count on the European Union's full support.

Chile, as well as being a friend and partner of the European Union, is a developed country and member of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development; even so, the cost of the reconstruction effort will be considerable: it is estimated that this will be as high as USD 20 million, which represents 15% of the Chilean GDP. For this reason, I call on the European Union to make every tool available to the Chilean authorities in order to help with the task of reconstruction. Chile is going to need international loans, and the European Investment Bank, with which Chile has just signed an agreement, should help with the financing of the reconstruction projects.

The European Union, under the Spanish Presidency, has established a mechanism for coordinating aid with the United Nations, and a post-disaster task force; the European Commissioner for International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response is also expected to arrive on the ground in the next few days. We hope that the Commission, without overlooking other equally urgent commitments such as the situation in Haiti, will also rise to meet the Chilean people's expectations.

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, we should use more than just words to show our solidarity with a country that has suffered a disaster, as Chile has, and we have heard this today from the Commission representative.

Chile has been a source of protection and asylum for us in the past. For example, a large community of Basque people lives there, having emigrated to the area for economic reasons in the 19th century and for political reasons in the 20th century.

That is why, in this case, words should be backed up by actions, and I am satisfied by the swift action taken by the European Union, which immediately sent EUR 3 million in aid in order to fund operations; I am also pleased by the reaction of the High Representative, Mrs Ashton, and I congratulate Commissioner Georgieva who acted swiftly and, as of yesterday, is in Chile providing encouragement and establishing what is needed on the ground there.

I am satisfied by the way in which the new European Commission Humanitarian Aid civil protection system is operating, by the help provided by the European institutions, and by the collaboration that has been established through the different agencies.

At times like these Europe has had, and continues to have, an opportunity to consolidate its leading role on the international stage, working directly with those affected and helping to coordinate the aid that is being organised from the Member States and from the regions.

I would like to highlight President Bachelet's actions, for she has demonstrated once again how politics should be conducted, displaying great humanity and working closely with Mr Piñera, who takes over as President today; I also wish to congratulate him for the exemplary way in which he has put politics to one side in order to rise to the challenge as his country needs.

On behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I should like to express my solidarity, my support for all the operations being carried out, and my condolences to the families of the 528 people killed and all those missing, and to the people who have been left homeless.

We recently visited the area on a pre-election observation mission for the delegation within the EU-Chile Joint Parliamentary Committee. We had an opportunity to observe the projects developing there and we saw that Chile is a model for economic and social development in the Southern Cone region.

We need to ensure that this earthquake does not interrupt that progress towards economic and social development.

Raül Romeva i Rueda, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, I would like to begin by echoing what has been said by Mrs Muñoz and Mrs Bilbao, because I believe the first thing we need to do is show the European Union's solidarity with the Chilean people and Chilean institutions, which are very well represented by President Bachelet and President-elect Piñera.

Secondly, I think it is also important to remember that, as is usually the case in these situations, natural disasters are indiscriminate and entirely oblivious to people's wealth or poverty: they punish everyone equally. However, it is also clear that the poor suffer the most, and it is particularly difficult to rebuild poor areas.

I therefore think it is important to consider not only the recovery and reconstruction measures needed after a disaster has occurred, but also, in many cases, to re-examine certain structural elements, and my question relates to that point. If I may, Commissioner, I would like to ask about a very specific matter relating to the Country Strategy Paper that the European Union has with Chile.

Of the EUR 41 million earmarked for the 2007-2013 period, how much is going to be used specifically to strengthen infrastructure such as roads and transport? How much is going to be used to improve housing construction in order to ensure that, in the event of potential, unwelcome disasters in the future, people are better prepared for this kind of situation? Finally, what proportion of these resources has already been set aside for these purposes?

Tomasz Piotr Poręba, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) The earthquake in Chile has claimed several hundred victims, and over one and a half million people have lost their homes. Let us, however, show solidarity with Chile, today, and remember that the people there are still suffering from a lack of hygiene supplies and a lack of access to drinking water, as well as a lack of food, medicines and blankets. In addition, the people are being harassed by criminal groups, who are plundering abandoned shops and houses.

We, as the European Union, must do all we can to prevent people who have lost all their belongings, and in many cases members of their family, from falling victim to thieves who prey on their suffering.

It is good that we have decided to send EUR 3 million for the most immediate needs. We should, however, remember that there are still places in Chile which have not been reached by aid, because of the damage sustained to roads and bridges. The recent events in Chile and Haiti demonstrate that, as well as financial aid from the European Union, the mechanisms of giving aid to countries hit by disasters still need improvement.

Solidarity with Chile is a very beautiful thing, and it is good that the European Union is showing that solidarity. Let us remember, however, not to stop at just solidarity, but to support Chile in the future, too.

Fiorello Provera, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (IT) Mr President, I wish you a speedy recovery. First of all I would like to express my solidarity with all those who have been affected by this natural disaster. Unfortunately, tragedies continue to happen because of large earthquakes. In situations like these, with widespread destruction of buildings and infrastructure, and with thousands killed, it is important to constantly improve coordination of civil protection and emergency authorities to avoid overlapping of efforts and wasted resources. The European Union intervened promptly in Chile but it needs to collaborate with local authorities to identify needs and to coordinate aid effectively.

This morning's press carried the news that half of the aid provided by the United Nations to Somalia has been stolen by local partners, by some UN officials and by Islamic militants. One aspect to consider, then, is transparency in the collection of public and private donations and the effectiveness of distribution of aid provided to populations. Generosity must not be betrayed and a strict system of controls needs to be put in place to prevent money being squandered or stolen, particularly when aid is sent to very distant countries whose institutions may be weakened by crises.

Diane Dodds (NI). – Mr President, our people will be heartened to hear that there has been positive action in helping the people of Chile. We have all been moved by their plight.

However, today I want to address my remarks to more general issues around the humanitarian aid strategy. The European Commission is very proud to declare itself to be one of the world's largest donors of humanitarian aid. Its mandate, it declares, is to save and preserve life, to find sanctuary for the displaced and to help the world ensure preparedness for natural disasters. These are truly worthy aspirations. However, it is not the Commission's money that is being donated. It is British, German, French – it is in fact money from 27 nation states. In a time of economic crisis every single one of these nations should be recognised for their worthy efforts. Perhaps in their documents the Commission should reflect this and acknowledge the efforts of those who actually do make the sacrifices. It is not the political elite and apparatchiks of the Berlemont, but ordinary people from ordinary communities.

Whilst it is true that developing countries need aid, it is also true that they need our support in establishing and maintaining credible democratic structures. They need our help in building a strong and unfettered civic society. They also need our help – and, most importantly, our honesty – in pointing out the wrongdoing from political regimes that ensures that ordinary people continue to live in poverty and in need.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, the recent huge, catastrophic earthquake in Chile, shortly after the disaster in Haiti, cost the lives of hundreds of people and caused massive damage to the structures of the country, especially in the area of Concepción.

We need to stand by the victims and their families and make a frank declaration of solidarity. We need to stand by a country with which we have close and friendly ties and which is one of the strongest economies in the region and a development benchmark for neighbouring countries. This has been established within the framework of the Joint Parliamentary Committee.

I would remind you that the European Union and Chile signed an association agreement which entered into force in 2005 and which provides for political and economic cooperation and joint action on a global scale. In addition, as already stated, the European Commission has adopted a six-year strategic development plan for Chile for 2007-2013, which makes provision for the take-up of Community resources by this Latin American country for regional and sectoral programmes being undertaken by the country's recently-elected government.

The immediate announcement of financial support and all the other things the Commission has mentioned today are encouraging. However, I want to emphasise that we need to facilitate the release of the resources earmarked under the aforementioned EU-Chile strategic framework as quickly as possible, so that the consequences of this recent earthquake on the country's infrastructure and for the further development of the country can be addressed promptly.

Enrique Guerrero Salom (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, I would like to begin by expressing my solidarity with the Chilean people, and that solidarity has also been expressed to the people of Haiti, Turkey and Peru, who have also suffered recent natural disasters.

Solidarity is one of the European Union's distinctive hallmarks, and we have to strengthen that solidarity with regard to the future.

Fortunately, Chile is a country with a far-reaching capacity to respond in such times of natural disaster; however, large areas of the world do not have that same capacity.

I would therefore like to mention the European strategy for humanitarian aid. Our response could be even more efficient; it could be faster and more effective, as long as we are moving in the right direction. Which is the right direction? Firstly, in my view we need greater coordination between Member States, their respective humanitarian agencies and the institutions of the European Union.

Secondly, we need better coordination between the European Union and international humanitarian aid organisations, especially the United Nations.

Thirdly, we need greater coordination between military and humanitarian actors. We have to maintain the safety of the civilian population and humanitarian groups while upholding the independence, neutrality and impartiality of humanitarian aid and respect for international law.

As far as the European Union is concerned, in order for humanitarian aid and crisis response to be a fundamental component of our external action, we need more human and financial resources.

We can take advantage of the Barnier report in order to establish a European volunteer corps and I would add, given that Commissioner Piebalgs is here, in order to strengthen and better coordinate the link between humanitarian aid and reconstruction and development policies.

Jim Higgins (PPE). – Mr President, I agree with everything that Mr Guerrero Salom has said in relation to our response. I have to say that I was initially shocked when I heard that what the European Union – Baroness Ashton – was going to donate was something in the region of EUR 3 million. EUR 3 million is nothing in terms of the consequences and the fallout and the devastation caused.

Last time we were here – four weeks ago – we were discussing Haiti. This morning we are discussing the Xynthia storm in Europe, and we are also discussing the fallout from the Chilean earthquake disaster, which happened just over two weeks ago. Then you had the aftershock of 6.6, which in itself was absolutely devastating.

The fallout is there. The consequences are there. The statistics are there. We are talking about 500 000 – half a million – houses destroyed. These have to be rebuilt, and that is where we come in with practical help. There are approximately 540 people dead, and the dead are still being exhumed from the ruins. That is a natural disaster in itself. But we are talking about an overall bill of EUR 22 billion. We really need to up our particular contribution in that regard.

One of the selling points in relation to the Lisbon Treaty – and we know that in Ireland we rejected Lisbon I – was that we were going to have an immediate humanitarian response to natural disasters. I have to say that whether it be Haiti, southern Europe or from the point of view of the situation in Chile, we have not responded. I know it is early days, but we really need to get our act together. What we need above all else is practical help: (a) money, (b) clean water, (c) restore the electricity supply and (d) get the economy up and running as quickly as possible.

Agustín Díaz de Mera García Consuegra (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, yesterday I spoke to Senator Pizarro, who became President of the Senate of Chile a few hours ago. Today Mr Pizarro will present President Piñera with the presidential band. I hope that President Piñera will undertake the reconstruction task efficiently and I would like to congratulate President Bachelet on her management of this crisis.

Mr President, may I express my solidarity and brotherly affection to the people of Chile after the terrible earthquakes and tsunami they experienced in Concepción, Biobío, Temuco and Valparaíso. I am certain that the heroic people of Chile will be able to overcome this catastrophic situation, as they have done before. May I reiterate once again my affection and deepest solidarity with Chile.

Andreas Mülzer (NI). – (DE) Mr President, given the devastating consequences of the 8.8 magnitude earthquake in Chile, you have to concede to the mayor of Concepción that 24 hours is an eternity for anyone

lying buried under rubble. Even though the authorities and the rescue services in this Latin American country are undoubtedly well set up for possible earthquakes, the help for the more than 2 million people affected did not get to all parts of the affected area early enough because of logistical problems. Troops who were already late in getting there were swamped by the chaos. The population was forced to flee to its rooftops and set up roadblocks not only out of fear of aftershocks but also out of fear of criminals. Chile may be prosperous enough to care for those affected by the earthquake by itself, but, thank goodness, it swallowed its pride and asked for help, including from the EU.

There will be lessons that we, too, must learn from this, however, namely that in emergencies the veneer of civilisation soon peels and that 24 hours can be too long. In this spirit, emergency plans and the coordination of assistance efforts for emergencies should be made more effective, including within the EU.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, we were all shocked by the scale of the natural and human catastrophe. Through the rapid mobilisation of ECHO's emergency response system and the EU civil protection mechanism, we were able to offer coordinated and practical help soon after the earthquake struck.

As I have already mentioned, the assistance deployed or offered by a number of EU Member States was also important.

In addition to the humanitarian and other actions I have described, it is worth mentioning that on Tuesday in Luxembourg the European Investment Bank and Chile – this was mentioned by an honourable Member – signed a framework agreement to enable the bank to operate in Chile.

This development highlights the excellent state of relations between the European Union and Chile and our shared commitment to continuing to expand and deepen our partnership. It is also extremely well-timed because the EIB can be an additional tool for the European Union to work with Chile in the medium- to long-term reconstruction efforts that are already getting under way.

Regarding the concrete question of the country strategy for Chile and the committed EUR 41 million. EUR 25 million was spent in the first tranche; EUR 15.6 million remains for the second. Normally this should be divided 50% for social cohesion, 50% for innovation and competition. We have offered to switch this to reconstruction under review. No requests yet from the Chilean authorities, but of course it could be directed under both headlines to reconstruction.

The Chilean authorities have not yet made any specific requests for the European Union to help with reconstruction. As I mentioned, President Piñera takes office today. He will surely give top priority to assessing and quantifying the damage and planning the massive effort that will be needed.

The Commission stands ready to consider any request that may be forthcoming. As I mentioned earlier, the fact that the European Investment Bank will now be able to operate in Chile adds an additional instrument to choose from among those which are already at our disposal.

It is also worth recalling what was mentioned too by some of you, that Chile is a good example of development. It is actually a net creditor, unlike most Latin American countries. The outgoing Finance Minister last Friday highlighted the fact that, unlike during other tragedies that have befallen the Chilean people, this time they and the Chilean state have their own resources as well.

So, to conclude, the European Union – the people, regions and countries of the Union – is standing shoulder to shoulder with Chile in the face of this disaster, and that is how it should be in a civilised and human world.

President. – The debate is closed.

Written Statements (Rule 149)

António Fernando Correia De Campos (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) After Haiti's earthquake, we are confronted again with a terrible catastrophe, with 800 confirmed victims and damage totalling to approximately 15% of Chile's GDP. According to the Chilean President, Mrs Bachelet, 80% of the population was affected and the country's infrastructure has been seriously damaged.

Once more, the EU has assumed its responsibilities as a privileged trading partner of that country, of which it is the primary trading partner and the primary market for Chilean exports. The response from the EU was to provide EUR 3 million in emergency aid, while European civil protection experts are on the ground assessing the most immediate needs.

The natural catastrophes which have been blighting the world, such as the earthquakes and deadly storms that we have recently witnessed in the EU, make us rethink the paradigm of humanitarian aid and of emergencies, which require a swift, agile and concerted answer.

The EU has demonstrated effectiveness and the ability to react. Parliament, as well as giving its heartfelt condolences to Chile, is also demonstrating through this debate its commitment to helping to rebuild the country, which was so severely damaged by the earthquake of 27 February.

(The sitting was suspended at 11.40 and resumed at 12.00.)

IN THE CHAIR: MR PITTELLA

Vice-President

6. Statement by the President

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, before proceeding to the vote, I would like to make a brief announcement, because today we commemorate the sixth European Day for the Victims of Terrorism.

Today we pay tribute to the more than 5 000 victims in Europe and we express our solidarity with the countless people wounded, who have suffered the barbarity of terrorism.

The bomb attacks carried out in Madrid six years ago, on 11 March 2004, which killed 191 people from 17 countries, and the bombs detonated in London on 7 July 2005 can be counted among the worst acts of terrorism ever perpetrated on European soil.

Terrorism is an attack against us all: it attacks the very fabric of our democratic society.

That is why Europe will always be united in the fight against terrorism, be it separatist, religious or political.

Terrorism can never be justified, in any way and for any reason. This European day gives us the opportunity to show that no terrorist or act of terrorism will ever be able to break or destroy our faith in key values, those of fundamental human rights and democracy.

(Applause)

7. Calendar of part-sessions : see Minutes

8. Voting time

President. – The next item is the vote.

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

Robert Goebbels (S&D). – (FR) Mr President, I would ask you to wait a little while longer because many Members are still stuck in the lifts. Someone had the extraordinary idea of repairing the lifts during the one week of the month in which we are in Strasbourg, when it could be done in the other three.

President. – Mr Goebbels, it is already after 12.00. We have already been waiting for five minutes. I think that we can proceed to the vote.

(Applause)

8.1. Cuba (B7-0169/2010) (vote)

8.2. Investing in Low-Carbon Technologies (vote)

8.3. Major natural disaster in the autonomous region of Madeira and effects of the Xynthia storm in Europe (B7-0139/2010) (vote)

9. Explanations of vote

Oral explanations of vote

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0169/2010

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE). – (SK) According to government archives and available literature, the Communist regime in Slovakia sentenced 71 168 people in the years 1948 – 1989 for alleged political crimes.

There is no better way to honour the memory of those political prisoners and prisoners of conscience than to work actively to promote the expansion of freedom and democracy where it is deemed an unattainable luxury. The European Union's appeals have so far been met with no response. However, I am deeply concerned about the situation of political prisoners in Cuba and I therefore urge the Council and the Commission to take effective measures necessary for the release of political prisoners and to support and ensure their work as protectors of human rights. To the citizens of Cuba...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, I endorsed adoption of the motion for a resolution on Cuba. Frankly speaking, I do not understand why Fidel Castro's European friends are so doggedly defending the idea of a bankrupt and demoralised revolution. Does it have to be the case that only the fatal victims of what considers itself to be a progressive regime will make people aware of the need for change in Cuba? Sometimes individual sacrifices contribute to historic changes. I hope this will also be the case this time. At the same time, I would not like there to be more victims caused by the dogmatism of the authorities or their inability to analyse their own position and change.

Neither can I accept the fact that many of the ACP countries take an entirely uncritical view of the character and significance of the social and political system which has been built in Cuba. I am profoundly convinced that this is an erroneous understanding of solidarity. It would be more honest to acknowledge what has been achieved in Cuba, but at the same time to condemn that which has not been a success and is anti-social, inhuman and destructive.

Ramón Jáuregui Atondo (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, I would like to speak on behalf of Mrs Muñiz to explain why the Spanish delegation within the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament has voted against Amendment 2 tabled by the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left, even though the amendment requested that the Spanish Presidency be supported in its dealings with Cuba.

Firstly, may I bring to mind the fact that we cannot support amendments tabled by a group that has sought to distance itself from the resolution as a whole, and that our commitment to all the political groups who have signed the resolution would not allow us to support a partial amendment of the document.

Secondly, Amendment 2 tabled by the GUE/NGL Group is not in line with the position taken by the Spanish Presidency, which is looking to establish a consensus in the European Union in order to renew our framework for relations with Cuba, but not for a complete break with the Common Position, which is what the amendment was calling for.

That is our reason for rejecting the amendment.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE). – (CS) It was an honour for me today to support the resolution on prisoners of conscience in Cuba, not only as a Member from a former totalitarian communist state, but also because I have personally met Cuban dissidents in the past, in particular the physician Dr Darsí Ferrer, who has been imprisoned with others since July last year.

Following my return I informed Parliament about the sad situation in the health sector and I would like to emphasise again that people who are not Communist Party members and who do not have dollars, have no access to medicines. Dr Darsí Ferrer was a significant personality in Havana, who was helping dissidents to obtain medicines. Now he is behind bars.

I am delighted that we have adopted this resolution, which is a very strong resolution, and which also clearly challenges European authorities to continue their efforts for democratic change in Cuba.

Daniel Hannan (ECR). – Mr President, who would have thought 20 years ago, when the air of Europe was thick with the brick dust of falling walls and with cries of freedom, that the red flag would still today be flying over Havana and that Fidel Castro would be dying peacefully in bed on that sultry Caribbean island.

Sola mors tyrannicida est, says my countryman, Sir Thomas More: death is the only way to get rid of tyrants.

Two things have kept the Communist regime in place in Cuba. First, the wrong-headed American blockade, which has allowed Castro and his regime to blame all the privations of their countrymen on foreign imperialism rather than on the economic mismanagement of Communism; and secondly the indulgence of some in Europe, including some in this House, who have a disgusting double standard whereby they excuse human rights abuses and the denial of democracy in Cuba on the grounds that it is good at producing doctors and ballerinas.

I hope that this House will grow up and that some in this House will see beyond their days as students wearing Che Guevara T-shirts. The time has come for constructive engagement with the democratic forces in Cuba. History will absolve us.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Mr President, I voted in favour of the Cuba resolution because it is, on the whole, fairly critical of the totalitarian regime in Havana. At the same time, I would like to use this opportunity to call on the Council to bring to an end its attempts at normalising its relations with Cuba while we are still dealing with a communist dictatorship which violates human rights in a flagrant manner.

I would also urge the new High Representative not to follow the line taken by the Commission in previous legislation. Here I refer, for example, to Mr Louis Michel, who has visited Cuba on repeated occasions without levelling any criticism whatsoever at the state of human rights and democracy there. It is totally unacceptable for the European Union to curry favour with the communist regime in Cuba.

Motion for a resolution B7-0148/2010

Jarosław Kalinowski (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, in endorsing the motion for a resolution, I wanted to express support for investment in the development of low-emission technologies. The SET Plan can be effective and credible only if it is properly financed, and this includes finance from private sources. Arguments in favour of the necessity of such measures are, principally, the current economic situation in which Europe finds itself, dangerous climate changes and threats to energy security. Thanks to the latest research and technologies, an opportunity to overcome the crisis has arisen, which at the same time supports measures related to climate change. It is also an opportunity for European agriculture, a way to create new jobs in rural areas in the non-agricultural sector, especially in the area of creating sources of renewable energy.

Jan Březina (PPE). – (CS) I too have voted for the motion for a resolution on investment in the development of low-carbon technologies (the SET-Plan), because in my opinion it is a key instrument for transforming the Union into an innovative economy, capable of fulfilling demanding objectives. In this regard I consider it essential that the Commission, in close cooperation with the European Investment Bank, submits an overall proposal on an instrument for investing in energy from renewable sources, energy-efficiency projects and the development of intelligent networks no later than 2011. Hand in hand with this there should be a strengthening of the role of the European Investment Bank in financing projects in the area of energy, and especially projects with higher levels of risk.

I categorically reject the exploitation of the topic of low-carbon technologies for below-the-belt attacks on nuclear energy in the presentations of Members from the left side of the political spectrum. I maintain that nuclear energy is a clean energy which contributes to sustainable development.

Marek Józef Gróbarczyk (ECR). – (PL) I could not support the resolution, although it is extremely important for the European economy. It should be noted that the resolution provides for a huge concentration of money only in certain areas, only in certain branches of the energy industry – the 'green' areas. This clashes with the notion of energy solidarity with countries which rely mainly on coal. Poland's energy needs are based on coal, so a smooth transition to a green economy is extremely important for us. As a result of such measures in Poland, instead of creating jobs we would have to close them. During a crisis this is extremely difficult, and would be harmful to Poland.

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0139/2010

Sophie Auconie (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, on 27 and 28 February storm Xynthia assailed France. Almost 60 people died, and hundreds of thousands of people sustained considerable damage.

The European Union must set an example in the face of this tragedy. That is why I personally had a hand in drafting this resolution calling on the European Commission to be extremely responsive. We expect it to provide financial aid to the disaster areas by means of the EU Solidarity Fund.

If, as a result of this tragedy, the regions of Poitou-Charentes, Charente-Maritime, Pays de la Loire and Brittany request a change to their allocation of expenditure cofinanced by the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund, the European Commission will have to examine these requests extremely favourably and very quickly.

Leaving this resolution aside, I, like my colleagues from the Union for a Presidential Majority, am convinced that it is time to create a true European civil protection force. It alone will be able to provide vital additional aid in the context of a disaster such as this.

President. – Mr Kelly, although you have not registered to speak before the first explanation of vote, you may do so by way of exception. Next time please remember to register.

Motion for a resolution B7-0148/2010

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Mr President, I just want to say that I think it is time that we had a conclusive paper on nuclear energy to outline the progress and the safety measures that have been brought to bear on it and how that will transpose itself in future into research that will be undertaken so that citizens can make up their minds.

There is a lot of scepticism about it – a lot of doubt – and that needs to be clarified, which will take a lot of the difficulties out of this debate on low-carbon technology.

Finally if I may say, on this, the anniversary of the declaration of independence of Lithuania and Estonia, I congratulate those countries on 20 years of independence.

Written explanations of vote

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0169/2010

John Stuart Agnew, Marta Andreasen, Gerard Batten, John Bufton and Mike Nattrass (EFD), in writing. – While we recognise that Cuba is a Communist tyranny and while we want to see Cuba transformed to a peaceful democratic state, we do not recognise the EU in this process.

Charalampos Angourakis (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL) The resolution by the European Parliament, the pretext for which is the death of the Cuban prisoner Orlando Zapata Tamayo, who died following a hunger strike, despite the efforts of the Cuban health services to restore his health, is a provocative and unacceptable attack on the socialist government and people of Cuba and forms part of the anti-communist strategy being directed by the EU and led by the European Parliament in a bid to overturn the socialist regime. We condemn the hypocrisy and provocative effort on the part of the centre right, centre left and Green representatives of capital in the European Parliament to exploit this event.

The Greek Communist Party condemns and voted against the European Parliament resolution. It calls on the peoples to express their solidarity with the government and people of Cuba. To call for the common position against Cuba to be revoked. To condemn efforts by the EU to use human rights as a pretext for exerting imperialist pressure and coercion on the people of Cuba and its government. To demand that the criminal US embargo against Cuba be lifted immediately. To demand the immediate release of the 5 Cubans being held in US prisons. To defend socialist Cuba.

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The European Union is the most democratic structure in the world and the fundamental value on which it has been built has been respect for human rights. This is why I find it laudable and encouraging that all the groups in Parliament have been united in their condemnation of the abuses committed by the Cuban authorities against human rights, not to mention the constructive approach, receptive to dialogue, which the EU has decided to adopt towards Cuba.

We are living in the 21st century and crimes of opinion and conscience should be erased from the values of every state in the world, no matter how long its history of totalitarianism and dictatorship might be. Conducting international dialogue rather than imposing sanctions can be used to change attitudes so that anyone who disagrees with their own authorities will not suffer abuses and injustices typical of regimes which lack respect for human beings.

Tragedies such as the one which has befallen Cuban dissident Orlando Zapata Tamayo, 'guilty' of a crime of conscience, must never be repeated. There are now other political prisoners too in Cuba who are in danger. As a guarantor of respect for human rights, the EU must get involved and take prompt action diplomatically so that the Zapata tragedy will never be repeated in Cuba, or anywhere else in the world for that matter.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI), *in writing*. – I condemn unreservedly the ill-treatment of people in Cuba (or anywhere else). However, I abstained in the resolution, as a whole, against Cuba. One reason was that the resolution purported to give authority to the European Union and its functionaries to speak and act on behalf of Member States. The other reason was that many Member States of the European Union prosecute and imprison people for exercising non-violent freedom of expression, the holding of heretical opinions or taking part in dissenting activity. It is utterly hypocritical for parties that favour political repression in Europe to point the finger at states such as Cuba that share their repressive and anti-democratic opinions and activities.

Edite Estrela (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted in favour of the motion for a resolution on the situation of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in Cuba. We reiterate the need for the immediate release of all political prisoners and prisoners of conscience. We believe that the detention of Cuban dissidents due to their ideals and to their peaceful political activity constitutes a violation of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

Göran Färm, Anna Hedh, Olle Ludvigsson, Marita Ulvskog and Åsa Westlund (S&D), *in writing*. – (SV) We Swedish Social Democrats share the opinion presented in the amendment that the blockade against Cuba should be lifted. However, we do not believe that the statement belongs in this motion for a resolution, as it concerns prisoners of conscience.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Orlando Zapata Tamayo died of starvation because he demanded to be treated as what he was: a political prisoner persecuted by a regime that, despite the changes in leadership, continues to rule over its citizens with an iron fist and prohibits them from associating or freely expressing themselves.

The tragic circumstances of this death should put us all to shame. Especially the political decision makers who, following the lead of Mr Zapatero and Ambassador Moratinos, have changed European policy towards Cuba.

All the European Union has achieved with its tentative attempt at appeasement has been to increase the feeling of impunity, whilst making the democrats – who deserved much more from us – feel more isolated.

I hope for a return to the firm democratic policy that has only recently softened. I want the European Union to finally acknowledge that this change of policy has been a complete failure. I also want Oswaldo Payá and the Ladies in White to be able to travel to Europe freely to reveal the circumstances surrounding the events that have been taking place in Cuba.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) We voted against this resolution due to the political exploitation by the majority in Parliament of the death of Zapata Tamayo, following a hunger strike in a Cuban prison, despite having received medical treatment. They want to thwart the intentions publicly expressed by the Spanish Presidency to end the common position on Cuba. Once again they are attacking Cuba and its people, by seeking to meddle in its independence and sovereignty, its economic and social successes and its exemplary internationalist solidarity.

Capitalism is not the future of humanity. Cuba continues to be an example that it is possible to construct a society without exploiters or exploited, a socialist society. The representatives of capitalism in the European Parliament do not accept that fact. They try to prevent a comprehensive political dialogue with the Cuban Government on the basis of the same criteria that the EU applies to all countries with which it has relations.

They do not condemn the US embargo on Cuba, the immediate lifting of which has been sought on 18 occasions by the General Assembly of the United Nations. They say nothing about the situation of five Cuban citizens jailed in the United States since 1998, without a fair trial, and they ignore that the US continues to shelter a Cuban citizen who was the instigator of the bomb attack against an airliner in which 76 people perished.

Jacek Olgierd Kurski (ECR), *in writing*. – (PL) In the vote, today, I endorsed the resolution on the situation of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in Cuba. As the European Parliament, we must unequivocally condemn the practices of the regime in Havana and speak up for the rights of independent journalists,

peaceful dissidents and human rights defenders. In the resolution which has been adopted we have expressed profound solidarity with all Cubans and have endorsed their efforts at achieving democracy as well as respect for and protection of fundamental rights. I come from a country in which a popular movement arose in opposition to the Communist regime – the Solidarity movement. Although Poland and other countries in Central and Eastern Europe, which today belong to the European Union, have now put their painful experiences of Communist regimes behind them, all the more we cannot forget those who are imprisoned and persecuted because they so much want democracy, liberty and freedom of speech.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The EU cannot have a romantic vision of the political regime in Cuba, which is a genuine communist dictatorship, based on the logic of a single party that violates human rights, oppresses its citizens, persecutes and eliminates political adversaries and imprisons countless people simply for the offence of having an opinion.

The death of Orlando Zapata was just one more case to shock the world that the European Parliament must condemn firmly, without hesitation and false justifications. That is why I reject the attempts of some members of the far left to dress up this appalling crime in political terms, which are only intended to legitimise a regime that is neither tolerable nor acceptable.

Willy Meyer (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (ES) I voted against Resolution RC-B7-0169/2010 on Cuba because I believe it constitutes an act of interference that violates international law. With my vote I have expressed my condemnation of this exercise in political manipulation whose only aim is to express disapproval of the Government of Cuba. The Members who voted in favour of this text are those who time and again refused to table a resolution in this Parliament condemning the coup that took place in Honduras. This resolution urges the European Union to show unreserved support for the change of political regime in the Republic of Cuba and also proposes the use of European cooperation mechanisms in order to achieve that aim, which constitutes an unacceptable act of interference that contravenes international law. For more than 50 years, the United States of America has maintained an economic, commercial and financial embargo against Cuba, in flagrant violation of international law and with severe repercussions for the economy and living conditions of Cubans. In spite of that, the Cuban Government has continued to guarantee its citizens universal access to healthcare and education.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) I voted in favour of the joint motion for a resolution on Cuba, as it is important for the EU, too, to clearly express the idea that there is an urgent need for democratisation in the country, which is still under Communist rule. The incarceration of dissidents and political opponents is a typical feature of Communist States, but it is excessively practised in Cuba. The fact that the authorities are not even permitting the family of a prisoner who has died as a result of a hunger strike to organise a burial is a particular scandal.

It is to be hoped that a change of political system on the island will be achieved as soon as possible. Irrespective of that, however, it is important for the EU and also the United States to apply the same standards everywhere. It is unacceptable for the US to grant Cubans who are embroiled in bomb attacks 'political asylum'. You can only express effective criticism if you yourself meet the criteria set.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – (ES) I voted in favour of the joint motion for a resolution on Cuba (RC-B7-0169/2010) because, as I said in the debate yesterday, regardless of our respective positions with regard to Cuba, the death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo is a regrettable occurrence in itself.

I also insist that we need to demand the freedom of all the political prisoners and prisoners of conscience, in Cuba and the rest of the world, but I nevertheless advise against taking action that has already proved to be a failure for Cuba's progression towards democracy and liberalisation, such as the embargo and the blockade. It is clear that changes are urgently needed on the island, and the European Union should monitor these so that the transition to democracy will benefit the Cuban people.

Alf Svensson (PPE), *in writing*. – (SV) The USA has had a trade embargo against Cuba for 48 years. The embargo affects the Cuban population and is a constant and recurring excuse for the shortcomings of the Castro regime. Everything is said to be the fault of the American embargo and, as a result, the people of Cuba cannot lay the blame clearly at the door of the Communist regime and distance themselves from it. The democratic opposition in Cuba wants the embargo to be lifted. On 29 October 2009, 187 of the UN member states voted to lift the embargo. Three voted for it to remain in place and two abstained. None of the EU Member States voted in favour of keeping the embargo. In the past the European Parliament has condemned the embargo against Cuba and called for it to be ended immediately, in line with the demands made by the UN General Assembly on numerous occasions. (P5_TA(2003)0374) The European Parliament has also

stated that the embargo defeats its own object. (P6_TA(2004)0061) The current resolution RC-B7-0169/2010 refers to the situation of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience in Cuba. During the debate before the vote, I tabled a proposal that Cuba should be presented with an ultimatum. The embargo will be lifted and within six months all prisoners of conscience must be released and reforms must be introduced. If the regime does not comply with these terms, the USA, the EU and Canada will bring in new and more intelligent sanctions which are aimed at the Cuban leadership, such as a ban on travelling to the country and a freeze on Cuban assets and on foreign investment.

Motion for a resolution B7-0148/2010

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The EU has undertaken to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 20%, to reduce energy consumption by 20% and to generate at least 20% of the energy consumed from renewable sources by 2020. Furthermore, the EU is aiming to set an example globally in saving resources and protecting the environment.

These ambitious targets can only be achieved if the EU as a whole and each of the Member States individually make clear commitments to deadlines. Investments in low carbon energy technologies are key to meeting the targets proposed for 2020, which is not as far away as it seems. Attaining these targets requires a considerable financial effort: EUR 58 billion, according to some meticulous calculations, from both public and private sources.

However, this financial, logistical and administrative effort will turn the EU into a global leader in innovation and will have a positive impact on its economy by creating jobs and opening up new prospects in the field of research, which has been unjustly underfunded for decades. The investments in developing low carbon energy sources will yield results in the medium and long term, making a positive impact across the whole European Union.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE), in writing. – (PT) It is vital to insist on a radical change in society based on the sustainability of cities, decentralised energy production and industrial competitiveness. This is an essential policy for a prosperous and sustainable society that is prepared for the challenges of climate change, secure energy supply and globalisation, with global leadership in the area of clean technologies. The SET Plan intends to contribute specifically to the development of clean technologies. I welcome the fundamental guidelines that the communication presents on how to organise the logic of intervention between the public and private sectors and between Community, national and regional financing. However, it is essential to increase public funding of scientific research in the area of clean technologies. Europe still has to create conditions for there to be more private investment in scientific research, in technological development and demonstration in the energy field. It is vital to move beyond words to action. The next EU financial perspective and the 8th Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development should prioritise energy security, the fight against climate change and the environment. Only in this way will it be possible to maintain the competitiveness of our industry, promote economic growth and job creation.

Edite Estrela (S&D), in writing. – (PT) I voted in favour of the European Parliament resolution on investment in the development of low carbon technologies (SET Plan), because, in order to effectively tackle the economic crisis, investing in those new technologies that have the greatest potential for job creation should be a priority. I believe that these investments could create new opportunities for the development of the EU's economy and competitiveness.

Diogo Feio (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The SET Plan presented by the Commission proposes investment in R&D to develop efficient and sustainable clean energy technologies with low carbon emissions, making it possible to ensure the necessary reduction of emissions without jeopardising European industries, thus making a commitment, which we believe to be serious, to sustainable development.

New energy policies, particularly within the context of the general crisis, must not lose sight of economic efficiency and must not, in any way, jeopardise the economic sustainability of European nations, without this meaning poorer environmental performance.

For this reason I urge a new approach on energy policy, one that is based on clean energy, more efficient use of the natural resources at our disposal and heavy investment in research and more environmentally-friendly technologies so that we can maintain European competitiveness and allow job creation within a framework of an innovative and sustainable economy.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I welcome the objectives of the SET Plan (Strategic Energy Technology Plan), which insist on the development of a low-carbon society. The SET Plan seeks to accelerate the development and roll-out of low-carbon technologies. This plan includes measures relating to planning, implementation, resources and international cooperation in the area of innovative technologies in the energy sector. Several studies estimate that promoting the European target of 20% renewable energy penetration will result in millions of new jobs by 2020. Furthermore, roughly two thirds of these jobs will be created in small and medium-sized enterprises. The solution requires the development of green technologies. Therefore, we need more funding for the SET Plan, which I advocate should be provided in the next review of the financial perspective. We also need to promote green technologies and skilled labour through investment in education and research. The sooner we begin to achieve a low-carbon society, the sooner we will emerge from the crisis.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) The development and implementation of low-carbon technologies is extremely important not only for environmental reasons – which include the need to reduce atmospheric emissions of carbon dioxide – but also for energy reasons, considering the inevitable gradual shortage and eventual depletion of fossil fuel reserves, on which humanity is highly dependent.

Unfortunately, both the SET Plan and the resolution just adopted, do not just offer an incomplete approach to the problem – both in terms of the technologies and energy sources to be considered, and of the necessity to reduce consumption – but, above all, they still consider this investment as another good business opportunity (in which some, a select few, will earn a great deal, to the detriment of many) rather than an environmental and energetic imperative to safeguard the common good of humanity.

It is significant and revealing that in the vote on the amendments to the resolution, instead of promoting ‘ambitious reduction targets’ of atmospheric carbon dioxide emissions, the choice was made ‘to promote world-wide carbon emission trading’.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) The use of low-carbon technologies which naturally produce less carbon dioxide is positive and desirable.

However, we cannot accept that, at the expense of technological development and strengthening of the so-called SET Plan, yet another excuse is being sought to weaken national energy policies.

Reading the words of the Commission that ‘the SET Plan is the technology pillar of the EU’s energy and climate policy’, leaves no doubt as to the real intentions of the European Commission to weaken the sovereignty of Member States in such an important area as national energy strategies.

The motion for a resolution contains aspects, in more detail, with which we cannot agree, particularly the promotion of ‘world-wide carbon emission trading’, given that this solution has already shown not to offer advantages in reducing carbon emissions, as well as the creation of more public-private partnerships, emphasising a ‘substantive increase in the portion of public investment’, thus using public money to serve private interests and profit.

Our group therefore voted against.

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE), *in writing*. – Mr President, Sustainable and effective low-carbon technologies are the core essentials in the huge task of decarbonisation we in the EU, and globally, are facing. It is due to this fact that I welcomed the rapid process in which Parliament drafted a resolution on the topic, giving a clear indication to the commission and the council that the SET Plan is timely and important. If we are serious with our mission, it is evident that we need all forms of low-carbon technologies, including sustainable nuclear power. Therefore I am happy that we managed to delete the wording on recital i, which is yet another attempt to put nuclear in a light it nowadays does not deserve. This recital may have had negative implications on the concept of ‘sustainable low-carbon technologies’ suggesting that nuclear is not part of that. The fact however is that we in the EU cannot afford not to use it if we want to take climate change seriously. Until renewable energies really can deliver effective results and secure constant energy flow, it is such low-carbon technologies which we must rely on.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Investment in low-carbon technologies must be a priority, since it is one of the most effective ways to tackle climate change, preparing the EU for a green economy. Intelligent low-carbon solutions should therefore receive special attention, not least with regard to their Community funding, to achieve the environmental targets set by the EU for 2020.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) I abstained from the vote on the motion for a resolution on ‘Investing in Low-Carbon Technologies’ as, although it contained a number of reasonable approaches, it supports the further development of nuclear energy, which is something that I reject due to the major risks associated with it. The motion for a resolution rightly points out that research has had too little funding hitherto. However, so that Europe remains competitive in respect of other global players, the funding of research projects must be massively expanded, especially in the field of the new energy sources. The development of new, low-carbon technologies in the energy sector will, I hope, not only safeguard the existing jobs in this field but will also create many additional highly qualified jobs. However, I believe that, in this respect, the investment should be made in the fields of solar energy and carbon capture and storage. Given the potential for grave consequences, the investments in nuclear energy must be re-thought and redeployed. This new policy direction in energy issues will also improve the security of energy supplies within the EU and institute a more robust independence from foreign suppliers.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – (ES) Like the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, I have voted against the motion for a resolution (B7-0148/2010) on investing in the development of low-carbon technologies (SET Plan) for a number of reasons; in particular, because the amendment requesting the deletion of recital I – which was key for us – was accepted; in that paragraph it was suggested that the sixth European Industrial Initiative on ‘Sustainable Nuclear Energy’ should be renamed simply ‘Nuclear Energy’. We consider that the concept of ‘sustainable nuclear energy’ is meaningless because, in the best of cases, it is possible to reduce the threat to the environment and to people’s health, and the risks of proliferation that stem from the development and use of nuclear energy, but not eliminate them.

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0139/2010

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted in favour of this motion for a resolution, to express my grief for the victims and my solidarity with their families and friends in both natural catastrophes. These severely affected several Member States and regions.

I would therefore state that it is imperative for Europe to make a prompt response to these events, namely activation of the European Solidarity Fund, thus showing the EU’s solidarity with all those affected.

At this time it is important to have special consideration for the island and outermost regions which, in addition to their permanent obstacles, are now confronted with devastated infrastructure and personal, commercial and agricultural property, and, in many cases, not being able to resume normal activities immediately, particularly in the regions that depend almost exclusively on tourism, as the media portrayal of the events could deter potential visitors.

It is therefore necessary to call on the Commission and the Council to take prompt action, so that the Council reassesses the proposal to make implementation of the European Solidarity Fund simpler, quicker and more flexible.

Similarly, it is important to review with the respective Member States the European programmes and structural, agricultural and social funds, so as to improve the response to the needs arising from these catastrophes.

Elena Băsescu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of the motion for a resolution on the major natural disasters which have taken place in the autonomous region of Madeira and the effects of the storm Xynthia in Europe. I believe that the European Union must show solidarity to those who suffer as a result of these natural disasters. They have hit regions in Portugal, western France, various regions in Spain, in particular the Canary Islands and Andalusia, as well as Belgium, Germany and the Netherlands. In western France the storm caused the death of roughly 60 people and the disappearance of a number of people, not to mention the destruction of several thousand homes. The European Commission can provide financial support to the affected regions through the European Union’s Solidarity Fund. It is of paramount importance that there is a sense of solidarity between Member States in the event of major natural disasters. There must be coordination between the authorities at local, national and European level in their efforts to rebuild the affected areas. Effective prevention policies must not be overlooked either. We must ensure, both in this case and for the future, that European funds will reach the affected regions as quickly as possible in order to help those affected by natural disasters.

Regina Bastos (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) On 20 February, a unique meteorological phenomenon occurred on Madeira causing, at least, 42 deaths, with 32 people missing, 370 homeless and around 70 injured.

On 27-28 February, in western France on the Atlantic coast (Poitou-Charentes and Pays de la Loire), another phenomenon caused 60 deaths, with 10 people missing and more than 2 000 homeless. This storm also isolated several regions in Spain, particularly in the Canary Islands and Andalusia.

Besides the human and psychological suffering, these meteorological phenomena caused a scene of widespread destruction with an extremely serious social and economic impact on the economic activities of these regions, as many people lost all they had.

I voted in favour of this motion for a resolution, calling on the Commission to immediately take all action necessary to mobilise the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF), in the most urgent and flexible way and to the maximum possible amount to help the victims.

I would emphasise the need to draft a new EUSF regulation based on the Commission's proposal, in order to deal with the problems caused by natural disasters in a more flexible and effective way.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The storm that devastated Madeira on 20 February caused enormous human and material losses in the region of Madeira. The role of the EU is vitally important, as it has mechanisms and instruments at its disposal, such as the Solidarity Fund, the Structural Funds – the European Regional Development Fund and the European Social Fund – and the Cohesion Fund, which need to be activated and applied in a quick, flexible and simplified manner. I welcome the motion for a resolution in which the European Commission is asked, as soon as it receives a request from the Portuguese Government, to initiate the action necessary to mobilise the European Union Solidarity Fund (EUSF) in the most urgent and flexible way and to the greatest possible extent. I call on the solidarity of the institutions of the European Union towards the swift and flexible application of the Cohesion Fund, bearing in mind Madeira's special status as an insular and outermost region of the EU. I appeal to the good will of the European Commission as regards negotiating the revision of the regional operational programmes INTERVIR+ (ERDF) and RUMOS (ESF), as well as the section on Madeira of the Thematic Territorial Enhancement Operational Programme (Cohesion Fund).

Nessa Childers (S&D), in writing. – I voted in favour of this report and was very happy that it was passed by the parliament. Following similar if less severe weather circumstances in Ireland involving flooding and the recent snow, I know how deeply these tragedies affect families and citizens of the EU, and it is important that this house acts to help in any way that it can.

Carlos Coelho (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The natural disaster that affected Madeira on 20 February has left a desolate scene, human suffering and widespread destruction, with devastating consequences for the respective economic and production structures.

One week later, another natural disaster – storm Xynthia – had devastating consequences on a region in western France and several regions of Spain.

I would like to join with the feeling of grief and express my solidarity with all those affected by this tragedy, in terms of both the human and material losses.

It is vital to provide aid to people, as well as to rebuild infrastructure, public facilities and essential services.

It is true that the Solidarity Fund can only be paid after the completion of the procedures to mobilise the Fund and the respective approval by the Council and Parliament. However, in the current situation, it is very difficult to ask people facing immense difficulties in resuming their normal way of life to wait. Therefore, we ask for the greatest urgency and flexibility both in making funds available and taking exceptional measures to help Madeira.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), in writing. – (PT) On 20 February this year there was a tragedy in Madeira, characterised by unprecedented, torrential rain, strong winds and huge waves. It left at least 42 dead, several disappeared, hundreds homeless and dozens wounded. I would like to highlight the immediate efforts of the Regional Government of Madeira and its institutions in their rapid and coordinated response to this tragedy. On 27-28 February 2010 in western France – in particular the regions of Poitou-Charentes and Pays-de-la Loire – there was a very strong and destructive storm, dubbed Xynthia. It left more than 60 dead, several disappeared and thousands homeless. In the face of these tragedies I wish to show my profound grief and strong solidarity with all the affected regions, giving my condolences to the families of the victims and paying tribute to the search and rescue teams. I call on the Commission to begin taking, as soon as requested by the respective Member State, all the necessary steps to mobilise as much of the European Union Solidarity

Fund as is possible. When assessing these requests, the Commission must take into account the specific nature of the individual regions, in particular the fragility of isolated and peripheral regions.

Sylvie Guillaume (S&D), *in writing*. – (FR) I endorsed this motion for a resolution on the action to be taken in the wake of the devastating and deadly passage of storm Xynthia on our territory because, beyond trying to lay blame, we must above all show European solidarity so as to support the victims of this disaster, which struck several European countries. Not only must we harness the Solidarity Fund, but this aid must also come from the Cohesion Fund, the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development. Lastly, we must encourage insurance companies to intervene as quickly as possible and subsequently learn lessons from such events when it comes to issuing planning permission.

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE), *in writing*. – (PL) Ladies and gentlemen, I endorsed the motion for a resolution on the major natural disaster in the autonomous region of Madeira and the effects of the storm 'Xynthia' in Europe. Let us concentrate on Madeira, because it was there that the catastrophe took the heaviest toll. We are creating a large and strong community for many reasons, but also so that we can help each other in times of need. Today, Madeira and other regions are in need, because they have been hit hard by the effects of the storm. It is our duty to help those who need our aid. I hope the motion for a resolution will contribute to the effective elimination of the effects of the tragedy. I sympathise deeply with all the victims and their families. Thank you.

Véronique Mathieu (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) In recent weeks, several EU regions have been hit by natural disasters: Madeira, then western France and various regions of Spain. The human and material consequences caused by the violence of these meteorological phenomena have left a deep impression on us MEPs. This explains the motion for a resolution on natural disasters voted on today in the European Parliament; it expresses our 'deepest sympathy' and 'solidarity' with the victims of the devastated regions. European solidarity must be reflected in financial terms by the mobilisation of the European Union Solidarity Fund and by means of other European-funded projects. However, when it comes to the Solidarity Fund, I must point out that the current regulation does not permit a sufficiently flexible and rapid response; the opportunity exists to amend this regulation, and it is now up to the European Council to make progress in this matter. I also voted in favour of the amendment supporting the proposal made by Mr Barnier in 2006 to create a European civil protection force. I regret that it has not been adopted; implementing this proposal would improve the EU's crisis response capacity.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The recent natural tragedy that occurred on Madeira has left the island in a state of chaos. Other regions in Europe have been equally devastated by the impact of storm Xynthia. The EU should unreservedly help in a joint effort to express solidarity, mobilising the European Union Solidarity Fund for this purpose. The EUSF was established with the aim of delivering urgent financial aid to Member States affected by natural disasters.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) On 20 February, a serious natural disaster with torrential rainfall on an unprecedented scale, in conjunction with a powerful storm and very high waves, hit Madeira, killing at least 42 people, with many people still missing. In addition, hundreds of people have been left homeless. A few days later, the devastating storm Xynthia passed along the French Atlantic coast, causing nearly 60 deaths, in particular in the regions of Poitou-Charentes, Pays de la Loire and Brittany. There, too, there are many people missing.

Thousands of people have also been left homeless. I therefore supported the measures proposed in the joint motion for a resolution for the EU to come to the aid of these countries and regions financially, for which reason I voted in favour of the motion for a resolution. In particular, it must be ensured that the Union's Solidarity Fund is mobilised promptly and flexibly.

Wojciech Michał Olejniczak (S&D), *in writing*. – (PL) I voted in favour of adoption of European Parliament motion for a resolution RC-B7-0139/2010. Ecological catastrophes and natural disasters are an increasingly common part of our lives. The dangers from changes in the environment have grown over recent decades, and we should do everything possible to prevent them.

The European Union, which has 27 Member States and half a billion citizens, must tackle not only the emergence of climate and environmental change, but must also look after its citizens and guarantee them the best possible conditions for survival after a crisis. Our efforts, however, must not concentrate only on giving help after the event. A fundamental reason for the European Union's existence is to give its citizens a

sense of security. In relation to this, the appropriate EU institutions must take specific steps to supervise the regions and their abilities to undertake preventative action.

In order to tackle, as quickly as possible, the effects of the storm 'Xynthia', we should mobilise the European Union Solidarity Fund and help all those who have incurred losses in connection with this catastrophe. Adverse and painful events which affect others should always prompt us to take effective action in solidarity with those who have suffered. Let us show that it is the same this time.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – I abstained on the resolution on the major natural disaster in the Autonomous Region of Madeira and the effects of storm Xynthia in Europe (RC-B7-0139/2010) because two of our key amendments were defeated. More specifically, the one which made reference to the fact that in France buildings were allowed on floodplains and natural wetlands and that housing speculation caused the construction of buildings in vulnerable areas, and the one stating that all Community funds for the implementation of such plans, particularly from the Structural Funds, the EAFRD, the Cohesion Fund and the European Solidarity Fund, be conditional on sustainability measures.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) I would like to begin by expressing my solidarity with the families of the victims of the natural disasters in Madeira and of the victims of storm Xynthia. Natural disasters have been an ever-frequent occurrence recently due to climate change. This is why we must ensure that the European Union is prepared to respond as quickly and efficiently as possible.

I voted in favour of the European Parliament motion for a resolution which calls on the Commission to consider the possibility of increasing the community cofinancing rate for regional operational programmes. No Member State is able to cope on its own with natural disasters of great magnitude. This is why the European Commission must adapt the European Solidarity Fund in order to guarantee that Member States hit by disasters will be able to access this fund quicker and in a more efficient manner.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) This motion for a resolution expresses the need to provide aid to those European regions that were recently the scene of natural disasters, such as the Autonomous Region of Madeira. The heavy rainfall on Madeira on 20 February has, in addition to the serious human consequences, with 42 people killed, several injured and made homeless, had countless repercussions and serious material damage.

In this context, it is vital to mobilise assistance for affected regions to recover from the economic and social consequences of disasters. I would stress particularly the fragility of insular and outermost regions, as in the case of Madeira, where the specific nature of its economy and social situation makes it all the more vital to provide the best aid possible.

I would repeat the need to call on the European Commission to mobilise the Solidarity Fund in a flexible manner, as well as to revise the regional programmes financed by the Cohesion Fund, with a view to adapting them to the requirements arising from the tragedy.

It would be equally apt to review the financing planned for 2010 earmarked for specific projects, in accordance with the general rules on the Structural Funds for 2007-2013.

In view of the size of the natural disaster on Madeira, and its indelible consequences, and the effect of storm Xynthia, I voted in favour of the tabled document.

10. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

(The sitting was suspended at 12.30 and resumed at 15.00)

IN THE CHAIR: MR WIELAND

Vice-President

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

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

12.1. The case of Gilad Shalit

President. – The next item is the debate about cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law (Rule 1 22 of the Rules of Procedure), initially the case of Gilad Shalit (four⁽²⁾ motions for resolutions).

Bastiaan Belder (IND/DEM), author. – (NL) Mr President, at around 8 o'clock this morning, here in Parliament, I visited the website dedicated to Gilad Shalit and a painful fact immediately caught my eye: for 1 355 days, 3 hours, 12 minutes and 37 seconds, Gilad, who has been abducted, has been denied any contact with his father, mother, brother and sister. However, on the same website I also came across a passage from the Book of Jeremiah: 'So there is hope for your descendants, declares the Lord. Your children will return to their own land'. Noam Shalit, who is with us here today, is placing his hope and confidence in you, as well as in the God of Israel, to obtain the release of his precious son.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, today we are debating the case of Gilad Shalit. During a special meeting with the Israeli delegation yesterday afternoon, I already assured Noam Shalit that his cause – the release of Gilad Shalit – is our cause, too. Let this debate and this resolution be clear signs of that, which obviously call for follow-up by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs. Yesterday morning, I spoke to Baroness Ashton personally about this. The case of Shalit is our cause, a European cause.

Ladies and gentlemen, please remain loyal to this cause in the coming period as well. I am counting on you. Let Europe make a difference in the Middle East. Together with Noam Shalit and his family, we are looking forward to the fulfilment of the rabbinic prayer for Shalit, psalm 126, verse 1: 'When the Lord brought back the captives to Zion, we were like men who dreamed'.

Frédérique Ries, author. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, Gilad Shalit was 19 years old when he was kidnapped in a Hamas attack near Gaza. Not in Gaza, but in Israel, in a kibbutz where his unit was stationed.

For nearly four years, this young man has been living in a cellar; there is no right to receive visitors, no doctor, no lawyer, no mail, no trial and no Geneva Convention for Gilad, nothing. He who is known – wrongly, in fact – as soldier Gilad Shalit was carrying out his military service like all young people in his country.

He is a rather shy young man – like his father for that matter, whom we have met on several occasions and whom we have the pleasure of welcoming today again in this Chamber – a young man who loved maths, who loved football and who would have returned to civilian life, of course, had he not been living, for four years now, in a hole, cut off from the world and cut off from his family.

Commissioner, I do not want to talk to you about politics this afternoon; I do not want to talk to you about the Middle East, conflicts, bargaining or prisoner exchanges. Our Parliament is unanimous today in calling for you to help a young man – a young Israeli, a young Frenchman, a young European – return home.

That is why I, together with my fellow authors of this resolution and members of six political groups, Mrs Essayah, Mr Cohn-Bendit, Mr Howitt, Mr Tannock and Mr Belder, who spoke just now, am writing today to Baroness Ashton.

We call very strongly for Baroness Ashton, who will travel to Israel and Gaza next Wednesday, to exert all her influence in order to demand the release of Gilad Shalit, the influence with which she is endowed by the mandate of our resolution today, the influence of 500 million European citizens whom we represent in this House.

(Applause)

Proinsias De Rossa, author. – Mr President, I welcome this cross-party resolution calling for the release of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit held captive since 2006 by the military wing of Hamas. I agree with Gilad's father, who has asked that his son's case be addressed as a humanitarian issue and not be turned into a political football. In the cut and thrust of political debate we must never lose sight of the suffering of both Israeli and Palestinian families whose loved ones have been taken from them in this conflict.

The Geneva Conventions must be respected by all sides. It is totally unacceptable that Gilad Shalit has been denied his rights as a prisoner of war to which the Goldstone Report categorically states he is entitled. His family have no information on the state of his health, either physical health or mental health.

(2) See Minutes.

At the same time, amongst the 7 200 Palestinian prisoners in Israeli jails, also held in breach of the Geneva Conventions, 1 500 are held for an indefinite period and 13 have already served 25 years. Forty-four are children while 23 members of the Palestinian Legislative Council are detained in retaliation for the capture of Gilad Shalit. Again, Goldstone is clear: these detentions of PLC members are contrary to international law.

I will raise these issues at the Euromed Parliamentary Assembly in Jordan this weekend. I urge Catherine Ashton during her upcoming visit to the region to press the Israeli and Palestinian authorities, including those in Gaza, for the release of Gilad Shalit and of Palestinian children and PLC members and to ensure their safe and early return to their families.

Charles Tannock, *author*. – Mr President, Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit has now been held hostage by the Jihadi fanatics of Hamas for over three years. Hamas claims it is a legal actor observing the Geneva Conventions and therefore he is a prisoner of war, but Israel, in my view rightly, regards him as an abductee from the moment he was seized. Irrespective of his legal status and international law, he has been cruelly kept incommunicado in Gaza, deprived of any contact with the outside world and even denied Red Cross access, which the Geneva Conventions mandate. His family has no information about his well-being beyond one video and sporadic indication from Hamas that he is still alive and well.

If Hamas has any claim to be taken seriously by the international community, it should at least now show unequivocally that the conditions of his incarceration adhere to international humanitarian laws.

But we demand more than that. We demand his immediate and unconditional release. I make no secret of my opposition to dialogue with the terrorists of Hamas, an organisation committed to Israel's annihilation, but, if we are ever to deal with Hamas, it must only be after Gilad Shalit has been liberated from his squalid captivity.

Sari Essayah, *author*. – Mr President, usually when this House makes a resolution which has even a slight connection with the situation in the Middle East, it is hard to find mutual understanding. That is not so in this case, thanks to the colleagues who have made it possible.

The situation of Gilad Shalit is a humanitarian issue and our joint resolution underlines the fact that, since being taken hostage nearly four years ago, he has been kept in an unknown place in Gaza, where he does not enjoy basic rights according to any humanitarian standards, including the third Geneva Convention. It is from this humanitarian perspective that we demand the immediate release of Gilad Shalit. Meanwhile, the minimum requirement is that the Red Cross and Shalit's parents may be allowed to be in contact with him.

The value of a human person cannot be measured. It is immeasurable. Gilad Shalit should not be made a bargaining chip by the terrorist organisation Hamas but should be released immediately. This is the message that we would like the High Representative, Baroness Ashton, to take with her to Gaza during her forthcoming visit.

Takis Hadjigeorgiou, *author*. – (EL) Mr President, yesterday I and other members attended a meeting at which Shalit's father was present and I should like to say that it is impossible not to be affected by this family's tragedy. That is why our position is that Gilad Shalit, a member of the Israeli armed forces arrested in Israeli territory on 24 June 2006, meets the criteria for him to be considered a prisoner-of-war under the Third Geneva Convention.

As such, he should be given humanitarian treatment and be allowed to communicate. The International Red Cross should be allowed to visit him and his family should have every right to be informed of his situation and, of course, to visit him. At the same time, we express our belief and our desire that this person will be released.

However, without wishing in any way to detract from what I have said so far, I believe that our position that this issue can be differentiated from a series of other Palestinians in gaol is somewhat apolitical. Their presence in these gaols is also a humanitarian issue. I believe that we are giving false hopes to this family if we think that, by focusing, as a Parliament, solely on the release of this particular person, for whom I repeat our demand that he be released, we shall achieve something.

Is the fact that dozens of 16-year-old Palestinian children are in gaol not a humanitarian issue? How can you differentiate between these two issues? We cannot not mention the fact that Gaza itself – as someone said earlier that he is living in a hovel and indeed he is living in a hovel – that Gaza itself, I repeat, is an immense hovel. One-and-a-half million Palestinians living there are living in a collective hovel. There are 7 200

Palestinians in Israeli prisons; they include 270 children aged between 16 and 18 and 44 children below the age of 16. Seven hundred and fifty thousand Palestinians have been arrested and put in prison since 1967.

So we are calling for the release of Shalit, but our position is that we believe that this can be achieved by divorcing it from the overall picture in Palestine is apolitical.

To close, I should like to add that the only area in the world with a minister for prisoners is Palestine. I would like to express once again our love and sympathy for the family and I trust that this problem will be resolved shortly.

Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, *author.* – (FR) Mr President, the resolution on Corporal Gilad Shalit, which we are examining today, supplements the many resolutions previously adopted by the European Parliament on the human rights situation in the Middle East.

Corporal Gilad Shalit, who has been held hostage for 1 355 days, must be released as soon as possible. We demand and we hope very sincerely that he will be released. The young Franco-Palestinian, Salah Hamouri, who has been detained by the Israeli authorities since 13 March 2005, must be released. The children imprisoned in Israel, in violation of the provisions of international law and the conventions on the rights of the child, must be released. The militants of the NonViolent Popular Resistance Against the Occupation, such as Abdallah Abu Rahmah from Bil'in, must be released. The elected representatives, the members of the Palestinian Legislative Council – including Marwan Barghouti – must be released.

It is time for the European Union to insist strongly that human rights and international law be respected in the Middle East. The solutions do not lie in oneupmanship, exercised under repressive and violent conditions, an example of which was the assassination of a Hamas leader in Dubai, which we condemn, not least because it makes securing the release of Gilad Shalit even more difficult.

Elena Băsescu, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (RO) This is the second occasion in the last two weeks that I have spoken about Gilad Shalit in plenary, and I am pleased that the joint efforts made with my fellow Members have resulted in this resolution. 'The case of Gilad Shalit' demonstrates the particular concern the European Union has for the humanitarian situation in Gaza. Gilad's rights, which are set out in the Geneva Convention, should not be made conditional upon the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Indeed, Gilad Shalit's father Noam has repeatedly confirmed that neither he nor his family is involved in politics. They have not chosen to be in this situation at the moment. The ideal scenario for us Europeans would be two states coexisting in peace and security.

Negotiations for Gilad's release have been going on right since 2006 via different intermediaries, with, in actual fact, one highly controversial proposal being put forward for him to be handed over in exchange for 1 000 Palestinian prisoners. Gilad and his family need our help.

Thank you very much.

Olga Sehnalová, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (CS) The case of Gilad Shalit has become a symbol of the endless desperation and frustration in the Middle East. This is true both for the people living there and for the international community, which is engaged there. Gilad Shalit is a hostage with a name, whose eventful fate we follow with sympathy and concern. The people of the Middle East are the nameless hostages of this never-ending conflict. An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth. Or is there another hope for Gilad and all the other victims?

All of the standards of international law will not make up for what we hear so desperately little of in this conflict – an appeal for humaneness. To try and abandon the geopolitical view of the world, where human beings and their fates are manipulated like playing cards. To try and put ourselves in the position of the families of victims and of all innocent detainees and destitute people.

What then prevents the release of Gilad Shalit and all those whose guilt has not been established beyond doubt by the courts? Not to mention the encouragement of those who want to live in peace. The key to peace is trust, compromise and the courage to defend peace against all those who are implacable. I would like to ask you to take the first step.

Margrete Auken, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (DA) Mr President, the purpose of our debate today is, in all earnestness, to put a name and a face to human suffering, and in that way expand our compassion and our empathy. In this regard, it is very valuable indeed that we have chosen Gilad Shalit as a topic for our debate today. This will lead us to extend our empathy to others, so that we can identify with their suffering

and their families' suffering. There are thousands of Palestinians who are being detained under totally unacceptable conditions, something that is contrary to international rules in every respect, and that is just as difficult a situation for them as it is for Gilad Shalit and his family. We must do our utmost to take this problem seriously, and my feeling is that all of us in this House are prepared to do so. The issue here is not just one prisoner, but thousands of prisoners who are victims of this major conflict.

I would also add a further point: it is important that we face up squarely to the cause of this suffering and that we realise that, if we do not do something, not only about the siege of Gaza, but also about the occupation of Palestine as a whole, and if we do not create a two-state solution which I believe all of us are calling for and want, there will be no future for these people. I think this is a really productive way to go about finding a common solution, and I hope that Baroness Ashton will put the EU in a position where it does not only have to pay, pay and pay, but where it can also make its voice heard every now and then.

Louis Bontes (NI). – (NL) Mr President, on 25 June 2006, an Israeli Army conscript, Corporal Gilad Shalit, was abducted following a terrorist infiltration from the Gaza Strip. He has since been held hostage by Hamas. Hamas has kept Shalit completely cut off from the outside world. He has been incarcerated in deepest darkness and not even the Red Cross is allowed access to him.

The Shalit case proves once again that Europe and Israel are on the same side. Barbaric Islamic forces are waging an all-out war against Western civilisation. Israel is in the frontline of that war. In Israel and Europe, every human life counts. For Islamic terrorists, human life counts for nothing, or rather, one human life is worth a thousand lives, because Hamas is demanding that, in exchange for Shalit, Israel release 1000 prisoners, including a large number of terrorist murderers.

It is important that we obtain Shalit's release, but without Israel having to release terrorists in return. After all, we have seen where exchanges like this have led in the past: the euphoria of victory for the terrorists, for their followers and leaders, and inevitably more terror. We cannot allow people to profit from terrorism, and it would be irresponsible if we encouraged Israel to respond to such hostage-taking with an exchange, because the next Hamas hostage could be somebody from Paris, Amsterdam or Brussels. And what kind of a position will we be in then?

The boot must be put on the other foot immediately: it is Hamas, not Israel, that must pay for taking Gilad Shalit, a European, hostage. The price should be so high that they release him of their own free will. In this regard, we ask that a complete ban on travel to and through Europe be imposed on all officials of the Hamas regime, including those who are not formally allied with Hamas and those who are not on the European terror list.

Tunne Kelam (PPE). – Mr President, this young man has been kept in captivity for almost 1 400 days with absolute disrespect for any international norms and no access to him even by the Red Cross. I think this case should be seen and solved exclusively as a human tragedy. I am encouraged by the wide support in the European Parliament for this debate and by the warm reception our colleagues expressed yesterday to Shalit's father.

Shalit's case should not become a bargaining chip. Instead it will be in the interests of Hamas if they want to gain legitimacy in the peace process. To conclude, the best proof for their credibility would be to release Gilad Shalit unconditionally and to abstain from further kidnappings.

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE). – (PL) The resolution we are discussing, today, is not of a political nature, and we are not trying to solve the Middle East conflict. All we want is that an innocent son be allowed to return to his father and to his family. I do not know if fellow Members know of the existence of an organisation called the Parents Circle. It is an organisation of Israeli and Palestinian families who have lost relatives in the conflict. We are talking, today, about an individual case precisely because we do not want Gilad Shalit's father to join those who have lost the closest of loved ones – their own children.

We are appealing for the release of a hostage, because we do not agree with the idea that the end justifies the means. Fighting in a just cause does not excuse actions which are universally considered to be wrong or acts of terrorism. Organisations which want to gain our approval, our respect, must not hold hostages.

(Applause)

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE). – (RO) I too wish to add my support to those who have called in this Chamber, both today and yesterday, for the release of Gilad Shalit, and I also wish to express my sympathy to his family.

I would like to address my speech to those who are perhaps asking themselves the question: 'Why have a resolution on the Gilad Shalit case, and why now?' Other fellow Members have reminded us that it will soon be four years that young Gilad Shalit has been held hostage in brutal conditions and in breach of the international standards recognised by the Third Geneva Convention on the treatment of prisoners of war. As every one of us can imagine, every extra day in captivity means awful suffering for Shalit and his family.

I would also give another reason for support, namely that Gilad Shalit is a European citizen, he is a European victim of terrorism, and on this day, which is European Day for the Victims of Terrorism, I can think of no more symbolic gesture than this resolution.

Ana Gomes (S&D). – Mr President, first of all I would like to salute the efforts made by Gilad Shalit's family to seek his release, which we wholeheartedly support. That is the message we want to convey through this resolution. We believe, as the Goldstone Report highlights, that he is indeed entitled to the status of prisoner of war, as the prisoners kept by Israel, including many children, should be.

We want all of them to be released. We want Gilad Shalit and all the Palestinian young men and women to be released. Indeed this is only way for peace to be achieved in that region. We urge Baroness Ashton to spare no effort to press for the release of Gilad Shalit and all the other Palestinian prisoners of war, especially those young people who are enduring this captivity.

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – (PL) The case of Gilad Shalit has a particular, personal dimension. It is the tragic case of a very young man the same age as my son, and it is also the tragic case of his family. However, let us not pretend that the case does not also have a broader political context. It does, in fact, make us aware that the black and white film which is often very one-sidedly presented also in this Chamber, the film which speaks of victims only on the Palestinian side, is something which is, really, not very objective.

I think that, today, we should demand very clearly the release of this young man, but let us also remember that those who are firing missiles at Sderot are responsible for the fact that he is still a prisoner.

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE). – (FI) Mr President, as we know, the background to this resolution was a very politically sensitive set of circumstances, but that ought not to prevent us from passing a clearly humanitarian resolution that is not watered down by general political remarks on the situation as a whole.

I am pleased that this resolution has kept to the point. I intend to vote in favour of it. It stresses the idea that all parties involved in the crisis in the Middle East must comply with international humanitarian law and human rights legislation. I hope that it receives the firm support of this House.

(Applause)

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, the case of the abducted Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, is of great concern to the European Union.

My former colleague Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner called urgently for Mr Shalit's release in this very House already on 5 July 2006, less than two weeks after his capture. Over the years and on a number of occasions, including at the latest Association Council with Israel last June and in the Foreign Affairs Council conclusions of December 2009, the EU has consistently called on those holding Mr Shalit to release him without delay. Therefore we join with today's Parliament motions calling for his release.

It is our opinion, in line with the assessment of many human rights organisations, that the terms and conditions of Mr Shalit's detention are contrary to international humanitarian law. Therefore we urge his captors to respect such obligations and in particular to allow delegates of the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit him. Finally, we are aware that mediation activities have been ongoing, aimed at the release of Gilad Shalit. We encourage all efforts made in this direction and we express our hope that they will soon be successful. I will also personally pass on a clear message from you to my colleague Cathy Ashton.

Of course our thoughts are with the family of Gilad Shalit. I know that his father has been in this House this week and I understand that he is at this very moment sitting here with us.

(Applause)

I want to reassure him that our thoughts and efforts are with him and, of course, with all the others who are suffering the consequences of this long lasting conflict.

(Applause)

President. – The debate is closed.

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

Written Statements (Rule 149)

Indrek Tarand (Verts/ALE), in writing. – I wish to express my regret in view of the imprisonment of Gilad Shalit. His abduction alongside the detention of the rest of the prisoners in the area is unacceptable. This situation needs to be amended as soon as possible. I believe that release of Shalit would contribute to the Middle East peace process in general.

(FR) For the rest, France has just decided to sell a Mistral class warship to Russia; we believe that it will sincerely regret its action.

12.2. The escalation of violence in Mexico

President. – The next item is the debate on seven⁽³⁾ motions for resolutions on the escalation of violence in Mexico.

Ramón Jáuregui Atondo, author. – (ES) Mr President, I would like to begin by saying that Mexico is a great democracy that has progressed steadily over the last 20 years. It is a friend of the European Union and we share a Strategic Partnership Agreement. I would also like to say that Mexico is currently waging a very difficult war against organised drug trafficking.

Today in the European Parliament, however, we are talking about Mexico in the context of human rights, because there has been and continues to be a marked increase in violence, which affects Mexican people in particular, and because there have been repeated, serious complaints about human rights violations.

The resolution that the major political groups are going to adopt here today is based on respect and consensus; of course, it recognises the situation I have just described and urges Mexico to continue on the path towards rule of law and full democracy.

However, it also makes four important requests: it urges Mexico to ensure the right to a free press, because there have been attacks on journalists; to guarantee protection for the organisations that defend human rights, because those groups have been attacked and threatened; to guarantee protection for women who suffer violence, because many women have been murdered; and to avoid impunity and abuses of power by their police forces. This is what Parliament has asked of Mexico, in the spirit of friendship based on a favourable relationship with Mexico.

Renate Weber, author. – (ES) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, this week we are celebrating International Women's Day. In this Parliament, we have seen a great many posters in all the languages of the European Union, saying that we can put a stop to violence against women. Today we are talking about violence in Mexico, and I think it is right that we should recognise that Mexican women, both indigenous and non-indigenous victims, receive the least protection from local and federal authorities.

Mexican women are victims of all forms of violence, from domestic violence to sexual violence and torture carried out by the army or the police, and they also become murder victims. Regrettably, up to now the response from the Mexican authorities has been ineffective, which is why we can now accurately say that we are looking at a case of almost total impunity.

Our resolution calls on the Mexican Government to fight against femicide, which is a harsh word, but an accurate one when we consider that almost all the murders involving female victims go unpunished. For example, during the past four years in Mexico, only 11% of the criminals who murdered almost 700 women have been sentenced.

At the same time, it would appear that women are the judicial system's favourite victims. There is no other way to explain how it was possible for two indigenous women, Alberta Alcántara and Teresa González, to be sentenced to 21 years in prison and to have now spent more than three years in jail for kidnapping six men from the Federal Investigations Agency – all by themselves – during an incident in a market. Let us hope

(3) See Minutes.

that the judge, who will make a decision on the women's appeal in one week's time, realises how ridiculous and unjust the situation is.

However, violence against women starts in the home. I hope that Mexican legislators will soon make improvements to the General Law on Women's Access to a Life Free of Violence so that the different forms of violence and the mechanisms implementing the laws can be properly defined. It would also be right to establish domestic violence and rape within marriage as criminal offences.

Furthermore, in order for Mexican society to change and reject violence against women, it is important that schools deal with this issue as a basic matter of education for young people.

Adam Bielan, *author.* – (PL) For several years now, the authorities in Mexico, including, first and foremost, President Felipe Calderón, have been waging a bloody war against drugs gangs. Over 40 000 soldiers have been involved in the war, and several successes have been achieved. These successes include, undoubtedly, the arrests of the bosses of the Sinaloa and Juárez cartels, the destruction of over 23 000 hectares of opium crops and 38 000 hectares of marihuana, the closures of over 50 illegal laboratories which were producing narcotics and the arrests of over 45 000 people who were involved with this process.

We need to be aware that the Mexican drugs cartels generate annual incomes of many billions of dollars, which is incomparably more than the amounts allocated by the Mexican Government to tackling the narcotics problem. So the gangs are spending huge sums on corrupting politicians, judges and police officers. This is precisely why the authorities are losing the war. Since 2006, almost 15 000 people have been killed, and over 6 000 of them have been killed since last October. Journalists are especially in danger, as over 60 have been killed, including, recently, Jorge Ochoa Martínez.

We have to understand that without international involvement, Mexico will not win the war.

(Applause)

Santiago Fisas Ayxela, *author.* – (ES) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Mexico has a major problem with drugs trafficking and drug-related violence. To address this situation, the Government of President Felipe Calderón has adopted a tough stance in order to achieve its eradication: he has taken the decision to temporarily mobilise the armed forces, a move which has had a significant impact on the number of people arrested, the destruction of drugs and the confiscation of weapons. The army has accepted all the recommendations of the National Human Rights Commission, including those concerning the investigation of complaints about their own conduct.

The Government also recognises that it needs to make substantial changes in the area of security and justice, and is implementing an ambitious reform of the justice system in order for it to be more transparent and to bring to justice those who commit crimes, while respecting human rights.

The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) wishes to show its solidarity with the Mexican people in the fight against drugs trafficking, and we support President Calderón in his willingness to combat organised crime.

Finally, I would like to express my satisfaction with this agreement, which unites the main political Groups of this Parliament.

Marie-Christine Vergiat, *author.* – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, since 2007 there has been a constant increase in human rights violations in Mexico.

According to the Mexican NGOs and media, more than 6 500 murders attributable to drugs cartels have been recorded for 2009 alone, the vast majority of which were in the state of Chihuahua. President Calderón's government has sent thousands of soldiers to the worst affected areas.

Since then, the violent acts committed by these military forces and by the police forces alike have increased with complete impunity. The NGOs are producing ever more reports and talking about crimes of state. Journalists, indigenous communities, and especially women, both indigenous and nonindigenous, are particularly affected. I met some of these women from San Salvador Atenco; they had been raped and tortured by the police forces. I was appalled at what they told me. The perpetrators of these acts committed in May 2006 still enjoy complete impunity.

Therefore we cannot share the concerns of the Mexican authorities, the agents of which regularly violate human rights. It follows that we shall not support the joint resolution and we shall table ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Barbara Lochbihler, author. – (DE) Mr President, the images of the brutal use of violence on the open street in the so-called war on drugs in Mexico reach us regularly via the mass media. The murder of hundreds of women, mostly workers in the north of the country, is making headlines and has spawned the term 'feminicide'. The European Parliament has produced its own report on this. Despite knowledge of the major increase in serious violations of human rights, the Mexican Government appears to be unable or unwilling to do anything about it. Pointing out the necessary relentlessness in the fight against drug dealers is no substitute for consistent government action. The major expansion of military presence and power, the competence of military courts for crimes committed by soldiers, the almost complete impunity – these are the real causes of the escalating violence in the country. Even the Mexican national human rights commission has repeatedly documented the increase in violent crime by the military.

The government itself does not want to admit the situation. It also continually hushes up crime. Yesterday, for example, there was a story going around in the media that the Ministry of Defence had paid out an awful lot of money to the families of victims of violence in order to buy their silence. Who were the perpetrators? They were soldiers. The EU must address the fight against impunity in all its relations with Mexico. Given the severity of the human rights violations, it is absolutely necessary for the EU not to update the Global Agreement with Mexico. It must not do so until there has been a substantial improvement in the human rights situation in that country.

Cristian Dan Preda, on behalf of the PPE Group. – (RO) The escalation of violence in the Mexican states in the area bordering the United States, especially in Ciudad Juárez, is deeply worrying. The events of recent months have been particularly bloody, as the intervention of the federal authorities in this region has also been accompanied by a significant rise in the number of crimes related to drug trafficking. Therefore, the war against drug traffickers comes on top of a war between rival criminal gangs, resulting in a series of murders of exceptional brutality.

I believe that Mexico is an extreme case highlighting the entire difficulty in taking firm action against crime in order to safeguard national security. It is extremely important that we, here in the European Parliament, send a clear signal to support the efforts made by the Mexican Government aimed at eradicating crime, thereby improving the situation of the civilian population.

At the same time, we must encourage the Mexican authorities to continue vital reforms in the area of consolidating the rule of law, especially the reform of the justice and penal systems.

Thank you.

Ana Gomes, on behalf of the S&D Group. – (PT) The violence in Mexico is linked to drug trafficking and the social inequalities made worse by the economic crisis. Fighting impunity is key. It is vital to invest in the judicial system to try and punish criminals and to ensure protection of witnesses and victims, many of them young working women caught in the wave of violence by the drug traffickers.

It is shocking that Juárez is the world capital of feminicide, but even more shocking is the macho culture that explains the inaction of the authorities in prosecuting those responsible for these crimes and in protecting defenders of human rights, including journalists.

Europe must use the strategic partnership with Mexico to support constructively all those who fight for human rights. They are the same people who are fighting to defend the rule of law and democracy. Without human rights there is no rule of law or democracy.

Ryszard Czarnecki, on behalf of the ECR Group. – (PL) Mr President, in this Chamber a moment ago, I heard a call not to sign the understanding with the Mexican authorities. I do not understand this suggestion. After all, we commend the President of Mexico – and those who spoke before me a moment ago also did so – for his determined fight against the drugs barons and the mafia. We should, therefore, commend the Mexican authorities for their action, while at the same time, of course, pointing out that they should not throw out the baby with the bathwater, and that in this fight they should still try to respect human rights. That is obvious. We have to understand the situation of a country which has been struggling with huge organised crime syndicates and the mafia for decades. If the president of the country declares war in this area, he should be given complete support. However, of course, we have been speaking, here, about journalists, and we have been speaking about other victims. It should be emphasised that these people should not be made the victims of discrimination.

Rui Tavares, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (PT) Ladies and gentlemen, just this morning, the Mexican Trade Union of Electricians was surrounded by a police force of between 100 and 200 police officers. It is the same trade union that, after announcing a general strike, saw one of its leaders, Domingo Aguilar Vázquez, captured the next day on 16 March, and arrested on phony charges.

This attack on the freedom of trade unions in Mexico, conducted directly by the government, is even more shocking because we are talking here of the Mexican Federal Government not punishing crimes committed, for example, by their own military, or ineffectiveness in fighting drug trafficking.

Yes, the situation is complex. There are attacks by the armed forces on drug traffickers, but at the same time there are attacks against the trade unions. What happens is that, in a situation of ineffectiveness, impunity and rising authoritarianism, a democracy like the Mexican democracy spirals out of control.

This Parliament must vigorously condemn and, above all, call on the Mexican Government to finally stop being ineffective with regard to criminals and, apparently, so authoritarian with, for example, trade unions, workers and civil society movements.

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE). – (FI) Mr President, I wish to highlight two issues in our resolution on Mexico.

Firstly, as we have heard, violence has been on the increase this year. Mexico is in the grip of large drug cartels and the violence they perpetrate is estimated to have cost 15 000 lives already. The situation is especially bad close to the border between Mexico and the United States of America. The Mexican Government is trying to bring the situation under control by means of a massive military and police operation. The strategy has also attracted a lot of criticism. Obviously, responsibility for the drug trade, money laundering and the problems these cause also extends to other countries, and Mexico needs to be offered assistance and cooperation.

Secondly, I want to mention recent reports by Amnesty International regarding the unwillingness on the part of authorities to protect human rights activists. Those who stand up for indigenous peoples and poor communities are at particular risk. When it becomes dangerous to promote human rights, many have to consider the risks of the work they do. Those on whose behalf the activists work then lose hope.

These matters, issues relating to the drug trade, and human rights must also be taken up for discussion in May, when we think about plans for cooperation at the next EUMexico Summit.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) The Mexican Government must make a firm commitment to combating drug trafficking and respecting human rights and the rule of law.

Drug trafficking has resulted in acts of violence ending in losses of human life. The cities of Tijuana and Ciudad Juárez featured among the ten most dangerous cities in the world in 2009. Since 2007, 15 000 murders have been committed in the war against drugs, with the figure in 2009 alone reaching 7 724.

Young people and women are hit hardest by the trafficking and consumption of drugs. In Mexico the economic crisis may turn into a social conflict, with poverty and the lack of education being among the factors which can determine that young people become victims of drug consumption. In Mexico in 2010, approximately 7.5 million young people have no chance of being registered in the formal education system, which also means no hope of making a decent living.

In conclusion, I would say that the dialogue between the European Union and Mexico needs to be stepped up with the aim of promoting economic and social development, as well as respect for human rights and the rule of law.

Thank you.

Bernd Posselt (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, we often discuss dictatorships in this House. Mexico is not a dictatorship, but a democracy. We are debating individual cases of serious human rights violations. For Mexico, that is not the key subject. The key subject is the fact that this large democracy, which is a strategic partner of ours, has been suffering from a serious, perhaps even fatal illness for decades.

It therefore requires the right treatment and the right doctor. President Calderón and his comrades-in-arms are that doctor. That does not mean that they are capable of using, or allowed to use, every treatment there is, but we must support them.

That is why I believe that paragraph 12 in the resolution, in which we state that we intend to make greater use of our financial instrument to reinforce good governance, the rule of law, the structures of a State under the rule of law against the disintegration of the State, against organised criminality, against that impunity, which has been quite rightly criticised, is so important. We cannot do that, however, by freezing or abandoning our contacts; rather, we must strengthen them.

Francisco José Millán Mon (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, we are all concerned by the increase in violence in Ciudad Juárez, but I trust in the broad measures that the Mexican authorities have put in place in order to effectively tackle this complex situation. I also support the vigorous battle President Calderón is currently waging against drugs trafficking, which is a very serious global threat that concerns us all. That is why we should help the Mexican authorities in this difficult struggle.

Ladies and gentlemen, over the past 10 years, Mexico has gone through a very positive process of political and governmental modernisation. President Calderón is steadily promoting reforms. Mexico has also taken on greater international responsibilities and is playing an active role within, for example, the United Nations and the G-20.

In this Parliament, within my modest capabilities, I have always supported the establishment of a strategic partnership between the European Union and Mexico, which we finally achieved in 2008. I hope we can adopt an ambitious joint action plan or programme at the May Summit in Madrid, because the European Union and Mexico need to work together in many areas, both on a bilateral level and in multilateral forums, in order to confront challenges and threats together, including drugs trafficking and other forms of organised crime.

Charles Tannock (ECR). – Mr President, Mexico has long been a primary conduit into the world's largest market for illegal narcotics, the United States. Mexico has therefore been scarred by the brutality and violence that go hand in hand with the drugs trade. Moreover, Mexico itself, as a country of 100 million people and a vital EU strategic partner, has increasingly – and sadly – become an important market for cocaine. The rising consumption by young people is especially worrying.

Drug-related violence in Mexico only seems to be getting worse, with ever more grisly murders and journalists who report on such cases being themselves targeted. The prevalence of unemployment and poverty probably does not help either and induces a climate of lawlessness in parts of Mexico. President Calderón faces enormous challenges but he is determined to meet them head-on, and the EU should support him robustly. Particularly we should support his efforts to reform and restructure the police and criminal justice system in order to break up the corrupt links between the drug cartels and law enforcement. I believe he is also quite justified in the need to use the army as a temporary emergency measure.

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, an unprecedented rise in violence has created, within the country, a sense of deep insecurity amongst the population. The Commission is of course highly concerned at this situation. We know that the Mexican authorities are taking this seriously and have put in place a lot of measures to address the problem.

President Calderón's war on organised crime is its main priority. Apart from deploying a number of military across the country to fight organised crime, Mexico is making a tremendous effort to strengthen law enforcement and the judicial system.

In August 2008, a package of security measures was adopted which aims at reorganising the Mexican law enforcement and justice system. The justice reform passed by the Mexican Congress in 2008 has the potential to address the main systemic problems facing criminal justice in Mexico, although we are aware that the implementation of this reform will require a long-term commitment.

Mexico is also making a very serious effort to respond to the concerns over human rights abuses, in particular the impact of organised crime groups and vested interests of freedom of the media and freedom of expression, which have been brought to the attention of the EU by civil society organisations. In this connection, the Mexican Government established a special prosecutor for crimes committed against journalists in 2006.

It is making noticeable efforts in addressing other shortcomings, as seen in the approval of a federal law to eradicate violence against women and the appointment of a special prosecutor on this issue, and in the new federal law to combat trafficking in human beings.

As a member of the United Nations Human Rights Council, Mexico pledged to adopt a state policy on human rights and to remain open at international level with regard to human rights. The issue of the protection of

human rights in the framework of the fight against organised crime and the integrity of human rights defenders are reflected in the recommendations accepted by Mexico as a result of its participation in the UN Universal Periodic Review.

Mexico has shown interest and readiness in discussing with the European Union all these issues, most recently during the session of the EU-Mexico Joint Committee held in Brussels on 26-27 November 2009. Indeed, this area constitutes the subject of dedicated cooperation.

On 3-4 December 2009, the EU and Mexico jointly organised an international seminar in Cancún on 'The Legitimate Use of Force and the Protection of Human Rights'. The seminar provided a venue to hold expert consultations on a draft policy document on the human rights accountability of local police forces.

The draft policy document was presented to the Quintana Roo local congress in the aftermath of the seminar. This initiative is complementary to the recently adopted federal law on the reform of the judiciary system and could be replicated by other federal states.

We believe that the EU-Mexico Strategic Partnership provides the best framework for the EU to support Mexico in the areas of public security and the rule of law. The Strategic Partnership executive document currently under negotiation foresees the establishment of a formal EU-Mexico policy dialogue on security issues, as well as increased cooperation with relevant EU agencies such as CEPOL, Europol, Eurojust and the European Monitoring Centre for Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA).

From the Commission side, we are already supporting a project from 2004-2007 to strengthen the administration of justice in Mexico. Further cooperation in the field is foreseen for the period 2011-2013.

In conclusion, it is clear that Mexico is facing important challenges in the areas of public security and respect for human rights. It is not easy and the situation is far from ideal, but it is also fair to say that it is showing willingness and determination to ensure the compatibility of an effective public security policy with respect for human rights. We will continue to support Mexico in its efforts.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place after the debates.

12.3. South Korea – death penalty declared legal

President. – The next item is the debate on five⁽⁴⁾ motions for resolutions on South Korea – death penalty declared legal.

Renate Weber, author. – Mr President, after 13 years without an execution in South Korea, it is deeply sad that the Constitutional Court there ruled in favour of the death penalty a few weeks ago. The ruling states that the death penalty is a legal punishment that can deter crime for the public good. That is a commonly heard argument and merely a response to emotive situations in a given country at a certain time.

It in fact means that the death penalty is being viewed as a preventive force in the hope that, when a criminal knows there is capital punishment, he or she will think twice about his or her acts. We all know that many studies have refuted that idea.

Even more important is the fact that an execution is irreversible; there is no way back. Roman law at the time of Justinian stated that it was better for a guilty person to go unpunished than for an innocent person to be deprived of their life. That was 15 centuries ago. Since the South Korean Constitutional Court itself recognised that the death penalty could be subject to errors and abuse, our concerns brought forward today might strengthen the democratic institutions of the Republic of Korea in the idea that this method of punishment should be abolished for good.

Since the Republic of South Korea acceded to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights in 1990, and is a signatory to most of the major human rights treaties, moving backwards would be very harmful to its international reputation.

⁽⁴⁾ See Minutes.

David Martin, *author*. – Mr President, the European Union in general, and this Parliament in particular, has a very proud record – an honourable tradition – of opposing the death penalty. Therefore we can do nothing other than regret the decision of the Republic of Korea's Constitutional Court that the death penalty is not a violation of that country's Constitution.

However, I believe we have to keep the issue in proportion. The justices ruled by a narrow margin of five votes to four. The last time they voted it was seven votes to two. They did not urge or condone the use of the death penalty but called for a political decision for the Korean Parliament to decide on the future abolition of the death penalty in that country.

We also have to note that South Korea is *de facto* an abolitionist country. No executions have been carried out since February 1998 and, in 2007, Amnesty International categorised South Korea as a country that has virtually abolished capital punishment.

However, the seriousness of this issue comes back to the fore when we realise that the floor leader of the Grand National Party in Korea said just recently that this *de facto* moratorium on capital punishment should be ended and a swift execution should take place of certain prisoners. I hope this unfortunate opportunistic voice in Korea will be ignored and that South Korea will indeed move away from being a *de facto* moratorium country by changing its law and becoming a *de jure* moratorium country.

Martin Kastler, *author*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is regrettable that a number of States around the world still, in this day and age, conduct or permit this inhumane kind of punishment for serious criminals. I believe that nobody has the right to decide about the life or death of another person, be it at the beginning or the end of that life, and certainly not in connection with punishing a criminal act. This barbaric punishment by execution has no place in the modern world.

The unforgettable, great Pope John Paul II pointed out that, above all, atonement, the chance for reconciliation, must be possible. With an irreversible act such as the death penalty, that is not possible. That is why, as parliamentary groups, we are joining forces to call on our colleagues in South Korea to take up this subject in their parliament and to join with us Europeans to campaign for the abolition of the death penalty, as a mark of humanity. I would like to call on all Members to support this joint motion for a resolution unanimously.

Marie-Christine Vergiat, *author*. – (FR) Mr President, at the Fourth World Congress Against the Death Penalty, held at the end of February in Geneva, the abolitionist movement welcomed the growing number of countries that have abolished or suspended the death penalty. South Korea seemed to have committed itself along those lines, since no executions have been carried out there since December 1997.

The recent decision of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Korea cannot but worry us; we cannot but regret it. We therefore want the Commission and the Council to regard the abolition of the death penalty – a violation of the right to life and a crime of state – as a key element in the European Union's relations with third countries.

We want them to call on the Korean Government and the President of the Republic, himself sentenced to death in 1981, to make a firm commitment to abolish the death penalty; to decide on a moratorium, pursuant to the UN decision; to voice their concern at the situation of the 59 people, including certain political prisoners, who have been sentenced to death in that country; and to call for their death sentence to be commuted.

Barbara Lochbihler, *author*. – (DE) Mr President, the policy of abolishing the death penalty is a very successful part of European foreign policy. This can be seen in accession negotiations, in bilateral talks and also in the United Nations, where more and more States within the world community are deciding to come out in favour of a moratorium or to abolish the death penalty completely. Until recently, the Republic of South Korea was one of those States that, in practice, no longer applied this degrading and demeaning punishment.

Today's resolution is an expression of our concern that, with the decision of the South Korean Constitutional Court that executions are legally compatible with the constitution, a situation has now been brought about that truly facilitates the renewed use of the death penalty. We are therefore calling for the government of South Korea to do everything in its power, as an initial step, to adopt a legally binding moratorium that prohibits executions from taking place – there are, after all, over 55 people on death row – at which point, as a second step, the South Korea parliament should pass a law to abolish the death penalty.

It is very positive to see that within South Korean society, too, a movement has come about that is campaigning, ultimately, for the advent of a law to abolish the death penalty. We in this House should support that movement.

Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (PL) Mr President, at a time when the number of countries which are giving up use of the death sentence is growing, the decision of the Constitutional Court of South Korea should be received at least with surprise.

The death penalty is a clear violation of human rights, because, after all, human life is a value which the law should protect, and a legal system which allows capital punishment strikes at its own foundations and is a peculiar kind of hypocrisy. Many arguments exist against the use of this means of administering justice. For me, the most important is its irreversibility. Whatever else might be said about it, capital punishment is a penalty which is final. It deprives people of that one most precious thing which they will ever possess. Besides, there remains the moral responsibility on those who carry out this act, because the risk always exists of executing an innocent person.

Furthermore, the decision of the Constitutional Court is disappointing, because we know that no executions have been carried out in Korea for years. I hope this decision will not affect the number of sentences passed. What is more, I call for the handing down of death sentences in South Korea to be ended completely.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (PL) South Korea is one of the European Union's key trade partners. It is also a country with which the European Commission has completed negotiations on a free trade agreement, giving both sides very broad access to the other's market. In view of such close economic relations, I am surprised that the EU and Korea differ so greatly when it comes to respect for human rights.

All Member States of the European Union are signatories to Protocol 13 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, which bans the use of the death penalty. What is more, the Union declares in the international arena that it has set itself the objective of working for universal abolition of the death penalty. In accordance with that declaration, the Union should express clear support for the movement in Korea which is working for the abolition of capital punishment. Let us hope that, first of all, a moratorium will be introduced on carrying out executions, and that the Korean Government will become actively involved in efforts to abolish the death penalty which are being made at the UN.

Under new powers in the area of trade policy, we have the right and the obligation, as the European Parliament, to demand the abolition of capital punishment in all of the European Union's partner countries.

Zbigniew Ziobro, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) Mr President, if today's views on capital punishment had been in force in Europe at the time of the Nuremberg Tribunal, none of the Nazi criminals who were tried by the tribunal, and who were responsible for the cruel deaths of millions of innocent people, would have been sentenced to death. I have not heard that anyone in Europe has criticised the Nuremberg Tribunal for its unjust judgments.

Europe is moving ever further away from the essence of a just punishment as a response proportionate to the wrong done by the perpetrator and the guilt incurred. When we talk about the murder, the killing, of many people, for example in an act of terrorism, or when we talk about genocide and the deaths of millions of people, and this is what has happened, after all, in Europe, then the question arises as to a proportional punishment. It is true that in academic circles, in Europe and elsewhere, a debate is, nevertheless, in progress on the effectiveness of this punishment in terms of its preventative action and the protection of innocent human beings. This, however, is probably not the key argument, here.

Europe has, today, abandoned the death sentence. This is a democratic choice, and we want this choice to be respected. However, we should also respect the choice of others, and this is why I am in favour of discussion on this subject, including discussion with people in South Korea. It is a democratic state, and a democratic country.

Marek Henryk Migalski (ECR). – (PL) I do not think we should comment on this matter, or that we should interfere, here, for at least two reasons. Firstly, because South Korea is a democratic country, and the ruling of the Constitutional Court is a ruling of a lawful body of that state. For this reason, there is no danger that the death penalty will be passed in political or trivial cases – it will be handed down to criminals and murderers. Secondly, capital punishment is a deterrent. It is not possible, of course, to prove this empirically, but if we assume the truth of the syllogism that a more serious punishment is a stronger deterrent, this means that

the most severe punishment deters more, and this means that the death sentence deters most of all. This being so, by applying the death penalty we are, in fact, saving the lives of innocent people. Therefore, the European Union and the European Parliament should not interfere in this matter with the South Korean authorities.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, the decision of the Constitutional Court of South Korea that the death penalty is not a violation of the Constitution must be received with sadness. That decision is a step backwards in comparison to the trend in South Korea, where the death sentence has not been applied for a decade. The last execution was carried out 13 years ago. There are currently 57 convicts on death row awaiting execution. A critical view should be taken of the South Korean court's ruling. South Korea, as an economic leader in the region, should in particular set an example on the matter of respecting the right to life of every individual. Capital punishment is not compatible with a contemporary system of criminal justice, and contrary to current opinion it does not lead to a drop in crime at all.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) The death penalty is an issue that will live as long as monsters and murderers, living with the knowledge that they can torture, abuse and murder people, remain hidden within the human society, because a weak and impotent society is unable to cope with their brutal behaviour.

Each of the victims of these monsters had the same right to life as all of us, until the moment when they crossed paths with such a monster, a criminal who condemned a person, in order to satisfy a perverse pleasure, to his or her fate without any right to mercy or defence. The Constitutional Court of Korea has delivered an opinion that the death penalty does not conflict with the Korean Constitution. Legal status has been thus practically evaluated. That the political elites in Europe, in our name, have abandoned this path does not mean, however, that we have become better people or that our society is more humane. No. The horrible, brutal monsters' killing of decent people in Europe, just like in Korea, did not stop. The only difference is that the European monsters do not have to worry about capital punishment.

Ladies and gentlemen, I respect our model based on the European Convention on Human Rights, but I believe that before we impose it on the outside world we should make sure that there really is a better solution for decent people, and that...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Joanna Katarzyna Skrzydlewska (PPE). – (PL) I would like to say that the decision of the Constitutional Court of South Korea is disappointing and disturbing. Despite the fact that the last executions in South Korea took place in 1997, the court decided on 25 February that the death sentence is a form of punishment which does not violate the constitutional right to life. This is now the second ruling of the court with the same content. The first ruling was given in 1996, when the court stated that public opinion was not in favour of abolishing the death penalty. One can, therefore, conclude that public opinion in South Korea remains the same, and this is a pity, because a country which is an economic leader should be an example to other countries in respecting the right to life, which is a fundamental human right.

(Applause)

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, the fight against the death penalty lies at the heart of the EU's human rights policy. The EU considers that capital punishment is a cruel and inhuman punishment which fails to deter criminal behaviour, while the abolition of capital punishment contributes to the enhancement of human dignity.

We have been able to welcome a number of recent positive developments in the fight against the death penalty. In January this year, Mongolia announced a moratorium on the death penalty. During 2009 Burundi, Togo and the US State of New Mexico all abolished the death penalty. In 2007 the UN General Assembly for the first time adopted a resolution calling on states to establish a moratorium on executions with a view to abolishing the death penalty; a further resolution in 2008 reaffirmed this call.

In this light, the EU was naturally disappointed at the judgment of the Constitutional Court of the Republic of Korea on 25 February – by a split vote of five to four – that the death penalty was in accordance with the provisions of the Constitution. We note, however, that this case revolved around the interpretation of the Korean Constitution; this was not a political decision on retention of the death penalty. We also particularly note the further views expressed by three of the five judges who found that the death penalty was in line with the Constitution. Judge Lee Kang-Kook and Judge Min Hyung-Ki made clear the need to limit the use of the death penalty and to reduce the number of crimes subject to capital punishment, while Judge Song Doo-hwan

argued that any decision on the death penalty should be the subject of a public debate and action by the legislature.

Although the courts continue to pass death sentences, the Republic of Korea has maintained a moratorium on executions since 1997. There is no indication at present that the judgment of the Constitutional Court will affect this moratorium. We welcome Korea's determination to maintain the moratorium on the implementation of executions.

At the same time, as the UN General Assembly resolution has noted, a moratorium should be seen not as an end in itself but as a step on the path towards complete abolition. Accordingly, the EU urges the Korean National Assembly to take steps as quickly as possible to abolish the death penalty. The Republic of Korea has long been a regional leader on human rights issues in Asia. Abolition of the death penalty would thus only confirm the Republic of Korea's commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights.

President. – The debate is closed.

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

Written Statements (Rule 149)

Gerard Batten (EFD), in writing. – Congratulations to the South Korean Constitutional Court for upholding the death penalty. They intend to retain the death penalty for the worst criminal offenders. For example, for a Mr Kang Ho-soon, who has reportedly confessed to killing seven women. The Justice Ministry has recently released figures that show more than 60% support for the death penalty. If a similar question were asked in Britain it would produce at least the same result. In British prisons we have various assorted serial killers, rapists, child-murdering paedophiles, necrophiles and cannibals serving life sentences. The last example just last week was that of pervert Peter Chapman who lured an innocent 17-year-old victim, Ashleigh Hall, to her death and was sentenced to 35 years. This is an inadequate sentence. He and his kind should be executed. This would also save millions of pounds every year currently wasted on keeping such criminals in prison for life that could be better spent on the old and the sick. So well done South Korea: go on executing your worst criminals.

Monica Luisa Macovei (PPE), in writing. – 'Every person shall have the right to life. If not, the killer unwittingly achieves a final and perverse moral victory by making the state a killer too, thus reducing social abhorrence at the conscious extinction of human beings' (Amnesty International, 1998). Morality, deterrence and fairness are key in the debate on the death penalty. The 'crime control' approach seeks repression of criminal conduct, while the 'human rights/due process' model emphasises individual rights. The former considers the death penalty moral because the defendant took a life (retribution), a deterrent because those who might kill refrain from doing so fearing for their life, while fairness is unimportant or unproven. The latter model claims that death penalty is immoral because the state should not take a life, is not a deterrent – as shown by statistics – and is unfairly administered, sometimes people on death row being innocent and their trials involving irregularities. I believe in the human rights model, as reflected by the international community in hard and soft law, and by the increasing number of countries abolishing the death penalty. I urge the Republic of Korea to show a clear political will abolishing the death penalty, and, until then, to immediately adopt a moratorium on its application.

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE), in writing. – (RO) EU guidelines on the death penalty date from 1998. This is the very year when the period of the unofficial moratorium on the death penalty started in South Korea. During this time, the South Korean Parliament has debated three proposals on abolishing the death penalty. Last month, the Constitutional Court in this country reaffirmed by a narrow majority the death penalty as being constitutional.

I deplore this decision and I hope that the Korean Parliament will introduce a resolution banning the death penalty.

If South Korea joined the ranks of the abolitionist countries, this would send a powerful signal to the whole Asian continent.

13. Voting time

President. – The next item is the vote.

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

13.1. The case of Gilad Shalit (B7-0171/2010)

13.2. The escalation of violence in Mexico (B7-0188/2010)

13.3. South Korea – death penalty declared legal (B7-0191/2010)

14. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

15. Council positions at first reading: see Minutes

16. Decisions concerning certain documents: see Minutes

17. Documents received: see Minutes

18. Written declarations included in the register (Rule 123): see Minutes

19. Forwarding of texts adopted during the sitting : see Minutes

20. Dates of forthcoming sittings: see Minutes

21. Adjournment of the session

President. – I declare the session of the European Parliament adjourned.

(The sitting was closed at 16.30)

ANNEX (Written answers)

QUESTIONS TO THE COUNCIL (The Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union bears sole responsibility for these answers)

Question no 9 by Radvilė Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė(H-0060/10)

Subject: Planned nuclear power plants in Russia and Belarus

Two nuclear power plants (NPP) are being projected in Belarus and in Kaliningrad district of the Russian Federation. Foreseen construction sites of both NPPs are less than 100 km from two Member States – Lithuania and Poland. Moreover, both Lithuania and Poland are planning their own NPP.

What is the opinion of the Council regarding the nuclear concentration on the Eastern border of the EU? Having regard to the plans of the Spanish Presidency Programme, to promote the building of a strategic relation with Russia, what concrete initiatives is the Council planning to take in establishing cooperation with Russia and Belarus regarding environmental impacts of planned nuclear power plants in the territory of these states?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council has constantly highlighted the importance of high standards of nuclear safety and of a high level of environmental protection. The Council regularly underlines its support for a high level of nuclear safety and environmental protection throughout the European Union and in third countries.

National responsibility for nuclear safety is confirmed by the international IAEA conventions, such as the Convention on Nuclear Safety (CNS), to which Belarus, Russia as well as Euratom and most of the EU Member States are parties. However, the review conference under the CNS provides an opportunity to exert peer pressure on other parties regarding the safety of their installations and the way they implement the relevant provisions of the Convention.

The Council would like to point out in particular that, under the CNS, Contracting Parties in the vicinity of a proposed nuclear installation have to be consulted, insofar as they are likely to be affected by that installation.

Furthermore the Euratom-Russia Agreement on the peaceful uses of nuclear energy currently under negotiation is intended to contain provisions on verifiable requirements for nuclear safety and the protection of the health and safety of workers.

The Council further recalls that this issue is regularly taken up in the framework of the EU-Russia Energy Dialogue and at Permanent Partnership Councils on Energy. It should be noted in this respect that the last (tenth) progress report on the Dialogue states that:

‘The parties [Russia, the EU] point out that diversification of both energy resources and transport infrastructure is an imperative of our time. In this framework, they support the development of electrical power trade between the EU and Russia bearing in mind the necessity of guaranteeing the highest level of nuclear safety.’

Regarding impact assessment in an international context the Council notes that Belarus is a Party to the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, which contains binding obligations designed to assess and minimise the environmental impact and the potential danger to the environment. The Council underlines that responsibility for the environmental assessment lies largely with the promoters of these projects.

The Russian Federation is not a full ‘Contracting Party’ to the Espoo Convention. Nevertheless, the EU encourages Russia to apply the Espoo Convention voluntarily. The point has been made for quite a long time to Russia, including in relation to existing Nuclear Power Plants.

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Question no 10 by Czesław Adam Siekierski(H-0062/10)**Subject: Composition of the European Parliament following the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty**

Under the Treaty of Lisbon, in force since 1 December 2009, the European Parliament has 750 Members plus a President, which is 18 more Members than we had under the terms of the Treaty of Nice (in force until 1 December 2009).

In November 2009, Parliament adopted a report on the status of the new Members, which confirmed that the new, additional Members would take office after the Lisbon Treaty had entered into force and after a special additional protocol increasing the number of Members had been ratified by all the Member States. However, that additional protocol has not yet been signed by the EU heads of state and it is difficult to say when it will be. Until an appropriate Inter-Governmental Conference is convened, the new Members will not be able to take up their duties.

In view of this situation, what action does the Council intend to take to ensure that a regulation allowing the new Members to carry out their duties in accordance with the provisions of the Lisbon Treaty is adopted as soon as possible? Can we expect the situation to be resolved during the Spanish Presidency?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

As the honourable Member has correctly pointed out, under Article 14 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), as introduced by the Lisbon Treaty, the number of Members of the European Parliament must not exceed 750, plus the President. As the elections to the European Parliament of June 2009 took place on the basis of the former Treaty (i.e. 736 elected MEPs), on 18-19 June 2009, the European Council agreed to add 18 additional seats to the 736 seats filled in the June elections, in the event that the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force⁽⁵⁾. The implementation of this agreement of the European Council requires the adoption and the ratification by the 27 Member States of a Protocol amending Article 2 of the Protocol (36) on transitional measures annexed to the Lisbon Treaty, following the procedure laid down in Article 48(3) of the TEU. On 4 December 2009, the Spanish Government submitted a proposal for the amendment of the Treaties to that effect.

The European Council decided on 10-11 December 2009⁽⁶⁾ to consult the European Parliament and the Commission with a view to examining this proposal. Pursuant to the second subparagraph of Article 48(3) TEU, the European Council specified that it did not intend to convene a Convention (composed of representatives of national parliaments, of the Heads of State or Government of Member States, of the European Parliament and of the Commission) before the conference of representatives of governments of the Member States, since in the view of the European Council, this was not justified by the scope of the proposed amendments. The representatives of the European Council therefore requested the consent of the European Parliament to that effect, as required by Article 48(3) TEU.

The estimated timetable for the opening of the conference of representatives of the governments of the Member States depends on the receipt of European Parliament's position on these two issues.

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Question no 11 by Zigmantas Balčytis(H-0065/10)**Subject: Institutional oversight of projects encompassed within the strategy for the Baltic Sea region**

The strategy for the Baltic Sea region is of historic significance and vital importance to the Baltic States and their neighbourhood. If pursued successfully it will strengthen the unity of the EU as a whole, as millions of

⁽⁵⁾ 11225/2/09 REV 2

⁽⁶⁾ EUCO 6/09

people living geographically close together who, however, for reasons to do with their history and traditions, have rarely joined forces will be bringing their efforts to bear on shared projects. As a representative of the Baltic region, I find it worrying that the 18-month work programme drawn up by the EU's presidency trio countries should focus on the EU strategy for the Danube region while failing to mention the strategy for the Baltic Sea region.

Given that the strategy for the Baltic Sea region has only just begun to be implemented, does the Council not think it too early to consider the mission accomplished and hence less deserving of attention from the institutions? Does it not agree that the strategy should be included in the presidency trio's 18-month work programme and that practicable monitoring arrangements should be laid down to ensure that the projects provided for are carried out at the right time?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

On 14 December 2007, the European Council invited the Commission to prepare a European Union strategy for the Baltic Sea region, which the Commission presented in June 2009 to Parliament, the Council, the Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

The Baltic Sea Strategy is aimed at co-ordinating action by Member States, regions, the EU, pan-Baltic organisations, financing institutions and non-governmental bodies to promote a more balanced development of the Baltic Sea and is accompanied by an action plan organised around four pillars: marine environment, prosperity, transport and energy, safety and security.

The October 2009 European Council stated that the Baltic Sea Strategy was an important contribution to the economic success of the region and to its social and territorial cohesion, as well as to the competitiveness of the EU and called upon all relevant actors to act speedily and ensure full implementation of the Baltic Sea Strategy.

The strategy itself builds on the existing EU instruments, funds, policies and programmes.

In this sense, as set out in its conclusions of 26 October 2009, the role of the Council is that of a policy developer as it receives periodic reports and proposals for recommendations from the Commission, while the Commission is responsible for actual co-ordination, monitoring, reporting, facilitation of the implementation and follow-up.

Furthermore, the Council called on the Commission to present a progress report by no later than June 2011, and therefore beyond the time period of the 18-month presidency programme.

Until then, the Council may only be involved when and if the Commission may decide to amend the strategy, given that, in that case, endorsement from the Council should be sought on the proposed amendment.

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Question no 12 by Ilda Figueiredo(H-0066/10)

Subject: Community funds

In view of the serious situation in some Member States, action is needed urgently in various areas, not least in the budgetary and monetary spheres, in order to tackle unemployment and poverty effectively, resolve the problem of unemployment – as a matter of priority – support production and the creation of jobs with rights, and safeguard economic and social cohesion.

Given that relations between Member States should be based on solidarity, is the Council willing to support transfers of Community funds whereby countries with serious social and financial problems could make use of their entitlements without needing to offer any quid pro quo at national level? Is it willing to join forces with the ECB for the purpose of considering financial support measures, for example loans granted on favourable terms?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

As from December 2008, to tackle the crisis, the EU and its Member States have implemented a wide range of extraordinary measures, including the European Economic Recovery Plan, based on solidarity and social justice. As a part of that Plan, the Regulation establishing European Globalisation Adjustment Fund (EGF) was revised in 2009 in order to allow the Fund to cover redundancies caused by the impact of the global financial and economic crisis.

Furthermore, a new Microfinance Facility should be operational over the period 2010-2013. This facility aims at increasing access to loans, and thus at reducing unemployment and poverty resulting from the crisis. The Council considers that the agreement reached with the European Parliament, in the first-reading, on a new Microfinance Facility is a positive contribution in this respect.

In the area of Structural Funds, additional measures are needed to alleviate the impacts of the economic crisis in those Member States that are most seriously hit. Therefore, the Council foresees measures to simplify payment of advances to the beneficiaries of state aid. Moreover, the Council foresees an additional pre-financing instalment for 2010, in order to allow for a regular cash flow and to facilitate payments to beneficiaries during programme implementation.

As far as financial assistance is concerned, relations between Member States should be based on responsibility, as well as solidarity.

While the economic and monetary Union by its very existence provides an element of stability and protection against market turbulences, the members of the euro area share a common responsibility for the stability in the euro area and their economic policies are a matter of common concern.

When Member States outside the euro area face difficulties or are seriously threatened with difficulties as regards their external payments, the Council can grant financial assistance.

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Question no 13 by Gay Mitchell(H-0070/10)**Subject: Fostering economic recovery**

Most of the European Union's Member States and the Eurozone collectively have moved out of recession with tentative growth. With these shoots of hope appearing in different parts of Europe and globally, what specific measures is the Council taking to cultivate economic recovery and make sure it grows and gains in strength?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

After the first favourable signs of the crisis abating last autumn, economic growth turned to positive in the EU in the third quarter of last year.

Meanwhile, in order to overcome the economic crisis the Member States and the EU have made huge fiscal interventions to support the financial sector and the real economy, in particular in the framework of the European economic recovery plan agreed in December 2008 in response to the global financial crisis and economic slowdown.

Nevertheless, currently 20 Member States have excessive deficits, which should be brought below the reference value within the next few years. Lack of sound budgetary policies and a weak financial sector could severely jeopardize the recovery and undermine the credibility of European Union macroeconomic policies.

However, while on the one hand it is necessary to phase out extraordinary financial measures that are unsustainable for Member States, on the other hand timing of the phasing out should be compatible with an economic recovery which is self sustained.

In this perspective, Union policies should be refocused towards long-term reforms in an ambitious and revamped new strategy, in order to further improve competitiveness and increase the EU's sustainable growth potential.

On the basis of the communication of the Commission Europe 2020 strategy of 3 March 2010, the Commission has proposed that Spring European Council agree on the focus of this strategy, set the quantitative targets and finalize the governance structure; and that in June the European Council should endorse the integrated guidelines to implement the strategy and the country specific quantitative targets.

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Question no 14 by Vilija Blinkevičiūtė(H-0073/10)

Subject: Gender key

The EC Treaty enshrines gender equality as a fundamental principle of the European Union and one of the objectives and tasks of the Community. Mainstreaming of equality between women and men is represented in all policy areas. Gender equality issues are important for sustainable growth and competitiveness, for tackling the demographic challenge, and for economic and social cohesion in the EU.

Keeping gender equality issues high on the agenda in these times of economic recession is a challenge, and maintaining visibility of gender equality issues is one way to meet it. The Council conclusions adopted on 30 November 2009 invited the Presidency and the Commission to include a section on gender in the key messages to be adopted by the EPSCO Council and submitted to the 2010 Spring European Council.

Will a gender key be included in EPSCO and submitted to the Spring European Council?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

As the honourable Member has observed, gender equality has cross-cutting and fundamental importance within the EU. Equality between women and men is strongly affirmed in the provisions of the EU Treaties. Article 3 of the Treaty on European Union provides that the Union shall promote equality between women and men, and Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union specifies that this aim is to be pursued in all the Union's activities. The European Council of 23/24 March 2006, when adopting the European Pact for Gender Equality⁽⁷⁾, also explicitly acknowledged that gender equality policies were vital to economic growth, prosperity and competitiveness.

On 30 November 2009, the Council adopted Conclusions on precisely this subject⁽⁸⁾, calling for gender key messages to be forwarded to the European Council.

In these Conclusions, the Council specifically affirmed several of the points that the honourable Member has also made. In particular, the Council considered that 'gender equality is crucial for fulfilling the EU objectives of economic and social cohesion and a high level of employment, as well as for ensuring sustainable growth and competitiveness, and for tackling the demographic challenge'⁽⁹⁾.

The gender issue is also addressed in the EU 2020 strategy, adopted by the Commission on 3 March. The Council had an exchange of views on this general topic at its meeting on 8 March, and the Presidency has undertaken to convey the outcome of these talks to the European Council. This procedure will give the Member States and the Presidency a vital opportunity to affirm the concerns and the positive perspective that the Council expressed in its Conclusions in November.

⁽⁷⁾ See doc. 7775/1/06 REV 1, paragraph 40 and Annex II.

⁽⁸⁾ Doc. 15782/09.

⁽⁹⁾ Doc. 15488/09, paragraph 2(a).

It is also worth noticing that the present Spanish Presidency of the European Union is very active in the field of gender equality and has already celebrated the European Women's Forum Beijing+15 on the 4th and 5th of February, after the European Women in Power Summit on 3rd February, bringing together representatives from European Union Governments, the European Economic Area, candidate countries, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the main European women's associations that work towards gender equality.

The next 25th-26th March the Spanish Presidency is organising the Informal Meeting of Equality Ministers that shall be focused on 'Equality as the basis for growth and employment'.

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Question no 15 by Alan Kelly(H-0075/10)

Subject: Unfair practices in food supply chain

What is the Council's position on unfair commercial practices operating in the food supply chain? As the Commission outlined in COM(2009)0591, reduction in food prices for producers has not been passed on in any meaningful way to consumers, while the same high food prices have undermined demand in European food products to the extent that most farmers are selling their goods at below the cost of production.

Many working in the retail sector have reported instances of large multiples demanding money from suppliers just to stock their products.

Does the Council feel that this situation is worthy of a larger EU-wide investigation on competition grounds? Does the Council recognise unequal bargaining power exists between retailers and suppliers/producers and that this is in danger of being exploited, given that the number of producer/suppliers of food is far greater than the number of retailers?

How does it propose to tackle this problem and will the Council be issuing any communications on the matter in the near future?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

As the Spanish Presidency stressed during her appearance before the Agriculture Committee on 27 January, the improvement of the functioning of the food supply chain is of primary importance, as part of an efficient and competitive agriculture and agro-food industry, which is one of its priorities.

In particular, the Council is currently examining the Commission communication entitled 'A better functioning food supply in Europe' (COM(2009) 591 final). In this respect, the Council held in January an exchange of views on this topic on the basis of a questionnaire elaborated by the Presidency and is now working on draft Council conclusions on this communication.

Five key ideas are developed in the draft conclusions as they now stand, without prejudice to the final text. Most of these ideas are referred to in your question:

Improving the structure and consolidation of the agro-food industry in order to help to achieve the scale necessary for greater bargaining power when dealing with large retailers.

Increasing transparency along the food chain. Greater transparency allows for tracking price levels and developments and for increasing pressure on stakeholders to speed up price transmission. This is key to fair distribution of added value along the food supply chain.

Combating unfair trading practices. The Commission proposes to assess these practices in the internal market and propose any necessary Community measures to address such practices.

Encouraging self-regulation initiatives. The Commission proposes to work together with the food supply chain stakeholders to prepare sets of standard contracts. Adoption of Codes of Good Commercial Practices is also envisaged.

Exploring competition in the food supply chain. The Commission proposes to work with the European Competition Network to develop a common approach to competition issues of relevance for the functioning of the food supply chain. The Council is reflecting on the interplay between the existing competition and CAP rules.

The Presidency hopes that these conclusions will be adopted by the Council at its March session.

Last but not least, together with the European Parliament, the Council is currently working on a Commission proposal for recasting Directive 2000/35/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 29 June 2000 on combating late payment in commercial transactions.

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Question no 16 by Georgios Papastamkos(H-0078/10)

Subject: European economic governance

The very profound financial crisis in Greece and the financial imbalance in other eurozone Member States have raised questions about the ability of EMU to withstand static and dynamic pressures. There is no doubt that retrenchment in public finances of a Member State of the eurozone is the responsibility of that State. However, the financial crisis has thrown into relief the lack of correlation between a full, single monetary union and an incomplete economic union in the EU.

Will the Council propose plans for the establishment of a European Monetary Fund with the funds and powers of intervention necessary to offset the structural shortcomings of EMU and to reflect a more formal and coordinated form of European economic governance?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

While the economic and monetary union by its very existence provides an element of stability and protection against market turbulence, the members of the euro area share a common responsibility for the stability in this area and their economic policies are a matter of common concern. They are required to conduct sound national policies in line with the Stability and Growth Pact and the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines.

The recent economic crisis and current developments on financial markets have shown the importance of close coordination of economic policies. At their informal meeting on 11 February, the Heads of State or Government of the EU declared that the euro area Member States will take determined and coordinated action, if needed, to safeguard financial stability in the euro area as a whole. Until now, no euro area Member State has asked for assistance.

On 16 February, the Council, following the invitation of the Heads of State or Government, focused on the situation regarding government deficit and debt in Greece, adopting:

an opinion on an update by Greece of its stability programme, which sets out plans for reducing its government deficit below 3% of gross domestic product by 2012;

a decision giving notice to Greece to correct its excessive deficit by 2012, setting out budgetary consolidation measures according to a specific timetable, including deadlines for reporting on measures taken;

a recommendation to Greece with a view to bringing its economic policies into line with the EU's broad economic policy guidelines.

In relation to economic co-ordination and surveillance in the euro area more generally, the Commission intends to submit this spring a proposal under Article 136 of the Treaty to the Council on the basis of provisions of the Lisbon Treaty. The Council will examine the Commission's proposal upon its receipt. Until now, the Council has not received any such proposal, and in particular has not received or discussed any proposal relating to a European Monetary Fund.

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Question no 17 by Mairead McGuinness(H-0083/10)**Subject: Scheme to reinforce economic policy co-ordination and surveillance of eurozone members**

Could the Council elaborate on suggestions that eurozone countries may have a greater say in how the economies of their fellow eurozone members states are run? A recent Commission announcement said that the Commission would come forward with a scheme to reinforce economic policy co-ordination and counter-surveillance before June, in line with the powers under the Lisbon Treaty. Does the Council endorse this approach for greater economic co-ordination and does the Council believe that this new approach would strengthen the eurozone?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The recent economic crisis and current developments on financial markets have shown the importance of close coordination of economic policies, as confirmed by Heads of State or Government of the EU as well as by the President of the European Council on the occasion of their informal meeting on 11 February.

Primary responsibility for their economic policies lies with the Member States themselves. The EU monitors and coordinates them, in particular in the context of the Stability and Growth Pact and Broad Economic Policy Guidelines. While the Stability and Growth Pact focuses chiefly on enforcing and maintaining fiscal discipline, the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines aim at ensuring multilateral surveillance of economic trends in the Member States. Structural policies, especially with a view to increasing competitiveness, leading to higher growth and employment are coordinated in the framework of the Lisbon strategy, which will be re-launched this spring as the EU 2020 strategy.

All these instruments are based on partnership and cooperation among the Member States. The Lisbon Treaty provides the euro area with additional legal framework in order to ensure the proper functioning of the economic and monetary union. The existence of the Euro Group is formally recognised in Article 137 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) and Protocol 1(No. 14) on the Euro Group. Furthermore Article 136 TFEU allows the adoption of additional measures applicable only to the euro area, aimed at strengthening the coordination and surveillance of the budgetary discipline of the euro area Member States or setting out economic policy guidelines for these Member states. Such measures are adopted in accordance with the relevant procedure from among those referred to in articles 121 and 126 TFEU with the exception of the procedure set out in article 126(14) TFEU.

The Commission intends to submit this spring a proposal to the Council to reinforce economic policy co-ordination and surveillance on the basis of this provisions of the Lisbon Treaty. The Council will examine the Commission's proposal upon its receipt.

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Question no 18 by Enrique Guerrero Salom(H-0086/10)**Subject: Illicit financial flows, tax evasion and developing countries**

Today we have sufficient evidence about the harmful consequences of illicit financial flows for developing countries. Even if cross-border illicit financial flows are largely hidden and difficult to measure, estimates are reasonably clustered in a range of USD 1 trillion to USD 3 trillion annually. The World Bank quotes figures of USD 1 trillion to USD 1.6 trillion annually, of which half — USD 500 to USD 800 billion a year — is estimated to come from developing countries. The estimated USD 500 to USD 800 billion a year of illicit money passing out of developing countries is the most damaging economic factor affecting the poor. It drains hard currency reserves, increases inflation, reduces tax revenues and has many other consequences that undercut developing countries' opportunities.

What efforts and initiatives is the EU undertaking, or does it intend to take in the coming months, to fight against tax evasion and capital flight in and from developing countries? How can we strengthen developing countries' fiscal management capacity?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Tax evasion, capital flight and illicit financial flows are undoubtedly a serious challenge for development, particularly in developing countries, and were identified by the 2008 Doha Declaration on Financing for Development as major obstacles to the mobilization of domestic revenue for development.

In May 2008, the Council adopted Conclusions⁽¹⁰⁾ underlining that good governance in the tax area, which comprises the principles of transparency, exchange of information and fair tax competition, is an essential means for combating cross-border tax fraud and evasion and for strengthening the fight against money laundering, corruption and the financing of terrorism.

The EU is actively promoting these principles in a number of contexts:

The European Neighbourhood Policy includes, in a number of its Action Plans for particular third countries, a general reference to cooperation in tax matters and to the principles of transparency, exchange of information and to the Code of Conduct for Business Taxation. These action plans are tools for economic and political cooperation between the EU and partner countries.

EU Development Cooperation Policy provides for additional support to developing countries that are willing to commit to the principles of good governance, including in the tax area, through the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Governance Facility and the Governance Initiative of the 10th European Development Fund.

Furthermore, the recent wider international acceptance of the OECD tax standards, including by many developing countries, has substantially changed the international environment towards more transparency in tax matters and has moved the debate forward within the EU. On 28 April 2009, the Commission issued a Communication on Good Governance in Tax Matters⁽¹¹⁾, in which it floated a number of ideas on how to promote good governance in tax matters towards third countries.

In its Conclusions of 18 May 2009 the Council invited the Commission to make proposals for concrete EU action on dialogue with, and assistance to, developing countries on promoting good governance in tax matters and more effective national tax systems in order to achieve development goals.

The subject was discussed by the Council again within the framework of its 17 November 2009 conclusions on Policy Coherence for Development. The issue was included in the initial selection of five priority issues that shall be addressed in the PCD work programme to be submitted to the Council this year. The Conclusions stated the need to improve transparency and counter illicit cross-border flows and tax evasion 'recognising that these have a severe impact on domestic resource mobilisation in developing countries'.

Building on these prior achievements, the Spanish Presidency of the Council has included this issue as one of its priorities in the development agenda for this semester.

Thus, at their informal meeting in La Granja (Spain) on 17-18 February 2010, with the participation of the President of the EP Development Committee, EU Development Ministers had an in-depth exchange of views on the issue of Taxation and Good Governance for Development and Innovative Mechanisms for Financing.

The Council will take this debate further in the next months and is looking forward to the forthcoming Commission Communication on Promoting Good Governance in Tax Matters in the Context of Development Cooperation, which is expected to be presented to the Council as part of the so-called 'April package'.

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⁽¹⁰⁾ See Background to the present note on Council Conclusions on "Tax issues in Agreements with third countries"

⁽¹¹⁾ doc. 9281/09 - COM (2009) 201 final

Question no 19 by Nikolaos Chountis(H-0092/10)**Subject: The Stability Pact and the financial situation in the Member States**

The European Council meeting on 11 February 2010 and the Eurogroup of 16 February 2010 took historic decisions. For the first time, a Member State – Greece – has been placed under tripartite supervision; for the first time, the Council has expressly prohibited measures affecting pay, health systems, pensions, the civil service, markets, etc. It is remarkable that the Council has, as yet, made no mention of the wretched state of the economies of the other Member States of the EU. Spain, for example, has a deficit of 11.2% and a rate of debt growth of 20%, France an 8.3% deficit and a 10% rate of debt growth, Italy a 5.3% deficit and a debt amounting to 114% of GDP, Portugal an 8.7% deficit and a 10% rate of debt growth, and the UK, with a 12% deficit, is at the same level as Greece, and has a rate of debt growth of 20%. The overall level of debt in the Netherlands is approaching 234% of GDP, in Ireland 222%, Belgium 219%, Spain 207% and Greece 179%.

In the light of these figures, the Stability Pact has, in effect, been scrapped. Does the Council admit that this is so? Can it say whether the huge deficits in the EU are attributable to the various 'illegal' support packages for banks and industries? Are the measures taken against Greek workers harbingers of similar 'recommendations' for workers throughout the eurozone? Is Greece a 'guinea pig', as the Greek Prime Minister claims?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Stability and Growth Pact remains the main instrument for maintaining financial stability in the EU as a whole as well as in the euro area. It is applied consistently and fairly to all Member States, and it is currently being applied with the flexibility introduced in its revision in 2005. The Stability and Growth Pact is therefore very far from being scrapped.

In order to overcome the most severe global economic crisis since 1929, Member States and the EU have made huge fiscal interventions to support the financial sector and real economy in the past two years, which naturally led to an increase of public deficits. These interventions were necessary and appropriate, and have played an extremely important role in averting an even more grave crisis, in stabilising the economy and in preventing a more dramatic recession. In this difficult period, the Stability and Growth Pact has shown the worth of its flexibility.

When economic recovery is confirmed, the extraordinary measures must be withdrawn. The Council has already agreed on the main principles of exit strategies. On the fiscal side, these are being implemented in the framework of the Stability and Growth Pact. In 2009 and 2010 the Council adopted recommendations with a view to bringing their budget deficit below the reference value of 3% of GDP to 20 Member States, including Belgium, Spain, Ireland, Italy, the Netherlands, Portugal and the UK. The deadlines for correcting the deficit vary from 2011 to the fiscal year 2014 / 2015 depending on specific situation in individual Member States.

Among the Member States currently subject to excessive deficit procedure, Greece is the only Member State that failed to take effective action as per the Council Recommendation adopted in April 2009. Furthermore, as shown by the October 2009 update of budgetary data, the figures presented by the Greek authorities have not been reliable. The Council will continue to closely monitor the situation in all Member States with a public deficit exceeding the reference value and, if any of them fails to comply with the recommendations, the Council will take the necessary measures.

The recommendations to Greece or any other Member State are aimed at helping the authorities to maintain sound fiscal policy, they are not taken 'against' any group of citizens. Some Member States have allowed an evolution of their public finances which is not sustainable and must thus take corrective measures – this is the only correct and sustainable way towards strong economic recovery. In the long run, lack of fiscal discipline would lead to unsustainable budget deficits and public debts, which would have a detrimental effect on the economy of the EU as a whole as well as of the Member States concerned.

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Question no 20 by Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou(H-0093/10)

Subject: Measures relating to budgetary adjustment and growth in Greece

In its decision and recommendation of 16 February 2010, the ECOFIN Council called on Greece to take a number of measures to reduce expenditure and increase revenue, in particular to reduce wage costs and increase VAT and taxes on cars and energy.

Given that most of the measures taken, or about to be taken, by the Greek Government already aim to reduce wage costs and increase revenue through higher direct and indirect taxation, does the Council not consider that such measures – which are tantamount to an austerity policy on revenue and income – may themselves further reduce demand for investment and consumption in the Greek economy, thereby undermining efforts towards recovery and the consolidation of public finances in Greece? Will it propose that the Greek Government should also take measures to promote growth in order to boost productivity in the Greek economy and combat rising unemployment?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The deterioration of the public finances in Greece, combined with broader macroeconomic imbalances and the loss of competitiveness of the Greek economy in recent years has led to the difficult economic situation this Member state is facing today. The Greek authorities are committed to taking the actions necessary to address this situation, and the Council is committed to supporting Greece's efforts.

The Council has repeatedly pointed to the long term structural problems of the Greek economy in various multilateral surveillance exercises. In conjunction with the Lisbon strategy for growth and jobs, the Council, in its Recommendation on the 2009 update of the broad guidelines for the economic policies of the Member States, noted that it is 'imperative to intensify efforts to address the macro-economic imbalances and structural weaknesses of the Greek economy'. It recommended Greece to increase competition in professional services and investments in R&D, use structural funds more efficiently, reform public administration and take a broad range of labour market measures within an integrated flexicurity approach.

On 16 February, the Council, following the invitation of the Heads of State or Government, focused on the situation regarding government deficit and debt in Greece, adopting:

an opinion on an update by Greece of its stability programme, which sets out plans for reducing its government deficit below 3% of gross domestic product by 2012;

a decision giving notice to Greece to correct its excessive deficit by 2012, setting out budgetary consolidation measures according to a specific timetable, including deadlines for reporting on measures taken;

a recommendation to Greece with a view to bringing its economic policies into line with the EU's broad economic policy guidelines.

In the context of the above mentioned measures, the Council recommended Greece to implement a comprehensive package of measures in order to improve the functioning of the product market and business environment, support productivity and employment growth, and improve efficiency and pace of absorption of EU structural funds, as well as to correct its excessive budget deficit and address the long-term sustainability of its public finances. With a view to supporting productivity and employment growth, Greece was invited to:

take immediate measures to fight undeclared work;

review labour market regulations, including employment protection legislation, with a view to increasing labour supply;

support labour demand by reinforcing targeted reductions in the cost of labour;

enact reforms in the educational system aimed at improving the level of skills of the labour force and enhancing responsiveness to labour market needs.

Against the background of the challenge to improve productivity, including through prioritised public investment strategies, Greece should take all necessary measures to improve the efficiency and pace of absorption of EU structural funds. In doing so, particular attention should be paid to the swift and efficient implementation of the operational programmes on 'Administrative Reform' and 'Digital Convergence', as these support essential reforms in public administration, which is central to the reform strategy outlined in the January 2010 update of the stability programme.

Greece is expected to present the first report of the implementation of these measures by 16 March, the second in May, followed by quarterly reports. The Council will closely monitor the situation and continue to take measures, as appropriate, in order to support the Greek authorities in promoting economic growth as well as maintaining sound fiscal policy.

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Question no 21 by Ryszard Czarnecki(H-0096/10)

Subject: Discrimination against the Polish minority in Belarus

Is the Council going to react to the discrimination being practised against national minorities in Belarus, in particular the Polish minority? The situation has become particularly bad in recent weeks, with repeated arrests of leaders of Polish organisations and the confiscation of property including the headquarters of Polish groups and associations.

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The EU is concerned over the recent deterioration of the situation in Belarus and increased human rights violations. The EU sees the situation around the Union of Poles as part of a deteriorating trend, of which the lack of freedom of expression and assembly, increased control over the media and pressure on journalists, the new law restricting the use of the Internet and the harassment of opposition activists are further worrying signs.

In her statement of 16 February, HR Ashton expressed concerns about the situation of the Polish minority in Belarus, and notably police action expelling representatives from community-owned property, police detentions of community members, and attempts by Minsk to impose a community leadership. These concerns have also been conveyed through diplomatic channels to the Belarusian authorities.

The Council briefly exchanged views on the matter on 22 February, and will return for a more in-depth discussion in the coming months.

When meeting with FM Martynov briefly in the margins of the inauguration of the Ukrainian President Yanukovich in Kiev on 25 February, HR Ashton conveyed her serious concerns over human rights violations, and noted that the situation around the Union of Poles was not a Belarusian 'internal affair'.

The Council intends to continue with the EU's policy of conditional engagement, and this is also supported by prominent Belarusian pro-democratic and pro-European leaders, such as Aliaksandr Milinkevich.

At the same time, it is of utmost importance that Belarus abides by its OSCE and international commitments, including in terms of the protection and promotion of the rights of minorities.

It is in the interest of the EU to pursue relations with Belarus to advance shared values and principles.

The EU will continue to monitor human rights situation in Belarus and keep it high on the political dialogue agenda with the country.

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Question no 22 by Pat the Cope Gallagher(H-0097/10)**Subject: Misuse of European passports**

Forged European passports, including Irish passports, were used in the assassination of a Hamas leader in Dubai last January. Can the Council provide an updated assessment on the measures it has undertaken to address the concerns of EU citizens over the misuse of European passports?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

In a statement issued on 22 February, the Council underlined that the killing of Mahmoud al-Mabhouh in Dubai on 20 January raised issues which are profoundly disturbing to the European Union.

The Council considered that it was an action which cannot be conducive to peace and stability in the Middle East. The EU strongly condemned the fact that those involved in this action have used fraudulent EU Member States' passports and credit cards acquired through the theft of EU citizens' identities.

The EU welcomed the investigation by the Dubai authorities and calls on all countries to cooperate with it. The countries concerned in the EU are themselves carrying out full investigations into the fraudulent use of their passports.

The European Union is committed to ensuring that both EU citizens and countries around the world continue to have confidence in the integrity of EU Member States' passports. In that regard, the EU adopted in 2004 standards for security features and biometrics in passports and travel documents issued by the Member States. This legislation was updated in 2009 and is intended to make the documents more secure and to establish a more reliable link between the holder and the document.

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Question no 23 by Brian Crowley(H-0099/10)**Subject: The Kalahari Bushmen**

The High Court of Botswana ruled in 2006 that the evictions of the Kalahari Bushmen from their traditional lands were unlawful and unconstitutional. Despite this, the Government of Botswana continues to prevent the Kalahari Bushmen from returning to their traditional lands by cutting off their water supply. Can the Council investigate the situation in Botswana to assess the extent of the harassment facing the Kalahari Bushmen of Botswana?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The policy of the Government of Botswana and its programme of relocation of San from the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR) have attracted particular attention and raised concerns within the international human rights' community, including the UN Committee on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination and the UN Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues.

The EU has, for its part, through local Heads of Mission, regularly discussed the matter of the San/Bushmen in Botswana with the Government of Botswana. These discussions take place in the context of the article 8 dialogue under the Cotonou Agreement, which provides for a systematic and formal dialogue in relation to the three essential elements of the Cotonou agreement, namely respect for human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law. In these meetings the Government has informed the EU on the follow up to the ruling of the High Court. According to our information, in December the San/Bushmen nominated their representatives who have been tasked to discuss with the Government the CKGR issue. In order to find a solution to the CKGR relocation issue, contacts between them and the Government are now underway.

The Council will continue to follow closely the situation of the San/Bushmen in Botswana.

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Question no 25 by Georgios Toussas(H-0105/10)

Subject: The US's 'New Strategy' in Afghanistan

NATO, with the active support of the EU and the CFSP, has launched Operation Moshtarak, the largest offensive in Afghanistan since the beginning the military intervention by the US and its allies, as part of the US's 'new strategy' determined by US President and Nobel peace prize winner, Barack Obama. Although it only began a few days ago, it has already resulted in the killing of at least fifteen civilians in the region of Marjah. NATO troops maintain that this was an error, while the Afghan authorities have admitted that it was a selected target, but blame the Taliban. These fifteen casualties come in addition to the 2 412 civilians already killed by NATO occupying forces in Afghanistan in 2009 alone, according to the United Nations.

Will the Council condemn this fresh slaughter of Afghan civilians? Will it meet the demand of peace-loving forces and call for the withdrawal of all foreign troops from Afghanistan?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The framework for the EU's engagement in Afghanistan is set out in the EU Action Plan for Afghanistan and Pakistan, adopted by the Council on 27 October 2009. According to this framework, EU efforts in Afghanistan are civilian. The EU is not involved in operation Moshtarak or any other military operation.

EU efforts are concentrated on strengthening the capacity of the Afghan state and its institutions to promote good governance, human rights, and efficient public administration, especially at sub-national level. Supporting economic growth, especially through rural development and social progress is also a top priority.

In addition, the EU is focusing its efforts on strengthening the rule of law, i.e. by assisting in the building of a civilian police force through EUPOL Afghanistan, the EU Police Mission in Afghanistan launched by the European Union in June 2007 and supporting the implementation of the National Justice Programme.

These efforts are also in line with the strategic priorities presented by the Government of Afghanistan.

The Council has emphasised that international assistance must be a transition strategy, focusing on enabling the Afghan Government to assume full responsibility, while the international community gradually takes a more supportive role.

The EU deeply regrets all civilian casualties in Afghanistan.

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Question no 26 by Charalampos Angourakis(H-0106/10)

Subject: Murderous attacks by Israel against the Palestinians

Israel is stepping up its acts of provocation against the Palestinians on Palestinian territories. The Israeli army recently burst into the offices of the Palestinian People's Party, causing significant material damage and arresting those present. This raid is one of dozens of Israeli incursions into Ramallah and the West Bank where hundreds of people are being arrested on the pretext that they are 'causing a disturbance'. At the same time, Israel is continuing to support the policy of 'extrajudicial killings' and the assassination of members of Palestinian organisations, while enjoying unofficial immunity from the US, the EU and NATO.

Will the Council condemn Israel's policy towards the Palestinian people and peace in the region, in particular the murderous attacks by the Israeli army, and its refusal to accept the existence of an independent Palestinian State within the 1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Persecution of a civilian population by a state power, whether directed against a state's own citizens or otherwise, is contrary to the rule of law and democratic principles in general. By extension, such acts are irreconcilable with the basic values of the European Union, notably the right to live in security. It is imperative that allegations of such acts be subjected to thorough investigation.

As far as the various incidents between Israeli security services and Palestinians as well as Israeli policies under the occupation regime are concerned, the Council has always insisted that both sides should respect international law and international humanitarian law. These are principles that the Council has referred to in its conclusions on the Middle East Peace Process, most recently in December 2009.

I would like to assure the honourable Member that the Council continues to attach particular importance to the human rights of individuals, in line with the legal principles I have mentioned, and is prepared to condemn their violation, where appropriate and on the basis of sound evidence.

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Question no 27 by Silvia-Adriana Țicău(H-0108/10)**Subject: Stage reached in the adoption of Council decisions on air transport agreements between the EU and Canada**

One of the priorities set by the Spanish Presidency of the European Union is to strengthen the transatlantic dialogue between the European Union and the United States and Canada. Two components of the dialogue between the EU and Canada are the adoption of a decision by the Council and the representatives of the governments of the European Union Member States on the signature and provisional application of the Air Transport Agreement and the adoption of a Council decision on the signature of an agreement between the European Community and Canada on civil aviation security.

Given that the signing of these agreements is extremely important for cooperation between the EU and Canada, can the Council say what stage has been reached in the adoption of these decisions?

Answer

(EN) The present answer, which has been drawn up by the Presidency and is not binding on either the Council or its members as such, was not presented orally at Question Time to the Council during the March 2010 part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council adopted its Decision on the signature and provisional application of the EU – Canada Air Transport Agreement on 30 November 2009 and the Agreement was signed on 17/18 December 2009.

According to the provisions of the Agreement, pending its entry into force, the Agreement shall be applied on a provisional basis by the Union and its Member States, in accordance with applicable national law, from the first day of the month following the date of the latest note of which the Parties have notified each other of the completion of the relevant domestic procedures to provisionally apply the Agreement. No such notification has yet been received by the Council.

Nevertheless, with a view to preparing for the conclusion of the Agreement, the Council preparatory bodies will start, in due time, to undertake the necessary adaptations to the Lisbon Treaty and, thereafter, take a decision to forward the draft Council Decision on conclusion as well as the text of the Agreement to the European Parliament for its consent.

Concerning the EU-Canada Civil Aviation Safety Agreement, the Council adopted its Decision on the signature on 30 March 2009 and the Agreement was signed in Prague on 6 May 2009.

This Agreement is not applied on a provisional basis, the Agreement needs to be concluded before it enters into force. Therefore, the Council preparatory bodies have started to provide for the necessary adaptations to the Lisbon Treaty with a view to preparing a decision to forward the draft Council Decision on conclusion as well as the text of the Agreement to the European Parliament for its consent.

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QUESTIONS TO THE COMMISSION

Question no 38 by Marian Harkin(H-0087/10)

Subject: Green Paper on volunteering

In order to raise awareness of the value of volunteering throughout the EU, would the Commission consider, in conjunction with the proposed initiatives to celebrate the European Year on Volunteering, drawing up a comprehensive Green Paper on volunteering to facilitate, recognise and add value to volunteering?

In addition to drawing up such a Green Paper, does the Commission consider it important to build synergies between other international organisations such as the ILO and the UN in relation to the JHU/ILO Volunteer Measurement Project and the UN Non-Profit Handbook?

Answer

(EN) The European Commission welcomes the continued interest of the European Parliament in the issue of volunteering.

The European Year of Volunteering 2011 will focus on the following four aims: firstly, to create an enabling environment for volunteering; secondly, to empower volunteer organisations; thirdly, to raise awareness about the value and importance of volunteering; and fourthly, to improve the recognition of volunteering activities. The European Year will therefore engage all the relevant stakeholders, especially civil society organisations, at EU, national, regional and local levels. The Commission also hopes for the continued involvement of Parliament during the preparation of the Year.

The Commission would like to assure the honourable Member that its priority is to ensure that action on the issue of volunteering continues well beyond the end of the European Year. Its influence should be reflected in policy initiatives and continued dialogue with civil society stakeholders, businesses and European and international institutions, all of which will ensure tangible, beneficial results for the volunteering sector, and European society at large, in the subsequent years. However, the Commission considers that at the present stage of preparing the European Year on Volunteering 2011, it is too early to assess whether a Green Paper on Volunteering would be the appropriate tool to facilitate, recognise and add value to volunteering.

A Commission study on volunteering in the European Union that was finalised in the beginning of 2010⁽¹²⁾ provides for the first time research and insights into the current situation of volunteering in the European Union. While this study has collated and made use of a wide-range of sources to gather the most information possible on the level of volunteering in the EU, it has not been possible yet to provide a statistically accurate comparison across Europe and there is still a lack of comparable data between Member States. The Commission therefore welcomes initiatives that aim at improving its understanding of the voluntary sector and fully intends to explore potential synergies with Eurostat and other international institutions, such as the International Labour Organisation and the United Nations, as suggested by the honourable Member.

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Question no 40 by Marc Tarabella(H-0095/10)

Subject: Measures to be taken by the Commission to combat effectively at European level violence against women

The European Parliament recently adopted by a large majority a resolution on equality between women and men in the European Union, 2009 (P7_TA(2010)0021). As rapporteur for the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, I proposed that a European Year for combating violence against women be established – a proposal that was adopted by 591 votes to 30, with 15 abstentions. Similarly, the written declaration drawn up by Eva-Britt Svensson calling for such a Year to be established was signed by 408 Members in April 2009.

⁽¹²⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/citizenship/index_en

Can the Commission state to what extent it intends to act on Parliament's firm and consistent stance on this matter?

What is more, my invitation to the Commission to 'start drawing up a proposal for a comprehensive directive on preventing and combating all forms of violence against women, including trafficking' was adopted by 558 votes to 85, with 22 abstentions.

Can the Commission state what action it has taken in response to that request?

Answer

(EN) Combating violence against women constitutes a political priority for the Commission. The Commission welcomes the adoption by the European Parliament of the resolution on the equality between men and women in the European Union (P7_TA(2010)0021) as well as the adoption of the proposal for the creation of a European Year to combat violence against children, young people and women.

The Commission is determined to use its political, legislative and financial powers and resources to help eradicate violence against women in Europe and elsewhere. The problem is addressed at the Commission's level through legislative and policy initiatives and actions in the areas of the protection of fundamental rights, gender equality and other employment and social policies, the policies of trafficking in human beings and sexual exploitation, cooperation in law enforcement and criminal justice, asylum and immigration policies, public health, developments, research and education.

A number of initiatives have recently been taken by the Commission in the area of combating violence.

A mid-term strategy for equality between women and men is currently being prepared, to be adopted mid-2010, to follow-up the existing framework. It is foreseen that violence against women will remain a specific priority area on which the Commission will focus.

On the field of criminal justice, the Commission will shortly submit a proposal on trafficking of human beings. It also supports the Spanish Presidency project to create a European Protection Order which also aims at better protection of women victims of domestic violence.

The Daphne III Programme, which represents the most targeted and comprehensive action in the area of combating violence, has recently launched a study on harmful traditional practices which will be completed in early April 2010. Moreover, a Eurobarometer survey of EU citizen's perception of violence against women has been launched by the Programme, which will allow comparing the changes in perception of violence in EU within the past ten years. The results of this Eurobarometer survey should become available in mid 2010.

Additionally, the Daphne III Programme has launched a preparatory action following an initiative by the European Parliament, on the standardisation of national legislation on gender violence and violence against children. The aim is that this study will help the Commission determine the scope of its future actions, including the possibility to propose legislation in this area. The study will look into the possibility for a European-level harmonisation of legislation on gender violence that could help reducing gender violence within the European Union. The study is currently under way and the final report is expected end of September 2010. The results of this study will be presented at a conference at the end of 2010. This will give the Commission an opportunity to present its actions towards a strengthened policy to response to combat violence.

In light of the abovementioned initiatives, the Commission takes note of the request of Parliament to the Commission to establish an EU-wide strategy on combating violence against women, to prepare binding legal instruments aiming at elimination of violence against women and a European awareness-raising campaign on violence against women. The Commission is currently investigating these possibilities and is reflecting on how best to respond to these requests.

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Question no 41 by Brian Crowley(H-0100/10)

Subject: The EU Drugs Strategy

The illegal drugs trade continues to have a devastating impact on individuals, families and communities across Europe. Does the Commission intend to improve the effectiveness of the EU Drugs Strategy in order to adequately address the cross-border trade and supply of illicit drugs?

Answer

(EN) The EU Drugs Strategy 2005-2012 was adopted by the European Council in 2004. It is a strategy and not a formal legal instrument. Implementation is largely in the hands of the Member States.

The Commission's role in this is to propose four-year Action Plan for implementation of the Strategy and monitor these. The monitoring reports are addressed to the Council and the European Parliament in the form of Communications.

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Question no 42 by Sarah Ludford(H-0058/10)**Subject: Ivory trade in Tanzania and Zambia**

Tanzania and Zambia wish to secure permission at the CITES meeting in March to sell ivory stocks. They propose to do so by delisting their elephant populations from CITES' Appendix 1 which prohibits all trade, to Appendix 2 which allows monitored trade.

Other African countries united in the African Elephant Coalition are strongly opposed to this request and have tabled a counterproposal for this CITES meeting calling for a true moratorium for all trade in ivory.

Will the EU and its Member States now fully back the moratorium call and refuse permission for yet a new round of ivory sales?

Answer

(EN) The European Union has yet to finalise its position on the different proposals related to elephants which will be discussed at the Conference of Parties to CITES starting on 13 March 2010. This position will be established once all relevant information is available, in particular the report by the Panel of experts appointed by the CITES Standing Committee to assess the proposals by Tanzania and Zambia.

It is very unlikely, however, that the EU will support any decision allowing a resumption of ivory trade. The assessment of any possible link between previous one-off ivory sales and illegal activities is subject to an ongoing study. Pending this, it is very difficult to see how the European Union could agree on a resumption of ivory trade, especially in the current context of high levels of poaching and illegal trade in ivory.

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Question no 43 by Bendt Bendtsen(H-0059/10)**Subject: China's protection of its own enterprises under Notice 618**

The Chinese National Indigenous Innovation Products Accreditation Programme (Notice 618 of 15 November 2009) aims to protect Chinese enterprises in connection with public procurement. The programme appears to restrict the scope of non-Chinese enterprises – even those with subsidiaries in China – to produce and sell products covered by the programme to the Chinese market.

What steps has the Commission taken since the President of the EU's Chamber of Commerce in China, Joerg Wuttke, clearly expressed his concern about the programme in a letter to the Chinese authorities on 14 December 2009 and put a number of questions asking for clarification of the programme's content and possible implications?

What is the Commission's position on China's new policy protecting its own enterprises in relation to the negotiations on China's participation in the WTO's Government Procurement Agreement?

What other measures will the Commission take in the current situation?

Answer

(EN) On 17 November 2009 the Chinese authorities issued a Circular in which they announced measures for creating a system in 'innovative' sectors where access to public procurement takes place on the basis of a pre-qualification system (accreditation). Since then, the Commission has been in close contact with European businesses in China and in Europe as well as with international partners to assess the impact of this circular.

The Commission has repeatedly raised the issue in numerous bilateral contacts at various levels with the Chinese Government to express its concerns on these measures and to invite the Chinese Government to explain them. In parallel, a number of international partners as well as a significant number of national and international business organisations have done the same.

It is the view of the Commission – and of many of its international partners – that the Chinese authorities have not provided a satisfactory explanation for these new measures. Important questions remain unanswered. The Commission intends to pursue the issue with the Chinese authorities at all relevant levels to clarify the situation and to ensure that the interests of European businesses in the Chinese procurement market are defended.

China is not party to the WTO agreement on government procurement (GPA), although negotiations are ongoing. Once China will join the GPA, it will have to abide by internationally agreed disciplines which will be instrumental to address such issues. However, in the meantime, the Commission is pursuing discussions in the WTO how to address trade distortions arising from subsidies affecting trade in services, as mandated by Article XV of the General Agreement on Trade in Services which is binding on China.

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Question no 44 by Santiago Fisas Ayxela(H-0061/10)

Subject: EU multilateral trade agreement with Colombia

Following the success of the negotiations in Lima on the EU's multilateral trade agreement with Colombia, it could be said that the agreement is practically a done deal. However, some MEPs are pushing for the agreement not to be signed, alleging that there have been killings of trade unionists – this is despite the undeniable improvements made by the Colombian Government as regards upholding human rights. This progress has been acknowledged by the ILO in Parliament's Committee on Development. Furthermore, President Obama has recently stated that the US is to strengthen its trade links with Colombia.

How are the negotiations with Colombia going, and when does the Commission hope to sign the trade agreement?

Answer

(EN) On 1 March 2010, the Commission concluded technical negotiations with Peru and Colombia on a Multiparty Trade Agreement between the EU and Andean countries. The text now needs to go via a phase of legal scrubbing before it can be initialled and a proposal then be sent to the Council in order to authorise the official signature of the agreement, after which Parliament will be asked for its consent. As promised by the Member of the Commission responsible for Trade, there will also be a political discussion in the INTA Committee of the European Parliament before initialling this agreement. The whole procedure will take several months and one could reasonably expect that a signature could take place after the summer.

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Question no 45 by Alan Kelly(H-0064/10)

Subject: Citizens' Initiative – making it accessible online

The Lisbon Treaty has given legal status to a new model of participatory democracy known as the 'Citizens' Initiative'. Would the Commission be willing to explore the possibility of making the Citizens' Initiative available in an online medium for efficient and accessible signature collecting?

The Internet is now Europeans' principal method of mass communication and is a particularly effective tool for participatory democracy. We have all seen the MySpace and Facebook campaigns for political initiatives and how much citizens have got involved in trying to enforce democratic change.

Given the advancement of information and communications technology, it should be possible to verify signatures online and, if the Commission incorporated an online element to the Citizens' Initiative, it would open the way for true, participatory democracy that would make the ability to gather signatures much easier and cheaper, and make debate in a European public sphere more possible.

Would the Commission indicate whether it believes this to be a possibility, while also taking into account the rights of those who do not use the Internet to take part in the Citizens' Initiative via traditional signatures.

Answer

(EN) The Commission believes that it should be possible to provide for the online collection of statements of support for a European Citizens' Initiative. It is currently looking into this issue in preparing for its legislative proposal on this matter.

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Question no 46 by Ilda Figueiredo(H-0067/10)

Subject: Community funds

In view of the serious situation in some Member States, measures are needed urgently in various areas, not least in the budgetary and monetary spheres, so as to provide the effective remedies required to tackle unemployment – given that there are over 23 million out of work – and the poverty in which more than 85 million people are now living.

What is essential is a commitment to social progress in order to resolve the problem of unemployment and poverty as a matter of priority, support production and the creation of jobs with rights, safeguard economic and social cohesion, and bolster the budgets of countries in greater difficulty, for instance by advancing funds without requiring any form of national quid pro quo.

Is the Commission willing to transfer the necessary Community funds as a matter of the utmost urgency, thus enabling countries with serious social and financial problems to make use of the portions due to them without needing to offer anything in return at national level?

Answer

(EN) In its Communications 'A European Economic Recovery Plan'⁽¹³⁾ and 'A Shared Commitment for Employment'⁽¹⁴⁾ the Commission gave a firm commitment to take effective measures to help the Member States fight the effects of the crisis by speeding up implementation of operational programmes (OPs) cofinanced by the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund.

A first set of measures, involving the simplification of the rules on eligibility and an additional advance on OPs, was adopted under the European Economic Recovery Plan in April and May 2009. An additional EUR 4.5 billion from the European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) and EUR 1.8 billion from the European Social Fund (ESF) was paid to the Member States in order to support urgent operations required to cope with the crisis (total advances paid to the Member States in 2009 amounted to EUR 11.3 billion).

The Commission also encouraged the Member States to use the OPs' built-in flexibility to channel Structural Fund financing into operations to respond to the crisis and, where necessary, to modify the OPs. It also pointed out that some operations could be funded by the Structural Funds alone, compliance with the principle of cofinancing being assessed in terms of the average for the priority over the programming period. This meant that such operations could be entirely financed by the Funds, provided they were offset by others that were financed entirely from national funds before the end of 2015.

The communication 'A Shared Commitment for Employment' and the related measures were needed to boost job creation and counter the effect of the crisis on jobs at a time when the real economy and the labour market were beginning to feel its impact. It was accompanied by proposals for amendments to the General Regulation on the Structural Funds and the Cohesion Fund.

A key amendment provided for a two-year derogation (for 2009 and 2010) from the rules on calculating reimbursements of interim payments made in respect of ESF OPs and would have meant that, where a Member State wished to apply that option, 100% of the public contribution to a priority covered by interim payment claims up to the end of 2010 would have been reimbursed. As a result, while OPs would have had to respect the cofinancing rate for the period as a whole, they would have mirrored what is possible at

⁽¹³⁾ COM(2008) 800 final.

⁽¹⁴⁾ COM(2009) 257 final.

operation level. Given the nature of the ESF, which is the EU's main tool for investing in people (it supports 9 million people each year), this provision clearly sought to speed up operations in favour of people, and in particular those who need it most, the unemployed or those at risk of becoming unemployed, with a cash flow estimated at EUR 6.6 billion.

The Council came to a compromise agreement, which involved the payment of an additional advance of EUR 775 million from the ESF and the Cohesion Fund to the five Member States most affected by the crisis (Romania, Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia). In addition a more flexibility was proposed as regards the automatic decommitment of the 2007 commitment.

The Commission opposed that compromise, which it felt did not provide enough support for people affected by the crisis. The proposal is currently before Parliament.

The Commission proposal for a new EUROPE 2020 strategy entails several proposals as part of flagship initiatives to make or reinforce EU instruments available for directly or indirectly combatting rising unemployment. The Flagship Initiative 'An agenda for new skills and jobs' proposes to facilitate and promote intra-EU labour mobility and better match labour supply with demand with appropriate financial support from the structural funds, notably the ESF. The Flagship Initiative 'Innovation Union' proposes to strengthen the role of structural funds, rural development funds, R&D framework programme in supporting innovation. The Flagship Initiative 'A digital Agenda for Europe' proposes to facilitate the use of EU's structural funds in pursuit of this agenda.

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Question no 47 by Catherine Bearder(H-0074/10)

Subject: Biodiversity and the subjugation of environmental priorities to commercial interests

The re-emergence of the threat to the African elephant highlights the danger of the commodification of some of the earth's most rare and endangered species. The threat to this particular animal is symptomatic of the approach of putting economic demands ahead of the need to protect our ecosystem and the host of animal species it is home to.

A second example of this can be seen in the form of the recently leaked document from the Commission revealing its intention to reclassify palm plantations as 'forests' in order to permit the use of palm oil as a biofuel.

The reclassification of palm oil plantations by the Commission gives carte blanche to the palm oil, logging and paper industries to deforest, to destroy, and to kill. Across the world organisations are fighting for the survival of species being pushed to the brink of extinction because of the aggressive proliferation of such industries. In this, the UN Year of Biodiversity, what additional steps does the Commission intend to take to safeguard the many vulnerable species open to exploitation for commercial gain?

Answer

(EN) The Commission shares the concerns that many natural resources are exploited in an unsustainable manner. The Commission is working in several ways to address this problem and ensure a better conservation of biodiversity both within and beyond the EU.

The Commission, together with Germany and other countries, is supporting a vast independent study on The Economics of Ecosystems and Biodiversity Loss (TEEB)⁽¹⁵⁾. TEEB was launched by G8 Environment Ministers in 2007 and has so far delivered three reports highlighting the importance of estimating the economic value of biodiversity and the economic consequences of its continuing loss. This work is important, because as long as the value of nature remains unaccounted for, the economic interest in exploiting it will continue to prevail over efforts to conserve it. The idea is to ensure that TEEB findings and recommendations are reflected in all relevant decisions and policies and put on a par with other economic considerations (for instance by integrating this valuation into conventional accounting procedures), not only in the EU but across the globe. The TEEB final report will be presented at the 10th Conference of the Parties to the Convention on Biological Diversity (COP10 CBD) in Nagoya, Japan, in October 2010.

⁽¹⁵⁾ <http://www.teebweb.org/>

This year, the UN International Year of Biodiversity, will see the negotiation of a new global biodiversity policy framework within the scope of the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD). The 10th Conference of the Parties to the CBD, in Nagoya in October 2010, will adopt a revised and updated Strategic Plan for the Convention, setting out a long-term global vision for biodiversity, a mid-term mission/headline target, and a set of goals and sub-targets to reach that mission/target. The Commission will seek to ensure that safeguarding vulnerable species is reflected in the global post-2010 framework, and to improve the conservation status of threatened species.

The EU will also be playing a key role at the Conference of Parties to the CITES (Convention on International Trade in Endangered Species) in March 2010. It will notably propose the adoption of measures for the protection of marine biodiversity, via the regulation of international trade in marine species subject to overexploitation. The EU will also oppose the adoption of any measure which could lead to a resumption of ivory trade in the current circumstances and will contribute to help out African States to develop a plan of action for the better conservation of elephants.

The Commission will also continue its efforts to ensure that its consumption of timber and timber products does not contribute to illegal logging, which often has severe negative impacts on biodiversity. This is being addressed through the Forest Law Enforcement, Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Action Plan and the proposed 'due diligence' regulation laying down obligations of operators who place timber and timber products on the market, which is currently in the co-decision process.

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Question no 48 by Ryszard Czarnecki(H-0076/10)

Subject: Breach of rules on competition and capital transfers by UniCredit

Breaches of EU competition and capital transfer rules have been committed in connection with the UniCredit Group's 'Project Chopin', with UniCredit, which owns Poland's Pekao Bank, involved in collusion and abusing its dominant position. UniCredit and the developer Pirelli, acting jointly and in collaboration, signed the 'Chopin Agreement' with Pekao SA in June 2005 but failed to inform the market and the financial supervisory authority of this, in spite of the requirement to do so. As a result, UniCredit, as the dominant shareholder, forced Pekao to conclude an unfavourable partnership agreement with Pirelli in April 2006. Pirelli and UniCredit are connected through their capital shares in the Olimpia company, in which Alessandro Profumo, CEO of UniCredit, holds an executive post. In parallel with this, an asymmetrical transaction has taken place at Olimpia, involving the purchase by Pirelli of worthless Telecom Italia shares from UniCredit.

Further to my previous question on the subject (H-0506/09), does the Commission intend to intervene in this matter, given that companies operating in more than one Member State are involved?

Answer

(FR) Firstly, it should be pointed out that the Community dimension of a case is not necessarily or uniquely demonstrated by the simple fact that the companies concerned are located in two Member States. In this regard the Court of Justice, in accordance with established case law, has indicated that the Community dimension and interest of a case are determined on the basis of its effects on intra-Community trade and of whether the practices in question exert an influence on the trade flows between Member States in a way that could harm the achievement of the objectives of a single market (see in particular ECJ, AEPI v Commission, Case C-425/07P, specifically §42). It follows from the information provided by the honourable Member that the case in question concerns a oneoff commercial agreement between two companies and that this agreement does not appear to have to be in the Community interest.

Furthermore, established case law also states that competition law, in particular the rules on abuse of a dominant position, do not apply in the case of relations between a subsidiary and its parent company (see in particular ECJ, Viho Europe BV v Commission, Case C-73/95). Therefore, competition law cannot be applied in the present case.

In view of the above-mentioned points, the Commission does not intend to intervene in the case brought to its attention by the honourable Member.

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Question no 49 by Georgios Papastamkos(H-0079/10)**Subject: European Economic Governance**

The very profound financial crisis in Greece and the financial imbalance in other eurozone Member States have raised questions about the ability of EMU to withstand static and dynamic pressures. There is no doubt that retrenchment in public finances of a Member State of the eurozone is the responsibility of that State. However, the financial crisis has thrown into relief the lack of correlation between a full, single monetary union and an incomplete economic union in the EU.

Will the Commission propose plans for the establishment of a European Monetary Fund with the funds and powers of intervention necessary to offset the structural shortcomings of EMU and to reflect a more formal and coordinated form of European economic governance?

Answer

(EN) The EMU policy framework as laid down in the Treaty on the functioning of the European Union and the Stability and Growth Pact aims at guaranteeing sound economic and budgetary conditions. In some cases, euro area Member States have unfortunately failed to enact sound policies in good times, and developed imbalances and vulnerabilities which are extracting a high price during the crisis in terms of growth and employment and in terms of high sovereign risk premia. These countries face serious economic and fiscal challenges, which require prompt and decisive corrective action. The Commission is supporting them in this endeavour with its surveillance and policy advice activity.

With respect to Greece in particular, the Commission adopted a comprehensive and ambitious package of detailed recommendations on 3 February, covering fiscal policy and collection of statistics (recommendation to the Council to give notice to take action under Article 126(9) – excessive deficit procedure), a proposal for a Council Opinion on the Stability Programme, and structural reforms (Council recommendation under Art. 121(4) – inconsistency with broad economic policy guidelines and risk of jeopardising the proper functioning of economic and monetary union). The Ecofin Council adopted the respective documents on 16 February and requested a first reporting on the supporting measure to safeguard the 2010 deficit target by 16 March at the latest.

Both the Heads of State or Government and the Commission have called on the Greek Government to do whatever is necessary, including adopting additional measures, to ensure that the ambitious targets set in the updated stability programme, in particular the 4% of GDP reduction of the budget deficit in 2010, are reached. On 3 March, the Greek Prime Minister announced additional fiscal consolidation measures amounting to some 2% of GDP. The Commission welcomed the measures, which confirms the Greek Government's commitment to take all necessary measures to deliver the Stability Programme's objectives and in particular to ensure that the 4% of GDP deficit reduction target for 2010 is met. At the same time, the Commission stressed that full and timely implementation of fiscal measures along with decisive structural reforms in compliance with the Council decision is paramount. The Commission monitors the situation closely and remains in close contact with the Greek authorities. The Commission will prepare a more detailed assessment of the measures in time for the mid-March Ecofin Council, based also on the foreseen reporting by the Greek authorities.

As stressed by the Heads of State or Government, members of the euro area share a common responsibility for the stability of the euro. Our economic policies are a matter of common concern. The critical lesson from this crisis is that we urgently need deeper and broader surveillance of economic policies, including earlier detection and tackling of imbalances, in order to better safeguard macro-financial stability in the euro area. The Commission intends to soon come forward with proposals to further strengthen the coordination and the surveillance of national economic policies within the euro area.

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Question no 50 by Laima Liucija Andrikiienė(H-0081/10)**Subject: Trade relations between the EU and Russia**

Since the beginning of the financial crisis at the end of 2008, Russia has imposed a number of protectionist 'temporary' anti-crisis tariffs on a number of imports, such as meat and milk products, furniture, some steel products, trucks, television sets and others. What is more, on 1 January 2010 a customs union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan came into existence. The external tariffs that were agreed by the three countries

are mostly based on Russia's tariffs. As a result, a total of 30% of the product lines exported from the EU to Russia have seen increases in tariffs.

It is widely recognised that the main problem the EU faces is that Russia is not a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and is therefore not bound by the WTO rules restricting unilateral increases in import tariffs and other trade-restrictive measures.

How does the Commission assess the EU's current trade problems with Russia, and how does it intend to address them? Does the EU have a particular strategy on how to address the issue of Russia's membership of the WTO?

Answer

(EN) Since the end of 2008, Russia has followed a policy of increasing import tariffs on a broad range of products as an alleged response to the current economic crisis. In fact, Russia is the G-20 country that has adopted the largest number of protectionist measures over the past year. These measures directly hit the EU's economic interests as the EU is Russia's largest trading partner.

These protectionist measures were originally introduced on a temporary basis. However, they have been made permanent under the recently created Customs Union with Belarus and Kazakhstan. The new Common External Tariff of the Customs Union, in force since 1 January 2010, has consolidated most of the 'temporary' Russian import tariff increases and has also extended them to the other two Customs Union members.

During the past few months, the Commission has focussed efforts on assessing and trying to mitigate the impact of this new trade regime. The Commission has urged Russia to roll back the tariffs to the previous lower levels, on a large number of products of particular export concern for the EU. It has also repeatedly requested Russia to hold formal consultations as foreseen under the Partnership and Co-operation Agreement.

Up until now, Russia is still proceeding with tariff increases. It should be stated that under the current EU-Russia bilateral arrangements, Russia does not have any specific legal obligations to respect a 'standstill' on the level of import duties. However such standstill, while not legally enforceable, can be commonly expected from any country wishing to join the World Trade Organisation (WTO).

The Commission continues to be engaged in Russia's WTO accession process. Intense consultations at senior officials' level are ongoing to clarify the new situation. The Commission remains fully engaged to move the accession process forward and urges Russia to improve and stabilise its trade regime with a view to respecting the negotiated accession commitments.

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Question no 51 by Nadezhda Neynsky(H-0082/10)

Subject: Directive 2001/18/EC on genetically modified organisms

Directive 2001/18/EC⁽¹⁶⁾ of the European Parliament and of the Council provides neither for safeguards against the horizontal transfer of viruses contained in genetic material from GMO crops to other crop species nor for the creation of GMO-free areas for organic and conventional agricultural production.

What measures does the Commission intend to take to ensure that Directive 2001/18/EC will allow any Member State, if it so wishes, to introduce additional restrictions on the release into the environment of genetically modified varieties of agricultural crops of major economic importance to the country in question, and to designate GMO-free areas in order to safeguard organic and conventional farming and protect biodiversity?

Answer

(EN) The Directive specifically provides for the assessment of all adverse health and environmental effects which may occur through the release of GMOs into the environment. Such assessment includes the potential transfer of genetic material from viruses to other organisms.

⁽¹⁶⁾ OJ L 106, 17.4.2001, p. 1.

With regards to the establishment of GMO free areas, the Commission would like to recall that in September 2009 the President of the Commission indicated that in the area of GMOs it should be possible to combine an EU authorisation system, based on science, with freedom for Member States to decide whether or not they wish to cultivate GM crops on their territory.

On 2 March 2010, the Commission launched an analysis in order to assess whether Member States can be given such freedom on the basis of existing legislation and, if not, to present a legal proposal before the summer.

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Question no 52 by Mairead McGuinness(H-0084/10)

Subject: State aid to small and medium-sized enterprises active in the production of agricultural products

Article 11, Paragraph 8 of Commission Regulation (EC) No 1857/2006⁽¹⁷⁾ on the application of Articles 87 and 88 of the Treaty to State aid to small and medium-sized enterprises active in the production of agricultural products states that from 1 January 2010 any compensation paid to farmers for crop losses due to adverse weather conditions will be dependent on whether farmers have taken out insurance policies covering at least 50% of their annual production or
production-related income. Where farmers have no crop insurance any compensation offered to them will be reduced by 50%. In Member States where crop insurance is not offered by any insurance company what is the status of Article 11, Paragraph 8?

Can the Commission provide information on risk assessment instruments currently available in Member States, specifically those Member States where insurance products are offered to farmers, for instance what level of cover is provided by these insurance products and how these products are financed – are they funded by the state, funded by farmers or jointly funded?

Answer

(EN) If, in a given Member State, no insurance company proposes insurance contracts covering damages brought about by the statistically most frequent climatic events, Article 11(8) of Regulation (EC) No 1857/2006 will not be applied but the aid scheme providing for compensation for losses will not be eligible for a notification exemption in accordance with the same Regulation. In such a case, the Member State could notify the aid scheme to the Commission by virtue of Article 108(3) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union and show in the notification that, despite all reasonable efforts, affordable insurance covering the statistically most frequent climatic risks in the Member State or region concerned was not available at the time the damage occurred. If such evidence is provided, the 50 % reduction will not be applied.

A variety of different risk management tools are currently available in Member States. With regard to insurances, mostly classic insurance schemes are available in the EU (mainly single-risk and combined insurance, but also yield insurance), and these are generally private. In many Member States, only a limited number of insurance companies are operating. The level of development of the agricultural insurances in each country is mainly linked to two decisive factors:

- The needs faced by each country (risk level);
- The economical support to the insurance systems given by each Member State.

Some governments subsidize insurances while others provide aid ex-post on an ad-hoc basis through compensation schemes or calamity funds, which can be partially financed by the agricultural stakeholders on a voluntary or compulsory basis.

The report Agricultural Insurance schemes⁽¹⁸⁾, which was financed by the Commission and last updated in 2008, presents the different existing risk management tools available to farmers in the EU. This helps to better understand the evolution of insurance systems in Europe, since the development of insurance systems is strongly correlated to the presence of other risk management tools and to the role of the public sector, in particular ad-hoc aid measures.

⁽¹⁷⁾ OJ L 358, 16.12.2006, p. 3.

⁽¹⁸⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/agriculture/analysis/external/insurance/index_en.htm

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Question no 53 by Nikolaos Chountis(H-0085/10)

Subject: Imminent merger of Olympic Air and Aegean Airlines

On 11 February 2010, Olympic Air and Aegean Airlines released similar statements confirming their talks on 'future cooperation', although press reports have appeared about the imminent merger of the two companies. This scenario, which would lead to a private monopoly and the loss of 2 500 jobs, has elicited a sharp response from consumer protection organisations. Bearing in mind that the two companies control virtually the entire domestic passenger market, that Greece has more airports than other Member States owing to its geography and that it is expected that there will be an increase in domestic fares and in the number and volume of subsidised services, will the Commission say:

Does the fact that the two companies control 97% of domestic passenger traffic constitute a reason for the Hellenic Competition Commission to refuse approval for such a merger? Is the Greek State able to refuse to give the Olympic name and logo to the new company that would be created by such a merger and impose a ceiling on domestic fares, since the new company would have a 97% share of domestic passenger traffic?

Answer

(EN) The Commission has been informed through company statements of a planned merger between Olympic Air and Aegean Airlines.

At this early stage, it cannot be determined whether or not the operation would require a notification to the European Commission or to the competent Greek competition authorities.

Under Council Regulation (EC) No 139/2004 ('the Merger Regulation')⁽¹⁹⁾, the Commission is competent to assess the compatibility with the Common Market of concentrations having a 'EU dimension', pursuant to the financial turnover requirements laid down in the Merger Regulation.

The main objective of the Commission's assessment of a concentration is to maintain effective competition within the common market and to prevent harmful effects on competition and ultimately on consumers. In its analysis the Commission takes into account, among others, the market position and power of the undertakings concerned.

As the planned concentration has not yet been the subject of a formal notification to the Commission under the Merger Regulation, the Commission is currently not in a position to comment on further details of the transaction to which the honourable Member refers.

The Olympic name and logo constitute assets that belong to Olympic Air following the completion of the privatisation of Olympic Airlines.

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Question no 54 by Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou(H-0094/10)

Subject: Measures relating to budgetary adjustment and growth in Greece

The ECOFIN Council meeting in February called on Greece to implement special budgetary adjustment measures. Mr Juncker stressed that the Commission would propose a package of possible measures to Greece aimed at reducing expenditure and increasing revenue and, by way of example, referred to cutting wage costs and increasing VAT and taxes on cars and energy.

Given that most of the measures taken, or about to be taken, by the Greek Government already aim to reduce wage costs and increase revenue through higher taxation, does the Commission not consider that such measures – which are tantamount to an austerity policy on revenue and income – may themselves further reduce demand for investment and consumption in the Greek economy, thereby undermining efforts towards recovery and the consolidation of public finances in Greece? Will it propose that the Greek Government take measures which are geared to actual conditions in Greece to promote growth and the recovery of productivity in the economy?

⁽¹⁹⁾ OJ L 24, 29.1.2004

Answer

(EN) High deficit and debt levels have a substantial negative impact on a country's ability to grow given implications on financial markets, interest rates and credit conditions. Therefore, fiscal consolidation is also necessary for growth. Though growth conditions in 2010 will be unfavourable in Greece, postponing fiscal consolidation would certainly lead to worse results in terms of growth. In compliance with the provisions of the Stability and Growth Pact, Greece submitted in January 2010 an updated stability programme according to which a substantial effort towards fiscal consolidation, with the deficit declining from 12.7% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2009 to below 3% of GDP as from 2012. A first part of the adjustment, equal to 4% of GDP, is to be achieved this year. The Commission and the Council have endorsed the Greek stability programme and consider that both the targets and the underlying measures are appropriate.

To the extent that risks associated with the deficit and debt ceilings materialise, additional effort is necessary to keep the budgetary targets on track. The Commission welcomes the announcement by the Greek Government on 3 March 2010 to introduce a set of additional consolidation measures equal to 2% of GDP. This announcement confirms the Greek Government's commitment to take all necessary measures to deliver the programme's objectives and in particular to ensure that the 4% of GDP deficit reduction target for 2010 will be met. The additional measures appropriately include expenditure cuts, and in particular savings in the public wage bill, which are essential for achieving permanent fiscal consolidation effects and restore competitiveness. The announced revenue-increasing measures also contribute to fiscal consolidation. Full and timely implementation of fiscal measures, along with decisive structural reforms, in compliance with the Council decision is paramount. This is in the interest of the Greek people, who will benefit from sounder public finances, better growth prospects and job opportunities. It is as well important for the overall financial stability of the euro area.

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Question no 55 by Pat the Cope Gallagher(H-0098/10)

Subject: Internet safety

Over 50% of European teenagers provide personal information, which can be seen by anybody, over the Internet. Does the Commission intend to bring forward new measures to improve child safety on the Internet, with particular reference to social networking sites?

Answer

(EN) In reply to the honourable Member's question, the Commission considers that improving child safety on the Internet and in particular on social networking sites is an important and shared responsibility of public authorities, parents, schools and industry.

In the framework of the Safer Internet Programme⁽²⁰⁾ the Commission facilitated the signature of a self-regulatory agreement, the 'Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU'⁽²¹⁾ in 2009 by 20 companies Arto, Bebo, Dailymotion, Facebook, Giovani.it, Google, Hyves, Microsoft Europe, MySpace, Nasza-klaza.pl, Netlog, One.lt, Piczo, Rate.ee, Skyrock, Tuenti, Sulake, VZnet Netzwerk Ltd., Yahoo!Europe and Zap.lu. These companies recognised their responsibility and identify potential risks on their sites for under 18s, including cyberbullying, grooming, and risky behaviour like revealing personal information. They aim to limit these risks by a number of specific measures.

The Commission is monitoring the implementation of this agreement very closely. On 9th February 2010, the Commission published an evaluation report of implementation of the Safer Social Networking Principles based on an analysis of the companies' safety policies and testing of the respective sites by independent experts. The report shows that most of these companies have taken action and empowered minors by making it easier to change privacy settings, block users or delete unwanted comments and content. Yet more needs to be done since only 40% of the companies only make profiles of under-18 users visible only to their friends by default, and only one third replied to user reports asking for help.

⁽²⁰⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/sip/index_en.htm

⁽²¹⁾ http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/activities/social_networking/docs/sn_principles.pdf

The Commission will analyse in detail the individual results of each signatory and will follow-up on individual basis with each company where more efforts are needed to fully implement specific parts of the social networking principles. As foreseen in the 'Safer Social Networking Principles for the EU' signed by the companies, the European Social Networking Task Force⁽²²⁾ will meet again this year, to discuss further possibilities of improving the online safety of under 18s who use social networking sites.

Besides, the Commission is reviewing the current European rules on data protection and privacy. To this end, the Commission has run a public consultation on the revision of the Data Protection Directive⁽²³⁾, which ended in December 2009. Its results show that many citizens want more rigorous consent requirements in relation to minors in the online world.

In addition, the Safer Internet Day's theme on 9 February this year was 'Think before you post' to encourage youngsters in particular to pay attention to the personal information they put on the Internet.

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Question no 56 by Konrad Szymański(H-0101/10)

Subject: Equal access to Internet services in the internal market

Apple's iTunes on-line store, which sells audio and video products, is aimed at consumers in only some of the Member States (which do not include, for instance, Poland). This is discriminatory and therefore in breach of Community law. What is more, in practice, it encourages Internet piracy.

What is of particular concern is the fact that, as a result of deliberately imposed technical restrictions on the use of credit cards, consumers in countries such as Poland are unable to buy products available on-line in another country.

The Commission expressed concern about the matter last year. Has the new Commission followed this up by taking any practical steps to put an end to this discriminatory practice?

Is discrimination against consumers in some Member States in connection with on-line sales something that the Commission will be looking into, with a view to ensuring equal rights for consumers on the Community market?

Answer

(EN) As the Commission indicated in its reply to question E-5058/09, differences in treatment applied by service providers according to the nationality or the place of residence of their costumers (such as restrictions to the use of credit cards that prevent customers from a Member State to have access to services provided from an online store in another Member State) are dealt with specifically by the non-discrimination clause in Article 20, paragraph 2 of Directive 123/2006/EC on Services in the Internal Market (the 'Services Directive'). While prohibiting discrimination, this provision also specifies that not all differences in treatment are forbidden since differences in the conditions of access will be allowed 'when those differences are directly justified by objective criteria'.

The enforcement of national legislation implementing this provision lies primarily within the responsibility of national authorities and courts. The Commission is not empowered to start infringement proceedings against a private party on the basis of Article 20(2) of the Services Directive. However, it is providing assistance to Member States in order to make sure that national provisions transposing Article 20(2) of the Services Directive are implemented and enforced correctly at national level by national authorities and courts. In particular, in this context, the Commission has recently published a study on business practices susceptible to fall within Article 20(2) and on the possible reasons behind them. Consumers having suffered from cases of possible discrimination may also seek redress by contacting assistance bodies in their countries such as bodies members of the ECC (European Consumer Centres) Network.

⁽²²⁾ The Social Networking Task force was first convened by the European Commission in April 2008 and is composed of social networks as well as researchers and child welfare organizations.

⁽²³⁾ Directive 95/46/EC of the Parliament and of the Council of 24 October 1995 on the protection of individuals with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data - OJ L 281, 23.11.1995

When applying these provisions, national authorities and courts will have to take account of objective criteria which may justify the different treatment.

In addition, as the honourable Member may know, it also needs to be pointed out that authors' copyright and rights related to copyright such as rights of record producers and performers in sound recordings of music held in online stores are usually licensed on a national basis. However, the Commission is not in the possession of information suggesting that the need to obtain copyright clearances to offer services in Poland explains why the iTunes' on-line store is not available in that Member State.

In addition to the application of the above-mentioned non-discrimination clause in Article 20(2) of the Services Directive, autonomous decisions by dominant companies need to be assessed under Article 102 TFEU which prohibits, as incompatible with the common market, any abuse of a dominant position by one or more undertakings, insofar as it may affect trade between Member States.

The Commission continues to pursue efforts to achieve the removal of the obstacles still impeding the development of legitimate pan-European music services and to enable consumers to buy from any online store in the EU, irrespective of their place of residence. The removal of the identified obstacles, together with the effective enforcement in Member States of Article 20(2) of the Services Directive will be of fundamental importance to achieve these objectives.

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Question no 57 by Morten Messerschmidt(H-0107/10)

Subject: Border controls

According to information from the Danish police, 203 arrests were made last year of persons in breach of a ban on entry into the country. The police indicate that this is merely the tip of the iceberg. Moreover, according to the Danish Jean Monnet Professor, Marlene Wind, the open borders make it easy for deported criminals to return and commit further crimes.

What measures is the Commission contemplating in view of the extent of cross-border crime within the EU? What are its views on the lack of effective measures to combat crime in Bulgaria and Romania, given the plans to abolish border controls in those countries also at the end of the year?

Answer

(EN) The creation of an area without internal border control is flanked by accompanying measures, amongst which effective police and judicial cooperation. With this in mind, EU Law enforcement agencies such as EUROPOL and EUROJUST have been created and a number of legal instruments have been adopted to allow Member States to effectively fight cross border crime such as for example a Decision from 2008 on the stepping up of cross-border cooperation, particularly in combating terrorism and cross-border crime. The provisions concern in particular the automated exchange of information with regard to major events and for the purpose of fighting terrorism, as well as regarding other forms of cross-border police cooperation.

As far as the efficiency of entry bans is concerned, the attention of the honourable Member is drawn to Directive 2008/115/EC on common standards and procedures in Member States for returning illegally staying third-country nationals (to be transposed by Member States by December 2010) which provides for a harmonised EU-wide entry ban. This entry ban has preventative effects and fosters the credibility of a European return policy by sending a clear message that those who have no right to stay and disregarded migration rules in EU Member States will not be allowed to re-enter any EU Member State for a specific period.

As far as Bulgaria and Romania are concerned, in accordance with the Act of Accession, the lifting of internal border controls is preceded by a specific evaluation process to verify whether all preconditions for the application of the Schengen acquis are met.

This evaluation covers the areas of external borders, visa, police cooperation, the Schengen Information System and data protection. Bulgaria and Romania set their target date for lifting internal border control for March 2011. Evaluations have started in 2009 and will continue throughout 2010.

The conclusion on whether (or not) all preconditions are fulfilled and the decision on the lifting of internal border control falls under the full responsibility of the Member States.

The success of the Schengen area depends on mutual trust between Member States and their capacity to implement fully those accompanying measures which enable the lifting of internal border controls. The effective fight against corruption and the strengthening of police and judicial cooperation are important factors which are crucial for building this trust. The Commission encourages efforts and closely follows the developments in this area in Bulgaria and Romania. In the framework of the Cooperation and Verification Mechanism, the Commission assesses the reform of judiciary, fight against corruption and organised crime. Handling cross-border crimes are an important factor of the evaluation. The Commission bases its assessment on various sources, including information coming from the Member States, and gives recommendations in its summer reports how to improve the situation.

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Question no 58 by Charalampos Angourakis(H-0110/10)

Subject: Privatisation of Skaramanga Shipyards

The privatisation of Skaramanga shipyards forced through by successive Greek governments has had painful consequences for workers, since hundreds of jobs have been lost. 'ThyssenKrupp', the owner of the shipyards, is now selling them after earning 3 billion euros for the construction of submarines, although it denounced the contracts with the Greek State and failed to deliver the product. The shipyards have been broken up, and a separate rolling stock company has been established. The 160 workers employed there have not been paid for approximately 10 months. The press has reported about hundreds of new job losses and bargaining between multinationals for ownership of the shipyards and with the government so that it gives the new owners a 'dowry' of billions of euros from the 2010-2011 arms programmes.

Does the Commission consider that the liberalisation of the markets and the application of the laws of competition to the shipbuilding industry, decided on by the EU and national governments, has led to the marginalisation of this sector in Greece, a seafaring country par excellence, job losses and the violation of workers' rights in order to allow monopolistic groups to make a profit?

Answer

(EN) The application of the laws of competition aim at ensuring fair and effective competition for the benefit of Europe and its citizens, as competition cuts prices, raises quality, expands customer choice, promotes technological innovation and, consequently, boosts the European economy. The Competition rules of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union include a general prohibition of state aid, save under exceptional justified circumstances, in order to ensure that government interventions do not distort competition and trade inside the EU. The Commission can in certain circumstances authorise aid for the restructuring of a firm in difficulty, including in the shipbuilding sector. However, it is the responsibility of the public authorities to ensure that the aid is properly implemented.

In 1997, the Commission gave Greece the chance to finance the restructuring of the civil commercial activities of Hellenic Shipyards by authorising EUR 160 million of aid⁽²⁴⁾. Unfortunately, some crucial conditions attached to the approval have not been complied with. In addition, Greece repeatedly provided unlawful and incompatible financing to the loss-making civil activities of the yard until 2002.

The Commission has a supervisory role to ensure that state aid rules are correctly applied by Member States. Because of the breaches of the conditions and the unlawful aid provided subsequently to the shipyard, the Commission, in July 2008, following an in-depth investigation under EC Treaty state aid rules, requested Greece to recover more than EUR 230 million of illegal aid⁽²⁵⁾.

The Commission would like to note that as regards the selling of the shipyards or any other decision regarding its reorganisation, only the owner of the shipyards is responsible for such decisions. The Commission's powers are limited to the control of interventions of the State in the economy; they cannot interfere with a company's industrial choices.

Aiming at the protection of employees, the EU legal framework provides for several directives that might be of particular interest in the context of restructuring the shipbuilding industry in the EU, notably Council

⁽²⁴⁾ See case N 401/1997

⁽²⁵⁾ OJ L 225 of 27.8.2009

Directive 98/59/EC of 20 July 1998 concerning collective redundancies⁽²⁶⁾, Directive 94/45/EC concerning the European Works Councils⁽²⁷⁾, Directive 2002/14/EC establishing a general framework relating to information and consultation of workers in the EC⁽²⁸⁾, Council Directive 2001/23/EC concerning the safeguarding of employees' rights in the event of transfers of undertakings, businesses or parts of undertakings or businesses⁽²⁹⁾ and Directive 2008/94/EC on the protection of employees in the event of the insolvency of their employer⁽³⁰⁾.

The directives having been transposed in Greece, it is up to the competent national authorities, in particular the courts, to ensure the proper and effective application of national transposing provisions in the light of the specific circumstances of each case with a view to the fulfilment of any employer's duties in this regard.

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⁽²⁶⁾ OJ L 225 of 12.8.1998

⁽²⁷⁾ OJ L 254 of 30.9.1994

⁽²⁸⁾ OJ L 80 of 23.3.2002

⁽²⁹⁾ OJ L 82 of 22.03.2001

⁽³⁰⁾ OJ L 283 of 28.10.2008