

WEDNESDAY, 19 NOVEMBER 2008

IN THE CHAIR: MR SIWIEC

Vice-President

1. Opening of the sitting

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

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Paul van Buitenen, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (NL) Mr President, on a point of order, I should like to make a request on behalf of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance with regard to tomorrow's debate and vote on Regulation (EC) No 1073/1999 concerning investigations conducted by the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF), or the Gräßle report, in other words. It appears that the Commission is considering ending the present process of reviewing the regulation further to recent revelations about irregularities within OLAF, and would consequently like to withdraw the present proposals in the course of the codecision procedure with Parliament.

On behalf of the Group of the Greens, I should like to ask you to check with the Commission to see whether this is the case, and if it would issue a statement before tomorrow's debate, so that the European Parliament knows whether the debate and the vote still have any value.

President. – The question was addressed to the Commission. Mrs Ferrero-Waldner will have the opportunity to answer it. I welcome Mr Jouyet. We are all here and can start on the next item of business.

2. Documents received: see Minutes

3. Response of the European Union to the deteriorating situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statement on the response of the European Union to the deteriorating situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, my dear Benita, ladies and gentlemen, I know how concerned you are, as are we, by the deteriorating situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo and I recall, as we have already debated the matter with you, that we were becoming increasingly worried when we raised the issue in your Committee on Foreign Affairs in October.

The Foreign Ministers of the Union discussed the issue at length in the General Affairs and External Relations Council on 10 November last and the President decided to put this item on the agenda for the next General Affairs and External Relations Council on 8 December, in the presence of the Commission, represented by Louis Michel and Benita Ferrero-Waldner.

It must be said that the situation in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo has deteriorated greatly since the end of August, when the CNDP, led by rebel leader Laurent Nkunda, launched an offensive against the Congolese armed forces. The latter proved unable to resist, leaving only MONUC, the United Nations peacekeeping force, to protect the civilian population.

The rebels' successes on the ground took them to the gates of Goma, the provincial capital of North Kivu, and enabled them to significantly extend their area of influence in this border province with Rwanda. The continuing crisis once again shows the potential for instability which is caused by the presence of all the rebel groups in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo: not only the CNDP, but also the Hutu rebels of the FDLR.

The rout of the Congolese armed forces also shows that this complex crisis cannot be settled by a military solution and that the path to a sustainable settlement requires a political solution which takes into account both the local and the regional players. I will return to this in a moment.

In the depths of the crisis and at the height of the offensive by Laurent Nkunda's rebel forces, the European Union mobilised vigorously, followed by the rest of the international community. The urgent task, you will recall, was first to prevent the capture of Goma and to try to stabilise the conflict. That is why Commissioner Louis Michel went out to the region to see for himself. On 1 and 2 November, he was followed by Bernard Kouchner, in his role as President-in-Office of the Council, and David Miliband.

The political message of restraint was delivered by both ministers, in Kinshasa, Kigali and Dar es Salaam. The ministers also went to Goma to demonstrate, on the ground, that our full attention is on this crisis, to assess the requirements of the displaced populations, and to meet the humanitarian organisations since, once again, the civilian population is the first victim of the resumption of fighting.

This fighting has led to a major deterioration in the humanitarian situation. It is estimated that a further 250 000 people have been displaced in the most dramatic conditions, taking the current total to over one million displaced persons in the province of North Kivu alone. Add to this the serious infringements of human rights perpetrated by the rebel groups, including summary execution, widespread sexual violence, the recruitment of child soldiers and acts of pillage, both by the rebel groups and certain elements in the Congolese armed forces.

The resumption of fighting has also interrupted the implementation of the agreements concluded in November 2007 between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda, known as the Nairobi process, with which you are familiar and which focuses on the struggle against the Rwandan Hutu rebels of the FDLR located in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The agreement between the Congolese government and the Congolese rebel groups, including Mr Nkunda's CNDP, in January 2008, known as the Goma process, has also broken down.

The priority, currently, is to deal with the humanitarian emergency and secure access to the displaced populations. In accordance with its mandate, MONUC is playing an essential role. It is presently continuing to reinforce its measures in North Kivu and we encourage it to continue its efforts in this direction. The Secretary-General of the United Nations has requested extra resources for this mission and discussions on this matter, which we hope to see concluded very quickly, have begun in the Security Council.

Faced with the emergency, the European Union has significantly strengthened its humanitarian efforts. Many Member States, as well as the Commission, have made exceptional emergency contributions to support the actions of the non-governmental organisations and the United Nations agencies, such as the World Food Programme, and the High Commissioner for Refugees. Extra provision, to a current value of over EUR 43 million, in the form of contributions to the airlift – I am referring to countries like the United Kingdom, Belgium and Italy – make Europe the main contributor, by far, to the humanitarian effort undertaken in this crisis.

Now we need to re-launch the dynamic which will give a sustainable settlement to the issue of the illegal armed groups operating in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, all of the illegal armed groups, whether they be Congolese or foreigners, in the knowledge that there is no military solution to the crisis and that any solution requires the re-launch of the Goma and Nairobi processes which I have just described and which form the appropriate framework for the lasting stabilisation of the situation in this Congolese province.

The resumption of dialogue and cooperation between the Democratic Republic of Congo and Rwanda is essential in this matter, and I wish to acknowledge the action of the European Union's special representative to the African Great Lakes, Roeland Van de Geer, in attempting to resume the threads of this dialogue. It is around these objectives that the international community, in particular the European Union, has mobilised in the last few weeks.

These efforts have borne their first fruits, especially in the resumption of the dialogue between Kinshasa and Kigali at ministerial level and in the organisation, in Nairobi on 7 November, at the initiative of the states of the Great Lakes Region and the African Union, of an international summit dedicated to the crisis in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo, in which, in particular, the Congolese and Rwandan presidents, Joseph Kabila and Paul Kagame, participated.

Amongst the main advances of this summit, we should especially note the commitment of the states in the region to send, if necessary, peace-keeping forces to the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo and, if necessary, to appoint a high-level team of facilitators, consisting of the former president of Nigeria, Mr Obasanjo, and the former president of Tanzania, Mr Mkapa.

At its extraordinary summit in Johannesburg, on 10 November, the SADC also stated its readiness, if need be, to send a peace-keeping force to the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo. The European Union welcomes the commitment of the African states and remains determined to continue its cooperation with the UN, the African Union and the countries of the Great Lakes region to achieve a solution to this crisis. However, let us be clear that it will not be possible to resolve this crisis without strengthening the resources designed to stabilise the peace, especially those of the United Nations.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, first, I will quickly say to Mr van Buitenen that I have indeed noted what he said and that I will certainly take his message to my colleagues, who will definitely reply tomorrow.

Mr President, honourable Members and Mr President-in-Office of the Council, my dear Jean-Pierre, today I am standing in for my fellow Commissioner, Louis Michel, who is unable to take part in this session for health reasons, and who has asked me to send his apologies to you.

You know the regard in which Commissioner Michel holds the Great Lakes region. Indeed, as the President of the Council has already stated, he was the first to travel to the Democratic Republic of Congo and to Rwanda, on 30 and 31 October last, at the height of the crisis, to try to resolve matters. From this shadow diplomacy mission arose the idea of organising the Nairobi conference, whose practical conclusions today give us new prospects for emerging from the crisis.

As for the response that the Commission is able to make, I would like to share with you an analysis of the situation from two aspects, although these are very similar to those described by the President of the Council.

First, on the humanitarian level: the international community, including the European Union, is in the process of providing a response to the crisis. The Commission immediately mobilised EUR 6.3 million to meet emergency needs. However, we remain very vigilant, so that we can adapt this amount as the situation develops; the humanitarian needs are, on the whole, covered in Kivu and there is really good coordination between the humanitarian agencies.

The Commission and the Member States jointly announced, in Marseille on 14 November, new contributions totalling an extra EUR 43.5 million to meet the crisis.

The biggest problem remains, however, one of access to the populations in some areas where there is continuing fighting between the Congolese Armed Forces, their Mai-Mai allies and the FDLR, on the one hand and the CNDP on the other, as no party is respecting the ceasefire.

Secondly, on the political and military level: in eastern DRC, no military solution is possible. There is only room for a balanced political solution, built on dialogue. This was also recommended by the countries in the region, at the Nairobi Summit on 7 November and, above all, this also seemed to be what the CNDP rebels and a large part of the political establishment in Kinshasa, such as the National Assembly, were hoping for.

The Commission is, therefore, highly satisfied with the conclusions of the summit held by the heads of state of the Great Lakes countries, more particularly with the decision to involve African diplomacy at a high level in the resolution of the crisis and to introduce a verification mechanism to allow the heads of state in the region to monitor developments closely and to provide the necessary responses in a timely fashion.

In this respect, the visit just made to the region by Mr Obasanjo is very encouraging. The visit has reassured us about the possibilities of military intervention by certain countries in the region, and it obtained guarantees from President Kabila that Kinshasa would be ready to listen to the CNDP demands and also ready to go down the path of dialogue. During the visit, the CNDP's grievances were also heard and General Nkunda reaffirmed his readiness to observe a ceasefire and do everything to facilitate the delivery of humanitarian aid in the areas under his control.

It is, therefore, crucial to maintain the current political momentum and do all we can to ensure that the declarations of the various players are put into practice. It is, then, high time to treat the underlying causes of the crisis in the east of the country, with which everyone is familiar: the presence of the FDLR, the organised pillage of mineral resources, the political frustrations of communities and minorities, and ideas must be made to converge.

On this matter, it is crucial for the entire international community to support the diplomatic efforts introduced in the wake of the Nairobi Summit and that the international efforts be coordinated to allow sufficient space to Presidents Obasanjo and Mkapa to continue the negotiations.

It is also important to highlight the role of MONUC. It is not MONUC which is responsible for all sorts of abuses of power. MONUC is actually doing important work, despite the poverty of the resources it receives and the restrictions on its functions. It is also carrying out a job which would be difficult to replace, that of ensuring peace, rather than waging war.

However, it is even more important to support the current efforts to strengthen its mandate at a moment in which, in the coming days, the Security Council is to consider this question. The mandate, we think, should be extended, to include, for example, control of the pillaging of natural resources and, especially, as the President of the Council said, increasing the resources available to enable it to do so.

Jürgen Schröder, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Mr President, currently we are facing a financial crisis which will go down in the history books. Nevertheless, in only a few weeks, it was possible to set up a G20 meeting which delivered concrete results, the most notable of which was the decision to use 2% of GDP to stimulate the economy and help the financial sector.

On the other hand, we have not managed to fulfil our commitment to use 0.7% of GDP for development. If we had done so, the DRC would certainly be more developed and maybe this entire conflict would not have happened at all. But let us take things as they are. We do not have time now to discuss development for Kivu: we are facing a humanitarian crisis there. Two hundred and fifty thousand additional people have been displaced over recent weeks. People are dying as a direct or indirect result of the fighting, and diseases such as cholera are spreading rapidly.

Since 2005, the UN has accepted the concept of responsibility to protect. The UN sent the peacekeeping force MONUC to the DRC. With 17 000 troops, MONUC is the largest peacekeeping mission in the world operating under a strong Chapter 7 mandate. But what can MONUC do? The quality of soldiers and equipment is very poor and the size of the DRC is enormous. I therefore strongly support the call to strengthen MONUC, but realistically speaking, it will be months before this reinforcement can be on the ground – precious months, during which people will die. For that reason, I propose sending a short-term European force to stabilise the region quickly until the reinforcement of MONUC is operational and deployed in the field.

Alain Hutchinson, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, first, in the middle of these quiet debates, in this very comfortable atmosphere, I want to paint the scene for you, as I have been over there three times in recent months.

Over there, as we hold our discussions, there is violence, rape and death. Today, that is daily life for many citizens living in this horrible part of the world. For me, this is no time for rhetoric, it is time for action. This dirty war is not at all, in my opinion, an ethnic war, as some are beginning to say; ethnic wars can always be created, because it suits us, the Europeans, because when there is talk of ethnic wars, that means the Africans are fighting amongst themselves and that it is not our problem. No, the origins of the war going on over there are to be found at the bottom of the mines – the diamond mines, coltan mines and gold mines – which, despite the massacres, continue to operate calmly and efficiently. Their minerals are exported, under the noses of the UN forces, from Goma airport or down the road to Kigali, and so they are still making some people very rich. That is the war.

To stop this war, this is the first issue which needs to be looked at. How can these mines be closed and what measures are needed to stop this scandalous trade? We could go back to processes, such as the Kimberley process, which was introduced for diamonds. I suppose some of our fellow Members will talk about that here.

Roughly speaking, over the last ten years, and while this figure is contested by some, I assure you that it can easily be verified, over 5 million Congolese have suffered violent deaths in this region, either direct victims of the war or victims of the collateral damage, such as disease and so on, brought about by the war. The question then is to know whom this war suits and who will benefit from its continuation. I think that is the first major point.

As for the European Union, I and my group think that there are three important questions. First, we must indeed support the peace efforts that are underway – not in recent weeks, but they have been going on for some time. We have nominated Abbot Malu Malu for the Sakharov prize, because this gentleman has, for a

very long time, been committed to trying to find peaceful solutions in this region. In Goma, he brought together not only the CNDP – because the CNDP came, went, came back and went again – but all of the rebel movements and the DRC government. This is something that I consider to be important. There is the Nairobi process and the recent Nairobi Summit, to which the Commissioner alluded.

I believe it is, of course, necessary to support these efforts and support our Commissioner, Louis Michel, who, and I say this as a socialist whilst he is a liberal, is making huge efforts in this area.

Secondly, we must defend this population, at all costs. We are told that MONUC is not there to wage war, that it is there to keep the peace. Maybe, but MONUC has a 'Chapter 7' mandate. It is not like 1994 in Kigali, where nothing could be done, where we had to stand and watch impotently as massacres occurred. Now there is a chapter 7, and MONUC's mission is to defend the civilian population. Well, the civilian population over there is being massacred and MONUC has not budged. A short time ago, in a village whose name escapes me for the moment, a real massacre occurred in Kiwanja, on the edge of a MONUC camp.

MONUC must therefore be reinforced by European forces; that is my group's opinion. We will, in any case, be tabling an amendment to this effect.

Finally, I believe, and I will have to say it very quickly in conclusion, there is, of course, a need to proceed to the decisions required to halt the exploitation of, and the trade in, minerals which, in essence, are responsible for all the massacres which are being perpetrated over there.

Thierry Cornillet, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, this corner of the world seems to be cursed and, as Alain Hutchinson has very aptly stated, there have been almost five million deaths since the start of the 1990s.

This area is like a death chamber – mass killings in North Kivu, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi – there is no end to it and each year the deaths start up again. I know that the same causes always produce the same effects; there are ethnic conflicts because the boundaries we marked out were often artificial boundaries. There is a form of exaggerated nationalism: everyone attempts to be a small-scale Napoleon III and have a Mexican adventure so that the problems of their country are forgotten. Of course, there is the taste for money, Alain pointed this out, the often incommensurable wealth of this area. There is also madness, for how else can we qualify the action of the Lord's Resistance Army?

So what can we do? Oh, I would also like to draw attention to the action of Commissioner Michel, who has a long interest in this matter. We have seen his action at the meetings in Kigali and Kinshasa, which resulted in Nairobi. There is also the SADC and Obasanjo. Once again, we shall have large diplomatic summits. However, is that a reason to rely solely on diplomacy? We are facing a very serious humanitarian situation.

In my capacity as humanitarian aid rapporteur for your Parliament, I went to Kinshasa at the beginning of November to meet with Mr Botswali Lengomo, the new Minister for social affairs and humanitarian action. I also met with Apollinaire Malu Malu, to whom we almost awarded the Sakharov prize, and who is in charge of the Amani programme. Above all, let us not forget the considerable humanitarian effort that we must undertake.

So what are we really doing? Are we sure we are doing everything we should? What is MONUC doing? It appears to be absolutely right. 17 000 men, with 6 000 in the area, that is the equivalent of an armed division with tanks. Who is going to believe that this is insufficient to guarantee access for humanitarian assistance, even if I am aware, as you are too, of the vast territories to protect?

Hence, the solution is, of course, a diplomatic one. We must therefore support an African solution, assuming we are able to implement it. Obviously, we must ensure that the ceasefire is permanent to ensure humanitarian aid access. Without this prerequisite, humanitarian aid will not get through. The source of income must also be stopped. Needless to say, we must close the mines but also, perhaps, start criticising companies in the West who purchase the coltan and other minerals that enable arms to be purchased. We must, of course, give our full support to the peace initiatives by displaying a continued, rather than a sometimes indefinite, political interest

I shall conclude by calling for a much stronger military presence to stabilise the peace and that is something only the United Nations can do. It is my understanding that the European Union has sometimes been known to be able to convince the United Nations of where its duty lies.

Seán Ó Neachtain, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (GA) Mr President, the current situation in the eastern region of the Democratic Republic of Congo is getting worse every day, and the international community is very worried about this. More than one and a half million people have been displaced in the Kivu province, which demonstrates how bad the problem is.

I support the efforts of Roeland Van de Geer, European Union Special Representative for the African Great Lakes Region, and former Nigerian President, Mr Obasanjo, who took part in intense talks with the political and military groups that are engaged in this violence.

I ask the African Union to make further efforts to ensure peace in the Great Lakes Region.

The governments of Rwanda and Nairobi signed a peace settlement in November 2007 as an attempt to resolve the animosity between the two countries. The implementation of this settlement must be ensured, but the violence has to be ended first.

The European Union gives more money to the Great Lakes Region than any other organisation or country in the world. I ask Louis Michel, European Commissioner for Development, and the Council to attempt to end the fighting and establish peace.

Frithjof Schmidt, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, the atrocious fighting in the east of the Congo is not simply a case of a civil war, it is also a regional conflict involving many neighbouring countries. It is also about strategic raw materials such as coltan, which we need for the production of our mobile phones, DVD players and computers. It is also about gold, diamonds, cobalt and precious wood. These are the deeper causes of this conflict. What can and what must be done? The United Nations must be beefed up so that it is capable of meeting its responsibility to protect the civilian population from all the armed troops active in the region. The United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC) needs a clearer mandate, more equipment and more manpower. The Member States of the European Union have repeatedly waived away the pleas to re-supply MONUC in recent years. Yet we have then seen sharp criticism of MONUC's failures and mistakes. This case of double standards must be brought to an end. We do not need a branded EU military contingent right now, we need MONUC to be actively re-supplied and I have listened with interest and approval to how this is also the way that the Council and the Commission wish to go.

The second important point to be made is that the extraction of, and trade in, raw materials from Congo must be monitored strictly and on an international basis. The international corporations involved in this trade that profit from the extraction of the raw materials in Congo must be monitored and compelled to be transparent. There is, of course, already an official UN Panel of experts on the illegal exploitation of natural resources from Congo. This panel of experts has put forward a series of recommendations, including sanctions against people and businesses who participate in such illegal exploitation. The European Union must push for the implementation of this UN recommendation, including, specifically – and this in an area where there is scope for action – insofar as relates to imports into the EU, as this is clearly an area in which we can act on our own and one where we can actively implement these UN recommendations.

The third point to be made is that the initiative for an international conference on the Great Lakes region must be brought forward. Only political cooperation and the economic integration of the region can provide peace there in the long term. Europe can, and must, play a key role in this.

Tobias Pflüger, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Mr President, a whole series of neighbouring countries are physically involved in this war and there is, above all, direct participation from Congolese government troops, together with militia and Angolan troops on one side, with General Nkunda, Tutsi soldiers and Rwandan support on the other. It is a regional war which does not just concern eastern Congo.

One key point is clear: the Congolese government has thus far not been prepared to negotiate directly with the rebels. That is a point on which pressure must be applied. It is very important to examine the real background to this conflict. The Federal President of Germany himself has made reference to the fact that this is a conflict about raw materials. Crude oil, gold, diamonds, copper, cobalt, coltan, zinc, tin and so on play a very important role here.

Above all, it is also about who actually holds the relevant licences to exploit these materials. Action really has to be taken against these companies. I just want to name one of these companies: *Gesellschaft für Elektrometallurgie mbh*, based in Nuremberg, is clearly the direct owner of one of the central mines over which this conflict is being fought.

I would like to talk a little about the role of the United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo (MONUC), since everyone in the House seems to be calling for MONUC to be re-supplied. According to what I read, it is the case that MONUC is part of the problem rather than part of the solution, because MONUC itself describes its situation as having developed into fighting on four fronts. MONUC's role should actually be quite different. In the meantime, we have found out from Human Rights Watch that Indian or Pakistani MONUC soldiers are conducting direct weapons trading with irregular militias and are clearly involved in the conflict for raw materials. That cannot be allowed to happen. MONUC's role must be something else entirely and completely neutral. That being the case, calling for MONUC to be re-supplied is not all that helpful.

I would also like to again point out that Congo played an important role once before in a previous European Union operation. At that time, it was the security of elections that was our role and Mr Kabila was installed as president – the same Mr Kabila whose troops are now a significant escalating factor. With that in mind, there should be close scrutiny of the actual role played by the EU in Mr Kabila's installation. I find what the EU did to be very problematic. The point must clearly be made that Mr Kabila and his troops must also be criticised in this respect.

The report by the local correspondent of the *Frankfurter Allgemeine* newspaper, who was captured, made very worthwhile reading. He described the set-up of the conflict very well. His article shows the interaction between official and unofficial troops, which is to say that calling for the re-supply of MONUC alone is pointless, as what is really needed is to get to grips with the causes of the conflict.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (NL) Mr President, last night, I had the privilege of speaking directly to an experienced aid worker about the war in eastern Congo. He knows the crisis in both North and South Kivu like the back of his hand. His account, without wanting to put a gloss on the prevailing misery in the region, offers us a few rays of hope. One ray of hope is certainly that, more than a week ago, the Congolese presidential guard, in cooperation with the police, rounded up government soldiers engaged in looting. This is a hopeful sign of the Congolese government making a start on putting law and order in place, and is a development that emphatically deserves our European encouragement and support.

Another ray of hope is that rebel leader Nkunda has, to date, appeared unable to mobilise and recruit the Tutsis in South Kivu for his power aspirations. My contact considers this to be a positive expression of a Tutsi identification with the Congolese state and civil population.

A third ray of hope is the religious reconciliation initiatives at local and provincial levels. The elected authorities are just as actively involved in these platforms as the traditional authorities and the tribal representatives. These platforms in North and South Kivu deserve dual European support: financial aid and professional input in resolving conflicts. For humanitarian aid in both Kivu regions to be effective, it is of crucial importance for the local authorities to be involved, which includes, therefore, both groups of local leaders, traditional tribal representatives and the elected authorities.

Based on his own experience, my contact stresses that, despite all war conflicts and even when people are fleeing, these power structures that are in place continue to be effective, hence his urgent appeal to provide cash to the throngs of refugees in the villages of North and South Kivu, as well as the village people themselves. After all, my insider states: 'If you have money, you can get food. Surprisingly enough, it is always market day somewhere. In Congo, it is perfectly possible to work with cash handouts. It does not make the people dependent, because they can decide for themselves what they will spend the money on. You boost the local economy and make instant use of it. In order to ensure that this runs smoothly, we go and talk to the elected village committees, who will point out the most needy.'

Following such a discussion, and with Europe's heart-warming efforts that are aimed at reconciliation, there has to be a future for North and South Kivu and, indeed, for the whole of Congo. I would therefore call on the Council, the Commission, the European Parliament and the European institutions from the bottom of my heart to do what is necessary.

Koenraad Dillen (NI). – (NL) Mr President, there is little point in discussing today how tragic we find the desperate situation in eastern Congo. We should be able to call a spade a spade and, of course, ask the question whether Europe, and particularly countries such as France and Belgium, who have especially evil reputations in that region, should intervene in a military sense. To me, the answer is no, for what have we noticed? In Congo, Europe has managed to prove once more how divided and how weak it is and what an illusion it would be to think that a common foreign and security policy would be possible at this stage. Indeed, let us remind ourselves that Paris, the current Presidency of the Council no less, has just had the head of protocol

of Rwandan President Kagame arrested in Germany for the attempted murder of President Habyarimana in 1994. He is seen as an involved party in the conflict. Even my own country, Belgium, is disingenuous since, only yesterday, the Belgian Foreign Affairs Minister, Karel De Gucht, heaped heavy criticism on the policy of European Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid, Louis Michel, precisely on account of the latter's policy in relation to Congo. I quote Karel De Gucht: 'If the present situation in Congo is the result of Michel's policy, then this is quite something. The situation has never been as distressing as it is now.'

Ladies and gentlemen, these words were spoken by one of the Commissioner's political allies. In this cacophony, we can only conclude that the protection of the civil population should, in the first place, be the responsibility of the African Union, which must be supported, and of the UN Mission in Congo. Europe would therefore do well not to send its own troops to that region.

Colm Burke (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I echo the sentiments of my colleagues in expressing my extreme concern regarding renewed fighting between the Congolese army and resurgent militias in North Kivu in the DRC. The increase in violence in North Kivu has seriously overstretched the UN peacekeeping mission (MONUC) in operation in this country.

The humanitarian situation is particularly grave with more than 1.5 million internal displaced persons in Kivu province. The operations of the World Food Programme and other NGOs have been seriously restricted by the violence and there is widespread theft, rape and killing of civilians by both government and rebel forces.

MONUC has a mandate under Chapter 7 of the UN Charter to ensure the protection of civilians under imminent threat of physical violence, but lacks the resources and quantity of troops needed to fulfil this mandate. The international community and the UN Security Council must strengthen MONUC by providing appropriate materials and staff to enable it to fulfil its mission. Seeing that the European Union has decided not to initiate steps towards another ESDP mission to deal with these further escalations in violence in the DRC, I would urge the European Union to enhance its cooperation with MONUC to the greatest degree possible.

The current French-drafted UN Security Council resolution proposes a temporary increase in MONUC's authorised military strength by up to 2 785 military personnel. This increase would bring the maximum permitted number of troops and police deployed under MONUC, already the biggest UN peacekeeping force in the world, to just over 20 000 to cover a country roughly the size of Western Europe.

I urge the UN Security Council to vote on this resolution as soon as possible, given the urgency of the current events in the DRC. I am outraged by the massacres, the crimes against humanity and acts of sexual violence against women and girls in the eastern province of DRC, and I call on all relevant national and international authorities to bring the perpetrators to justice.

Ana Maria Gomes (PSE). – (PT) The new horrors in the Kivus and the international community's inability to put an end to these are as shocking as the greed of the Rwandan and Congolese leaders who are perpetuating this situation of organised chaos in order to conceal the sinister plundering of the region's natural resources.

What can the European Union do? What can it do for a country where there have been, and still are, various ESDP (European Security and Defence Policy) missions and where the first democratic elections would not have been held without Europe's support? What can it do for a country receiving millions in development and humanitarian aid? What can it do for a country of unparalleled strategic importance where five million people have died at the mercy of the most barbaric violence in recent years?

The European Union must go much further than the minimum decided since this latest military escalation began. It is not enough to increase humanitarian aid and launch diplomatic initiatives in which promises to disarm and declarations of good faith are repeated for the umpteenth time.

The European Union urgently needs to strengthen MONUC (United Nations Mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo) so that it can regain its lost credibility and effectiveness. To this end, it is not enough to table resolutions in the Security Council. The European Union must immediately link up with the DPKO (United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations) and provide equipment and, if necessary, soldiers to help fill the gaps in MONUC.

As a last resort, if the proceedings in New York and the situation on the ground justify this, the EU cannot, and must not, rule out sending a military mission under the ESDP. It is our responsibility to protect what is at stake, namely the lives of defenceless civilians who need immediate international protection.

Never again! We have to get serious and not let the genocide in Rwanda and the massacres in the Congo happen again.

Luca Romagnoli (NI). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the statements by the Council and the Commission on the EU's response to the serious crisis in the Congo are, as usual, hypocritical and ineffectual. Behind Laurent Nkunda are Rwanda and Uganda, countries which have always been interested in the region, so much so as to try to invade it on several occasions in the recent past: the underground resources and the resources in the east of the DRC are too great to be left in the hands of others.

Between January and now, three times the number of weapons have been purchased compared with 2007, and some of these, as far as the Rwandan sector is concerned, were destined for the rebel Laurent Nkunda, with the results that we see today. For years, however, Washington has focused its interest on the Great Lakes region, particularly by supporting Uganda and Rwanda. For instance, the largest US embassy in Africa is in Kampala; nothing happens in Uganda or Rwanda without the agreement of the United States.

Now, this swift about turn by the European Union regarding the possibility of sending a peace-keeping force to the region sends the wrong signal, as usual, because our preference is for focusing on diplomacy, as if diplomacy were enough to convince an ugly customer like Laurent Nkunda to withdraw. As usual, our discussions amount to nothing, and then we hear Commissioner Michel almost eulogising Mr Nkunda. Thank you for that!

Geoffrey Van Orden (PPE-DE). – Mr President, we all understand the complexities of the current appalling situation in eastern Congo, which is ethnically based and has its origins in Rwanda, Burundi and Uganda.

An effective mediation process between Rwanda and the DRC must be started as a matter of urgency. A ceasefire needs to be put in place and properly enforced, and the civil population clearly needs protection and urgent humanitarian assistance.

I am reminded of the recent statement by the Permanent Representative of the African Union to Brussels in Parliament's Subcommittee on Security and Defence, when he indicated his preference for Africans to deal with security issues on their continent. I am pleased, therefore, that the EU has not sought to use the Congo tragedy as an opportunity merely to put its label on another so-called EU military operation. It is primarily Africans who must take responsibility for resolving the present situation, but we must give them every possible assistance in doing this through the African Union and the United Nations.

Meanwhile, there seems to be some ambiguity concerning the mandate, rules of engagement and use of force by MONUC. MONUC's commander, Lieutenant-General Vicente Díaz de Villegas, recently resigned after seven weeks in the job. He cited personal reasons, but I wonder if it was not professional frustration.

However, it is encouraging that on 6 November, a thousand-member South African force deployed near Goma as part of MONUC. The MONUC head claims that they have instructions to open fire if necessary. MONUC must be able to act to protect civilians against imminent threats of violence. Clearly, there needs to be a substantial increase in numbers of effective UN and AU troops deployed in eastern Congo and a clear idea of where they come from – there are many countries that could contribute to this that are not doing so at the moment.

If the West fails to do all that it can to assist operations in the Congo, there are other less high-minded actors waiting in the wings.

Genowefa Grabowska (PSE). – (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, Mr Jouyet, I am a member of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly and during the last session held in Kigali, Rwanda, I listened to President Paul Kagame, who spoke of the need to stabilise the situation in Central Africa. He spoke of wanting peace, but while in Kigali, I visited the holocaust museum which commemorates the death of a million Tutsis massacred in just three months – a hundred days. That was in 1994.

Will we now witness a repetition of what happened then? We cannot allow it. I consider it to be our duty. I think that the European Union must do more. I do not know whether sending additional troops will solve the situation. Personally, I doubt it, but it does seem to me that we need a radical review of the sources of funds which, as noted by my fellow Member, are derived from the exploitation of Congolese natural resources and are then not channelled to small traders and unnamed individuals, but enter European markets as well. This is both the source and the solution of the problem.

Let us now move on to the humanitarian situation, which is clearly getting out of control. This is where we can play a role, and this is where the European Union must do everything to protect those 1 600 000 people in need of water, food, blankets, tents and care. Let us address this problem.

José Ribeiro e Castro (PPE-DE). – (PT) Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, at this moment in time, the world's powers are tackling the international financial system. They are trying to get it under control, and not before time. It is also perhaps time that we solved another problem that we have been talking about for decades.

For years, we have been listening to tales of the shameful pillaging of resources. How many times, and now again in the Congo, have we heard about the blood of people being shed? I believe it is also time to prosecute these companies, halt this disgraceful trade and freeze the accounts holding the shameful profits from this exploitation of mineral resources at the cost of the blood and suffering of people.

I do not understand why these companies are not listed in the same way as we blacklist terrorist organisations. I do not understand why the international community is incapable of prosecuting these businesspeople who are not strictly businesspeople, but actually bandits who are threatening regional and world security.

I urge the French Presidency and the Commission to lead an international initiative in this respect.

Ioan Mircea Pașcu (PSE). – Mr President, names like Lumumba, Mobutu, Chombe, Dag Hammarskjöld and Katanga dominated my late childhood in the early 1960s. Fifty years on, Congo – now the Democratic Republic of Congo – is again ravaged by internal unrest bordering on civil war. Only this time the war in the eastern parts of the DRC comes after, and in spite of, important EU efforts in the form of money, programmes, missions on the ground – including military missions – and intense diplomatic efforts.

The current situation in the DRC, therefore, is not just another crisis. Rather, it is a test case of the capacity and willingness of the EU to play the international role it now claims in world politics, since the crisis has all the ingredients the Union maintains it is best equipped to deal with, and is taking place on a continent, Africa, whose geo-economic importance is increasing exponentially.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE). – (NL) Mr President, Mr Hutchinson started the debate by saying that we should stop the rhetoric and leap into action. I think that he is absolutely right. Allow me to mention two essential elements from the debate.

First of all, what matters most is for the recommendations of the UN Panel of Experts on the illegal exploitation of the DRC's natural resources, as well as the sanctions against persons and companies whose participation in the looting of the resources has been proven, to be implemented. The EU must swing into action.

Secondly, we must put an emphatic stop to the illegal exploitation and implement systems of traceability and proof of origin of gold, tin ore, coltan, cobalt, diamonds, pyrochlore and timber, so that this blood trade can be brought to a halt.

My explicit question to President-in-Office of the Council, Mr Jouyet, and Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, is what initiatives will you be developing in this respect in the next few months? I think we are entitled to an answer to this question.

Jim Allister (NI). – Mr President, I do not regard myself at all as an expert in relation to Congo, nor do I have any ready-made solutions, but I do know this: if five million people have died over the last 20 years, then we all need to be concerned.

That concern for me is accentuated when I read some of the strictures which come from a number of NGOs involved in the area. For example, a few days ago, I read that Amnesty International – not an organisation I always agree with, I should say – had this to say of the human rights, and particularly the humanitarian tragedy in North Kivu province: 'The UN Security Council, the European Union and the African Union are sitting on their hands. They have so far failed to give the UN peacekeeping force the reinforcements and equipment it needs to provide effective protection to civilians.'

I have listened in debates for an answer to that criticism. I have to say, frankly, that I have not really heard it. Diplomacy is good, but diplomacy of itself will not deliver all the answers.

Jas Gawronski (PPE-DE). – Mr President, it would be easy for us to forget about Africa's problem, given our own economic difficulties, but it would be a dreadful mistake.

I think we need to put pressure on the African Union to realise its own responsibilities in the region. If the African Union is ever to assume the same kind of gravitas as the EU, it needs to put words into action – something it has conspicuously failed to do, for example, over Zimbabwe. We should also not hesitate to link our long-term trade and aid relationship with countries like the DRC to their respect for human rights, good governance and transparency.

In this light, I hope the Commission will reiterate its support for the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative.

Anne Van Lancker (PSE). - (NL) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, after everything that has been said, I should like to put the following to you. You both stressed the fact that there is no military solution to this conflict. Whilst I could not agree with you more, there is nothing wrong with the agreements of Goma or Nairobi. There is nothing wrong with the process that is being brought back to life, except that the agreements are never observed. Needless to say, Europe should press for a stronger and better MONUC mandate and more troops. The big question we should ask ourselves though is whether MONUC could ever succeed, even with a Chapter 7 mandate, without any European intervention? Mr Jouyet, I should like to ask you what the good reasons were on the part of the EU ministers for rejecting European intervention of this kind?

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, President-in-Office of the Council. – (FR) Mr President, honourable Members, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, many thanks for this very interesting debate.

We are fully aware of the appeal made in Parliament to the European Union to deploy a military mission in this region of the Republic of Congo. However, I feel I should point out that the European Union is already committed in the Republic of Congo, firstly through community aid: EUR 50 million in 2008, then EUR 6 million in emergency aid as mentioned by Benita Ferrero-Waldner. There are two ESDP missions supporting reform of the Congolese police and army, whose unpreparedness and lack of efficiency were, as we have seen in this case, only too tragic. Moreover, the European Union has already intervened, this was back in 2003 via a military mission referred to as Artemis. However, the conditions were different since, at that time, the European Union was preparing the way for the arrival of a United Nations mission, which then took place.

Therefore, beyond rhetoric, how can we respond to the tragedy in this region? The quickest solution to address the humanitarian crisis would be to strengthen the existing measures, in other words MONUC, through a broader mandate and additional manpower. I mean that, in the case of France, it is ready to participate in this reinforcement because if we wait for the deployment of a European Union mission, we run the risk of losing time. As you know, the Union is already committed in Chad and the Central African Republic, so there is the problem of deployment and, to put my point quite clearly, a number of States within the Council would not, at this time, be able to participate in these reinforcement operations.

As several speakers have pointed out, reinforcing MONUC would offer advantages since its mandate is based on Chapter 7 of the United Nations Charter. We must also consider that the halting of the Nkunda offensive on 29 October has enabled MONUC to begin redeployment. The next stage for the United Nations mission is to reconfigure with new elite troops, in particular, the Indian Ghurkhas expected this month. 3 000 men need to be added to the 17 000 men already present, and this was the thrust of the steps we undertook in New York at the Security Council over the last few days.

However, as several speakers have indicated, we cannot stop at the military situation alone since, faced with the atrocities which, as many have pointed out, have been going on for far too long, priority must be given to a political solution, as the visits by Commissioner Michel, Bernard Kouchner and David Miliband have shown, to enable contact to be resumed between the protagonists in the region. Priority must be given to the negotiations conducted within the African framework, whether this is the African Union, SADC or the Great Lakes Conference, to revive the Goma and Nairobi processes.

In the longer term, the Union must help the Republic of Congo to equip itself with a real army, there is no real army, it is totally dilapidated, enabling it to ensure the security of the country which is vast and very difficult to control and to prevent further humanitarian crises.

I share the opinions of those who have stated that we also need to tackle the causes of the conflict and this is what the Council has done, on 10 November, in its call to combat the illegal exploitation of the natural resources of the region by rebel groups in particular. Should this task of monitoring the fight against illegal exploitation be entrusted to MONUC? The question is open, but faced with a humanitarian crisis situation,

and several others have also stressed this, MONUC's priority must be protection of the civilian population and I believe that what is important, and this has also been stated, is that one of the solutions to the plundering of resources must be found at regional level in order to put a stop to the exploitation and exportation of these resources to our countries.

Finally, I note that we should indeed execute the resolutions made by the United Nations panel on these issues.

Those are the additional elements that I wanted to bring to the attention of this House.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, honourable Members, first of all, I believe the debates have shown that we are all agreed: now we must act fast, very fast, in a terribly tragic situation.

As regards sending a European force to the east of the DRC, I believe that it emerged that only a European force with the strict aim of securing the humanitarian space could possibly be accepted by all the countries in the region. This would therefore mean imposing on all parties in the conflict a humanitarian ceasefire to allow delivery of aid to the populations near the frontline. This is precisely what the Great Lakes countries want, and for them a ceasefire and the delivery of humanitarian aid is an absolute and immediate priority.

In this respect, they have also indicated the avenues to explore: political negotiation and, above all, and this is what we have all said, reinforcing MONUC. While the humanitarian situation is gradually coming under control, some Member States appear not to rule out the possibility of a CFSP mission. However, no final decision will be taken until there is unanimous European support on this issue and the United Nations Security Council has stated its official position on this.

With regard to the reinforcement of MONUC, I believe this is absolutely essential, as does Louis Michel. MONUC brings a constructive and objective approach to this conflict, but it cannot be asked for things that are not part of its mission. MONUC must ensure peacekeeping in a specific approved framework and not impose peace on all the parties using military means. It is sometimes difficult to grasp, but the nuance is, I feel, significant.

On the other hand, it is clear that, for the scale of the Congo and the complexity of the problem, MONUC is not sufficiently equipped – you have all said this and it is true –, neither in resources, nor perhaps with regard to its mandate and, for this, the request by the United Nations Secretary-General for more resources, in particular, three thousand additional men, is no doubt justified.

Moreover, the extension of MONUC's mandate, in particular regarding the monitoring of the illegal exploitation of natural resources – which, as you said, is the real sinew of the war – is very important, as many have already rightly stated, in order to be able to have any influence on the development of the conflict. Once peace returns, this question must be examined by the international community.

The example of the Kimberley process certainly opens avenues to be explored in this sense and, in practical terms, the Commission has already released EUR 75 million for the programme in the east of the Congo, for rebuilding governmental structures such as justice and the police, and to re-establish resource exploitation monitoring. This programme is being put in place and I hope that the first results will materialise.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS KRATSA-TSAGAROPOULOU

Vice-President

President. – I have received six motions for resolutions⁽¹⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 20 November 2008.

Written statements (Rule 142)

⁽¹⁾ See Minutes.

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing. – (IT) The resolution on the Republic of Congo represents a clear commitment for the European Union with regard to this part of the world. This time, however, we have the responsibility, in view of the serious nature of the crisis, to ensure that words are followed by deeds. As ever, the UN is stammering out solutions. Let it be the European Union that takes the initiative to attempt to mediate for peace between the parties in conflict.

I would like to thank the Commission for a particularly important signal given in recent weeks in the DRC: the allocation of a subsidy of EUR 75 million for a programme that aims to reconstruct the administrative and governmental structures in the country, including the justice and police systems. This is a particularly significant step, because it is being made in the present with a view to the future and makes a start on tackling what lies at the heart of this dispute: the exploitation of the Congo's natural resources, currently the object of very harsh and unregulated dispute between the various combatant groups

4. Crises in the car industry (debate)

President. – The next item is the statements by the Council and the Commission on the crisis in the car industry.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, President-in-Office of the Council. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner Verheugen, ladies and gentlemen, in the third quarter of this year, the European automotive industry has been hit by the deepening crisis in the global economy. This comes after the industry's good performance in the second quarter of the year. All the leading automotive markets in the world are being affected, but with differing levels of seriousness.

Sales in the United States have fallen by 32% in a year, reaching their lowest level in 25 years. The three big American car manufacturers – General Motors, Ford and Chrysler – have requested emergency aid from the Federal State. The emerging markets which, until this summer, offset the fall in sales for these countries, have also been hit by the crisis, but to a lesser degree.

In China, sales were down 1.4% in September. This is the second consecutive month of falling sales in China, following the 6.3% drop in August.

In Brazil, car sales were down 11% last month, for the first time since 1999.

The automotive market has not yet fallen in Russia, but there is a significant slowdown in this market and it could experience the first falls at the beginning of next year.

We can clearly see, then, that the situation is also worsening in the large emerging countries.

In Europe, vehicle registrations were down almost 4% over the period from the start of the year to last August. The end of the year may prove difficult and the decline in the automotive market could be around 5% for the whole of 2008, which, for this market, would be the worst result recorded since 1993.

Throughout the world, however, the automotive industry is making considerable efforts to tackle the crisis and is trying to find the foundations for new growth. The measures to reduce production will have negative knock-on effects on jobs in all value chains as well as on demand. We shall see this in the next few days.

Despite the difficult economic situation, the leading European car manufacturers will still be profitable in 2008, even though the growth rate in margins is obviously slowing down. They are able to maintain this profit situation given the very high productivity gains made over the last few years. The competitive position of the European automotive industry remains, therefore, relatively good – I am not saying this lightly –, and this is explained by three factors.

Firstly, the fact that the European automotive industry is increasingly present in the emerging countries, which are both markets and production sites. It is in these emerging countries that growth, even if it is slowing down as I have already mentioned, remains a driving force.

The second factor is that there is a better new models policy, with models that are now more economical, ecological and in tune with consumers' demands.

Finally, as I pointed out, given the productivity gains in previous years, the financial situation of the European industry is, at present, still relatively healthy.

Above all, in this situation, vigilance is required to prevent State subsidies granted to non-European manufacturers by their governments from distorting fair competition on the world market, in particular, on the emerging markets. Targeted and temporary support measures for European producers could prove useful, in particular, to improve the technological and ecological performance of the European car population, where the regulatory environment, as we know, is the most demanding in the world in terms of environmental legislation. This is what led European manufacturers to invest more heavily than their main American competitors in research and development to face up to these ecological challenges.

We can be pleased that this has given our industry a lead in the environmental sector, but we must be vigilant and make sure that it effectively maintains this lead. The Commission – I shall leave Commissioner Verheugen to expand on this – will make proposals on 26 November regarding European measures to support industry, especially the automotive sector. The European Investment Bank is also being asked and should participate in the efforts underway at European level.

Member States must provide the Bank, if necessary, with the appropriate resources so that it will be in a position to make available new resources to support the automotive sector. Member States are also considering national actions to support their manufacturers. These efforts must be coordinated in order to maximise the effectiveness of this support. As it has done in other areas in response to the crisis, the French Presidency shall do its utmost to obtain joint European action on this major industrial issue.

The December European Council will debate the Commission's proposals and the various national support plans that may have been put in place by then. This will, of course, involve acting consistently with the other political objectives of the Union. Support for the automotive sector must, in particular, respect the integrity of the internal market. It is in no one's interest to take advantage of the crisis to create distortions on the automotive market and, naturally, this support must resolutely fall within the environmental objectives that the Union has set in the energy and climate change package.

I believe the Commission is working towards this. The Presidency is determined to promote the emergence of a balanced agreement between Member States and Parliament on a coordinated offensive approach in support of the automotive industries.

Günter Verheugen, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (DE) Madam President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, ladies and gentlemen, it is not surprising that the first full impact on the real economy of the crisis in the financial markets has hit the car market.

The car market is particularly sensitive to consumer behaviour. It is clear that, in this situation, consumers who are unclear about their own economic future, who do not know whether they will still have a job next year, whether their income will be as high, or whether they will still have their capital, are not going to rush out and buy a new car. That is a well-known and also probably a natural reaction.

It is not just the crisis in the financial markets that leads to this restraint, however. There is also uncertainty amongst manufacturers and consumers in respect of the requirements that politics will make of the car of the future. Consumers do not know, for example, whether they can count on tax incentives or allowances if they buy or do not buy certain cars. It is therefore necessary for the statutory conditions for the industry to be cleared up as soon as possible.

The situation is clear. The motor industry is a key industry, if not *the* key industry, for Europe and it consists of more than the manufacture of cars. We have to look at the entire supply chain and the entire car market which, of course, also includes the vehicle trade and vehicle repair shops. This is a sector which, all told, employs 12 million people in Europe and has a far-reaching impact stretching into other sectors.

The President-in-Office of the Council has already described the decline. I will give you another figure. So far this year, 700 000 fewer new cars have been registered across Europe than last year. This has essentially been over a nine-month period, which means that by the end of the year, the figure will probably have risen to over a million. I am sure you can quite easily imagine the economic consequences of this.

We still have no reason to hope that this will change very quickly in 2009. In other words, we must assume that 2009, too, will be a crisis year for the motor industry, which will have significant effects on capacity utilisation, the number of people employed and the ability of car-makers to invest, especially as relates to large investments such as are needed to meet the requirements for low-pollutant and low-consumption vehicles.

This economic development has also given rise to an extremely negative development in relation to the environmental situation. The older the stock of cars on the roads of Europe, the greater the pollution produced – and this is a very important point that we must keep an eye on. If we really want to bring down pollutant emissions, in particular of CO₂, and that is our joint priority target, the crucial thing is to replace the old cars currently being driven around the roads of Europe quickly.

For a little while now, exactly the opposite has been happening. The stock of cars on Europe's roads is getting older and older and pollutant emissions are rising. I say to you, in the clearest possible way, that if all the parties involved – Parliament, the Council and the Commission – do not pay very close attention to making cars affordable for consumers in the next few years, this situation will be exacerbated further.

We can, of course, already offer zero-emission cars. It is just that no one can afford them. We therefore have to create a reasonable relationship between these points. As you know, we do have the Cars 21 process. Since we recognised the seriousness of the situation at a very early stage, I arranged a 'motor summit' as part of this process a few weeks ago in Brussels with car manufacturers, the Member States in which cars are manufactured, the unions, the environmental associations and all stakeholders. Through this, a couple of things that we need to do became very clear.

The first of these is that we really must keep the statutory conditions for business stable and predictable. The industry must know where it stands and what we expect of it. We must keep an eye on the cumulative effects of the measures we take. I think it right that I should remind you that CO₂ is not the only thing that we are discussing when it comes to the motor industry.

We have already approved Euro 5 and Euro 6. The measures have not yet been implemented, however, and they, too, require high levels of investment and will make vehicles more expensive. We have already adopted additional requirements relating to protecting pedestrians. This again means a need for heavy investment, and that makes cars more expensive. We already currently have making their way through the legislative process further strict regulations relating to safety improvements in European cars. The effect is the same. When we take all this together, we can already see that European vehicles are going to experience a clear jump in prices over the next few years, and we must take account of this too.

The second thing was that we agreed that demand must be boosted. This can take place in various ways. In my opinion, tax incentives are a good tool, but only when the tax incentives in question are CO₂-based. Tax incentives that quite simply lead to any old cars being bought are really of little use. They must be about strengthening the demand for low consumption and environmentally friendly cars. The same applies to public procurement.

Then there is the question of the ability to invest. In this regard, there has been a line of credit at the European Investment Bank for years whereby car makers are offered favourable-rate credit in order to develop new environmentally friendly vehicles. These lines of credit were also utilised in recent years, so this is nothing new.

We now need to increase these lines of credit to be able to meet demand and the European Investment Bank is ready to do that. I am working on the basis that the relevant decisions will have been taken before December is out.

Finally, I would like to point out once again that we must ensure in our trade policy, too, that we maintain the future readiness of the European motor industry. The competition will be increasingly relocated to regions of the world with expectations of high growth. We will be competing in these regions with manufacturers from other parts of the world who manufacture under significantly cheaper conditions than European manufacturers.

Let me be quite clear here: the great advantage that the European manufacturers have in terms of global competition is the fact that Europe will soon already be offering the cleanest and safest cars in the world and it is my hope, when it comes to quality, that the same will apply and that we will also be offering the best cars in the world.

Let me add something about the problem at hand, the one that really led to this debate here today in the first place. One European car maker, Adam Opel GmbH in Germany, a 100% subsidiary of General Motors, is currently in very worrying financial waters. Negotiations are under way between Opel and the German government as to whether there may be a state guarantee to solve Opel's financial problems. Very serious arguments of political policy structure are being put forward to oppose this and I can well understand these

arguments since we have an industrial policy that is not based on subsidies and that will continue to operate that way. Our European industrial policy aims, by hook or by crook, to prevent a return to the old subsidising mindset and instead to help industry to grow through predictable, stable conditions for business and to hold its own in competition.

The problem at Opel is, however, not one caused by management error, poor production or bad quality cars. This company has, in recent years, made particular efforts to meet the requirements of the future, with high levels of investment in modern technology. The problem arose solely on the back of the crisis situation at Opel's US parent company. I really do believe that what we have here are extraordinary circumstances, circumstances that do not apply to other manufacturers in Europe and which justify the consideration of extraordinary measures.

I would like to reiterate that we are not talking about subsidies here but about a possible guarantee. This is a competitive company we are talking about. From the European point of view, we have no interest in seeing Opel disappear from the marketplace, and this is not just a German problem either. Opel manufactures in several European countries and has a supply chain stretching across Europe. That supply chain is closely connected with all the other car makers, which means that, if a large European manufacturer were to vanish from the marketplace, that would also have consequences for all other manufacturers. As I say, that would not be in our interests while, from the social and political viewpoints, it would clearly not be justified to say that Opel employees have to foot the bill – and I want to make this point clearly – for serious and irresponsible errors that were made at the parent company in the United States.

(Applause)

We will see, then, what decision the governments affected reach, and I say the word governments expressly, something that has not been on sufficient public display hitherto.

In Sweden, too, there is a problem with another General Motors subsidiary, Saab, where the problems are structural and considerably worse. In addition, there is a problem in Spain, where the planned production of a new environmentally friendly vehicle is in doubt. From the European perspective, I would say that we will do everything in our power to help European manufacturers get through this difficult time so that they will be able to play their role as a real engine for future growth and sound jobs in the future, too.

(Applause)

Vito Bonsignore, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.* – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, we are talking about the manufacturing sector in the European Union that produces a third of the cars produced in the world. In Europe, the sector employs three million people in addition to all the indirect employment, and it is one of the key industries for the world as a whole in terms of direct sales, indirect sales and total number of people employed.

Let us also consider that today, while we are having this debate, the most recent estimates say that over the coming year, the numbers of unemployed people throughout the European Union will double. Personally, I believe that even this estimate is optimistic. I agree with the Commissioner that the car industry should receive assistance, in the attempts that we have requested to produce cars with low emissions and low fuel consumption. We need to aid change, not penalise those who are left behind, and we need to link funding to innovation. If helping car firms to recover may seem burdensome, the bankruptcy of some of them would cost the EU much, much more.

The sector is in crisis, throughout the world, and we can find a way out of this situation by making a technological advance – here we are in agreement – and therefore we need to decide between producing 21st century cars in Europe or losing this manufacturing activity to countries which are coming close to producing low-technology, low-cost cars in large quantities, such as India or China.

It is true that banks are now no longer lending money, that the large automobile firms are using up the liquidity that they had previously built up, and which had existed up until halfway through this year, and that the market has shrunk significantly and will end 2008 with negative figures and, I believe, Mr Jouyet, with a percentage figure closer to two digits, while my forecasts for 2009 are pessimistic.

Europe has a great opportunity: to support, without discrimination, structural changes to the sector with long-term, low-interest loans and assistance for research.

Robert Goebbels, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, faced with the recession, the Socialist Group in the European Parliament advocates a united and European policy. This is true not only for financial confidentiality, it also applies to the other economic sectors, including the industrial sector.

We have often regretted the lack of a strong industrial policy in the European Union. Countries such as the United States and Great Britain have allowed their industries to decline while mainly backing services. The outcome is not convincing. Europe must fight to maintain the extensive industrial fabric on which SMEs and services to businesses are dependent.

The automotive industry in Europe is by no means a dinosaur, it is not a species doomed to extinction. I agree fully with Vice-President Verheugen in this respect. We account for one third of all automobile production in the world, despite the fact that car production has declined recently. Cars produced in Europe must become cleaner and less energy-guzzling and, for the foreseeable future, we will not be able to do without this essential, individual means of transport. The best possible organisation of collective transport will never succeed in appeasing the human need for mobility. The European Union must therefore develop a common response to the sector's problems and the response cannot be, as Mr Verheugen has just stated, the strangulation of the European automotive industry. I do not want a Europe in which the only cars on the road are Japanese – or, in the future, Chinese.

I am aware that the politically correct argument insists on promoting so-called 'green' jobs. A recent United Nations report estimates the potential for green jobs in the world to be 3% of global jobs. This would be very welcome. However, simple arithmetic leads us to conclude that 97% of jobs are not green, but fall under the realm of traditional sectors. This is another reason for us to fight to maintain a European automotive industry which employs 2 million people directly and 10 million indirectly, equating to 7% of all European jobs.

When the United States, China and Japan are investing massively in economic programmes, Europe cannot afford to sit back and watch passively as whole swathes of its industry disappear. Those who tell us that we must leave the market alone are naïve ideologists. Without intervention by the public hand, the hidden hand, dear to Adam Smith, will prefer the short term and will destroy structures that are essential in shaping our common future.

Lastly, we expect the Commission, Madam President, to provide a proactive framework to maintain the competitiveness and the very existence of the European automotive industry.

(Applause)

Jorgo Chatzimarkakis, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner Verheugen has very impressively illustrated how the crisis spilled over from the financial market to the market in car sales. What is more, the reality of the situation is that confidence has evaporated and uncertainty prevails in respect of future regulation on CO₂. For this reason, I am only able to call on my fellow Members and the Council to come to a clear and reliable regulation in this area of CO₂ regulation for cars very quickly – on the basis of what has been put forward by the French Presidency, for which I can only congratulate you, Mr Jouyet.

Yet the absolutely most climate-friendly car we could possibly want in Europe is worth nothing if it is in the shop window and not on the road. People do not just need to drive such a car, they have to be able to pay for it too. That is why we are calling for the following three-pronged approach. First of all, get new models on the streets. This requires lots of investment in research now, for which reason we welcome the European Investment Bank's programme. Ecofin meets on 2 December – we hope that a decision will be made there that will bring about flexible, favourable credit flows in the motor industry.

Secondly, the motor industry financial institutions must be safeguarded. We cannot do that here, at the European level – it must be included within the national rescue packages, which must remain open.

Thirdly, we must have scrapping premiums in Europe. Italy has taken a lead in this area, as has Sweden, though perhaps not quite as impressively as Italy. This is how tax incentives can be used to get new models onto the streets. It would be good if no European barriers were put in the way on the basis of competition law. For that reason, it would also have been good if Mrs Cruz had been present. This is the route to a new way forward!

Rebecca Harms, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, just like yesterday, I feel I have to say that I have great doubt about the honesty with

which the Commission is conducting this debate. It is my opinion, Commissioner, that as the founder of the CARS 21 strategy group, you must, for starters, accept the responsibility for the fact that it has failed to achieve its aim of putting the European motor industry on a proper future-ready footing. What have you actually done over recent years that there is now a need to use this financial crisis to balance the books?

The fact that the motor industry in Europe has a strategic problem is one thing. However, the fact that you do not include your strategic weaknesses, as it were, over recent years – your inability to get behind environmental innovations – on the balance sheet, that I find dishonest. If thousands and tens of thousands of European families are now to fear for the future of their jobs in the motor industry, the Commission, too, the Commissioner and CARS 21 must all bear some responsibility for this.

How can we actually tell that the Commission, and you in particular, Commissioner, did not do anything to bring about the situation whereby the strategic goals resulting from the volatile oil prices caused by the finite nature of the oil supply and from the exigencies of protecting the climate were not ultimately implemented? Commissioner, you personally blocked your fellow Commissioner Mr Dimas's proposals on CO₂ regulation for cars for years. You are the one with your foot on the brakes in relation to bringing about a binding target for efficient cars – the conversion to a binding agreement by the middle of the coming decade of something which was voluntarily agreed back in the mid-1990s. You want there to be less environmental innovation than was already taken for granted in the mid-1990s. Yesterday, we learnt that the Council, under German pressure, is still not prepared to sign up to binding targets for 2020 that are, in any case, still close to those of the mid-1990s.

For me, these double standards, this dishonesty in the debate about environmental innovation is a scandal. I call on you, in this trilogue, to finally live up to a promise you make in this debate about innovation in the motor industry. Anything else would mean that you really would assume even greater responsibility for the failure of this industry and its suppliers to be future-ready.

Ilda Figueiredo, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (PT) The crisis in the car industry has various causes, but clearly one of the most important is the fall in purchasing power of most of the population as a result of their low incomes, particularly due to low pay, precarious work and unemployment.

As a result, one of the most effective measures would be to increase pay through a fair distribution of income. However, naturally, other measures are required now. This is because the halt in production by car manufacturers has repercussions on many other sectors, including the various component industries and transport, which may exacerbate the whole economic and social situation.

Therefore, just as there have been exceptional measures for the financial sector, there should also be exceptional measures for the car sector in order to safeguard employment. It cannot be said that defending production and employment is not as important as the financial sector. We must ensure the necessary solidarity to support industry in the European Union, particularly in the more fragile economies and sectors.

In Portugal, this situation is very worrying as the sector is heavily dependent on the strategy of multinationals. In recent years, we have seen various relocations, both in the production of cars, as in the case of Opel and Renault, and in the production of components, such as the cases of Yazaki Saltano and Lear in particular, in addition to the threat of reduced employment in other companies, such as Sunviauto and Delphi and in hundreds of micro- and small enterprises affected by this situation.

In some cases, production has been halted for several days, as at Autoeuropa in Palmela and at Renault's component plant at Cacia, Aveiro, due to a lack of orders. With fewer cars and fewer components coming and going, goods transport is also affected.

Therefore, Commissioner, President-in-Office of the Council, it is vital for the European Union to provide extraordinary support to help industrial production and safeguard employment with rights.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, the harbingers of the crisis in the motor industry, such as the first falls in orders, were probably not taken seriously enough. At first we perhaps hoped it would just be gas-guzzling American cars that would be affected. Anyone who has spoken a little to car dealers knows diesel vehicles have been hard to shift in the EU, too, for months now.

Therefore, the European Union should not be surprised by the ever-worsening maelstrom of problems since it has worked industriously to bring about the downfall of this once blooming sector through a flood of regulations, for instance, that have been rained down on the motor industry. Companies need a stable, predictable legal basis on which to be able to make plans. If the EU constantly changes the rules, it will perhaps

eventually drive every industry to ruin. Nor should we forget the continuous ratcheting up of the tax load on diesel and, recently, the biofuels adventure.

To solve the crisis, then, it will not be enough for the EU to release the planned EUR 40 billion in credit. The Union must create predictable conditions of trade in future that it is possible to plan around, and it must do so for every industry.

Werner Langen (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, I would like, once again, to emphasise the importance of the motor industry with its 12 million direct and indirect jobs and its status as a worldwide technology leader in the sector. We must recall – Commissioner Verheugen and others have done so – that the motor industry is of course dependent on the state of the economy and the price of oil and that buyer behaviour exhibits a dramatic loss of confidence in times of crisis in the financial markets. That is the main problem in the motor industry. Competition is very tight, and it simply cannot be possible for an individual company – or even an individual Member State – to put in place measures which distort competition without the European Commission taking care to prevent the distortion in question.

I say this by way of a preliminary remark. In light of this, the proposals to create a Europe-wide economic stimulus package are just as counterproductive as individual proposals to put up a protective shield over the entire motor industry. I believe the right course to be to promote research and development into low-pollutant vehicles, either through the research programme or by means of credits, as proposed by the Commission. I think it is necessary to ensure that aid at the Member State level, equally, is not allowed to lead to distortions in competition. I am also absolutely convinced that we must not alter competition policy overall, as I have read in recent days in proposals, including from prominent sources within this House.

The Commission is right when it applies the rules on competition strictly. I would also say, however, that it is possible that we need to come up with European transitional solutions – but not long-term subsidisation – for management errors of the like that have affected GM in the United States and its subsidiaries, and that such solutions must be subject to competition law. Only in this way can the jobs in this industry be secured in the long term, and I would also say that the best incentive would be to postpone a sensible climate-change policy for cars, make cars affordable, as has been said, and not to make any excessive demands. I can only describe what Mrs Harms said in this regard as completely removed from the reality of the situation.

Matthias Groote (PSE). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, ladies and gentlemen, the reality is that the motor industry is in crisis and there are many reasons for this. The financial crisis, in particular, has further accelerated the crisis in this sector and the Member States are currently working on resolutions.

The European automotive industry is a key industry. For that reason, we need European solutions for this key European industry in order to defeat this crisis. Nearly all car makers have European structures. In order to be able to implement the necessary investment in environmentally friendly vehicles – as has been mentioned a number of times today – and low-consumption technologies, car makers need public guarantees or low interest credit from the European Investment Bank. The supply industry, too – and this is very important – must not be forgotten in all this. The supply industry contains small and medium-sized companies in which jobs are created and innovation occurs.

Yet what can the European Union do to protect this key industry? In the last plenary part-session, the President-in-Office of the Council proposed that key industries should be protected. For me, this was a good idea, because if you take the proposal to its logical conclusion it means a 'Volkswagen Law' for the entire European motor industry. That would certainly be a sound instrument. The European Commission, however, is currently fighting against this protective instrument. Therefore, I would ask the Commission this: will it hold its grudge, despite the crisis in the motor industry, or will it change course in light of this crisis?

Sophia in 't Veld (ALDE). – (NL) Madam President, it is telling that the Commissioner for Enterprise and Industry is here but not the Commissioner for Competition. I have major reservations about helping out the car industry. Whilst the problems are undeniably very serious, why support the car industry and not other sectors? The problems have possibly been exacerbated, but certainly not caused, by the credit crunch, and state aid should not be a reward for bad behaviour. Although the EU Treaty allows for rescue aid, we should not use tax money – which, after all, is paid for by the public – to keep ailing industries afloat. Neither should we forget that huge amounts of money have already gone into the rescue of car manufacturers in recent years – not always successfully, I should add.

While we have a short-term responsibility for jobs that are on the line, we also have a long-term responsibility to leave behind a healthy economy, a healthy environment, and also healthy state finances for future generations. I find it a bit unfair that there has been no money for care, education, child care or the environment for years, and that we are now being asked to pump billions into the car industry to save it from disaster. If aid is given, there should be stringent conditions for what the car industry must do in return in the form of restructuring, and this should apply only to future-oriented, environmentally friendly and innovative activities; for, indeed, whilst state aid may be able to rescue companies, it can also ruin other companies as a result of distortions of competition.

Jean-Paul Gauzès (PPE-DE). – (FR) Madam President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, this has already been said several times. The automotive industry, directly or indirectly, accounts for 12 million jobs within the European Union. That represents 10% of European GDP. The automotive industry is today facing a serious crisis: the European market has fallen by around 15%. This decline could reach 17% to 20% for the final quarters of 2008.

Manufacturers' results are falling. In this context, the lack of funds is the primary danger facing this industry. Consequently, the manufacturers are cutting production and trying to reduce structural costs. Jobs become the first victims of the crisis.

As you said, Mr President, faced with this crisis, what is needed is a coordinated response from Europe and the Member States, especially those directly concerned. The financial support of the EIB that is planned is necessary.

Of course, I endorse your proposals. Firstly, we must support investment, particularly for the design and development of clean vehicles and the development of hybrid and electric vehicles. We must also support the market through financial incentives to renew those cars on the road. As the Commissioner said, old cars account for a significant part of the pollution generated by cars as a whole.

However, we must also set up a stable and ambitious but realistic regulatory framework. The objectives for reducing CO₂ emissions must be upheld, manufacturers have devoted – and are still devoting – large amounts to this, but realism must plead in favour of restraint in the fines imposed for failing to achieve the objectives. Excessive fines would eliminate general manufacturers.

Let us not forget that the automotive industry is the industry hit by the toughest ecological requirements.

Finally, in the current circumstances, it would be detrimental to the manufacturers to undermine the protection covering external bodywork parts.

Monica Giuntini (PSE). – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I think this debate we are having on one of the most critical sectors in the European economy is timely.

The world economy is getting worse and worse and the already negative context for the car industry in Italy and in Europe is also deteriorating. The minister referred to the data earlier; there has been a marked fall in sales of 5% in 2008. Italy has seen a fall of over 18% in October alone, which is the worst figure in over ten years in the sector.

This is thus a crisis which is affecting all the most important European markets, but I would like to stress that it is not just the car production sector that is feeling the effects of the crisis, but the whole supply chain, with a particularly detrimental impact on firms specialising in producing components for cars.

As has been said, the crisis is hitting the whole sector, and merely by way of example I will mention the situation in Italy on the Tuscan coast where, in recent months, following relocation processes, recourse has been had on a massive scale to the wages guarantee fund, imposed on hundreds of workers, and to the dismissal of employees working on temporary contracts. One example, among many, gives us an idea of how very serious the situation is, and that is the Delfi group, whose workers have been relying on the wages guarantee fund for two and a half years. Urgent steps are needed to redeploy them, starting with the efforts initiated by local government bodies.

It is now clear, however, that there is a partial impotence on the part of national, regional and local institutions, and hence a need for strong commitment and action by Europe, including confronting the multinationals on the problems of relocations and thus the need to adopt, Europe-wide, measures designed to contain this crisis in order to avoid the impact in social and employment terms.

Gianluca Susta (ALDE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the financial crisis is teaching us that we need to go back to the real economy and thus we need to help the European manufacturing industry to recover, particularly at a time when the US, led by Barack Obama, is preparing to change economic relations worldwide to some degree.

There should be no talk of State aid, but we ought to strengthen our manufacturing industry in three areas: recycling, which should be understood in the same way across Europe, the repositioning of production to focus on innovative sectors and the provision of information to consumers and significant action within the World Trade Organisation to rebalance customs tariff barriers, most of all in relations between the European Union and the Far East.

Additionally, we must not forget investment in research in the sector and also in large-scale infrastructure, both tangible and intangible. We must play a fair game within the world. Today, the rules are changing, and we need to use the conclusions of the G20 to go back to an equal departure point.

Gunnar Hökmark (PPE-DE). – (SV) Madam President, jobs are what is important around Europe now. What we are seeing within the motor industry is an industrial challenge that is also characteristic of other parts of the European economy. What must not be allowed to happen now is for us to have a situation whereby state aid undermines employment in companies in one country but boosts it in another. We cannot have state aid that is to the detriment of the industry within one area and to its benefit in another area, because that would lead to unemployment and a loss of jobs that would proceed across Europe step by step. We must not have state aid that makes things more difficult for vibrant companies and keeps afloat companies that can no longer survive alone. The problem in the motor industry is a long-term one that we have seen more clearly in this financial crisis, but where we have, for a long time, seen large-scale losses and weakening demand around the world, as well as overcapacity.

What is important now, first and foremost, is to ensure that demand exists in Europe. This means tax cuts in order to make it possible for there to be demand from European households for the products that are produced here. It means ensuring that European industry is able, in area after area, to be a leader in terms of technology and development, as well as within the environmental and energy sectors too. That is where public efforts should be focused.

Yet it also means clearing the way for the European motor industry to be a global player. This means ensuring that we can have open free trade in which the European motor industry has access to world markets. It is therefore important to remember that those who stand in the way of free trade and progress in the Doha Round today are, in actual fact, hindering the opportunities for the European motor industry to grow in the large markets of the future.

Patrizia Toia (ALDE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, faced with the extremely serious crisis that is affecting the car sector from the US to our continent, Europe has a very clear choice: either to remain inactive and observe this collapse in demand and production, the effects of which we cannot even calculate today, in the name of an abstract consistency with a theoretical model of market liberalism, with total respect for competition, as some voices have urged here today, or to take on its responsibilities to tackle the situation properly.

We have opted for the second choice and we call upon the Commission and the Council to show decisiveness and determination. We welcomed what Commissioner Verheugen said and we hope that none of his colleagues hold him back too much in this determination. This is an exceptional situation and thus exceptional responses are required.

On the other hand, ladies and gentlemen, the financial crisis has shown us some actions by political and economic authorities who have made choices in terms of conduct and investment of public resources which, up until a few months ago, would have been unthinkable. Our action should, however – and I am just finishing – be selective, combine strategy with urgency, and should encourage, both through more attractive loans and support for demand, a selective repositioning towards more environmentally sustainable production.

Martin Callanan (PPE-DE). – Madam President, in my view, Europe's car industry has shown remarkable resilience in the past few years, despite some extremely tough economic conditions and a veritable deluge of EU legislation. Our car manufacturers lead the world for environmental awareness, technical standards and innovation. It is a record that deserves to be supported and not undermined. I am particularly proud of the UK car industry and, if I may, would like to make a plug for my local Nissan company – the most productive car plant in Europe – which is located in my region in North-East England.

Nobody would dispute the importance of environmental protection, but I am extremely concerned that, in our rush to prove our green credentials, we are sometimes in danger of destroying a very important and successful industry. Already we are seeing a massive fall in sales in the UK. Sales last month were down 23%. Rather than imposing a very rigid and inflexible timetable for change in the industry, we should be seeking to support the industry and give it the incentive to make the changes that are necessary to bring about their future. If the car industry has our political support – and our political support for the supplier and component industries too – we can help them to get through this difficult period.

I hope that the Commission will be extremely vigilant with regard to Member States stretching the limits on state aid to car manufacturers. In Britain, we have a very long and a very unsuccessful history of state support for the auto industry. We managed to get out of that in the 1980s. I hope we will not go back there again because, if we pour public money into the car industry, what about the building industry, the construction industry and the food industry? All industries are suffering and we must be extremely careful with the hard-pressed taxpayer's funds to ensure that we do not throw too much more of it into the car industry. This did not work in the past and will not work in the future. I hope the Commission will be extremely vigilant in keeping an eye on errant Member States that might be tempted down this unsuccessful road.

Ivo Belet (PPE-DE). – (NL) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, as has been said before, the car industry is a vital sector; indeed, it is a key sector for the European economy, providing, as it does, direct or indirect employment to 12 million people. This is enormous. I therefore believe that cheap loans for this key sector are more than justified, but this fresh money should obviously be put into new, environmentally friendly technologies. We can expect the European car manufacturers to join forces to an even greater extent when it comes to developing these new technologies, for example, to create affordable, high-performance batteries for electrical cars.

We should recognise, moreover, that Europe itself has also made its share of mistakes. We have possibly invested too heavily in hydrogen, while we now need economical, electrical hybrid engines in the very short term. This is why we should, perhaps, adjust our priorities and projects, particularly in the context of the Seventh Framework Programme for Research and Development. It should be our ambition, and indeed why not, to have all new cars in Europe run on electricity, hybrid or not, by 2020. Why should this not be possible? In order to achieve this, we need a prompt switch-over, which means that we must also invest in training the workers involved. Commissioner, we are counting on your agreeing that aid for training workers is a future-oriented and justified investment and that it is considered as such. Moreover, various manufacturers, including Ford in Genk and Opel in Antwerp, are already investing and making huge efforts, including on behalf of vulnerable groups of the labour market. It is, to my mind, justified to further encourage and reward policy of this kind.

Finally, the CO₂ legislation which we shall be approving in the next few weeks is the perfect opportunity to set our sights high. Crises invariably create opportunities. We now have to make a combined effort to create these next-generation cars. If we persevere now, then the European Union will dominate this market for decades to come, hence this appeal to the European manufacturers to abandon the trenches and go on the offensive.

Pierre Pribetich (PSE). – (FR) Madam President, what should be our strategy to overcome this crisis? Right now, the facts are before us. The crisis is affecting all manufacturers and there is a knock-on effect hitting the 12 million European citizens who work in the automotive industry.

We must think, first and foremost, of these workers and their families and we must make it our priority to protect them by answering this troubling question: what is the strategy needed to overcome this crisis?

A fast and effective united and structured industrial policy for the medium and long term, a 'new car deal', a coordinated response by Member States and the Union that will be equal to the situation.

I hear, in this Parliament, the old dogmatic views of outdated liberalism resurfacing: no help, no subsidies, competition, nothing but competition. Ladies and gentlemen, the time has come for regulation, for public action. We therefore need a new car deal, an ambitious and intelligent plan for the automotive industry, first of all to save jobs and develop employment in Europe, with support for training. Then, to speed up the technological change of these enterprises to clean and intelligent vehicles, with the resolve to revive demand, by simplifying the renewal of old cars on the road, which are generators of pollution, through the creation of a European environmental bonus.

In short, Europe must act and must not fail to respond. It must act and not be silent and take no action. We must act and act intelligently to support this transformation.

Dumitru Oprea (PPE-DE). – (RO) We are living in a world where we have gone from getting around using one horse per person to getting around with tens or hundreds of horse power. 4- and 5-seater cars are carrying just one person more than 75% of the time. They have been using 7.5 litres of fuel per 100 kilometres over 100 years.. The major problems facing mankind are problems relating to behaviour and pollution. We therefore need to think about and use cars differently. They need to be much smaller, quite safe, green, using a few litres per 100 kilometres and at prices which will allow human behaviour to be controlled in the future.

Ieke van den Burg (PSE). – (NL) Madam President, with all due criticism of the car industry and of the way the Commission has operated, we have no choice but to devote attention to the car industry because, like housing construction, it is facing a dramatic decline. All the alarm bells are ringing, so we must act on time, in the short term and in a targeted manner.

I should like to stress three things: this should involve not only the major car manufacturers, but also suppliers and financing companies. The restructuring exercise should focus on cleaner, more economical cars, and certain aspects will need to be coordinated at European level. We must discourage Member States from flying solo, which could exacerbate the problems in neighbouring countries. This is particularly important to suppliers, because they work across borders. They operate within the internal market and should be able to enjoy the measures to the same extent, and not just at national level. This level playing field should be closely monitored by the European Commission. As such, I support the role which the Directorate-General for Competition has been assigned in this connection.

Marie Anne Isler Béguin (Verts/ALE). - (FR) Madam President, having paid to save the banks, we now have to save the automobile industry and once again, of course, with public funds. For more than ten years, however, we have been alerting the automobile industry of the consequences of CO₂ emissions on public health. For more than ten years, we have been calling for the industry to build clean cars. For more than ten years, it has turned a deaf ear and has resisted with the powerful automobile lobby. It has been holding back any development. Recently, Commissioner, and you are in a position to know this, in this Parliament it opposed 'CARS 21' in order not to reduce emissions below 130 grams.

Yet, after making considerable profits, which were not reinvested in industrial restructuring, the financial crisis has become a good excuse to ask for public aid and sack workers left, right and centre. Are consumers going to be fooled yet again? In fact, consumers are going to have to pay so that they can obtain a clean car on the market, with no guarantee that it will be cheaper, just as in the present situation.

It is therefore elsewhere that the automobile industry must be steered to avoid future bankruptcies because we must prepare for the post-car era.

Kurt Joachim Lauk (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, first of all, we would observe that the markets in Europe that have been less subject to collapse have a clear regulatory environment in respect of legislation on the taxation of CO₂ and a clear regulatory environment in respect of what is expected of car makers. Mr Jouyet, if your Presidency were to succeed in obliging the Member States to create clear regulatory environments as quickly as possible, even the consumer would regain confidence. That would be the best possible aid for the motor industry.

There is something else we should do. We should not, at this point, be talking about subsidies amounting to billions whilst, at the same time, threatening the motor industry with fines amounting to billions if targets are not met. That makes no sense. It provides a massive amount of uncertainty and makes vehicles more expensive for consumers. We need to proceed differently, put a vision in place and announce that, by the end of the 2020s, 20, 25 or 30% of cars should be emission-free. That would spark innovation and bring it to the fore, whilst also providing clarity to consumers about the future strategy of the motor industry in Europe.

Inés Ayala Sender (PSE). – (ES) Madam President, in the current crisis situation, the laudable efforts of the French Presidency and the Industry Commissioner, Mr Verheugen, should be congratulated. However, we need more, and urgently. We also need to hear the Industry and Competition Commissioners speaking in harmony.

The car industry, which means manufacturers, support industry, distributors and finance companies, needs an urgent and audacious multifaceted aid plan. People will not understand modesty and reticence when

decisions are made about the aid needed to support the car industry, given its direct, mass and high-quality employment, particularly in comparison to the diligence shown in helping the financial sector, in which the most serious errors have been judged with benevolence.

The Opel workers at Figueruelas in Zaragoza, who have assisted and supported the future of their company in Spain and Germany, will not understand, nor will the government of Aragón or the Spanish government which are utilising all their investment resources and hoping for cooperation and leadership from the European Union.

We need a rapid and audacious plan which will quickly help to replace the European car fleet with safer and cleaner vehicles. We need a European 'Plan Renove' or renewal scheme, as from December, which will encourage everything from direct investment to consumption.

European car manufacturers, and also the support industry, distributors and finance companies, also need aid and guarantees. A quick, straightforward and logical agreement on the vehicles and emissions issue would also be helpful.

Gabriele Albertini (PPE-DE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, Mr Juncker, President of the Eurogroup and Prime Minister of Luxembourg, has stated that we need a European strategy to save the car industry in response to the rescue plan announced by the United States. I am fully in agreement with what has been said and I hope that it will happen.

At the next meeting of ministers of finance of the Member States, the European Investment Bank will propose an increase in loan volumes of 20 and 30% in 2009 and 2010, amounting to EUR 10-15 billion per year for the car industry, and this decision is extremely timely. Some Member States have already taken independent action: the German government, for example, submitted early in the month an aid plan targeting the economy, with the idea of generating new investment amounting to EUR 50 billion over the next year. Among the key sectors involved is the car industry.

I hope that the European Commission will do the same, acting as a body. Aid to the sector should be invested within the European Union, and therefore should go to firms that are not relocating their production operations. Every decision to grant aid to firms is extremely welcome, given the circumstances, and its main goal should be to shore up employment and stimulate investment within Europe.

Dorette Corbey (PSE). – (NL) Madam President, Commissioner, I actually agree with the comments made by Mrs Harms. The support that is needed for the car industry indeed represents failing industrial policy. For years, there has been talk about the need to prepare the car industry for the 21st century, which ultimately did not happen. Again and again, the car industry has turned a deaf ear to the appeals for cleaner and more economical cars. Ultimately, we have nothing to show for it. The car industry has done nothing in the way of innovation to produce cars with less CO₂ emissions, and still there is the lobby to ease the CO₂ requirements on the car industry, which is a crying shame.

The question is: where do we go from here? I think that we can continue to support the car industry, but that this must be coupled with very strict requirements, and that real support should be given only to electrical cars, an entire programme to make the electrification of the car industry possible and, of course, to the retraining of workers. After all, it is very important that the workers in the car industry should have a future. They should never be forgotten.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, President-in-Office of the Council. – (FR) Madam President, I would like to thank all the speakers. It is a very rich debate on an important matter and I share, like the Presidency, the feeling that has been expressed by the majority of you, namely that it is absolutely vital that we assume full responsibility to face up to this exceptional situation that is hitting a key industry: the figures are, as you pointed out, 12 million jobs in the European Union and an industry hit by the financial crisis, due to the level of consumer credit which is the hallmark of this industry.

Moreover, it is an industry that has to face up to unparalleled ecological challenges. Falling behind schedule is one thing, not making up the lost time is another, just when we are also committed to adopting the energy and climate change package, which is one of the great challenges the European Union has to face.

This is, therefore, an exceptional situation and the European response, for the Presidency, must be equal to these challenges. This response must take into account three factors.

Firstly, what our third-country partners are doing. We must retain the competitiveness of this European industry. Secondly, we must retain the major objectives of the European Union: the Commission's proposals must promote the achievement of the energy and climate change package objectives with which you are familiar. Concerning vehicle CO₂ emissions, I believe we are close to an agreement and that it is within reach in the context of the procedures involving your Parliament, the Commission and the Council.

Thirdly, we must also respect the integrity of the internal market. Transparency and equal treatment and coordination are essential but this does not in any way preclude, when there are circumstances such as the ones we are experiencing at present, temporary targeted support, determined and granted on the basis of commitments also undertaken by the automobile industry.

I note the lines of action proposed by Commissioner Verheugen which I consider to be good initiatives and which the Presidency supports, either through loans from the European Investment Bank for the most significant ecological investments, or through tax incentives to make the demand for cars more compatible with environmental requirements, to renew cars on the road that are ageing and therefore move further away from the environmental requirements, to reduce the cost of motor vehicles, which also seems to be an important objective, and to move more in the direction of vehicles that are more economical. Finally, I consider that when facing crisis situations, developing public guarantees is also important in this sector.

I also think that we need to have incentives to develop training and, in certain cases, retraining, because in the coming weeks and in the first few months of 2009, we can, unfortunately, expect to see an even more difficult situation.

Everything proposed by Commissioner Verheugen seems to me to be heading in the right direction and we shall support him. It is now a question of time, we must act fast and I also approve the idea expressed by Mr Goebbels of a stable and offensive European framework so as to retain the competitiveness of this vital industry.

Günter Verheugen, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I think it is a shame that Mrs Harms is no longer present. After such an unorthodox attack – one which was pushing the limits of defamation – it would have been right to have allowed me the opportunity to answer her. I will now do so in writing. However, on behalf of the Commission, I reject in the most definite possible terms Mrs Harms's claims in both style and substance.

(Applause)

That is unacceptable.

On the matter itself, the European motor industry is not on a medical drip. Some of the interventions gave the impression that what we are dealing with here is a sector that is either dependent on or is calling for subsidies. No subsidies are paid to the European motor industry, nor has it asked for any. Our entire industrial policy is, of course, based on the idea that we want to be independent of subsidies.

The only instrument available is low-interest credit from the European Investment Bank. Let me make it clear to everyone, however, exactly what that means – these credits are at interest rates that are perhaps around 1% below standard market rates. This is necessary in order to be able to finance the investments which, for example, you, as the European legislator, demand from the car makers, namely investments in modern, environmentally friendly technologies. That is why the European Investment Bank does this, and not only for the European motor industry. The impression has been given in this Chamber that the motor industry is the only European sector able to make use of this credit facility from the European Investment Bank. No, that is not the case. It crosses all sectors and is thus not at all specific to the motor industry. I would ask you all urgently to avoid giving out the impression in this House that the European motor industry is a destitute sector on a state-supplied drip. The industry is not on a drip, nor does it need to be, because in its technical position and its competitiveness, it is quite clearly the best-performing motor industry in the world. I am absolutely convinced that it will continue to be so.

We have been working for years – with the industry and with science – on developing the modern technologies of the future. In the context of the Seventh Framework Programme, we are spending a lot of money on this, and have been for a number of years. We are working intensively to ensure that the framework conditions for this industry are stable. It was the first industrial sector for which we developed a sectoral policy of this nature at all, and the reason for this was precisely the fact that we saw future problems facing this sector in good time.

On the case of Opel, I would like to reiterate: it is an absolutely exceptional, extraordinary situation that has nothing to do with the business policy of the company itself. This is exclusively the consequence of problems that arose in the United States of America which have an impact on Europe and for which we need to find an answer.

One final point – Mr Groote spoke about a subject of special interest to him, namely the ‘Volkswagen Law’. I am not of the belief that it would be a good idea to launch a European initiative with the aim of setting up similar statutory regulations for all European car makers. Hardly anyone else would agree with this idea, either. To my knowledge, Mr Groote, the Commission has not changed its view on this matter. Decisions can be expected soon, however.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place at 11.30 a.m.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Esko Seppänen (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (FI) The world’s car industry has got into difficulties, though that is not true for all plants. Porsche has found a new way of making money, and that is to take up options to buy shares in Volkswagen. That, however, is not a solution to VW’s problems or those of other car factories.

The bank crisis has brought with it a car crisis: in a deflating economy, people cannot afford to buy new cars or the fuel to put in them. The European Investment Bank wants to rescue the car industry in the name of the EU, but we need to think again about whether the world is going to need all the capacity that is used today for producing cars. If EIB loans went towards new energy and environmental technology, that would meet the world’s real needs at the present time more successfully. The loose money which consumers used to buy new cars in recent years has gone, and it is not coming back.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The car manufacturing industry is one of the driving forces of the European economy. Approximately 300 000 cars and 300 000 goods and passenger vehicles are produced in Europe every year. Road transport is responsible for 72% of all emissions generated by transport, but the time has now come for us to reaffirm the importance of the car manufacturing industry from an economic and social perspective.

The financial crises and economic recession are having a severe impact on the car industry, which guarantees, both directly and indirectly, more than 15 million jobs. 2012 will be a crucial year for Europe’s car manufacturing industry as new requirements will be introduced with regard to fuel quality, pollutant emission restrictions, type certification and the safety of road users.

In order to make our road traffic greener, the Union intends to introduce bonuses for greener vehicles and penalise those which cause more pollution. The ‘Climate Change’ package will therefore become one of the means aimed at boosting demand for greener, safer vehicles.

Social Europe is based on economic development and, in an equal measure, on social values. The European car industry must be supported to respond to the new challenges so that existing jobs can be preserved and it can remain competitive.

(The sitting was suspended at 11.25 a.m. and resumed at 11.35 a.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MR McMILLAN-SCOTT

Vice-President

5. Voting time

President. – The next item is the vote.

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

5.1. Community statistics on public health and health and safety at work (A6-0425/2008, Karin Scheele) (vote)

5.2. Publication and translation obligations of certain types of companies (A6-0400/2008, Piia-Noora Kauppi) (vote)

5.3. European statistics (A6-0349/2008, Andreas Schwab) (vote)

5.4. Support schemes for farmers under the CAP (A6-0402/2008, Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos) (vote)

(The sitting was suspended at 12 p.m. for the formal sitting and resumed at 12.30 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MR POETTERING

President

6. Formal sitting - Sir Jonathan Sacks

President. – (DE) Chief Rabbi Sacks, Lady Sacks, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honour and pleasure to welcome the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth, and his wife, to the European Parliament in Strasbourg at this formal session as part of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008. A very warm welcome to the European Parliament, Sir Jonathan!

(Applause)

As our first guest in this year of intercultural dialogue, the Grand Mufti of Syria, Sheikh Ahmad Badr Al-Din Hassoun, made a speech in our plenary session. As the year went on, we also had the opportunity to listen to an address by the Ecumenical Patriarch of Constantinople, Bartholomew I. With your speech today, Chief Rabbi, we will have heard from representatives of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

Each of these religions has produced its own special contribution to shaping what today's European society has become and what distinguishes it. The same is true of humanism and enlightenment. Even if we live in secular societies in which there is a clear separation of church and state, it is fitting to duly recognise the positive role that organised religion plays in our societies.

This relates not only to the physical contribution to areas such as training, health and social services, but also to the same extent to the development of our ethical consciousness and to the shaping of our values. The European Union is a community of values and the most fundamental of these is the inherent dignity of every human being.

Chief Rabbi, you are well known as a great author and professor, an unsurpassable man of learning and one of the world's leading representatives of the Jewish faith. You have often written and spoken about the danger that a rejuvenation of anti-Semitism poses to our societies.

Last week, at the European Parliament in Brussels, we held a very special commemoration, which we arranged jointly with the European Jewish Congress, in order to remember the 70th anniversary of the Night of Broken Glass. On that occasion, I pointed out that we in the European Union bear a responsibility and a duty to resist, absolutely without exception and without appeasement, all forms of extremism, racism, xenophobia and anti-Semitism and to defend democracy, the protection of human rights and human dignity across the globe.

Chief Rabbi, in your book *The Dignity of Difference* – and on this point I will close – which was written a year after the terrible events of 11 September 2001, you tackled one of the most fundamental questions of our day, namely: can we all live together in peace and, if so, how? It is now with great pleasure and honour that I ask the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth to address us.

(Applause)

Sir Jonathan Sacks, *Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth.* – Mr President, Members of the European Parliament, I thank you for the privilege of addressing you today, and I thank you even more for undertaking this vital initiative of intercultural dialogue. I salute you all, but in particular your visionary, wise and deeply humane President, Hans-Gert Pötinger. May I – in what I hope will be today my

only breach of the separation between church and state, religion and politics – give my prayer and my blessing that God will bless all of you and all you do. Thank you.

I speak as a Jew from within the oldest continuous cultural presence in Europe. I want to begin by reminding us that European civilisation was born 2 000 years ago in a dialogue, a dialogue between the two greatest cultures of antiquity: Ancient Greece and Biblical Israel – Athens and Jerusalem. They were brought together by Christianity, whose religion came from Israel but whose sacred texts were written in Greek, and that was the founding dialogue of Europe. And some of the greatest moments in European history in the intervening 2 000 years were the result of dialogue. I will mention just three.

The first took place between the 10th and 13th centuries in al-Andalus, in the great cultural movement initiated by the Umayyads in Spain. It began with an Islamic dialogue on the part of thinkers like Averroës with the philosophical heritage of Plato and Aristotle. The Islamic dialogue inspired Jewish thinkers like Moses Maimonides, and the Jewish dialogue inspired Christian thinkers, most famously Aquinas.

The second great moment of intercultural dialogue took place at the beginning of the Italian Renaissance when a young Christian intellectual, Pico della Mirandola, travelled to Padua, where he met a Jewish scholar, Rabbi Elijah Delmedigo, who taught him the Hebrew Bible, the Talmud and Kabbalah in their original languages. Out of that dialogue came the most famous statement of Renaissance values: Pico's Oration on Human Dignity.

The third and most poignant of them all has been the dialogue between Christians and Jews after the Holocaust, inspired by Martin Buber's philosophy of dialogue and by Vatican II and Nostra Aetate. The result has been that, after almost 2 000 years of estrangement and tragedy, today Jews and Christians meet in mutual respect as friends.

But I want to say more than this. As I read the Hebrew Bible, I hear from the very beginning God's call to dialogue. I want to draw attention to two passages. I am not quite sure how this will go down in translation, so I hope anyone who is listening to me in translation will get it. I want to draw attention to two passages in the opening chapters of the Bible whose meaning has been lost in translation for 2 000 years.

The first occurs when God sees the first man isolated and alone and He creates woman. And man, seeing woman for the first time, utters the first poem in the Bible: 'Now I have found bone of my bone, flesh of my flesh. She shall be called Aisha, woman, for she was taken from Aish, man'. Now this sounds like a very simple poem. It even sounds rather condescending, as if the man was the first creation and women were a mere afterthought. However, the real meaning lies in the fact that biblical Hebrew has two words for man, not one. One is Adam, and the other is Aish.

This verse that I just quoted to you is the first time the word 'Aish' appears in the Bible. Listen again. 'She shall be called Aisha, because she was taken from Aish'. In other words, the man has to pronounce the name of his wife before he even knows his own name. I have to say 'you' before I can say 'I'. I have to acknowledge the other, before I can truly understand myself.

(Loud applause)

That is the first point the Bible makes: identity is dialogical.

The second occurs soon after, in the first great tragedy that overcomes the first human children Cain and Abel. We expect brotherly love. Instead there is sibling rivalry and then murder, fratricide. And at the heart of this story in Genesis, Chapter IV, is a verse that is impossible to translate and in every English Bible I have ever read the verse is not translated, it is paraphrased.

I am going to translate it literally and you will see why no one translates it that way. Literally the Hebrew means as follows: 'And Cain said to Abel, and it came to pass when they were out in the field that Cain rose up against Abel and killed him.' You can see immediately why it cannot be translated because it says 'and Cain said' but it does not say what he said. The sentence is ungrammatical. The syntax is fractured. And the question is, why? The answer is clear: the Bible is signalling in the most dramatic way, in a broken sentence, how the conversation broke down. The dialogue failed. And what do we read immediately afterwards? 'And Cain rose up against his brother and killed him'. Or to put it simply: where words end, violence begins. Dialogue is the only way to defeat the worst angels of our nature.

(Loud applause)

Dialogue therefore testifies to the double aspect of all human relationships, whether they are between individuals or between countries or cultures or creeds. Our commonalities, on the one hand, and our differences on the other. What we hold in common and what is uniquely ours.

Let me put it as simply as I can. If we were completely different, we could not communicate, but if we were totally the same, we would have nothing to say.

(Applause)

And that is all I have to say about dialogue, and yet I want to add that dialogue may not be quite enough. You see, between the late 18th century and 1933, there was dialogue between Jews and Germans, just as there was dialogue and even friendship between Hutus and Tutsis in Rwanda, or between Serbs and Croats and Muslims in Bosnia and Kosovo. Dialogue brings us together, but it cannot always keep us together when other forces are driving us apart.

Therefore, I want to add one other word, which played a significant part in healing fragmented societies. The word is 'covenant'. It played a major role in European politics in the 16th and 17th centuries in Switzerland, in Holland, in Scotland and in England. Covenant has been part of American culture from the very beginning to today, from the Mayflower Compact in 1620, to John Winthrop's speech aboard the *Arabella* in 1631, all the way through to the present. I do not know what Barack Obama will say when he makes his inaugural speech but he will either mention or allude to the concept of covenant.

Covenant is, of course, a key word of the Hebrew Bible for a simple reason: biblical Israel was formed out of 12 different tribes, each of which had insisted on retaining its distinct identity.

What is a covenant? A covenant is not a contract. A contract is made for a limited period, for a specific purpose, between two or more parties, each seeking their own benefit. A covenant is made open-endedly by two or more parties who come together in a bond of loyalty and trust to achieve together what none can achieve alone. A contract is like a deal; a covenant is like a marriage. Contracts belong to the market and to the state, to economics and politics, both of which are arenas of competition. Covenants belong to families, communities, charities, which are arenas of cooperation. A contract is between me and you – separate selves – but a covenant is about us – collective belonging. A contract is about interests; a covenant is about identity. And hence the vital distinction, not made clearly enough in European politics, between a social contract and a social covenant: a social contract creates a state; a social covenant creates a society.

(Applause)

You can have a society without a state – that has happened at times in history – but can you have a state without a society, without anything to hold people together? I do not know. You can hold people together in many different ways: by force, by fear, by suppressing cultural difference, by expecting everyone to conform. But when you choose to respect the integrity of many cultures, when you honour what I call – as the President reminded us – the dignity of difference, when you honour that, then to create a society you need a covenant.

Covenant restores the language of cooperation to a world of competition. It focuses on responsibilities, not just on rights. Rights are essential, but rights create conflicts that rights cannot resolve: the right to life against the right to choose; my right to freedom against your right to respect. Rights without responsibilities are the subprime mortgages of the moral world.

(Loud applause)

What covenant does is to get us to think about reciprocity. Covenant says to each of us: we must respect others if we expect others to respect us; we must honour the freedom of others if they are to honour ours. Europe needs a new covenant and the time to begin it is now.

(Applause)

Now, in the midst of financial crisis and economic recession, because in bad times people are aware that we all share a fate.

The Prophet Isaiah foresaw a day when the lion and the lamb would live together. It has not happened yet. Although there was a zoo where a lion and a lamb lived together in the same cage and a visitor asked the zookeeper: 'How do you manage that?'. The zookeeper said: 'Easy, you just need a new lamb every day!'

(Laughter)

But there was a time when the lion and the lamb did live together. Where was that? In Noah's Ark. And why was that? It was not because they had reached Utopia but because they knew that otherwise they would both drown.

Friends, last Thursday – six days ago – the Archbishop of Canterbury and I led a mission of the leaders of all the faiths in Britain, leaders of the Muslim community, the Hindus, the Sikhs, the Buddhists, the Jains, the Zoroastrians and the Baha'i, and together we travelled and spent a day in Auschwitz. There we wept together, and there we prayed together, knowing what happens when we fail to honour the humanity of those not like us.

God has given us many languages and many cultures, but only one world in which to live together, and it is getting smaller every day. May we, the countries and the cultures of Europe, in all our glorious diversity, together write a new European covenant of hope.

(The House accorded the speaker a standing ovation.)

President. – Sir Jonathan, on behalf of the European Parliament, I am honoured to thank you for your important message. I would like to thank you for your great contribution to the intercultural dialogue.

You spoke about the mutual respect and acknowledgement of others. I think this is what we have learnt from our European history. You said that what unites us is much more than that which divides us. This is the principle – and you finished with this – of our European engagement for a strong, democratic European Union which is based on the dignity of each human being.

Sir Jonathan, thank you for your great message. All the best to you, the religion you represent and the peaceful living together of all religions on our continent and in the world. Thank you, Sir Jonathan.

(Applause)

IN THE CHAIR: MR McMILLAN-SCOTT

Vice-President

7. Voting time (continuation)

President. – We now continue with the vote.

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

7.1. Modifications to the common agricultural policy (A6-0401/2008, Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos) (vote)

7.2. Support for rural development by the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (A6-0390/2008, Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos) (vote)

7.3. Community strategic guidelines for rural development (2007 to 2013) (A6-0377/2008, Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos) (vote)

8. Explanations of vote

Oral explanations of vote

- Report: Piia-Noora Kauppi (A6-0400/2008)

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I would like to thank Mrs Kauppi for her report on the electronic company register, which I fully support. It is a brilliant idea and an excellent report, and Parliament stands united in support of its implementation.

I hope we will have electronic company registers in the Member States as soon as possible, as well as a Europe-wide electronic platform that contains all information companies are required to disclose. The

proposals, if implemented, would mean less bureaucracy, more transparency, a diminished administrative burden, lower costs for companies and, as a result, enhanced competitiveness of European companies.

- Report: Andreas Schwab (A6-0349/2008)

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE-DE). – (LT) I voted for the report on the Regulation of European Statistics prepared by Andreas Schwab. The reason I voted for it is the fact that the content of the new regulation is really important, significantly improving the existing regulation. I have in mind the definition of the European Statistical System, its place in Community law. The regulation also sets out the functions of national statistics institutions in the European Statistical System in solving matters of statistical confidentiality and statistical quality. This is undoubtedly a step forward compared to the current situation and the regulation now in force.

In fact, the European Commission's proposal to split the European Statistical System Committee into two parts seems controversial to me and the rapporteur's position of not separating functions seems more acceptable and worth supporting. However, I trust that, in future, if the European Parliament, Council and Commission work together, we will overcome these disagreements.

- Report: Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (A6-0402/2008)

Albert Deß (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, I have an explanation of vote to make on the report in respect of modulation. In the most recent agricultural reform, it was decided that farmers would have planning certainty until 2013. For that reason, I was opposed to implementing modulation on a scale that would result in farmers losing larger amounts. I am pleased with the result and would like to thank all my fellow Members who voted in favour of raising the allowance from EUR 5 000 to EUR 10 000, meaning that less modulation funding is taken away from small businesses.

If we, in politics, talk of planning certainty, this is something we should also grant to the farmers. I am therefore pleased about the result of today's report on modulation and hope that the Council accepts our results.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, today's vote ended almost twelve months of work on the preparation of our opinion on the operation of the common agricultural policy. It is important for the changes we have made to contribute to simplifying this policy. At the same time, we should retain its Community nature and ensure equal conditions of competition. I hope that EU agriculture ministers will read the opinion and accept our proposals.

What I have in mind in particular are proposals dealing with the simplification of cross-compliance requirements, including postponement until 2013 of the implementation of requirements relating to the area of animal welfare, area C, by new Member States. Regrettably, many solutions have been designed in a way which does not take into account the situation or the model of agriculture existing in new Member States. We are now starting to discuss the future of the common agricultural policy after 2013 and to review the financial perspective. Much work remains ahead of us.

Seán Ó Neachtain (UEN). – (GA) Mr President, I would like to express my appreciation of the very positive vote that took place here today in relation to the Common Agricultural Policy, and I would also like to welcome the policies that were presented, such as providing fruit and vegetables to schools.

However, in relation to the policy itself, I would like to draw attention once more to the obligatory modulation recommended by the Commission and to state that I am totally against it. The policy must be flexible and the Member States must be permitted to raise or lower that modulation as they wish.

In my opinion, the EUR 5 000 threshold is too low. It should be raised to EUR 10 000 to protect and support farmers on low incomes that are suffering already – I do not think money should be taken from them for obligatory modulation.

- Reports: Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (A6-0402/2008), (A6-0401/2008)

Giovanni Robusti (UEN). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I just wanted to speak to state publicly the reasons for my final vote against the Santos report 0401 and 02. The report is merely dependent on the health check on the common agricultural policy, which takes no account of the changed world conditions. We are discussing the details without seeing the main problem.

The CAP that we are using the health check to verify was created to reduce agricultural production in order to promote environmental protection, because those were the conditions under which it was established. Today, we all know that the economic conditions have changed drastically, but the CAP remains more or less the same and all we are discussing is whether the first or the second option is better, whether we need less or more, this or that measure, when they have now become inadequate to meet the challenges of the future.

I cannot accept this endless dealing with small, specific interests, ignoring the general good. I am convinced that the prime victim of this lack of courage is agriculture itself. In order to provoke dialogue and a debate, I voted against this report; I am leaving on my website the technical details that cannot be included in a one-minute speech, and my specific reasons will be published there.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE). – (FR) Mr President, the Hungarian Members of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament voted in favour of the reports by Mr Capoulas Santos because these reports are much more positive for new Member States, and for Hungary as well. Compulsory modulation and gradual modulation are less brutal than in the Commission's proposal. I regret there was not a vote in favour of the ALDE amendment regarding compulsory modulation. It is regrettable but, in spite of that, it is a good report.

With regard to the second report, Amendment 67 was proposed by the Socialist Group. With reference to the intervention system, it is very important not to intervene on the basis of tendering procedures. Maintaining the current system is very positive. This is why we voted in favour.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I compliment Mr Capoulas Santos on his very complex work. The Fine Gael delegation supported these reports with caveats. On the issue of milk quotas, we voted for greater flexibility and a higher percentage increase in quotas, giving farmers the opportunity to produce milk should they wish. We regret that this was not the view of the plenary and that we are now back with the Commission's proposal.

Secondly, on modulation, we are concerned about the transferring of funds from pillar 1 to pillar 2 because it takes income from farmers to be used in schemes which require cofinancing by Member States, and this is something that may not be guaranteed into the future. The raising of the franchise to EUR 10 000, on which Parliament has voted in favour, is welcome. I would like to clarify that our vote on Recital 6 – Amendments 190 and 226 – should read '+' (in favour). I hope that the Council will assist the ailing sheep sector in its deliberations of tomorrow and today.

- Report: Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (A6-0401/2008)

Dimitar Stoyanov (NI). – (BG) I would like to draw your attention to proposed amendment 54 tabled by Mr Deß and a group of other MEPs. If this amendment was adopted, it would result in an appalling double standard between the old and the new Member States, because by increasing the quota, the new Member States would need to increase it only if the financial year allowed it. I see that Mr Deß is still in the auditorium – so perhaps he would be able to explain to me whether the financial year allows the quota for the new Member States to be increased. Thankfully, this amendment was not adopted but rejected by this House, which has allowed me to vote for the entire report, and I am very happy that Parliament has not allowed two categories of Member State to be created in respect of increased milk quotas.

Albert Deß (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, the report on the milk quota argues for milk quotas to be raised. Along with all my CSU colleagues, I voted against all the amendments in which quota increases are called for. The milk quota due to apply until 31 March 2015 is designed to stabilise European milk markets. There is currently a surplus on European milk markets.

This has put serious pressure on milk prices. Any further increase in the quota will intensify the fall in prices faced by milk producers. Many farmers' livelihoods would then be in jeopardy. We do not need an increase in the quota but rather a system that reacts flexibly to the situation in the market. If, however, a majority here in Parliament and in the Council decides to phase out milk quotas by 2015, a milk fund will be necessary in order to ensure the continued survival of milk production in the disadvantaged areas and grassland areas in future.

- Reports: Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (A6-0402/2008), (A6-0401/2008), (A6-0390/2008), (A6-0377/2008)

Daniel Hannan (NI). – Mr President, if I were to set out to design the most expensive, wasteful, corrupt, immoral, bureaucratic system of farm support that I could, I am not sure that I would have come up with anything as ingenious as the common agricultural policy, a system that penalises us, as taxpayers, to subsidise the production of food for which there is no market and then penalises us again, as consumers, to sustain prices for it. It often penalises us a third time, as taxpayers, to destroy the food which could not be sold.

In the meantime, it causes environmental destruction because output-based subsidies encourage the felling of hedgerows and the use of pesticides and unfriendly fertilisers and, of course, causes terrible starvation in Africa. This is particularly harmful, I have to say, for a country such as yours and mine, which is a food importer with a relatively efficient agrarian sector, and which is therefore penalised both positively and negatively, paying more into the system and getting less out of it than other EU Member States.

Almost anything we did would be better than the common agricultural policy, be it direct support or any other system. And in case you thought I had forgotten to say it, it is high time we put the Lisbon Treaty to a referendum. *Pactio Olisipiensis censenda est!*

- Report: Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (A6-0402/2008)

Christa Klauß (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, I have voted in favour of the Capoulas Santos report and of Amendment 186, which recommends a franchise of EUR 10 000 for the modulation.

This concerns small-scale agriculture in Europe. The modulation process must be applied in moderation. Small farms in Europe need the support of the EU, so that they can continue to exist within the EU's wage structure. We want healthy food to be produced in Europe and to be available at reasonable prices. We also want the countryside to be managed. If we really do want all of this, then we must give our farmers support, so that we can continue to produce healthy food in future in Europe, which is an area with one of the most favourable climates in the world. This is why I have voted in favour of the Capoulas Santos report.

- Report: Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (A6-0390/2008)

Hynek Fajmon (PPE-DE). – (CS) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted against the report prepared by Capoulas Santos on the European rural development fund. We created this programme just two years ago and it actually came into operation just last year. The applicants have begun to draw up their projects and to learn the rules of the fund. Now, after just one year, we are changing these rules. I cannot support such a step, because it will bring only losses and delays in financing projects needed by rural areas. Such a frequent change of rules cannot bring any benefit and therefore I have voted against it.

- Reports: Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (A6-0402/2008), (A6-0401/2008), (A6-0390/2008), (A6-0377/2008)

Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, this is a very important subject. Assessment of the common agricultural policy shows that it will make sense in the future if it is based on fair principles. The common agricultural policy should, above all, ensure food security for Europe, self-sufficiency and production of food for export, economic security for farming families, profitability of agricultural production, equal subsidies for farmers from old and new Member States, safety of the environment, preservation of biodiversity, putting a stop to the cultivation and farming of genetically modified organisms throughout the whole of the European Union, developing rural areas, ensuring the advancement of the most deprived regions, protection of cultural heritage and preservation of traditional culture, and equal access for inhabitants of rural areas to education, culture and technical developments. These goals can be achieved only if we learn the right lessons from our existing experience and reach for courageous solutions.

Written explanations of vote

Recommendation for second reading: Karin Scheele (A6-0425/2008)

Šarūnas Birutis (ALDE), in writing. –? (LT) The European Environment and Health Action Plan 2004-2010 recognises the necessity to improve the quality, ability to compare and accessibility of data on health conditions and disorders linked to the environment by using the Community statistical programme. I believe that this is a very important regulation. We must know our society's perception of health, its susceptibility to different

illnesses. This regulation establishes a joint system for organising Community statistics on society's health and workers' health and safety.

It is very important that the data is collected in the European Union on citizens' perception of health, physical and mental activities and disability, about cases of illnesses which are increasing or decreasing, about injuries, damage done by alcohol and drugs, lifestyle and the accessibility of health care institutions.

Statistics will have to include information essential for Community actions in the area of society's health, aimed at supporting national strategies which are developing high quality and stable health care accessible to all.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) This regulation establishes a common framework for a systematic production of Community statistics in public health and health and safety at work. At the moment, statistical information on public health and health and safety at work is collected mainly on a voluntary basis. The adoption of this regulation will formalise the current 'gentlemen's agreement' and guarantee the continuity of data collection as well as the quality and comparability of data.

At first reading in 2007, the European Parliament adopted 12 amendments to the Commission proposal. Most of the amendments dealt with horizontal issues, like the inclusion of gender and age in the breakdown variables and the use of additional and complementary financing provided by certain Community programmes in the two areas covered by the regulation. Some amendments were adopted to the annexes dealing exclusively either with public health or health and safety at work, such as the collection of data on protection against pandemics and transmissible diseases.

In subsequent negotiations with the Slovenian Presidency, almost all amendments adopted by the European Parliament were agreed to be incorporated in the common position. The Council also made some other changes to the text but, in broad terms, these changes were acceptable.

Duarte Freitas (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) This regulation establishes a common framework for a systematic production of Community statistics in public health and health and safety at work.

The statistics should take the form of a harmonised and common data set and should be produced by Eurostat together with the national statistical institutes and other national authorities responsible for the provision of official statistics.

At the moment, statistical information on public health and health and safety at work is collected mainly on a voluntary basis.

I agree with the proposed regulation because it aims to consolidate the progress made in regular data collection in the two areas in question, by formalising the current informal agreement between the Member States, guaranteeing the continuity of data collection and establishing a regulatory framework for improving the quality and comparability of data through common methodologies. It will certainly ensure greater clarity in terms of planning, sustainability and stability of European requirements for statistics on public health and health and safety at work.

Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE), in writing. – At present there are no harmonised standards with regard to Community statistics on public health and health and safety at work. The harmonisation of such statistics will hugely improve comparability and enhance policy development. The common position on the whole accepts the amendments forwarded by this House at first reading and accordingly I was able to support the Scheele report.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), in writing. – (DE) The stress of modern working life with its new types of employment contracts, job uncertainty and poor work-life balance is leaving its mark. Statistics show that mental health problems are currently one of the main causes of an early exit from working life. Job uncertainty is, of course, accompanied by an increase in cases of bullying. Health problems, such as back pain, are also constantly growing. In addition, in recent years, the number of cases in which employees have been dismissed while on sick leave or following an accident at work has risen. We have many problems that we need to confront and we need statistical data in order to keep up with the latest developments. For this reason, I have voted in favour of the Scheele report.

Dumitru Oprea (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) It is obvious that we need Community statistics for public health and for health and safety at work in order to provide support for the strategies which are aimed at developing high-quality medical care, which is viable and accessible to all.

Health and safety at work is an area which promotes the protection of workers' lives, integrity and health, and creates working conditions which will ensure their physical, psychological and social well-being. In order to do this, we need a coherent, sustained programme which will protect employees against the risks of accidents and work-related illnesses.

I support this draft resolution because, at the moment, we do not have a harmonised and common data set capable of proving the quality and comparability of information from the statistical systems in each country. Community statistics on health should be adapted to the progress made and results achieved from the Community measures implemented in the area of public health.

Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE), in writing. – (PL) In today's vote, I voted to accept the recommendation on the Council's common position on the acceptance of the Regulation of the European Parliament and the Council concerning Community statistics on public health and health and safety at work.

It is my view that our health promotion strategy should place a special emphasis on disease prevention and early diagnosis. This strategy will be effective if we provide people with appropriate health care and treatment facilities, and if we reduce differences in access to health care between European Union Member States.

We will not be able to develop a joint health care strategy if the appropriate statistical institutions do not have the relevant data. Consequently, adopting the regulation will represent a step towards better coordination of Community action on health care statistics. Collecting information on pandemics and infectious diseases will undoubtedly contribute to their improved control.

It should also be noted that at present, public health and health care statistics are collected only on a voluntary basis. This being the case, the regulation aims to formalise existing solutions and to ensure continuity of data collection.

The unanimous vote of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety points to the importance and rightness of the report.

- Report: Piia-Noora Kauppi (A6-0400/2008)

Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE), in writing. – I voted in favour of the Kauppi report. Companies throughout Europe should be able to operate in an environment free from excessive burdens. Nevertheless, Member States must be allowed to formulate their own requirements and the principle of subsidiarity should be respected. I am satisfied that the Kauppi report strikes the correct balance.

Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE), in writing. – (PL) I voted in favour of accepting the report on the Parliament and Council Directive concerning information disclosure and translation requirements, intended to reduce excessive administrative burden imposed on certain types of companies.

The proposal has as its objective the elimination from national law of all additional information disclosure requirements which increase business costs.

Under existing regulations, information must be entered in the commercial registers of Member States and published in national official gazettes.

At present, at a time when commercial registers publish information on the Internet, publication in official gazettes does not, in most cases, create added value, simply exposing companies to high costs.

The proposed changes give Member States flexibility in setting additional information disclosure requirements and ensure that companies will be relieved of additional, frequently unnecessary, payments.

- Report: Andreas Schwab (A6-0349/2008)

Šarūnas Birutis (ALDE), in writing. – (LT) The task of statistics is to provide objective and quantitative data, which can be referred to in processes involving the formation of public opinion and decision making. EU and Member State statistics are a direct supporting measure when making political and administrative decisions. Hence, when harmonising EU statistical systems, we must take their importance into account.

The scientific independence of statistical research in Europe must be ensured. In addition, the regulations should not contradict the principle of subsidiarity.

I support the Commission's proposal on the Regulation on European Statistics, which is a legal basis for collecting statistical data at a European level and which reconsiders the legal system in force, according to which the organisation of statistics at a European level is regulated.

Bruno Gollnisch (NI), in writing. – (FR) Voting against a report that initially appears to be technical, since it relates to the generating of Community statistics, may appear absurd. Indeed it is not without interest to have such data to help in making decisions.

However, in spite of the declared intentions, this new regulation leads to the generation of new convoluted statistics, an increase in the statistical burden on national institutes and businesses, whether in terms of red tape or financial costs, contrary to the commitments made on several occasions to simplify and reduce this load.

Moreover, the Europe of Brussels shows on a daily basis what it thinks of the figures that it is supposed to use. I shall only take two examples. Firstly, the limited proposals to support the real economy, which is entering into recession, support which, in any case, will be subjected to the dogmatic primacy of sacrosanct competition, global free trade and the 'stupid' Stability and Growth Pact. Secondly, the denial of the inflation suffered by households since the introduction of euro coins and notes. The price for certain basic commodities has in fact doubled, or even tripled, in 6 years, while the ECB focuses on global and misleading aggregates, and calls for wage moderation.

Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE), in writing. – The collection of data plays a vital role in policy development and decision making. The Commission's proposal in this area will give a firm legal status to data collection and I voted in favour of Mr Schwab's report.

- Report: Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (A6-0402/2008)

Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) On the basis of the report by the Portuguese Member, Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos, I voted in favour of the legislative resolution amending the proposal for a Council regulation establishing common rules for direct support schemes in favour of farmers within the context of the common agricultural policy and establishing certain support schemes in favour of farmers. To exclude any threat to supplies, in the context of balanced and sustainable land management, it is essential to affirm the concept of food safety. I welcome and support the requests to simplify the procedures. I support the Community's crisis management instruments. This vote confirms a favourable change in how agriculture is taken into account in Community policies. However, the problem of the future of farming has not been solved: this will be the electoral debate in 2009 and in the political negotiations that will open immediately following the elections.

Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing. – (IT) I confirm that I voted for the Capoulas Santos report, but I would like to point to two aspects that may become untenable for farmers in my country. The first relates to milk quotas: the one per cent rise, the product of the compromise reached, is really too small a step and is not enough to satisfy the farmers' legitimate demands.

The other unsatisfactory area is the funding for tobacco. Although I am going against my political group's position here, I am firmly convinced that the aid ought to be extended. A cut in subsidies would, in reality, do nothing to combat smoking, but would have a negative impact on the protection of jobs in a sector with over 500 000 workers in the 27 Member States. I hope for an improvement in the proposal during the course of the steps that will follow today's adoption

Bastiaan Belder (IND/DEM), in writing. – (NL) The CAP 'health check' is an extensive and important area. Whether we like it or not, we indicate the course which agricultural policy should take after 2013. Allow me to mention two aspects in this respect.

Decoupled support allows for more market-oriented, and therefore more competitive and more innovative agriculture, but we should not veer the other way to a fully liberalised agricultural market. We should not throw away the umbrella the minute the sun appears. Intervention mechanisms, insurance cover and so on should be organised in such a way as not to distort the market, and should, at the same time, be a real safety net.

The proposals to channel considerable amounts to the second pillar via modulation do not receive my support. It appears that the funds in the first pillar are spent more wisely than the rural development funds. Moreover, I foresee all kinds of cofinancing problems in relation to a level playing field.

Hanne Dahl (IND/DEM), *in writing*. – (DA) The June Movement has voted against Amendment 208 in the report, as the outbreak of infectious animal diseases is due to insufficient veterinary separation of the animals. The problems arise in connection with the commercial utilisation of animals. It is therefore farmers and their industry that bear the responsibility and the risk associated with the proper handling of the animals to avoid disease.

A draft law on a common economic allocation of costs is a bad idea since, at the end of the day, it will mean that citizens will pay for something they are not responsible for.

Bairbre de Brún (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (GA) The aim of reforming CAP should be to improve policy so that rural life throughout Europe would be more sustainable on a social, economic and environmental level.

The 'health check' measure is a mixture that contains some improvements but which fails in other ways to deal with the challenges ahead of us. Rural life, and farming in particular, is facing many threats at the present time. Young farmers have to leave the land while, at the same time, large landowners are remunerated for leaving valuable agricultural land uncultivated. Biodiversity is under threat as well.

I agree that it should be possible to use the reserve funds for new farmers and for young farmers, and for categories in the areas under greatest disadvantage, such as sheep – which have an important role as regards the preservation of biodiversity. I also support the application for payments to farmers to be brought forward earlier in the year so that farmers would have increased stability. Our rural communities require stability to enable them to plan for the future.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – While I supported the Santos report (A6-0402/2008) on the proposal for a Council regulation establishing common rules for direct support schemes for farmers under the common agricultural policy and establishing certain support schemes for farmers, I am not in favour of the amendment that passed on increasing modulation. It will result in extra funds being transferred from pillar 1 to pillar 2 taking income directly from farmers (particularly small farmers) in countries such as Ireland. Funds will go to schemes which require cofinancing by Member States – a source of funding that is uncertain and cannot be relied on.

Lena Ek (ALDE), *in writing*. – (SV) I chose to vote against the report as it was clearly a step in the wrong direction from the Commission's proposal in a number of areas. One example is the watering down of the changes to direct aid for rural development. The majority agreed to reduce direct aid by only 6% for 2009 and 2010. The Commission had proposed to reduce aid by 7% in 2009 and 9% in 2010. Personally, I would have liked to have seen greater cuts still.

In addition, it raised the threshold at which direct aid is to be switched to rural development aid. Under the original proposal, this switchover would have applied to subsidies from EUR 5 000 per annum and upwards. The majority has now voted to increase that threshold to EUR 10 000. This has the consequence of reducing the proportion of passive agricultural aid converted into active aid for rural development. The money would be better spent on starting up businesses in rural areas rather than producing crops that already reap a good profit.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) Despite improvements made to this report, to which we contributed, not least with the adoption of our proposal to increase the modulation exemption from EUR 5 000 to EUR 10 000, in order to promote greater social justice in the payment of aid to farmers, we regret that other proposals were rejected, even though some received more than 200 votes in favour, such as support for sugar production in the Azores.

We also regret that the proposal of simplified aid for farmers receiving sums of up to EUR 1 000 was not adopted, despite having received 175 votes in favour. This would have been a way of combating the lack of social sensitivity of the Commission proposal, by simplifying the process and cutting red tape, which was actually used as a pretext by the European Commission to propose that aid of less than EUR 250 per year should be ended. This may harm around 90 000 small Portuguese farmers.

As a result, despite our final vote against the report, we continue to defend our proposals as we consider that these are the best way to support Portuguese farmers and our family-based agriculture.

Glyn Ford (PSE), *in writing*. – The European Parliamentary Labour Party had a number of serious concerns regarding this report that will perpetuate and increase distortions within the European Union and on a global level regarding agricultural production. In view of today's vote where a series of amendments were carried

to reinforce and worsen this situation, I was unable, on balance, to vote in favour of either the amended proposal or the draft legislative resolution despite the fact that the report has other detailed elements I support.

Duarte Freitas (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) Despite agreeing with the need to revise the support schemes for farmers, I consider that the Commission's proposals go well beyond what is needed, thereby seriously impacting on the income of farmers who are the guardians of the European rural landscape and of crucial importance to our food sovereignty.

In many ways, the Capoulas Santos report improves the Commission proposal, particularly by giving greater flexibility to Member States in terms of setting minimum thresholds for payments.

I therefore voted in favour of the threshold of EUR 10 000/year for the application of modulation, which will favour many small and medium-sized farmers, and the non-application of higher modulation rates to cooperatives and other legal entities made up of several farmers who, taken in isolation, do not receive more than EUR 100 000, in order to avoid unfairly penalising farmers.

Although the report is not ideal – for example it does not allow the redistributive effect of additional modulation – I am pleased with the final result of the vote in plenary which is why I voted in favour of the legislative resolution.

Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV) The European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, as usual, has chosen a different route from that chosen by the Commission. Instead of reforming the common agricultural policy, the committee wants to increase the subsidies and ensure that taxpayers increase their economic stakes.

The June List absolutely wants to abolish the export refund on agricultural products and has voted in favour of those proposals that recommended this. We believe that the EU is doing great harm abroad by dumping agricultural products in poor countries without paying any attention to the social consequences.

The June List wants to abolish the common agricultural policy and we would observe that it is fortunate that the European Parliament does not have powers of codecision in respect of the EU's agricultural policy. Otherwise, the EU would fall into the trap of protectionism and of heavy subsidies to all the various groups within the agricultural industry.

Jean-Marie Le Pen (NI), in writing. – (FR) Before the great budgetary turning point of 2013, which may signal the end of the CAP through creeping re-nationalisation, Member States are trying to reach agreement on a new reform of the CAP, subsequent to the covert one in 2003.

The declared objective of the Commission is to adapt even further to the market by reducing direct subsidies for environmental and rural development policies.

The reform, unfortunately, is not equal to the challenges facing Europe in the agricultural sphere: feeding nine billion people in 2050, occupying limited agricultural areas, the dependence on prices linked to speculation on agricultural raw materials, and so on.

In this fluctuating and uncertain context, we must defend the exception made for agriculture at the WTO insofar as agriculture and the food processing industry are not businesses like any others, but non-transferable production resulting from the know-how and genius of generations of farmers.

And what if the health check on the CAP were only the first step towards the complete liberalisation of the CAP, with no regulation and no safety net?

We must be vigilant and denounce any liberal drift on this issue, which does not mean failing to act.

Astrid Lulling (PPE-DE), in writing. – (DE) I am not happy with the result of the compromise of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, but I am reasonably satisfied. We have been able to avert the most serious damage which would have been caused to our farmers as a result of the disastrous proposals put forward by the EU Commission, by ensuring that the direct payments are not reduced by 13% between 2009 and 2013. These direct payments, which are essential to our farmers, should only be reduced by 1% in 2009 and 2010 and 2% in 2011 and 2012 at the most.

If this money finds its way into the milk fund, as we have proposed, for example, in order to pay grass premiums to milk producers, the cut in direct income will be less painful. The milk price is falling again, but

not the production costs. For example, the price of fertiliser has risen by 40%. Unfortunately, the Commissioner is once again up in arms against the milk fund.

Even if we do not cut these direct payments to farmers, which amount to up to EUR 5 000 or even up to EUR 10 000 per year, as is being demanded in the amendments which go beyond the compromise proposed by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, this will not have a major impact on farmers in Luxembourg, because only farms managed on a part-time basis fall below the EUR 10 000 threshold. The priority must be to keep the cuts as small as possible, otherwise there will be no future for full-time farmers in Luxembourg, which is unacceptable.

David Martin (PSE), *in writing*. – I support a 2% increase in milk quotas over four years as I believe the 2% will give the smoothest landing ahead of the abolition of the milk quota system in 2015.

Dimitrios Papadimoulis (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (EL) I voted against the report by Capoulas Santos on the new support scheme for farmers under the Common Agricultural Policy, because I consider that the sustainability of agriculture cannot be safeguarded at European level. The agricultural sector does indeed need to be financed in order to safeguard the sustainability of the sector and food security in Europe. However, financing should be provided from the Community budget and should not penalise small and medium-scale producers by adopting, for example, minimum aid limits. On the contrary, the criterion of personal work should be of prime importance for the payment of support and an upper limit on support per holding should be set.

However, the crisis management system proposed by the Commission falls short. It would make more sense to create a public safety fund which is based on Community financing and which is designed to prevent crises and plant diseases and guarantee a minimum income for farmers. Finally, the report contains no proposal for setting up mechanisms to address climate change, which is directly affecting European farmers.

Neil Parish (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – Conservative MEPs voted against this report as it is a step in the wrong direction. We consider it to be essential that the decoupling process initiated in the 2003 Reform be extended to all sectors so as to allow farmers to produce what the market demands and achieve a genuine level playing field. This report resists decoupling and even tries to reverse decisions already taken, notably the inclusion of the tobacco regime in the Single Farm Payment. The report would see production-linked tobacco subsidies extended until 2012 and clearly we cannot accept this.

The report also allows too much flexibility in the use of Article 68 which we fear will distort the market, will allow coupled payments in through the back door and may be challenged at the WTO. Finally, the exemption of the first EUR 10 000 from modulation, combined with a very low level of compulsory EU modulation, will simply not generate sufficient revenue for a strong rural development policy and will hit UK farmers disproportionately.

Luís Queiró (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (PT) The debate on the common agricultural policy (CAP) health check offered an excellent opportunity to launch an in-depth discussion of its reform, which must take place in 2013. To successfully achieve this, we need to proceed with caution, placing the emphasis on both competitiveness and also on the environmental and social dimensions, rural development and food security.

The agreement reached between the main political groups, which was really down to the determination of the rapporteur, Mr Capoulas Santos, already provides some solutions and approaches which it is hoped that the Council will take on board. Although this is not currently an area of codecision, Parliament has worked in this spirit and this fact should be utilised by the governments.

I voted in favour of the package because of the importance of the result achieved in terms of the Community contribution to insurance premiums and the retention of lower subsidies which are extremely important in countries such as Portugal. This is also the case with the balanced solution for modulation in rural development support. In the case of milk quotas, regrettably we have not achieved a balance avoiding potential harm to producers in regions such as the north and centre of Portugal and the Azores.

Carl Schlyter (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – (SV) I am voting in favour of the rejection of this report and in favour of the report being referred back to the committee since it has further weakened the reforms put forward by the Commission, which were already too small in scale and too slow.

Olle Schmidt (ALDE), *in writing*. – (SV) The enormous amount of aid the EU gives to its domestic agriculture is immoral and directly harmful. This aid is to the detriment of global competition, which we know is a

precondition for prosperity, it justifies the reforms that are required in the agricultural sector and it reduces the choice available to us, the consumers.

The proposal that the Commission has produced is important for further measures of liberalisation in line with the reforms of 2003. I cannot, therefore, vote in favour of those of Mr Santos's reports that would, to a large extent, mean the watering down of the Commission's proposal.

Marek Siwiec (PSE), in writing. – Today, an important vote was held. It was important for all farmers in the European Union. However, there are farmers who are not as strong as others because they have not had time to adapt to the agricultural structures of the European Union yet. They used all the capacities they had to build up sustainable agricultural enterprises after they got the chance to do so after 1989.

These farmers are not the big producers that we know from France and Germany; they are still small. But they are extraordinarily important for my country, Poland. We need them if we are to have a rural area where people want to live and work in future. And therefore they need our special support. So I voted today to help small producers, i.e. in Poland, to show that they can count on our and on my support today and in the future.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of the report on support schemes for farmers as part of the CAP. I support the common agricultural policy.

The European Union needs to support farmers by granting direct payments and developing the rural infrastructure. The EU has to invest in agriculture, especially with a global food crisis looming. I supported Amendment 23 which recognises the need to support the sheep sector at Community level, which is in serious decline.

I also feel that Member States should be authorised to use, as a supplement, 5% of their ceilings to support farmers or groups of producers in the form of financial contributions to expenses related to insurance premiums. Particular attention must be given to small farmers, which is why I supported Amendment 211, which introduces a derogation from the additional reduction in direct payments in the case of cooperatives or groups of farmers paid directly and which centralises grants for distribution to their members. I voted in favour of Amendments 114 and 118 which allow Member States to use up to 15% of their national ceilings to grant support to farmers to compensate for the specific disadvantages affecting those in the dairy sector, as well as producers of beef and veal, sheep meat and goat meat.

Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL) The regulations for the application of the CAP 'health check' are a decisive step in the control of agricultural production by monopoly business groups, in the aim of increasing their profits. At the same time, they are paving the way for an all-out attack in 2013 on small- and medium-sized enterprises, which have already been weakened.

Big business is exerting pressure for greater and faster reform of the CAP and for it to be adapted to the rules of the WTO, so that the multinationals can garner even more land, consolidate their sovereignty in the production and marketing of food and strengthen their position in international competition.

The consequences of the CAP are already visible to small- and medium-scale farmers, especially following the decoupling of aid from production in the 2003 reform: the abandonment of farms, the decline in the rural population, grubbing up, the abandonment of the countryside and adverse environmental effects.

They are also visible to workers, who face the unbearable cost of higher prices for foodstuffs and increased risks to public health arising from dangerous substances and dubious raw materials and production methods.

We are radically opposed to the proposed regulations, which reveal the anti-rural character of the CAP. We call on small- and medium-scale farmers to join with the workers in the common fight against the anti-rural policy of the EU and capital.

(Written explanation cut short in application of Rule 163 of the Rules of Procedure)

- Report: Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (A6-0401/2008)

Sylwester Chruszcz (NI), in writing. – (PL) I voted today against the report on the Council Regulation amending the common agricultural policy. It is my view that the Regulation fails to meet the expectations of many producer groups and to reduce the gulf between farmers in the old and the new European Union states. I greatly deplore the fact that most MEPs do not perceive the problems facing European and Polish

agriculture, which does require changes. However, I find the trend of the changes proposed by the European Commission impossible to accept.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE), in writing. – With regard to the Santos report (A6-0401/2008) on the CAP Health Check, I need to clarify that, while I voted for the report, there is one aspect of the CAP, namely subsidies to grow tobacco, that I cannot support, nor have I ever supported. Tobacco is the most heavily subsidised crop per hectare in the EU.

Since the early 1990s, the EU has spent about EUR 1 000 million annually on subsidies to tobacco growers. Despite the effort to reduce these subsidies, tobacco subsidies are still given out to tobacco farmers by the hundreds of millions (EUR 963 million in 2002). This is by far the highest support, compared to other agricultural sectors, creating distorted incentives and high levels of inefficiency. It has been costly, the policy has not worked from a trade point of view, and it has been bad for the EU's reputation, exposing an awkward ambivalence in the EU's health goals. Subsidies should be removed completely from tobacco (but not from tobacco farmers) and switched to support healthy agriculture much quicker than is currently planned.

Lena Ek (ALDE), in writing. – (SV) The Commission's proposal to phase out milk quotas has been watered down by means of a requirement for a review as soon as 2010. What is more, the majority pushed through the establishment of a special milk fund. I believe that this report could have been better if we had managed to get a number of amendments aimed at greater market adaptation, such as a greater increase in the milk quotas, adopted. Unfortunately, none of these amendments were adopted, and I therefore voted against the report.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) We regret that our proposals were rejected. These argued for a different common agricultural policy based on providing support to producing farmers, in order to combat instability in productive sectors due to price variations, and on market regulation mechanisms guaranteeing a dignified income for small and medium-sized farmers, in order to prevent the decline in the rural world and the desertification of many regions.

We also regret that our proposal which aimed to guarantee financing by the European Union of public insurance in the Member States was rejected. The aim was to guarantee farmers a minimum income in certain circumstances such as public disasters like droughts, storms, hail, forest fires or epizootic diseases.

We reject the announcement of the end of the milk quota system, the renationalisation of the common agricultural policy and the continued injustices in the allocation of aid.

The insistence on defending the European Commission's proposals, even with certain amendments, does not provide a firm enough basis to demand a different position from the Council.

Christofer Fjellner (PPE-DE), in writing. – (SV) In its proposal, the European Commission is taking several important steps in the right direction in terms of creating a more competitive agricultural sector through further decoupling of aid and the abolition of compulsory set-aside, export subsidies, milk quotas, production aid and market support. The proposal also means a transfer of money from direct aid for agricultural production to rural development, with the focus on the four prioritised areas of climate change, renewable energy, water management and biodiversity. Since the European Parliament wanted to see fewer reforms and a slower pace of change, we chose to support the Commission's original proposal and to vote against Parliament's changes.

Duarte Freitas (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) Despite agreeing that the modifications recommended by the Commission to the common agricultural policy are necessary, I feel that, with regard to milk quotas, the Commission proposal is very harmful to less competitive European regions which are heavily dependent on the milk sector.

I therefore feel that the dismantling of milk quotas through Regulation (EC) No 248/2008 should not have been started and that this dismantling should not continue as proposed by the Commission and accepted by the rapporteur.

The Capoulas Santos report contains one positive element in that it calls for the preparation of a report in 2010 to analyse the state of the milk market.

As a result, I did not vote against this report because I support the changes to sugar refining in the Azores which will allow this activity to continue in a region without any major economic alternatives.

Elisabeth Jeggle (PPE-DE), in writing. – (DE) In today's vote on the health check for the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), I voted against the report on the milk sector. I am of the opinion that there should be no further increases in the quota without a market analysis. I believe that Parliament's demand to raise the quota by 1% in five stages, as proposed by the Commission, will send out completely the wrong signal.

However, I very much welcome the fact that Parliament has spoken out once again in favour of the milk fund. The funds which will be saved from the agricultural budget and, in particular, in the milk sector, will be an efficient way of relieving the burden on this sector and of restructuring it. In addition, I support the call to the Commission, Parliament and the Council to produce a report on the milk market by 31 December 2010 which will form the basis for the discussion on further measures for controlling milk quotas. I also welcome the fact that the franchise for the modulation has been raised from EUR 5 000 to EUR 10 000 per year. This means that Parliament is in favour of giving further support to small farms, the majority of which can be found in our areas of Baden-Württemberg and Bavaria.

Neil Parish (PPE-DE), in writing. – Conservative MEPs supported amendments allowing for milk quota increases of at least 2% per year before the abolition of the quota regime in 2015 as a means of preparing the ground for a liberalised, market-orientated dairy sector. We did not support those amendments which aimed to constrain quota increases. Ultimately, no significant amendments were adopted in either sense, which means the Commission proposal stood effectively un-amended.

While the 1% annual increases proposed by the Commission are preferable to no increase, we still consider this to be too timid a step. We also reject the report's reluctance to do away with certain coupled payments and market support measures. As a result, we voted against the report overall.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of the report on amending the 'Regulation on modifications to the common agricultural policy'. I supported Amendment 4 which allows dairy quotas to be increased by 2% for 2008-2009 and by 1% for the marketing years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. This will provide the elements required for a suitable evaluation of the market situation in the milk sector. I also supported the fact that in cases where the situation in the milk market for the relevant marketing year will allow this, increases in milk quotas will be possible for the 12 new Member States. Against this background, we need to guarantee that the decision to amend the milk quota is taken in good time, before the start of the marketing year in question (1 April of the relevant year).

- Report: Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (A6-0390/2008)

Andreas Mölzer (NI), in writing. – (DE) The payments from the European Agricultural Fund are intended to provide support for farmers, in order to ensure that the countryside remains in a good agricultural and environmental condition. While strict regulations apply to foods produced in the EU, goods are being imported at give-away prices which are not subject to these regulations. In addition, the milk quotas have been increased and will come to an end altogether in 2015, which will lead to falling milk prices and will leave small farmers in dire straits. Finally, the supermarket chains, such as Hofer, receive EU subsidies and further increase the pressure on domestic farmers, for example, by using milk as a loss leader.

The ones who suffer the most are small farmers in rural areas who are dependent on milk production, but who do not have the opportunity to produce milk on a large scale. Consumers have to pay the increased prices for milk and food, but none of this extra money feeds back to the small producers. However, when prices fall, it is the farmers who feel the effects. This must change, otherwise we will be dependent on food imports because of the huge number of farmers leaving the land. Our farmers rely on subsidies and this is why I have voted in favour of the Capoulas Santos report.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of the report on support for rural development given from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development (EAFRD). I voted in favour of Amendment 24 which specifies the start-up aid for young farmers amounting to EUR 75 000. This may be granted in the form of a single premium, the amount of which will not exceed EUR 50 000, or of an interest subsidy, the capitalised value of which will not exceed EUR 50 000. Where the two forms of aid are combined, the total amount will not be able to exceed EUR 75 000.

I also voted in favour of Amendment 12 which, in order to ensure adequate funding for rural development programmes, maintains that greater flexibility should be introduced to enable the use, within the same Member State, of unspent resources from the Structural Funds for this purpose.

- Report: Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (A6-0377/2008)

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) Of course, it is important that different areas of policy are coordinated with one another, but this should not only be restricted to funding. In the EU, you have the feeling that the right hand does not know what the left hand is doing. We promote the transport of goods all over Europe and then we promote environmental protection measures in order to combat the negative effects of the transport. Another example is the support for tobacco production being put in place at the same time as measures to reduce tobacco consumption.

The same principle applies to rural areas. On the one hand, there are additional subsidy funds and, on the other hand, as a result of the requirements of the Maastricht Treaty and the boundless enthusiasm for privatisation, the infrastructure outside the main centres of population is being dismantled and rural areas are becoming increasingly cut off. If the post office in Austria is privatised as expected, within a decade, the post offices outside the cities will be at least 20 kilometres apart. Rural areas are increasingly becoming the place where the elderly live. The removal of this important point of contact for older people will lead to them becoming more and more isolated, not only elderly people, but also the socially disadvantaged and people with impaired mobility are particularly affected by the infrastructure cuts. I have voted in favour of this report in the hope that it will form the basis for better coordinated strategies in future and will counteract these negative developments.

Dumitru Oprea (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of Mr Capoulas Santos's report. One of the reasons why I voted in favour is because, in a particular way, during periods of crisis, agriculture is one of the areas which need to be given special attention.

In periods like this, consumption generally decreases. This is why investment in agriculture needs to be aimed at reducing operating costs, but without affecting the quality of agricultural produce. I also feel that during the forthcoming period, we should reconsider and determine the real value of agricultural produce. This is because, otherwise, more and more farmers are going to give up farming land in conditions where they will no longer be able to sell their produce at a realistic price. There are frequently cases where the cost of agricultural production does not even cover the investment. On the other hand, let us not forget that in the agricultural sector, we need to identify and use alternative fuels, a strategic area for the whole world.

This report is relevant based on the issues which it raises. Agriculture needs to feature among the EU's priorities.

9. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

(The sitting was suspended at 1.05 p.m. and resumed at 3 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MR MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ

Vice-President

10. Approval of Minutes of previous sitting: see Minutes

11. Conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of highly qualified employment - Single application procedure for residence and work

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

- A6-0432/2008 by Mrs E. Klamt, on behalf of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, on the proposal for a Council directive on the conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of highly qualified employment (COM(2007)0637 - C6-0011/2008 - 2007/0228(CNS));

- A6-0431/2008 by Mr P. Gaubert, on behalf of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, on the proposal for a Council directive on a single application procedure for a single permit for third-country nationals to reside and work in the territory of a Member State and on a common set of rights for third-country workers legally residing in a Member State (COM(2007)0638 - C6-0470/2007 - 2007/0229(CNS)).

The House services tell me that Mrs Klamt's father has died and she is therefore not present. Naturally, we send our condolences to Mrs Klamt and thank Mr Weber for assuming the responsibility of acting as rapporteur in this debate.

Manfred Weber, *rapporteur*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr Vice-President, the reason why I am speaking today has already been mentioned. This is because Mrs Klamt has had a close family bereavement. We would like to convey our condolences to her.

I would like to start by expressing my gratitude on behalf of the rapporteur for the excellent cooperation in this area. As you know, the report has been produced in close cooperation between the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament, as part of the process for increasing collaboration. For this reason, I would like to thank the fellow Members who were involved and also the shadow rapporteurs on the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs. The rapporteur would also like to thank in particular the French Presidency, with which she has had close contact over recent months. However, as a Member of the European Parliament, I would like to emphasise once again that it would have been better if the agreement at the level of the ambassadors had taken place after the deliberations in the European Parliament. This would have been a pleasing indication of the close cooperation.

To come to the point, we are in competition with countries throughout the world for highly qualified workers. With a proportion of 1.72% of the total workforce, the European Union is far behind all its competitors. Australia, Canada, the United States and even Switzerland have a higher proportion of highly qualified workers in their workforces. In the competition for the best and cleverest brains, we in the European Union are starting from an unfavourable position. We all know that this question plays a decisive role in our future and in the ability of our national economies to introduce innovation.

Using eight compromise amendments, Ewa Klamt was able to come to an agreement with the other groups in the Parliament on the essential criteria. The report by Ewa Klamt, which was agreed on by the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, contains the main criteria for the admission of highly qualified workers from third countries. The first aspect is the definition of 'highly qualified workers' and here it is a question of the wages that are paid. The scope of the directive includes, on the one hand, people who have a higher education qualification and, on the other, people who have comparable professional experience covering a period of at least five years. The Commission had initially proposed three years' professional experience. The European Parliament has also gone one step further on the salary criterion. The lower salary limit should be 1.7 times the average gross annual wage. The Council has chosen a factor of 1.5. I would therefore like to emphasise that the European Parliament is calling for a higher-level definition of 'highly qualified workers'.

The next issue is the question of the brain drain, which is an important consideration. How should we approach this challenge? We should not be recruiting highly qualified workers from third countries where they are desperately needed. An application for a Blue Card can be rejected if the brain drain is a genuine problem. However, we must also be honest with ourselves. Although we take the issue of the brain drain seriously, we are competing on a worldwide market and therefore, a time limit on the Blue Card is necessary.

Of course, administrative factors are not the only ones which play an important part in attracting highly qualified workers to Europe. Cultural issues, such as openness to immigration and attracting the best people, are also important. However, we must not disregard the added value which the Blue Card can bring to Europe. For the first time, we have succeeded in creating a standardised admission system covering the whole of Europe. This represents genuine added value.

Tomorrow's vote is also important for us because we have introduced a special amendment which emphasises Community preference. This means that when European workers who are qualified for a specific job are available, they must be given priority over issuing a Blue Card. We should also emphasise that we were all agreed, and we should make sure that the home countries are informed of this, that although we have standardised the procedure, we do not want to lay down any European quotas. In other words, we do not want to specify what the levels of immigration should be. This must, and should, remain under national control. On behalf of the rapporteur, I would once again like to thank everyone involved. I hope that the result tomorrow will be as good as the result we have already achieved in the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs.

Patrick Gaubert, *rapporteur*. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am particularly happy that our legislative debate today is dealing with legal immigration as this enables us to take part in a debate here that

is not focusing on or is no longer focusing on the criminalisation of illegal immigration, but which highlights, rightly, the positive aspects and considerable contribution of legal immigration to our European businesses.

It is important, in the current demographic context, to remind Europeans of the significant contribution of immigration to the economic prosperity and development of the European Union. The latest demographic forecasts in our possession reveal major risks concerning the viability of the pension, health and social security schemes.

Faced with these situations, the European Union has made a clear choice: to promote a common immigration policy encouraging legal, economic immigration, managed efficiently in line with national market requirements. Therefore, we are debating today two far-reaching, pragmatic legislative texts, which are meant to meet the labour requirements clearly defined by our Member States.

By adopting these two texts simultaneously, the European Parliament is sending a clear message of openness, that we must seize upon fully to explain to public opinion, to our fellow citizens, and to third countries the positive things we are doing in terms of immigration. We need not be ashamed of our choices in this matter and we have no need for lessons on this point from third-country leaders who are unable to conduct the appropriate policies to avoid their populations risking their lives to seek better conditions in Europe.

To focus on the directive on the single procedure, for which I am the rapporteur, firstly, the proposal creates a one-stop shop system for third-country nationals who want to reside in a Member State country in order to work there. It provides for a single application procedure that is simpler, shorter and faster, both for the employer and for the migrant, the objective being to reduce the bureaucratic procedures and simplify the administrative actions. This procedure and single permit will also facilitate permit validity checks, both for the administration and for employers.

Secondly, the draft directive will ensure equal treatment for all third-country nationals in a certain number of areas. Recognising the fundamental social and economic rights of immigrants legally present within the territory of the European Union and of new arrivals will help improve their integration and will therefore lead to better social cohesion.

Equal treatment concerns working conditions, health, safety in the workplace, education, vocational training, recognition of qualifications, social security, including health care, the export of pensions paid, access to goods and services and fiscal advantages.

Realistic restrictions are indeed planned, but we shall ensure they are not greater than what is planned in the Blue Card. The interests of immigrants must be taken into account and their rights must be protected. In fact, the figures reveal that the unemployment rate amongst immigrants is higher than that of European Union citizens, that they are often in insecure employment and that mastering the language of the host country remains a significant barrier.

The two texts proposed by the Commission, and I take this opportunity to applaud their common sense, correspond to our idea of immigration policy: a reasonably firm and humane policy. I would also like to thank the Council and the French Presidency for the exceptional and fairly swift efforts made to pave the way for the rapid adoption of these two perfectly complementary texts.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (FR) Mr President, rapporteurs, Manfred Weber and Patrick Gaubert, honourable Members, Vice-President of the Commission, Mr Barrot, Mr Weber, please pass on our condolences and all our sympathy to Mrs Klamt who obviously cannot be with us.

Almost four years ago, in January 2005, the European Commission announced an important debate on the prospects of a proactive European policy on economic migration. It was noted that the resistance and reservations were still numerous and extensive efforts were still needed to reach a consensus on this point. Patrick Gaubert pointed this out. He also reiterated how striking it was to note how opinion has changed since that date. Economic migrations have become the first pillar of the common immigration policy, that Member States have chosen to adopt by approving the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum at the European Council of 16 October.

The European Parliament will vote today in plenary on the first two Community texts that set up common tools on economic migration. The first, the Blue Card, allows access throughout Europe to highly qualified workers and will guarantee a set of rights and administrative facilities.

The second, the single permit, which merges a residence permit and a work permit, will significantly reduce the administrative difficulties for all persons coming to work legally in the European Union and will guarantee them a set of rights throughout the Union.

These two texts demonstrate that the Union is truly committed to promoting legal migration, as the rapporteurs have pointed out, that it wants to make the lives of third-country nationals legally resident on our territory easier, in short that it is not the 'Fortress Europe' that some people would like to see.

I, too, would like to pay tribute to the work carried out by the rapporteurs on these two proposals. Their work has opened the way for very active cooperation – and I am delighted to emphasise this – between the Council and the European Parliament throughout the work.

First of all, I shall deal with the Blue Card issue. Less than a year after the presentation of the Commission's proposal, the Council managed to provide a general approach. This was no easy task given the unanimity rule. The Council took into account, thanks to the excellent cooperation we have had with Mrs Klamt, numerous areas of discussion from the European Parliament, be it the definition of the card beneficiaries, its delivery conditions, the attention paid to the ethical recruitment method and the possibilities for circular migration, as well as the elimination of discrimination based on age or the necessary flexibility regarding card validity.

There is one point on which the positions of the European Parliament and the Council differ considerably and that is the wage criterion question. The Council accepted a lower threshold, with further possible derogations for sectors experiencing shortages, which opens up the advantages of the Blue Card to more people. Given the proposals that have been made, I hope that the European Parliament will be able to accept the position of the Council and thereby broaden the scope of this Blue Card.

This work promises success that will send a triple message to our fellow European citizens, a message about the determination of Europe to organise the possibilities for legal migration, especially for professional purposes. It is really the first text in the context of this specific objective. It is also a message about the responsiveness of European integration, with this symbol that the European Blue Card will become, offering real mobility within Europe for highly qualified third-country nationals and members of their families, in accordance with the powers of each Member State, for the Member States will, of course, retain control of their labour markets. The third message relates to the importance that the Union attaches to enhancing the draw on skills and talents in a world that is now globalised, in accordance with the efforts undertaken to stimulate Europe's competitiveness within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy.

In this way, the European Union reconciles its wish to increase its attractiveness with its faithfulness to commitments to promote the development of the poorest countries. The Council ensured that a whole series of proposals, aimed at preventing and restricting the brain drain, was included in the directive. I should like to state this solemnly here and I shall, of course, return to this in response to the different speeches that I am sure you will make, because I am aware of your entirely legitimate attachment to effective and equal cooperation with countries of origin, in particular African countries.

I now turn to the directive establishing a single permit, which merges the residence permit and the work permit. This is also an important text which makes economic migrations considerably easier, in a context that is legal, transparent, responsive and predictable, while reducing administrative procedures which, too often, hamper the migrations that are necessary to the economic and demographic balance of the Union. Above all, this text creates a common set of rights for all third-country workers who work and reside legally in the European Union.

The initial reception given to this directive did not make it possible to envisage substantial progress in the near future. The work carried out on the Blue Card has, nonetheless, little by little enabled the ground to be cleared in this difficult matter. The Presidency has spared no efforts in making as much progress as possible in finalising this proposal, and has naturally taken the utmost account of the positions of this House.

Work on this text has been stepped up and we are confident that the main elements will be established by the end of December. The proposal will be examined for the first time by the ministers during the 'Justice and Home Affairs' Council session on 27 and 28 November. Quite clearly, a strong signal from the European Parliament regarding the appropriateness and added value of this text will enhance the movement that is starting to take shape and which can pave the way for the final adoption of this directive which, clearly, simplifies migrants' lives.

Jacques Barrot, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, I, too, would like to extend my warmest thanks to the rapporteurs, Mrs Klamt – and I wish to echo the expression of sympathy that Mr Jouyet addressed to her – and, of course, Patrick Gaubert. Their reports are of high quality and I thank the two rapporteurs from the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, Mrs Jeleva and Mr Masiel. I also thank Manfred Weber, who stood in for Mrs Klamt.

The two proposed directives are the first in a series announced by the Commission in 2005 in its action plan on legal migration. They are important not just for the migrants themselves but also for our Member States and their companies. To echo the words of Patrick Gaubert and the speech you have just made, Mr Jouyet, they show the true importance of this pact on immigration and asylum, which the French Presidency saw through to completion, and they prove that this pact is, in fact, balanced and also demonstrates the desire of Europeans to open up to these migratory flows which may be particularly useful and prove to be very positive for the future of our European society.

These two texts, therefore, allow us to show the face of an open European Union, welcoming the citizens of third countries, who may thus legally take up residence and work at whatever level at which they are qualified, and, needless to say, in full enjoyment of their rights. They also prove the European Union's ability to agree on common economic immigration instruments and thus find an appropriate balance between the expectations of a society, the rights of migrants and the needs of their country of origin.

I will begin with the horizontal instrument, the Directive on the single permit and the rights of migrant workers. I am pleased that the broad outlines of the Commission's original proposal have been confirmed, especially in relation to the single procedure, the single permit for citizens of third countries admitted as workers, and the common set of rights for all, for all migrants working legally, whatever the initial reason for their stay.

It is absolutely fundamental to ensure that all citizens of third countries who are working legally should enjoy the same minimum set of rights in all Member States. This, it seems to me, is in line with all the great European principles relating to fundamental rights.

Also Mr Gaubert, your report suggests new or additional features that the Commission can support. I wish to mention three amendments in particular: the amendment to grant a temporary residence permit where there is a delay in the administration's consideration of a request for renewal, the amendments strengthening the procedural rights and, finally, the amendments which provide for the option of applying for the single permit when already residing legally in a Member State.

The Commission understands and also shares the European Parliament's desire to eliminate any restriction in the article providing for equality of treatment and, turning to the Presidency, I obviously hope that, as far as possible, the Council will prove open to all of these amendments.

I now come to the proposed 'European Blue Card' in Mrs Klamt's report, of which Mr Weber reminded us. The aim of the European Blue Card is to make the Union more attractive, to increase its ability to attract highly qualified workers from third countries, so that legal immigration can help to strengthen the competitiveness of our economy, as a complement to the Lisbon Strategy.

The report set before your House supports the Commission on the need and urgency of introducing this common system in Europe. The Commission willingly subscribes to the report's conclusions, therefore, but with some reservations. Firstly, the Commission is certainly favourable to the amendments which make the system more attractive, for example, those aimed at removing any restriction on equality of treatment and access to the labour market after two years as a holder of a Blue Card. Secondly, the inclusion of refugees in the category of legal residents able to benefit from this system. This facility was missing from the initial proposal but we find it valuable from every aspect, be it political, humanitarian or economic.

Finally, the retention of the criterion on professional experience in certain professions. In the new technologies sector, in particular, a person's experience and capabilities are more valuable than any diplomas.

In contrast, the Commission cannot accept the amendment limiting the provision of the Blue Card just to citizens of countries with which the Union has signed agreements. True, this amendment is aimed at reducing the negative effects on developing countries, but the Commission believes that this would lead to an excessively restricted application of the directive. In addition, this would risk discrimination against highly qualified migrants who could then use the national systems, over which neither the Commission, nor your Parliament, exercises any control.

Similarly, you can see my reservations about making the derogation of the right to circular migration an option. Frankly, this is more of a disagreement than a reservation. The option of returning to the country of origin for two years without losing long-term resident status is essential if we wish to allow exchanges of staff between universities and hospitals, for example, or even to encourage the diasporas to make a commitment to developing their countries of origin. This would restrict circular migration which we increasingly want to see developing.

Finally, I will say a few words about the obvious need to take account of the state of the labour market. As Manfred Weber reminded us, we have a Europe whose labour markets are separated and it is up to each State to determine how many immigrants could be allowed in. Obviously, we must also not forget that, in the labour market field, there is the duty to allow in all the European citizens of the other Member States.

To conclude, I turn to the Presidency, to Mr Jean-Pierre Jouyet, and hope that, as far as possible, the ministers meeting in the Council next week can take as much as possible from the amendments of the European Parliament which, certainly, provide added value, and I hope that, before the end of the year, we can show that this Europe, far from turning in on itself, wishes to open up to these migratory flows, in the knowledge that we increasingly wish to move towards concerted management of migratory flows with the countries of immigration.

(Applause)

Danutė Budreikaitė, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Development*. – (LT) With the Blue Card proposal, it is hoped that the qualified workforce will be attracted to the EU and be given conditions to come temporarily but, at the same time, to remain long term. The proposal states that no brain drain will occur, but rather a brain return - circulation. This is hardly likely.

How does the proposal appear in the context of the development cooperation policies?

With the introduction of the Blue Card, developing countries will lose specialists, in whose training the EU also participated, particularly from the most sensitive areas - education and health. The shortage of those specialists, perhaps, will have to be filled by volunteers from our countries.

Furthermore, the United Kingdom, Ireland and Denmark are not participating in the Blue Card with its ethics of not inviting specialists from sensitive sectors in developing countries. In this case, initiatives to support developing countries seem false. Apparently, the interests of business still prevail.

In reality, the Blue Card may cause developing countries great intellectual damage.

Jan Tadeusz Masiel, *draftsman*. – (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, Minister, the Directive on the admission of skilled third-country nationals to the EU is the first valuable step towards a common European Union immigration policy. It is the first serious attempt to restrict illegal immigration and promote legal immigration in Europe.

In preparing the Blue Card scheme, we were torn between the fear of its abuse by third country nationals and the hope that the new arrivals will meet the needs of our labour markets and contribute to the development of our economy. The Blue Card is intended to become Europe's calling card, making it an attractive place to work and live for the skilled workers needed by our small and medium-sized enterprises.

From the point of view of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, which I represent today, it was important to ensure that workers from outside the European Union are not treated less well than our own citizens. For this reason, we needed to make provision for equal pay for equal work, ensure that families could be united and provide access to basic social benefits, so as to achieve rapid and complete integration of the arrivals. In conclusion, may I thank the shadow rapporteurs for their assistance and inform the French Presidency that the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs worked fast to assist it in the achievement of its goals before the end of its term of office.

Rumiana Jeleva, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs*. – (BG) I would like to congratulate Mr Gaubert on his report on the Council Directive on a single permit for third-country nationals to reside and work in the territory of the European Union. I was draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs regarding this directive. As an MEP for Bulgaria, one of the ten Member States which have been subjected to transitional periods, I am strongly opposed to restrictions on free access to the labour market for a considerable part of the European workforce. For this reason, I

welcome the efforts by European institutions to secure equal treatment for everybody who resides and legally works in the European Union.

The purpose of this directive is to act as a horizontal tool, bearing in mind that particular directives are already in effect or are to be adopted. I have in mind the Directives on seasonal workers, workers who are long-term residents and 'EU Blue Cards' which we are discussing today. While formulating our stance, I had the support of colleagues from our parliamentary commission and believe that the texts we have proposed set the rights of third-country workers in a balanced way. I would like to mention here the right to education, the recognition of degrees and certificates, working conditions, access to social security, tax rebates and others. This directive provides a minimum, general selection of rights to third-country workers in relation to work. Consequently, the rights given to them should therefore not exceed the rights guaranteed under particular directives. Namely, it is for this reason that the European Commission's proposal envisages particular conditions for exercising these rights. In the final version of the stance, which was put to the vote by the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, these conditions are, however, lacking. This has put us in a situation where there are blatant discrepancies such as with the 'EU Blue Card' as well as with that guaranteed under other particular directives, including the Directive concerning third-country nationals who are long-term residents of the EU.

Ladies and gentlemen, at this time of financial and economic crisis, it is necessary that we be realistic. As rapporteur for the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, I appeal to you that we take a responsible outlook and vote for a logically sound and consistent document.

Kinga Gál, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (HU) Thank you very much, Mr President, for the floor. Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, in the context of the present migration directive package, today Parliament is debating and tomorrow it will adopt important and long-term reports.

Currently, there are 27 different systems within the European Union for regulating the status of third-country nationals. The two new directives guarantee a simpler procedure for highly qualified workers, and include the possibility for a simpler system of entry and residence. We can see that these two directives can introduce an effective compromise system in place of today's fragmented regulations.

The rapporteurs for the European People's Party have done serious and important work in this regard. The report on the employment of highly qualified workers, which has come to be known as the 'Blue Card' report, is a good, balanced report. Rapporteur Ewa Klamt deserves special praise. We likewise congratulate Mr Gaubert for his report.

At the same time, the People's Party is committed to making sure that the clause regarding preferential treatment for EU nationals is an important part of the Directive. I therefore wish to draw the attention of those fellow Members who object to the principle of preferential treatment and who propose amendments seeking to remove the establishment of this principle from the report to the fact that, as a Hungarian citizen and in the name of the citizens of all the new Member States, I consider it unacceptable not to establish firmly the principle that workers from Member States are given preference over workers from third countries.

This approach is particularly unacceptable and reflective of hypocrisy when we, as nationals of the new Member States are still – to this day and for who knows how much longer – discriminated against in numerous old Member States when it comes to access to the labour market. It is shameful that Europe speaks of our Union in such a way that it still treats the citizens of the new Member States as second-class citizens in this regard. Thank you for your attention.

Javier Moreno Sánchez, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, I would ask that my initial words are not taken into account by the infernal time machine as they are intended to add to the message of condolence conveyed by this House to Mrs Klamt and, in particular, to congratulate the rapporteurs.

I will now start. I congratulate the rapporteurs because, with these two proposals, we are taking a qualitative step towards a common immigration policy and we are promoting legal migration which is a key element of our global approach.

The common set of rights and the single residence and work permit for legal migrants must be extended to the highest possible number of workers. As a result, we socialists ask that no category of workers is excluded.

The 'Blue Card' offers an opportunity for migrants to settle with their families and work in our countries. It opens a single door to 27 labour markets. However, it cannot be solely highly qualified workers who enter

through this door. Commissioner, we therefore expect the Commission to shortly present its proposals on other labour categories.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must avoid a brain drain. This Blue Card must not become a passport encouraging vital human resources to leave developing countries. For every qualified professional who comes to Europe, the PSE Group wants us to fund the training of a new professional in the country of origin.

Finally, Europe must be an attractive destination, not only for talent coming from outside the Union, but also for our own European talent. In 2007, nearly 300 000 highly qualified Europeans left to work outside the Union. We must do everything we can to keep them in the European house.

Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, it seems as though Conservatives and Socialists are hand in glove with each other on the Blue Card, leaving my group lost in amazement, to be honest. For a while now, the EU has been trying to come up with a comprehensive package on migration, including measures to tackle illegal migration as well as measures to push Europe's forward-looking strategy on legal migration.

You might remember the very emotional debate on the Return Directive. At the time, the ALDE Group said that the return policy could not be looked upon in an isolated way: it should be seen as an integral part – a necessary part – of a total package for migration, which is still very true. Today, we finally have the chance to give a strong message on the need for better opportunities for legal migration, to address the demands of businesses in urgent need of qualified workers.

The fact that we could not expect too much from the EPP on legal migration is unfortunate but could, in a way, be foreseen. The fact that the PSE is, broadly speaking, happily in line with the EPP on the Blue Card amendments makes my hair stand on end. Following the vote in the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, the scheme has been watered down significantly. Far too many restrictions have been introduced, which do not help in any way when trying to make the EU more attractive to highly qualified workers.

It must be clear that the intention of the Blue Card is to increase the competitiveness of the EU economy. The Blue Card proposal is not an easy attempt to take the best and leave the rest, thereby creating a brain drain from developing countries.

The current trend is that the vast majority of the highly qualified workers emigrate to the US, Canada or Australia instead of the EU. If we want to reverse this trend, we have to be ambitious. This House is about to adopt a report that would weaken an already very modest Commission proposal even further. To be clear, the ALDE Group is a very strong supporter of the Blue Card. However, we feel that the current text does not bring about the much-needed change for legal migration but that it confirms Member States' protectionist practices instead.

We all know that the Council has been excellent in making ambitious statements, but we also know that, too often, effective decision making is constrained by the inability of the Member States to really work together in their mutual interest, and that effective decision making in this field is being undermined by a very emotional and muddled debate on legal migration, owing to a lack of focus.

The Tampere Programme, the Hague Programme, the French immigration pact, the Stockholm Programme coming up – at the end of the day, it all comes down to the transposition of these basic commitments into concrete and effective measures. If we want the EU to benefit from the proposed scheme, we have to be ambitious and therefore I hope you will vote accordingly tomorrow.

Bogusław Rogalski, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Mr President, the available data alerts us to the fact that the European Union is not a location commonly chosen by skilled third-country workers, unlike countries such as the United States, Canada or Australia. For instance, only 5.5% of skilled migrants from the Maghreb countries come to the EU, whereas United States and Canada accept approximately 54%. This is due to the huge differentiation of the migrant reception systems in the EU, which greatly hampers movement between countries. Only six Member States have special skilled migrant employment programmes.

It is therefore vital to introduce a more coherent approach by Member States to the European migration policy, incorporating integration and political issues. We must standardise regulations, so as to be able to control migrant flows both into and inside Europe, and thus give skilled migrants a better chance.

Jean Lambert, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Mr President, I would like to thank the rapporteurs for their positive approach on these partial – but very long-awaited – more positive measures on migration and the position of third-country nationals within the European Union. I welcome, too, the Commission's more positive view of certain of Parliament's amendments.

The starting point for my group, the Greens, has been to have rights which are as equivalent as possible to those of EU nationals – a common set of rights – and for the system to be as open and as welcoming as possible. I thoroughly agree with Members who have said that it is a scandal that EU nationals are not, at present, treated on an equal basis, but I would urge Members not to share the cautious approach of our Member States in giving our own nationals equal treatment by penalising third-country nationals.

There is absolutely no doubt that the EU has a need for workers at a variety of skill levels. We want people who want to come to use and develop their skills from a wide variety of countries – India, New Zealand, Ghana, China, wherever – and that is why we will not be supporting Amendment 84, nor indeed Amendment 24, which talks about granting Blue Cards only to those highly qualified migrants from countries with which we have previously concluded partnerships. I am not sure what the United States would say about that.

It is true that we need to be careful regarding certain sectors in the world's poorest countries, but we also need to be careful that these are not the only people who cannot develop their skills in the European Union. We also need to take care that we are not using this particular proposal in order to write a general development policy. This is a global proposal. It covers all potential countries in the world. Yes, we also need to maximise the skills in our own Member States, and that is why we support the amendment recalling, for example, the anti-discrimination legislation, which we also hope will be ambitious in its next stage.

So we will support all amendments which safeguard the rights of individuals and we will vote against those which try to delete those rights. We welcome the efforts to simplify procedures, but we too regret that Parliament has not been more ambitious, especially on the Blue Card, and that it has, in fact, put further hurdles in the way. So it is unlikely that we will be supporting that proposal as it is, although we certainly support the idea in principle.

Giusto Catania, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of my group, I would also like to express my condolences to Mrs Klamt.

I would like to immediately examine the substance of today's debate, since the European Union is continuing to adopt a schizophrenic policy with regard to immigration. This is happening in the Member States' policies: they have signed the pact on immigration and asylum, which expressly states that zero immigration is harmful and unrealistic for the European Union, but then we discover that my country's minister of home affairs is advocating the closure of the borders for the next two years.

Community policy on immigration continues to be schizophrenic. Mr Gaubert is right in saying that we are facing a demographic crisis in Europe and that we need more immigration. The Commission has explained it to us: we need 50 million immigrants by 2060, but we are doing nothing to encourage them to come, and instead we have made it a priority to harmonise the return policy.

Today, we are debating a single residence and work permit exclusively for those who are already in European Union territory and we are creating the Blue Card for highly qualified workers, which will have an impact of only between 1.5% and 3% on the immigration rate in Europe, and thus will play a minimal role as compared to our real requirements for workers in Europe.

Currently, there are approximately 6 million unauthorised workers in the European Union who have already been absorbed into the labour market and who are kept in unauthorised positions because, clearly, such a situation is convenient in keeping down labour costs and cutting down on social welfare protection.

We think that we ought to start with a regularisation programme for these workers who have already been absorbed into the labour market: we think that the Blue Card is a mistake, in making a selection upstream of immigration; we think that the definition of highly qualified workers is too restrictive and we think that Community preference is a form of outright discrimination.

We believe that there ought to be a complete change in direction for immigration policy. We know how to read the fact that the Blue Card is the first signal in opening up legal immigration channels, but this is not enough to ensure that our group will vote in favour.

Johannes Blokland, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (NL) Mr President, Member States should continue to decide for themselves about the right of entry of migrants to their territories, and as long as there are people without jobs in our Member States, I continue to be doubtful as to the need for stimulating legal immigration.

The Commission proposal, contrary to what is being suggested, does not bring a simple procedure any closer. Alongside the Commission proposal, national regulations remain in force for migrants with sound qualifications, and additional requirements are possible. What value then does a European regulation add? This does not answer the question of educational establishments and industry. They want an unambiguous system for workers and students from outside the European Union, and this is set to create additional red tape, while less was promised. I should like to call for a system whereby immigration policy is left with the Member States. In that way, every Member State can have its own clear set of procedures. In an EU context, we can then agree on whether people are allowed to travel freely and to move to other countries.

Carl Lang (NI). – (FR) Mr President, Mr Jouyet, Commissioner, I thank you most sincerely. Through your points of view, you have just provided me with the arguments for my next electoral campaigns, relative to this question of immigration, since you yourselves speak of – and I quote – ‘an open European Union, opening up to migratory flows, the advantages of the Blue Card opened up to as many people as possible, attracting skills, not hindering immigration’.

See nothing, hear nothing, know nothing – that could be the motto of the European institutions regarding the immigration question, while the people of Europe have been suffering daily for 20 years in relation to this question, with all the social and economic consequences in terms of identity, security, job insecurity, poverty and unemployment.

I hear references to the rights of immigrants, but who mentions the social rights of the workers? Who speaks of those who, in their millions and tens of millions in Europe, are in a difficult social situation, who do not access employment at any level of hierarchy or qualifications?

Furthermore, the integration policy conducted in Europe is a true national disintegration policy, of which we have fallen foul through excessive Communitisation. The Blue Card that you are proposing is nothing but an indraught to the entire world to attract millions of new immigrants, whereas it is not this policy that needs to be pursued, but a policy for returning immigrants to their countries, a policy of national and Community preference, a policy of national and Community protection.

Finally, by plundering the elites in the developing world, you are going to prevent the economic development of these countries. These peoples and these countries need capital and skilled workers. You are depriving them of both.

Carlos Coelho (PPE-DE). – (PT) Mr President, Mr Jouyet, Mr Barrot, ladies and gentlemen, unlike the previous speaker, I am clearly against Fortress Europe and therefore support active policies to admit economic migrants.

The only way to have a balanced immigration policy is to be firm in combating illegal immigration and to boldly regulate legal migration. In this context, we approve the Directive on the ‘Blue Card’.

However, we do not want to limit migration solely to highly qualified people, thereby shutting the door on all other migrant workers with fewer qualifications. Over the next few years, both categories will be essential to the economic and social development of Europe. In this respect, we are talking about millions of people.

For this reason, I also support the proposal for a directive which aims to establish a single application procedure for a single residence and work permit. In addition to offering clear benefits in terms of simplification, cutting red tape and facilitating control of their status, it allows a single common set of rights to be recognised to migrant workers legally residing in the Union territory. With the exception of seasonal and highly qualified workers who will be covered by specific directives, all migrants will benefit from a set of labour rights equivalent to those enjoyed by nationals of the host Member State.

This equal treatment throughout the Community area should help to combat situations of labour exploitation and improve integration of these workers, thereby leading to better social cohesion.

I agree with what Ewa Klamt has said: it is useful to create a common system for the admission of highly qualified workers, instead of having 27 different systems. I agree with the proposals made by Mrs Klamt in terms of tightening up the admission conditions, at the same time as improving prevention of the brain drain.

While applauding the efforts of Mrs Klamt and Mr Gaubert, I should like to end, Mr President, by regretting that, once again, the opinion of this Parliament does not seem to particularly count. Everything indicates that a political decision has already been taken by the Council without waiting for the vote in Parliament, which I regret.

Wolfgang Kreissl-Dörfler, (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, first of all I would like to express my deepest condolences to Mrs Klamt and to congratulate her on this report.

We need highly qualified workers from third countries on our labour markets, partly because we have invested too little in education and training and have made too many skilled workers unemployed, who are now no longer available on the labour market. Therefore, we must do more for education and training at home and we must also open up our labour markets to highly qualified immigrants.

The Blue Card is the first step in the right direction and represents a possible triple win situation. Firstly, in the medium term, companies can fill some of their vacancies with skilled workers and benefit from new international expertise. Secondly, the highly qualified workers and the members of their immediate families can gain a different perspective which they may not have experienced in their home country. Thirdly, when they return, either temporarily or permanently, to their country of origin, they can make a significant contribution to economic growth there.

The concern that this may lead to a brain drain is well-founded. Therefore, we recommend not actively advertising in the education and health sectors, in particular in those countries which have been hit by emigration and the lack of skilled and unskilled workers. However, this is question of development policy which we will not be able to resolve here. In addition, we must remember that individual citizens are not owned by states. Just as our citizens are able to look for work in other countries or leave their country of origin without facing major obstacles, it should be possible for people from other countries to work in the EU.

The principle of equal pay for equal work is, of course, important to us. It is true that things can always be improved and improvements are necessary. However, I believe this to be the first step in the right direction.

IN THE CHAIR: MR McMILLAN-SCOTT

Vice-President

Gérard Deprez (ALDE). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I should like to express, like many others, my congratulations to our two rapporteurs, Mrs Klamt, to whom I present the condolences of my group, and Patrick Gaubert.

However, Mr Jouyet, I should also like to include the French Presidency in this because, regarding the Blue Card at least, the French Presidency has demonstrated a high level of commitment which has enabled a political agreement to be obtained at Council level. I might add that I do not think there was the same resolve on Mr Gaubert's report.

As fellow Members have pointed out, the European Union is taking, with these two reports, an important step in its migratory policy. We all know, and we have often regretted this over the last few years, that most of our time and resources have been spent in combating, necessarily, illegal immigration. Today, however, with these two texts, the European Union is sanctioning the need and importance of an active legal economic immigration policy. We all know that legal economic immigration is a necessity for the European continent, and it is not the obscurantism of a few fascists that is likely to make us change our opinion.

By introducing the obligation for Member States to grant a single residence and work permit, Patrick Gaubert's report also aims to ensure the right of immigrant workers to equal treatment in as many areas as possible. I should like to send a message to my friend Giusto Catania. Giusto, you made a silly mistake. The single permit does not just apply to workers already within the territory of the European Union. Equal rights also concern those who will come and not only those already here. Therefore, when you criticise something in order to have arguments to reject a report, I am sorry but you really should try to read it correctly.

For its part, Mrs Klamt's report sets out to define the entry conditions for highly qualified nationals on to European soil and this is something we absolutely need. One final remark on this matter, since fellow Members of my group focused on this, is as follows. I share with them a certain number of regrets. The system – I am not talking here of principles –, the system is slightly overcautious, at times too protectionist, but

fundamentally it represents a necessary step forward, and that is why I, personally and as Chairman of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, shall vote in favour of the two reports.

Mario Borghezio (UEN). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, for many years we have been hearing, on the subject of immigration, a series of calls accompanied by schedules, telling us the lovely fairytale of the need – also stated by the UN – for the continuous expansion of the Western economy and, in particular, we have heard European countries claim there is a need for tens or perhaps hundreds of millions of new workers for Europe.

Now, unfortunately for everyone, the financial crisis is squeezing everyone in our country, and even the CGL, which is the biggest trade union, is saying, at least via some of its leaders in the Veneto regions: 'Honestly, our workers are at risk of losing their jobs, and we need to start thinking seriously about their jobs'. The Commission is therefore doing well to repudiate all these lovely fairy-tales of the past and to work on that 3% of immigration that can still be useful, where there can be good grounds for people to enter the EU. Europe certainly still needs qualified immigrants, and they can be useful to us, but there is a huge obstacle in terms of the rights of the immigrants' countries not to have their best brains taken away from them.

This proposal then is, in itself, a good one, but what is missing is its final development, which would be to encourage and facilitate the return of these specialised workers to their countries to protect them from the effects of globalisation.

Hélène Flautre (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, six months after the shameful vote on the 'Return' directive that received so many jeers and criticisms internationally, I very much doubt that the Union will be able, by adopting these two texts on the Blue Card and the single permit, to redeem itself on the international stage. Why? Because it was announced, very pompously, that a genuine European policy on legal migration would be established, and we now find ourselves with a third-rate status for workers, which provides no social support, the loss of the residence permit if they lose their job, limited access to unions and restricted freedom of movement. This is not the hallmark of a great ambition and the Union is far from rivalling the United States or Canada with this Blue Card, assuming moreover that that is itself a laudable objective.

Is it really asking too much to grant genuine social protection guarantees and equal treatment, the same as for national workers? Do we prefer to reduce these workers to a workforce liable to the *corvée*? Would ratifying the UN Convention on the protection of migrant workers and members of their families have guaranteed them too many rights?

Finally, I ask myself – I ask you – what is the logic in wanting to attract migrant workers into the Union while refusing to regularise those persons already working on our territory, who are working legally and doing so with no residence permit? The Union is embarking on a legal migration policy, but under protest, and it is the utilitarian logic and the exceptions to equal rights decided by each Member State that are liable to assert themselves. When are we going to understand – and above all accept – that migration is a chance, an opportunity in terms of human development, in terms of economic and social development, in terms of the development even of countries of the South and in terms of intercultural dialogue, of which we have been making so much this year?

Eva-Britt Svensson (GUE/NGL). – (SV) Mr President, through the likes of Frontex, highly vulnerable people are being turned away from the EU and the Union is building walls that are hard for many people in great need of protection to penetrate. At the same time it is now being proposed, through the 'Blue Card', to grant certain people special access. There would be special access for highly educated workers, with very high requirements in relation to the level of education and professional experience of the person in question, and with a minimum salary that, in Sweden for example, would have to amount to at least SEK 43 000 or EUR 4 300 per month. Ordinary workers or people needing protection need not bother, whereas highly educated people – the very people the developing world needs if its countries are to be able to improve their situations domestically – these people are welcome. I, for one, welcome openness and immigration, but with the prerequisite that no one is discriminated against on the basis of their country of origin or level of education.

Gerard Batten (IND/DEM). – Mr President, the European Union prefers to import yet more migrant labour rather than try to deal with the problem of those Europeans already unemployed in Member States. Successful applicants for the so-called Blue Card work permit, who are allowed to enter one Member State, will be permitted, after 18 months, to move to another Member State. This includes their family and dependants. This is part of the European Union's emergent common immigration policy, in which it will dictate who can and cannot migrate to Member States and on what terms.

Britain claims to have an opt-out from this policy, but the Queen has given royal assent to the Lisbon Treaty, and we face the prospect of its full ratification by the other Member States. If and when the Lisbon Treaty is fully ratified, Britain's opt-out will prove to be worthless and it is almost certain that we will be forced to comply with this directive.

Roberto Fiore (NI). - (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I think that it is a strategic mistake on Europe's part to think that we should import qualified staff from other nations, and from other continents, when it ought to be our institutions, our schools and our universities training highly qualified workers, in accordance with a new strategic approach. Thus, what is missing is an idea of what the future of Europe will be and therefore nobody is thinking of who we will need to call upon over the next ten or fifteen years to lead our high-level factories or facilities.

We should also say that this will certainly involve a lowering of welfare benefits for those doing these jobs in Italy and other European countries. There will be a dumping of salaries, and this is typical of certain immigration policies. Furthermore, at a time of dramatic crisis resulting from the financial collapse, it is impossible to imagine that, in addition to our own unemployed, we will have the problem of the unemployed from outside the EU who will, by force of circumstance, pose a problem to civil order and the security of our peoples.

Dumitru Oprea (PPE-DE). - (RO) 'We are not Fortress Europe,' said Mr Jouyet. This is indeed the case, as the two reports we have had this afternoon provide evidence of Europe's openness and that it accepts and supports the process of globalisation. I think that this European work permit will resolve the whole range of problems linked to illegal immigration which Europe is facing. The US has demonstrated this with the Green Card scheme it launched in the past.

Europe needs to prove that it is in favour of openness, all the more so as, according to the report, only 5.5% of immigrants headed for the European Union, while 50% of highly qualified immigrants headed for the US or Canada. Why are we not an attractive destination? Why is there a large discrepancy between the salaries here and those in the US and Canada, making the lack of attractiveness even more glaring?

In the context of the current crisis, it is a gesture of fair play, a normal gesture, on Europe's part, which needs to be balanced with being open to third-country workers. However, this policy on European cards needs to be implemented in a logical manner so that it does not cause any serious imbalance or trigger major problems in the countries where the specialists originally come from.

Claudio Fava (PSE). - (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, our group is fairly satisfied with these two proposals. The fact that we are fairly, not completely, satisfied is demonstrated by the number of amendments by means of which we have tried to help to improve these texts. We are also only fairly satisfied because there has been a lack of ambition; we believe that more could have been done, and that it could have been done better.

There are signs of opening up and of a civilised attitude, which are quickly followed, even at times in the debate within this Parliament, by signs of rigidity, particularly from the Council, and of considerable protectionism. This also applies to the Blue Card: there is resistance on some central principles, such as 'equal pay for equal work', which is a sacrosanct, natural principle. Even on this, however, we have encountered certain areas of difficulty.

We believe that it is vital to overcome the principle of Community preference, to overcome the idea that there is a two-speed Europe, which is the reason why it is necessary to make use of the principle of Community preference. We believe that reference to the labour market is important, but the labour market cannot be the only governing principle. There are other inclusive principles relating to political and social welfare attitudes that ought to form part of immigration policies. Legal immigration means equal dignity and equal opportunities, or else we are going back to selective, partial and discriminatory immigration. We would like to avoid that.

For this reason too, on behalf of my group, I support the proposal that Mr Moreno has put to the Commission: let us try to design a Blue Card that is not linked solely to the 3% of highly qualified immigrants, but one that seeks to find specific legal instruments with which to open up the market to immigration. Immigration ought to be inclusion. If it becomes selection, then it is no longer a positive policy.

Athanasios Pafilis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, the proposals for a directive and the two reports implement the general immigration policy of the European Union, the aim of which is to secure cheap manpower for European capital in order to increase its profits.

The directive on the granting of a blue residence and work card in the European Union to highly qualified immigrants allows brainpower to be stolen from poorer countries so that European monopolies can acquire a better position in global competition, especially with the United States of America. It does not offer any particular rights or benefits to card holders, because it requires a contract of employment to already be in place. Their salary will also be institutionally lower.

The second directive and report on a standard residence and work permit moves in the same direction. Only those who have secured employment will be able to enter the European Union and obtain a permit. Thus, immigrants are at the mercy of employers. Dismissal will be equivalent to deportation. For illegal immigrants, there is the axe of the European Immigration Pact, with 18 months' detention, deportation and a ban on entry for 5 years.

The overall policy of the European Union legalises the harsh and savage exploitation of immigrants and workers as a whole in the European Union.

We support the fight by immigrants for equal employment and social rights, the fight to defend and extend workers' rights throughout the European Union.

Hélène Goudin (IND/DEM). – (SV) One of the arguments that is put forward for why the EU is not an attractive immigration destination for qualified workers is the fact that there are different entry and residence rules in the different Member States. The explanatory statement to this report goes on to say that the differing rules in the Member States actually give rise to competition between the Member States. This is said to be a bad thing. I would like to say that it is exactly that fact – the fact that the system has not been forced into the straight-jacket of a single format without various solutions being allowed to compete – that has made Europe successful.

We can see that certain countries have been more successful. Sweden, for example, is one of them. Sweden has invested in education and language teaching, amongst other things, which has made Sweden one of the most competitive countries, with companies such as Ericsson, Volvo and Ikea. The problem of a lack of competitiveness in many of the Member States relates, rather, to the fact that the Union is shot through with protectionism and subsidies for industries that are far from competitive. We have gone in for life support rather than focussing on structural changes.

Luca Romagnoli (NI). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, here is another absurd initiative from the EU: introducing a Blue Card that will promote the entry of immigrant workers, incorrectly referred to as highly qualified.

According to the rapporteur, this will help to tackle the falling demographic trend. She says: 'in Germany, for example, there is a need for 95 000 engineers'; if they were well paid, I am sure that we could send several thousand from Italy. This absurd initiative not only uproots qualified staff from developing countries, but ignores the unemployment suffered in Europe by qualified persons, and the justified fears of our young degree and certificate holders, and instead of promoting their entrance into a profession, boosting their capacities for study and research, and ensuring that they have futures that include work and professional qualifications, we are introducing a further cause for doubt, competition and undoubted exploitation.

The line between foolishness and crime in human action is often a grey one, and it seems to me that the EU is today giving us another example of that.

Simon Busuttil (PPE-DE). – (MT) I welcome the report by Ewa Klamt and Patrick Gaubert on the Blue Card and single application procedure. This is the first time that we are opening a window, so to speak, on legal migration policy. These reports are therefore very relevant, because through them we can build up future policies on this extremely important issue. Furthermore, for the first time, this gives immigrants a legal means by which to enter European Union territory, in order to be able to work amongst us.

However, we must place this within the context of our clear policy. As I understand it, the immigration policy that we must align ourselves to has to be based on the rights of the European Union's Member States to retain full control over the number of workers who are granted right of entry. As was previously mentioned, we must adhere to the principle of Community preference, whereby European Union citizens are given preference over non-European Union citizens.

On this basis, I believe that not only can we develop a policy on legal migration that deals with the granting of the Blue Card to highly qualified workers, but that down the line, we can begin work on other proposals that I know the Commission will put forward in the coming months, and which concern the possibility of employment for less qualified workers.

Our discussions today must also be seen in light of our policies on illegal and not legal immigration. I say this because if we fail to be credible on our immigration policy, we cannot expect our citizens to trust us to open up our markets to legal migration. I believe the two go hand in hand and should work in parallel with one another, otherwise we will not be able to move forward. In the area of illegal immigration policy, there are a number of issues pending that we still have to consider, such as the law on sanctions against employers who illegally employ third country citizens or, effectively, illegal immigrants. We need to work upon this law if we want to properly penalise these employers, as this will, in addition, serve as a deterrent to the influx of illegal immigrants.

There is another proposal that the European Commission has already announced it will be putting forward in the coming weeks. This regards the revision of the Dublin law on the responsibility countries must assume when processing asylum applications by immigrants who have already entered their territory. We eagerly await the tabling of this proposal.

To conclude, it would be worth noting that, had the Lisbon Treaty been in force today, the legal basis of these proposals would be different to what we have now. The Lisbon Treaty would have breathed new impetus into the European Union so as to come up with a solution in the area of immigration. I believe that those who oppose the Lisbon Treaty have no reason to be pleased with the fact that today's current European policy on immigration is not as strong as it should be.

Martine Roure (PSE). – (FR) Mr President, at European level, we need to equip ourselves with effective immigration tools, and our world requires protection methods to provide help at an early stage to those who are suffering.

The international community, in general, and Europe, in particular, are unfortunately unprepared, despite living in a century which, with globalisation, will inevitably be one of population movements. We absolutely must consider this reality in all our outlooks.

As for the Blue Card, we must be able to welcome migrant workers, while making sure we do not pillage countries by holding on to the players needed for their development. This is why we want to help in the training of highly qualified workers in key sectors, in their countries of origin, and we must promote circular migration.

I want to end my brief speech by reminding you that we need European solidarity to be extended to the developing countries. If we are to talk in terms of feasibility – the ability to react to the current financial crisis attests to this –, if we have the political will, we have the material resources.

Hubert Pirker (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, representatives of the Council, the discussions among the fellow Members are clearly polarised. The Right is afraid of illegal immigration on a huge scale. Mr Romagnoli is no longer here to take the discussion further. The Left is concerned that illegal immigrants will not be able to find employment. We do not want either of these things, in other words, neither illegal immigration on a huge scale, nor the employment of illegal immigrants which will give them legal status. What we really want to achieve with the Blue Card is a step towards the controlled immigration of highly qualified workers into individual Member States of the European Union.

The Blue Card and the standardised residence and work permit regulations represent precisely the tool which will allow Member States to react and to bring highly qualified workers into the country just when they need them. We are also putting in place standardised rules for issuing the Blue Card and for monitoring it throughout Europe. I am pleased that the Council has included my proposal in the implementing rules to label the Blue Card with the symbol of the state which issued the card and to which the work and residence permits apply. This means that for Austria, there will be a red, white and red Blue Card and the other states will have a similar solution.

I believe that the incentive which allows people to start working in another Member State after three years, provided that the requirements have been met and that a need has been identified, is a positive move. Another important rule is that the Blue Card will expire when there is obviously no further need for the worker. This becomes clear when the worker has been continuously unemployed for more than six months. At this point,

it is obvious that the worker is no longer needed and the Blue Card then becomes invalid. I would like to propose to the Council that workers are required to register with the national authorities when they become unemployed, otherwise it will not be possible to check whether the six-month period has come to an end.

Finally, I would just like to say that the Blue Card is a tool for the Member States which will allow them to react flexibly. It represents an opportunity for the European Union to become and to remain an attractive business location. It is an incentive for highly qualified workers to move not to the USA, Canada or Australia, but instead to choose the European Union as the place where they will live and work, at least for a certain period of time. I believe that the Blue Card represents a positive step in the direction of controlled immigration based on the requirements, opportunities and needs of the Member States.

Stavros Lambrinidis (PSE). – (EL) Mr President, Mr Vice-President of the Commission, for over a decade now, there has been no substantial debate on how Member States can cooperate in order to make Europe a more attractive destination for the legal immigrants which our communities require and a more humane place for those already living among us.

The recent 'return directive' which, as we know, treats many poor immigrants as common criminals, is indicative of the almost monomaniacal way in which Europe is focusing on a policing approach to immigration policy.

The basic reason for this is as follows: most Member States of the European Union have not yet managed, firstly, to apply effective immigrant integration programmes and, secondly, to persuade a large section of the public that the inevitable increase in multicultural communities is a desirable development which promotes our economic and social growth.

Within this framework, one cannot but welcome the legislative initiatives which we are debating today. This is perhaps the first serious effort to create a common European legal immigration policy, despite the relative timidity of some proposals and despite their problems, some of which we have addressed in amendments such as – as many have quite rightly said – the risk of depriving poor countries of their qualified workers.

At the same time, however, these individual regulations concern a minimum number of what one might call privileged legal immigrants. We now need bold legislative initiatives in order to introduce European rules on legal work and for the millions of others whom our economies and communities need.

Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, Mr Vice-President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, the European Union is still seen as an unattractive place by highly qualified workers from third countries, while unskilled immigrants arrive in their thousands. The European immigration policy therefore needs a broad and consistent general approach to peace and security, European development policy and integration and employment policies.

The legislative proposal is an effort to lay down common criteria for a fast-track immigration procedure for highly qualified immigrants. We need common, uniform definitions for access to 27 labour markets.

Everyone acknowledges the fact that the European Union needs the facility to use skilled manpower from third countries on a long-term basis in order to improve its competitiveness and boost economic growth. However, we need preconditions. As a member of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, I consider the first precondition to be the recognition of the university education of highly qualified persons or three years' experience.

Development policy must guarantee the availability of manpower from third countries. The rapporteur, with whom I commiserate on the unfortunate occurrence, emphasises that immigration for the purpose of highly qualified employment is not a long-term solution to economic and demographic problems, given that, generally speaking, economic immigration affects national labour markets in the Member States.

The principle of subsidiarity must be applied until such time as we have uniform social systems and uniform labour legislation. The European Parliament therefore recommends strict adherence to the principle of Community preference. Member States must determine the numbers of third country immigrants admitted within the framework of their national sovereignty and must also be entitled to set a zero quota.

Blue Cards should only be issued, even if the preconditions are met, at the discretion of each Member State, with European added value in the form of mobility after two years' legal residence in another Member State.

Karin Jöns (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, in order to bring illegal immigration under control, to meet the challenges represented by demographic change, to increase our competitiveness and, at the same time, to ensure a high level of social harmony, we need a joint immigration policy more urgently than ever. This House is in agreement on this point. For this reason, I would like to thank all four rapporteurs for their close cooperation.

However, for my group, a joint immigration policy must include all migrants, otherwise it will fall short of our requirements. This means that the principle of equal treatment must apply to everyone without restrictions, in the case of employees' rights, access to education and access to social security systems. Therefore, I would ask you to vote in favour of my group's amendments tomorrow. The Framework Directive must also apply to seasonal workers, refugees or temporary asylum seekers.

As far as the Blue Card is concerned, I would like to change the outcome of the vote of the committee responsible tomorrow in order to open up the European labour market not only to migrants from countries with which we already have partnership agreements. There must be no restrictions of this kind and it pleases me to hear that the Commission shares this view.

Finally, another word to the Council. In view of the occasion, I urge you to adopt both directives together. If we are serious about equal treatment, we cannot adopt the principles of equal treatment first of all just for highly qualified workers and then later perhaps for other migrants.

Inger Segelström (PSE). – (SV) Mr President, I would like to begin by thanking the rapporteur, Mrs Klamt, and the shadow rapporteurs, for an interesting report. As a Nordic Social Democrat, I had hoped for your backing so that collective agreements, too, would apply to the EU Blue Card. I believe this will be necessary, but I am not particularly alarmed by the fact that it is not to be implemented. Parliament should have taken the lead on this, however.

What is good now is that it is clearly laid down that it is a criminal offence for employers to break the rules and to fail to check whether they are employing illegal workers whilst, at the same time, they may be liable to make up short pay and the like in retrospect. It is also good that the citizens of third countries can go home during the period in question and then return to the EU. This shows that we are taking third countries' concerns about brain drain seriously. I am also satisfied with and support the decision that Member States must take account of national and regional labour markets. This shows that those who are already in our home countries and who are unemployed will be first in line for jobs. This is particularly important in these days of rising unemployment in the wake of the credit crunch, especially, too, when xenophobia represents a threat to democracy in many of our Member States.

Roselyne Lefrançois (PSE). – (FR) Mr President, I should like to begin by thanking the rapporteur and shadow rapporteurs for their spirit of cooperation. This directive is the first major text concerning legal immigration. It aims to promote the arrival on EU soil of highly qualified workers from third-party countries, the great majority of whom, at present, prefer to go to the United States or Canada. Thanks to the Blue Card, these workers will now be able to take advantage of numerous rights for themselves and their families.

Of course, we run the risk of being accused of supporting the idea of selective immigration, but I wish to point out that it is the Council that is systematically opposed to a horizontal directive applicable to all immigrant workers. The Commission therefore had no other option if it was to hope to move forward slightly in the field of legal immigration than to start with highly qualified workers, for whom it knew it would be easier to obtain the agreement of the Member States. Obviously I regret this sectoral approach, but we, in the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, have for so long been denouncing the exclusively repressive nature of European policy regarding immigration and calling for a legal immigration policy worthy of the name that I feel it is important to validate this first step.

Let us not forget that other texts are already in the process of being prepared concerning, for example, seasonal workers and trainees.

Emine Bozkurt (PSE). – (NL) Mr President, an important step has finally been taken. Europe is of one mind when it comes to conditions for a single system for recruiting top people. This is the added value this card offers. This step is a necessary one, even though, in my view, it is just the first one. Once we have gathered some experience with the Blue Card, we must look at subsequent steps in the next term.

We must not forget that we live in turbulent times. There may well be redundancies in the short term as a result of the financial crisis. This is why it is important that the Blue Card system, as described in Mrs Klamt's

report, leaves room for policy from national Member States. The Member States must be able to decide how many migrants with sound qualifications are needed and to set to work in their countries without causing a brain drain in sensitive sectors, such as health care, in the third countries. We should also look ahead though. Europe desperately needs migrants with sound qualifications. This is why the best solution is the simplest possible arrangement for the Blue Card by which actual talents are attracted. I think this solution is included in the present proposal, thanks in part to the amendments by the Socialist Group in the European Parliament. Accordingly, it is important for people who are already residing legally in the EU not to have to return to their home countries first in order to apply for a Blue Card for an EU Member State if they meet the other conditions.

Harald Ettl (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, within the next 20 years, the European Union will need more highly qualified workers from third countries. Other states have been making disproportionate use of the potential in this area for years. The regulations produced by the EU are balanced and are intended to prevent the brain drain from third countries. The requirements at any given time will be determined by the Member States. This all sounds very sensible but, on the other hand, we are currently threatened by recession because of the financial and economic crisis.

Unemployment will increase throughout Europe and some Member States already want to restrict the freedom of movement of workers within the European Union even further. Would it not be more sensible, in a situation in which we are being forced to change our industrial policy because of environmental issues, to invest in more and better training programmes for highly qualified employees who have significant potential for innovation? We must focus all our efforts on this issue instead of poaching top employees from third countries. That alone will not be enough to secure our future in the long term.

Genowefa Grabowska (PSE). – (PL) Mr President, we all remember the labour camps opened in the autumn of 2006 in several European Union Member States. In those camps, illegal immigrants worked in terrible conditions side by side with citizens of European Union Member States.

This situation pushed forward our work on the immigration package, some of which we are discussing today. It seems to me that we are moving in the right direction. The proposal makes for more civilised working conditions and simplifies the rules governing the employment and residence of legal immigrants. As a Polish woman, I would also like to emphasise our solidarity with third country citizens legally residing in the European Union. We must not discriminate against them.

Nor do I think that the Blue Card will threaten the economic interests of the citizens of the new Member States, or constitute competition for them. The fact is that most European labour markets are now open to us, and, as is well known, all transition periods will end before the Blue Card comes into effect.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE-DE). – (LT) Minister, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the world is becoming more and more open, not just Europe. Modern technologies and globalisation make it such and fighting this reality is counterproductive.

I congratulate France which, during its Presidency, took the important initiatives we are discussing today.

The interest of the European Union is clear: we lack, we need workers, as well as highly qualified specialists, because our citizens use their right to leave, live and work elsewhere, somewhere they prefer.

Legal immigration into the EU is a completely acceptable solution to the problem. It is also our response to the challenges of globalisation and the EU aim of becoming more competitive.

I agree that the proposals must be coordinated with each other, coordinated with other legal acts, but there is no doubt that we had to solve these problems and I once again congratulate both rapporteurs and the presiding country.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (PSE). – (RO) The draft resolution which aims to introduce the Blue Card for highly qualified immigrants is intended to attract a highly qualified professional workforce from outside the European Union, offering these immigrants the chance to settle and work legally in the European Union. This initiative is beneficial in the situation where it is anticipated that during the next 20 years, there is a risk that 20 million jobs will remain unfilled.

However, I would like to remind you that Romanian and Bulgarian citizens still face restrictions on the labour market, with fears already that some countries are going to extend the transitional period for another three

years. This is why, against this background, it is vitally important that we do not add to the discrimination against European citizens as well.

Marek Aleksander Czarnecki (ALDE). – (PL) Mr President, demographic changes in the European Union and the ageing population are circumstances causing a demand for skilled workers from outside European Union countries. Economic migration is a challenge which must be met by the European Union in a rapidly globalising world. It is my view that Member States must develop an integrated and coherent approach to European migration policy.

Engineering and computer technology are areas which must be given special attention within the context of development and employment. The adoption of Community regulations is necessary if we are to restrict illegal immigration. I agree with the rapporteur and with the consultant, Mr Masiel, and support the introduction of the European Blue Card scheme for skilled immigrants, intended to facilitate employment of skilled workers from third countries.

Tomáš Zatloukal (PPE-DE). – (CS) The mobility of persons from third countries within the territory of Member States of the European Union presents a major challenge for Europe in a globalised world dominated by tough economic competition. We are adopting common European rules making it possible to manage migrant flows into Europe and to limit illegal migration. It is right to welcome the Commission's suggestion to speed up the reception process for workers and to provide them with better conditions of residence in order to increase the attractiveness of the EU to highly qualified workers from third countries. The deciding factor is not only a rapid reception process for workers, free of bureaucratic obstacles, but common and unified conditions of access for all of the 27 different labour markets. Whilst debating both reports, one must mention that in the EU, barriers to the employment of people from new Member States still exist.

Toomas Savi (ALDE). – Mr President, the European Union Blue Card is a much-appreciated initiative from the position of the developing countries. As the EU Blue Card will be issued by the Member States, one might speculate that a Member State may far too often find, after examination of its labour market, that it is not in a situation which allows the facilitation of foreign labour, or that a Member State's public policy poses some obstacles to the full implementation of the EU Blue Card policy. I am afraid that some Member States may undermine the purpose of the EU Blue Card.

The EU Blue Card has not been created only to satisfy the labour demand of Member States, but also to start 'brain circulation'. In a way it is a supportive measure to the EU development cooperation policy, as the Blue Card workers eventually return to their countries of origin with the experience that is vital for progress.

Nicolae Vlad Popa (PPE-DE). – (RO) I believe that it is extremely important for the European Union to become more attractive to highly qualified workers, especially bearing in mind that the majority of immigrants at the moment are unqualified. These workers need to enjoy favourable conditions, a harmonised system for regulating emigration, and movement from one country to another, as well as salaries which reflect their qualifications.

The European Blue Card must also be seen as a way of discouraging illegal immigration, as part of the agreement for immigration and asylum, as well as part of the solution to the problem of the labour shortage which will affect the European Union in the coming decades.

I would like to focus on the notion that citizens from the new Member States must not be in an inferior position to those from third countries. It is not acceptable for some states to keep their labour market closed to citizens from the new Member States but, on the other hand, offer jobs requiring high qualifications to workers from countries which are not EU members.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Demographic problems and the ageing of the European population are not the only reasons why the Blue Card should be introduced as an instrument controlled by the EU. The enlargement of the EU was followed by a huge outflow of specialists from new Member States. The outflow of skilled workers is today the greatest problem for employers, holding up investment and thus restricting economic development.

If our companies cannot find skilled workers in their domestic markets, they will lose out to Chinese competition. Polish employers want a broader opening up of the labour market. They are willing to employ workers from countries such as Ukraine and Belarus. At the same time, we should remember that all benefits must be consistent within the EU. We must remember that some of those who will come to us under the Blue Card scheme will return home, taking with them the experience they have gained in the EU. We must

work simultaneously to strengthen the education and continued development schemes for specialists needed by the labour markets in our Member States.

Janusz Onyszkiewicz (ALDE). – (PL) Mr President, I should like to draw attention to two dangers which have emerged during the debate and in proposed regulations.

First, the excessive requirements for third country citizens taking up employment here. The requirement of at least two of five years of professional experience being in a managerial position seems to me to be definitely too high. In the case of a nurse or an IT specialist, this is not needed to enable them to play a useful role in our companies.

The other danger is the attempt to set a uniform minimum rate for the workers. This regulation is certain to destroy the basic principle which really should apply, that of equal pay for equal work, since it could result in someone coming to the EU to work earning more than someone who is working here already.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, President-in-Office of the Council. – (FR) Mr President, this rich debate shows the quality of the reports made. I would once again like to thank the rapporteurs and the draftsmen of the opinion, Mr Masiel, Mrs Jeleva and Mrs Panayotopoulos, and say that, indeed, as our debates have shown, this is a great step forward for agreement on legal immigration. Four years ago, no one wanted to hear about community tools. We know that in a few years' time, we will be able to go further.

I also congratulate the Commission, through Mr Barrot, who was able to launch this debate and ensure that our ambitions in this area grew rapidly. Well done to the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs too. Mr Deprez found the right words, balance and the voice of reason; he supports an open Europe and I welcome that. One or two nuances aside, Mrs Roure also wants Europe to be ready for the century of population movements, which is what we are trying to achieve. As Mrs Lefrançois pointed out, these two texts are a start and not an end, and do leave room for circular migrations.

On the question of Community preference as raised by Mrs Grabowska and Mrs Gál, and by Mr Fava and Mr Catania, in particular, I would point out that the Blue Card will not apply until 2011, by which time the transitional measures of the accession treaties will have come to an end, and that it offers a status that is not equivalent to the status of EU citizens. Furthermore, we are ready and wish to include in the text the principle of Community preference enshrined in the accession treaties.

As for the numerous remarks about the brain drain – in particular those of Mr Kreissl-Dörfler and Mr Borghezio, Mrs Budreikaitė, Mr Moreno, Mrs Lambert and Mrs Roure, I believe the European Parliament has expressed its legitimate concerns about including in the Blue Card safeguards to transform the brain drain into a brain gain, and it seems to me that there are three main ways to do this.

First of all, the directive does not, in any way, prevail over European agreements or agreements between certain Member States and the countries of origin, who draw up lists of professions to be excluded from its scope to ensure ethical recruitment in sectors hit by a labour shortage. Secondly, Member States must be offered responsibility in the context of case-by-case examination: they must be able to reject a Blue Card request to ensure ethical recruitment. Finally, the directive must be able to promote the circular migration of highly qualified workers and, of course, emphasise, as has already been pointed out, the requirements for training in the country of origin.

On the other hand, it does not seem to me necessary to prevent issuance of Blue Cards systematically if there is no agreement with the country of origin. As Mr Barrot pointed out, I think that this would create discrimination and transfer the requests to national systems, and that it is therefore preferable to negotiate on a case by case basis.

Concerning the distinction made between highly qualified workers and unskilled workers, a subject mentioned by Mr Busuttil and Mrs Lefrançois, in particular, and by Mrs Lambert, I believe we must move forward by stages. At present, there is unfortunately no consensus on legal migration to act at Community level on all labour market segments. Nonetheless, we are moving forward since there is a single set of rights for all third-party workers in the European Union, and we must start with the highly qualified, seasonal, posted and trainee workers. The Stockholm programme may enable us to make progress.

Contrary to what was stated by Mrs Flautre and other speakers, the rights guaranteed by the Blue Card do not include any restrictions regarding freedom of association or the rights attached to employment, quite the opposite, and this Blue Card will be the only tool allowing migrants to exercise a right to mobility to

undertake qualified professional work in the European Union, which is not possible today via national systems. This is the major advantage of this text.

Also, to answer Mr Pirker regarding the period after which these benefits will cease in the event of unemployment – it is true there is a three month period – the Presidency of the European Union would have liked this period to be longer than what is proposed, but no consensus was reached in this area. Indeed, some Member States even wanted there to be no period at all, which, clearly, was not the wish expressed by the Presidency.

Finally, to answer Mr Fava, recital 16 of the Council text does include the principle of equal treatment in terms of pay for third-country workers and Community nationals for equal work. This is implemented by Article 15(1) of the same text.

Jacques Barrot, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, I am going to confine myself to completing the remarks of Mr Jouyet, that seem to me, this afternoon, to well present our mutual interest in your work. I would like to thank all the speakers and all the rapporteurs, who have done a good job.

I should just like to state again that the draft directive respects Community preference fully. Moreover, this Community preference is enshrined in the European Union accession treaties and the treaties state that if a Member State applies temporary restrictions on the freedom of movement of workers who are nationals of another Member State, it must grant them priority, in terms of access to the labour market, over workers who are third-country nationals. I say this for the benefit of Members from new Member States as this must be emphasised.

Next, I also need in turn to reply to those who are concerned by the risks of a brain drain. I would remind you that the proposal recommends a clause on ethical recruitment in order to restrict and even ban active advertising that might be undertaken by Member States in developing countries, which are already facing a serious brain drain.

In this proposal, there is also the possibility for a Member State to reject Blue Card applications based on ethical recruitment considerations. We have measures intended to make circular migration easier and we have an obligation, for Member States, to provide the Commission with annual statistics on the application of the directive to enable it to monitor the impact of this legislation.

It is true that we must avoid active recruitment in countries suffering from acute shortages, especially in the health sector in Africa, and all this will find its solution in the development of partnerships with the countries of origin.

Thirdly, I obviously want to say that this text will be followed by other proposals from the Commission. In March next year, I shall be presenting a text on legal migration for seasonal workers, paid trainees and employees in plurinational or multinational groups who may be transferred. Here too, as Mrs Lefrançois said, this is a start and we must continue towards a complete framework for legal immigration.

I too, shall just repeat what Mr Jouyet said so well, that there is a very definite desire to treat all these immigrants and new arrivals in the European Union with equal rights which, once again, also reflects the ideal of our European Community.

In any case, I have taken note of many comments and remarks. During the coming months, we shall be having further discussions on these migratory issues. Indeed, I feel that we must get used to dealing with them dispassionately, with great objectivity and with a great sense of justice, while recognising that we also need immigration, but an immigration which, specifically, is covered by a legal framework that is reliable and fair for all.

Manfred Weber, *rapporteur*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr Vice-President of the Commission, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to say first of all that I am happy to convey to Ewa Klamt your best wishes and also your sympathy. I would also like to thank you for the debate and to emphasise three points.

Firstly, I would like to repudiate the nationalistic rhetoric which we have heard in some cases today. This definitely does not represent the opinion of the majority of Members of this House and should be rejected out of hand.

Secondly, I would, of course, like to refer to the question of legal immigration, which we need in order to ensure that our national economies retain their innovative abilities, and to the fight against illegal immigration,

which are two sides of the same coin. The citizens of Europe expect us both to be open to immigration which is useful and legal and also to combat illegal immigration.

Thirdly, this was to be expected when it came to the question of the Blue Card, but I would also like to say that this is a positive first step towards presenting a common image throughout the world. For this reason, I believe that we should take this step together, so that we can move one step further along the way. Let us vote in favour of this legislation tomorrow.

Patrick Gaubert, rapporteur. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I have heard a number of things ... I shall begin by talking about the debate. The debate was quite interesting. I shall not quote anyone, but will say that the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats has no need for lessons where respect for human rights is concerned. The PPE-DE Group is happy that Europe is able to reach agreement on common instruments relative to managing migratory flows, as it is also happy that Europe is not turning in on itself.

We have a migratory policy that is both humane and firm; humane because it rejects the disgraceful living conditions of the illegal immigrants who are living in our countries – we are doing all we can to stop men and women boarding boats and risking their lives – and firm because it condemns the traffickers and rogue bosses.

Concerning the Blue Card and the residence permit single procedure, I say to our friend Mr Catania that we need the elite and the others in our countries. As we are on the subject, the rights of legal immigrants will be the same as those of Community citizens, neither more nor less.

Europe has no need to redeem itself with respect to others insofar as its migratory policies are concerned. Europe does not consider immigrants as crooks or criminals or as a threat to our security or workforce. They are men, women and children, flesh and blood, seeking a better life on our territory, because at home they have nothing.

Our common aim is to help and support them, even if this means encouraging them to stay in their countries. Our migratory policy is dignified, open, perhaps security conscious, but for them, and for us, we can be proud of this policy – as we can take pride tomorrow when voting on these two reports on Europe's migratory policy.

President. – I should like to express my personal condolences to Ms Klamt on the sudden loss of her father last week. I saw her shortly after she had heard the news, so my sympathy goes out to her.

The joint debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 20 November.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Cristian Silviu Buşoi (ALDE), in writing. – (RO) First of all, I welcome both the Commission's initiative and the rapporteur's position as I feel that substantial progress has been made on the migration of highly qualified workers, which is essential to achieving the Lisbon objectives.

However, I believe that the EU needs to be attractive not only to highly qualified workers from third countries, but also to young Europeans. Bearing in mind that the EU's competitiveness is at stake, we do not want to see either a brain drain in favour of the US or Canada to the detriment of the EU. Consequently, the current initiative needs to be consolidated by a policy to encourage young Europeans.

Furthermore, we need to implement this measure with special care and responsibility, taking into account the situation in terms of human resources in certain fields in the countries these migrants originate from, so as not to deepen the human resources crisis further, particularly in the education and health sectors.

Finally, I support Mrs Klamt's position with regard to applying Community preference during the recruitment process and to the idea of giving priority to citizens from the new Member States who are still subject to restrictions concerning access to the labour market. If these restrictions need to be retained, granting priority seems to me to be a minimum condition for ensuring that citizens from these countries do not feel like second-class European citizens.

Corina Creţu (PSE), in writing. – (RO) I would like to draw your attention to certain provisions which may have a discriminatory impact and therefore, I would ask you to consider granting priority to citizens from

the EU's new Member States in terms of access to the EU labour market, in relation to immigrants who have come from outside these countries.

The 'Blue Card' initiative is beneficial as it will partially resolve the problem of the shortage of highly qualified workers and may play an important role in reducing illegal immigration. However, there are also provisions which put the citizens from the countries which recently joined the European Union at a disadvantage. In a situation where access to the labour market in most of the EU's states is still restricted for Romanians, either totally or in certain areas, I feel that it is necessary to oblige Member States to reject Blue Card applications for those sectors in which access for workers from the countries which have recently joined the EU is still restricted by the current transitional provisions. Inhabitants of EU States, even if they only joined recently, must be given priority over those from outside the EU.

I also need to warn about the risk of a brain drain from underdeveloped countries, which will affect key sectors in these countries, such as health, education and research, giving rise to a boomerang effect with complex implications at a global level.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) With regard to the establishment of 'conditions of entry and residence of third-country nationals for the purposes of highly qualified employment' in the EU (the 'Blue Card') and the creation of a 'single application procedure for residence and work', we consider, among other worrying aspects, that these initiatives must be viewed in the context of the EU's overall immigration policy.

In other words, they only make sense and their full scope is only revealed if they are integrated within the other pillars of this policy, as reaffirmed in the 'European Pact on Immigration and Asylum': criminalisation of immigrants, detention centres, 'return' directive; border control, creation of Frontex; 'readmission agreements' as a clause of 'cooperation' agreements.

By introducing discrimination between immigrants, this 'Blue Card' seeks to respond to the neoliberal objectives of the 'Lisbon Strategy' and to the EU's labour needs (set by quotas), thus reducing immigrants to 'labour', promoting the plundering of human resources from third countries – particularly their most qualified workers – and implementing dangerous centralised systems in the EU for the storage and collection of data on immigrants.

In other words, the 'Blue Card' and the 'single procedure' form one pillar of the EU's inhumane immigration policy which criminalises and expels or exploits and discards immigrants.

Magda Kósáné Kovács (PSE), in writing. – (HU) Immigration has long been one of the most important economic and social issues in the European Union. In an ageing Europe, everybody agrees on the need for reinforcements to the labour force in order to maintain and boost our competitiveness.

Promoting immigration as a joint response requires not only regulation by the EU, but an even-handed strategy that takes into consideration sustainable development and social equilibrium in equal measure.

Mrs Klamt's report on the European Blue Card is to be commended because it lays down more acceptable conditions of employment for highly qualified workers from third countries, taking into account family circumstances as well as their possible temporary return home. I am especially pleased, however, that we are dealing with this matter alongside the Gaubert report on the single permit for residence and work, so that we can avoid even the appearance of opening Europe's doors just to highly qualified workers.

For the sake of the EU's internal social equilibrium, we need to think through the extent to which a financial and economic crisis like the current one impacts on Europe's interests. Rising unemployment in itself leads to social tension, and so we must prevent further heightening of existing domestic ethnic and racial tensions through immigration. This may not only fuel the growth of the far right but, in the long run, may be a source of animosity towards the EU – in spite of the fact that the European Union played nothing but a stabilising role in the crisis.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The introduction of the Blue Card, which the EU needs because it is facing a shortage of highly qualified workers in certain sectors, is a step forward for the economic migration of highly qualified workers from third countries.

However, the Blue Card may represent a step backwards if Member States are not going to reject applications for exemptions from this for those sectors of the labour market where access is restricted for workers from the new Member States, based on the transitional measures provided for in the accession treaties.

I feel I need to remind you that the UK and Ireland have already expressed the desire to maintain the labour market restrictions for Romania and Bulgaria for another three years.

I would like to stress that applying the Blue Card directive policy would disadvantage European citizens in relation to those from third countries. Although this directive refers to the principle of Community preference, it is obvious that this cannot be applied to those European citizens who are subject to restrictions in certain sectors of the European labour market.

Please vote for the amendment on this clarification so that we do not end up in a situation where economic migration from third countries takes precedence over the free movement between states within the EU. The logical desire of new Member States is not to feel like second-class EU members.

Marianne Mikko (PSE), *in writing*. – (ET) Ladies and gentlemen, the Blue Card will relieve several labour and immigration problems. The Blue Card is a so-called ‘carrot’ in the struggle against illegal immigration. By promoting and facilitating legal immigration, Europe will not only be combating the shortage of specialists, but also the trafficking in human beings and illegal immigration.

I support the idea that Member States must have the right to decide how many cards they wish to issue each year. At the same time, we should not become protectionist due to the present economic crisis. We must be prepared to receive highly qualified workers from third countries. We should not close the door to talented citizens of third countries as a result of the present economic recession.

We need a uniform approach in order to remain internationally competitive. The European Union system of 27 different permits is an obstruction to ‘brains’ coming to work in Europe. A uniform system may be one solution that would help surmount the present period of recession, not to mention the improvement in competitiveness today and, especially, in the future.

Sirpa Pietikäinen (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (FI) Europe now needs, and will need in the future, both a more and less trained workforce from beyond the borders of the EU. For the EU to be able to compete with the United States of America for trained and educated immigrants, the Union needs to become a more attractive prospect. Facilitating the mobility of workers from outside is a step in the right direction for the EU, and so I would like to thank Mrs Klamt for her commendable report. The Blue Card would enhance the mobility of trained workers from third countries in the EU.

Making the EU a more enticing place to work in should not be allowed to happen, however, at the expense of developing countries. Unfortunately, the brain drain often takes the skills and know-how needed for development away from those countries, and when the EU makes the new rules, it should take this problem clearly into account. There also needs to be active continued development of higher education in Europe, however, even if it is easy to acquire trained and educated people from elsewhere.

The new rules for immigrants must not result in any significant inequality between third country and EU nationals. Parliament’s strict definitions of a professional workforce will create a scenario of inequality if unreasonable demands are made of those coming in from third countries in terms of their educational and employment background.

The dearth of labour is threatening the European Union as a whole, and not just in the highly trained sectors. The EU should therefore extend the scheme for facilitating the movement of a workforce from third countries to the entire spectrum of workers, instead of skimming the cream off the top of the cake.

Mihaela Popa (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (RO) The demographic deficit and ageing of the European Union’s population put us at risk of the labour market, health care and pension systems being jeopardised.

In this situation, the Blue Card will act as a counterbalance to the US Green Card system, which has proven to be a real success, bearing in mind that approximately 50% of highly qualified workers choose either the US or Canadian market.

I believe that it is vital for us to have a uniform immigration system for all 27 Member States so that every state in the European Union can benefit from the added value contributed by a highly qualified workforce.

It seems to me just as important that the EU gives these professionals the recognition they are due by offering them fair and non-discriminatory salaries.

Before I end, I would very much like to mention the fact, however, that the EU's labour market is not fully open yet to workers from the new Member States. We therefore need to be very careful that the measures we adopt do not discriminate against de facto citizens of the European Union.

Katrin Saks (PSE), in writing. – (ET) There are two problems that concern me in connection with the Blue Card.

From the European point of view, the inflow of brains is excellent. In comparison with America, Australia or Canada, the number of specialists that have come to our country is significantly smaller. Such 'enticement' is, however, in conflict with our other principle, which speaks of the fact that the issue of migration must be resolved globally, and that the economic development of third countries must be assisted, in order to reduce migration, particularly illegal migration. Whether we wish to admit it or not, the 'brains' that we dream of here are needed in third countries in order to promote life there.

From the European perspective, in which there is strong competition, it would naturally be favourable to acquire new specialists, all the more so given that research shows that their integration into a new society is a much easier and quicker process. This is not a secondary issue either.

Another problem that I see is that in connection with economic difficulties and increasing unemployment, the negative attitude towards migrants will become even more acute. And I also fear that EU internal immigration. I do, however, hope that supporters of far right-wing political parties do not take advantage of this, and that the restrictions that now apply to some Member States will be removed in the near future. The EU as a whole would benefit from this.

IN THE CHAIR: MR ONESTA

Vice-President

12. European Space Policy: How to bring space down to earth (debate)

President. - The next item is the debate on:

- the oral question to the Council (B6-0482/2008) by Mr Pribetich, on behalf of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, on the European space policy: How to bring space down to earth (O-0111/2008), and
- the oral question to the Commission (B6-0483/2008) by Mr Pribetich, on behalf of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, on the European space policy: How to bring space down to earth (O-0112/2008).

As a native of Toulouse, I am delighted to chair this debate.

Pierre Pribetich, author. – (FR) Mr President, Mr Vice-President, Minister, 'it is high time to rekindle the stars'.

I wanted to begin my speech with this line from a Guillaume Apollinaire poem, to emphasise the importance for the European Parliament of relaunching its space policy.

For more than thirty years, the European Union and its Member States have worked together in financing, drawing up and developing space policy. Alas, this policy has progressively lost its luminescence and radiance.

It is true that in 2003, the foundations of a European space policy were set out by the EC-ESA framework agreement. It is also true that the 'Space' Council of 22 May 2007 was in line with the political continuum of this framework agreement. However, the light emitted by this star remains insufficient. For Europe's independence, its role on the international stage, its security and prosperity all come together to make this major policy an incomparable trump card for an industrial policy that creates both jobs and stimulates growth; an ambitious policy for cultural, economic and scientific influence that is reinforced on the international stage and is an essential vehicle for society to acquire the knowledge that we wish to gain.

In the institutional triangle of the Union, and to ensure that this does not turn into a Bermuda triangle, the European Parliament, on behalf of European citizens, must play an important and increased role in the drawing up and definition of this policy.

It is high time to rekindle the stars. On 26 September 2008, the Council participated in this act and we want to make our mark on this policy. Of course, this address here and now on behalf of the Committee on

Industry, Research and Energy is made in this same spirit. To follow the correct route, it seems to me essential to remember the fundamental elements in the creation of this space policy.

Firstly, there is the question of the budget. We call for, from this point onwards, the creation of a specific budget line to reflect and demonstrate our commitment to European space policy.

The space industries need sufficient public support to increase their research and development capacity and, quite simply, to remain profitable. International competition is hard and fierce.

Whilst the United States, Russia, Japan and even India are significantly increasing their budget dedicated to the space industry, and multiplying public orders, us Europeans are still searching for the appropriate funding to achieve our ambitious aims like others search for lost time.

Consequently, what initiatives can the Commission take to improve the contribution to the European space sector, and be not just an actor, but the major actor responding to this growing, global demand, across all aspects of space policy from beginning to end?

The second point is the issue of strategic options for those applications linked, on the one hand, to Galileo and EGNOS and, on the other, to GMES, through the prism of governance to create an efficient structure generating a clear governance for a reinforced efficiency across all European space programmes.

The final issue is the exploration of space. What is the long-term vision for our European space policy, and for what ends does it exist? Embarking on the long-distance conquest of space is a project for several decades and requires both long-term vision and ambition

At this point, I see an echo of the speech made by President Kennedy, focusing the American people on a new uncrossed frontier. Made sacred on 21 July 1969, this step was, without a doubt, in the technological history of our civilisation, the most fabulous catalyst for progress for all space-related and even everyday industries.

Give us, in this concert of nations, this long term vision. Here we find ourselves at a milestone on this long journey. Europe is at a crossroads with regard to space policy. Space has, from now on, multiplied its spheres of action and application. From scientific to defence activities, space covers sectors of activity as vast and as varied as environmental protection or the development of SMEs.

Let us get closer to users and increase the viability and quality of the collected data. Let us become the leaders in the space market. It is a duty that we owe to future generations to fortify this European space policy and make the vital choices to place into orbit an avant-garde and futuristic Europe for subsequent generations to live in.

Space is our new European frontier. The great history book lies open with its dizzying array of blank pages. Europe must not only play a part in it, but be the major actor. Therefore, it is high time to rekindle the stars.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (FR) Mr President, Mr Vice-President of the Commission, Mr Verheugen, honourable Members, your speech, Mr Pribetich, and questioning are particularly pertinent and given the *élan* with which you have posed and supported them, your speech will be particularly difficult to follow.

They are pertinent, because space has become, as you have pointed out, an essential tool for all European countries. These missions contribute to our acquisition of knowledge, whether this concerns the observation of the earth or oceanography or meteorology by satellite. It also corresponds to the growth of our economies through satellite telecommunications and navigation. It has become, in a discrete yet essential way, an integral instrument for modern life.

Space is also a tool, as you have indicated, that allows Europe to be united around a common ambition and to develop a European identity. It is in this spirit, therefore, that the French Presidency organised, last July, with Valérie Pécresse, the first informal meeting of European space ministers at Kourou which, as you know, is the European spaceport. I know that the European Parliament was represented by Mr Rovsing at this event, and I thank him for that.

This meeting allowed us to set out a common vision for Europe in space built around the three principal actors of European space policy: the Union, the European Space Agency, and the Member States – while recognising the Union's increased responsibilities. Together, these three actors will make Europe one of the main space powers on the international stage, of that we are certain.

To develop a European space policy of benefit to all Europeans, first of all we need to guarantee open and equal access for all Member States of the Union to the advantages that are brought by space activities. Secondly, we must reinforce existing coordination mechanisms in the space sector, European expertise and investments financed by both the Community and by intergovernmental and national sources. Finally, it is necessary to improve the synergy between civil and defence space programmes.

Therefore the Union, the European Space Agency and the Member States will ensure that we benefit from an access to space that is autonomous, viable and at the best price, which is necessary with regard to our biggest partners. Of course, this requires a reinforcing of the role of the European Union in the sphere of European space policy.

It is for the Union to unite demand for space applications, to take stock of users' requirements, to establish priorities and to look after the continuity of services. Also, at Union level, we have developed instruments and Community financial schemes to take into account the characteristics of the space sector with respect, in particular, to forthcoming financial perspectives.

The 'Space' Council that took place on 26 September made it possible to send into orbit, if I dare say, and to confirm the importance of the two flagship programmes, Galileo EGNOS and GMES. With regard to Galileo EGNOS, the European Union can congratulate itself on having signed a significant number of cooperation agreements with third countries such as the United States, China, Israel, South Korea, Ukraine and Morocco.

This same Council of 26 September underlined the importance of increasing the coordination between the Commission, the European Space Agency and the Member States in the sphere of research and development, notably for satellite navigation systems.

With regard to the GMES programme, the forthcoming Councils on 1 and 2 December are expected to set out the applicable lines and define the terms of the partnership between the Union and the Member States and to lay down legislative proposals formalising the programme before the end of 2009. I can already inform you that the Council believes that an approach based on the public good must be maintained for this programme to develop successfully. Furthermore, a data policy must also be put into place swiftly.

Finally, there must be four priorities that have also been cited by Mr Pribetich: the first concerns space and climate change, inasmuch as the contribution of space applications is unique in this sphere. The second is the contribution of space activities to the Lisbon strategy. The third covers space and security with respect to having monitoring and surveillance of European space infrastructures and space debris at European level. Finally, the fourth priority remains space exploration, this is a political and planetary policy and Europe should act within the framework of a worldwide programme.

In this respect, Europe must develop a common vision and a long-term strategic plan and must also have the necessary political dialogue with other states within an enlarged framework of international cooperation and, in this respect, the Council is very pleased that the Commission has announced that it will be organising a high level political conference in 2009 concerning the long-term worldwide vision for space exploration.

And so, Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, this renewed vision of European space policy demonstrates a new commitment from the Member States, a commitment that, in the interests of unprecedented European ambition, I have no doubt will resonate across your House.

Günter Verheugen, Vice-President of the Commission. – (DE) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, ladies and gentlemen, I am very grateful to Mr Pribetich for giving me the opportunity to begin a speech on a highly technical subject with a line from a poem by my favourite French poet Guillaume Apollinaire: *'Il est grand temps de rallumer les étoiles.'* I believe that the French Presidency has already taken considerable steps towards giving European space policy the importance which it genuinely deserves.

We have made major progress in recent years and, for the first time, we have a European space policy, which we have never had before. We have a framework for a common European policy in which the Commission plays a coordinating role. We have achieved a high level of agreement on the strategic, environmental and economic importance of the space policy for Europe. No one opposes this. I would like to highlight specifically the meeting of the European Space Council at the end of July at the Kourou Space Centre in French Guiana, where, for the first time, it became clear that Europe is ready for this new departure into space.

We have also been able to demonstrate that the European space industry is highly competitive. When we compare the money which Europe can spend on activities in space with that which our American friends

spend, for example, we are in a good position. Europe plays a leading role in satellite technology and in carrier rocket technology. We have the best carrier rocket systems in the world. In Kourou, we have an infrastructure which is not to be found anywhere else in the world. Our contribution to the International Space Station in the form of the space laboratory demonstrates the high level of European space technology. I am also very pleased that the ESA has carried out a whole series of successful research expeditions within our solar system which other countries have not been able to achieve.

As Europeans, we have absolutely no reason for hiding behind others. The collaboration between the European Commission and the ESA is excellent and the division of work is functioning smoothly. Against the background of this effective cooperation, there is not the slightest reason to consider changing the structures in this area.

However, there are problems which we still have to solve. As Europeans, we have no independent access to space. We cannot send people into space or bring them back again. We have to decide whether or not we want to be dependent on others in the long term. I do not want to hide my own opinion from you. Europe needs an independent and secure means of access to space. We will also have to consider what form the next major missions to research the solar system should take. In my opinion, the next large-scale missions can only be regarded as tasks carried out on behalf of the whole of the human race. We should avoid all types of national or regional competition. In any case, our policy aims to achieve the highest possible level of cooperation. This will be the subject of the conference which Mr Jouyet has just been speaking about and which the Commission is organising next year.

To ensure that it is clear to everyone, we want to discuss what will be the next major mission that goes beyond the pure technical application of space-based technologies. What is the next large-scale mission, the next major objective which will satisfy the human urge to explore space? Space-based technology is completely indispensable to our civilisation, our security and our economy. You only need to think of all our communication technology or the financial markets, which would not function at all without satellites.

It is right that there should be a strong security component to this policy. We are not trying to ignore that. We have been able to establish a regular and structured dialogue between the Council and the Commission, which includes the European Defence Agency and the EU Satellite Centre. This dialogue is intended to result in improved coordination between civilian, security and defence-related space activities.

From the perspective of the environment, the GMES (Global Monitoring for Environment and Security) system, which is currently under development, represents the European response to the global environmental crisis. This system will provide us with the data and information we need to act and react with foresight when disasters occur. Of course, our two flagship projects – GMES and Galileo – are making an important contribution to the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy by ensuring that there is a strong industrial and technological basis in Europe for space-based applications.

As far as GMES is concerned, I am very pleased to be able to tell you that, only a few days ago, the Commission accepted a communication at my suggestion which relates to the organisation of the funding and the questions of cooperation with GMES. The Competitiveness Council will be looking at this in a few days. It is true to say that GMES is on the right track. The first demonstration projects have started and, as far as I can see, we will be able to meet the schedule. We are in full agreement with the ESA about the space-based infrastructure of GMES. The ESA has already made good progress on the development of the European satellites which we need for this system, so the prospects are good.

However, one thing still needs to be resolved. The Community budget only provides research funding for GMES. We have no operational funds. Next year, we will need a small amount of operational funding for the first time and this has already been cleared with the budgetary authority. However, we need to find a long-term solution, because it is clear that GMES is not a system which will fund itself. It will generate an income, but this will never cover the costs. GMES is a European infrastructure project and this is how we need to look at it in order to ensure that long-term funding is available.

Next year, we will draw up an accurate schedule and action plan for the future implementation of the GMES initiative. In summary, in 2009 the Commission will present a proposal for financing the initial deployment of GMES in 2011 on the basis of a detailed impact assessment and cost-benefit analysis.

Galileo has already been discussed. I simply want to say here that, as a result of the effective cooperation between the institutions, the Galileo and EGNOS programmes now have a solid legal basis and can be put into operation. The implementation of Galileo and EGNOS also forms part of the plan but, of course, we

need to find out whether the requirement in the GNSS Regulation to complete the Galileo system by 2013 can also be met by industry. This will become clear in the course of the tendering procedure.

I would like to urge the European space industry to make use of the major opportunity presented by Galileo, to work together with us as closely as possible and to mobilise all of its resources. For us, Galileo is one of the most important, if not the most important, industrial policy projects and we must ensure that it runs smoothly.

This involves issues raised by the resolution, such as the questions of competition which arise in relation to international business practices and public procurement markets. It is true that different international regulations govern the procurement practices in the space industry. These practices differ depending on whether services or goods are being procured and, above all, depending on which countries have signed the relevant agreements. During the process of awarding contracts for the Galileo deployment phase, the Commission has strictly applied the principle of reciprocity and we hope that this has given a boost to the negotiations with third countries on the mutual opening up of markets.

One final point, and I am very grateful that Parliament has considered this, is the question of the involvement of small and medium-sized companies in European space activities. This is very important to me, because there are only a few large-scale European players in the space industry. There are only a handful of European countries which can really have a presence in space. However, many others are making contributions and I am very pleased to see that specialist space technology is increasingly being developed in a number of Member States, particularly the new Member States, by small and medium-sized companies which are providing often extremely complex and highly advanced products and services. For this reason, it is important that we ensure that small and medium-sized companies are given an appropriate proportion of the orders on major projects. This proportion is set at 40% and the Commission will do everything in its power to make sure that the proportion is adhered to.

This is not a purely economic issue, it is also a political question, because this will allow us to ensure that European space-related activities are not regarded simply as the privilege of a few large European countries, but are seen as something which all 27 countries are involved in and can benefit from.

Etelka Barsi-Pataky, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (HU) Thank you for the floor, Mr President. The title of our parliamentary decision is 'How to bring space down to earth'. Ladies and gentlemen, the average citizen of Europe makes use of 50 satellites a day. The utilisation of space has quite imperceptibly come to be part of daily life. The question is: can Europe cooperate in that process, can it actively shape the utilisation of space?

A few remarks are in order. Space is our common and global asset. Therefore, international cooperation is of paramount importance to Europe. However, Europe can participate meaningfully only if it has established its autonomy in the political, technological and operational fields. Hence, it has relevance for Parliament.

In light of the global financial and already partly economic crisis, we now see clearly that high-technology initiatives such as space utilisation add a significant edge to our competitiveness.

Moreover, given the challenges we face and the related tasks to be tackled, we rely increasingly on space technology, for example, to understand and monitor climate change or achieve security by means of defence, the prevention of increasingly frequent catastrophes or the provision of ever broader communication and navigation services.

Thus, we are dealing with strategic questions here. The European Parliament wishes to play a constructive part in this process, primarily by fostering a structured dialogue between the EU and government institutions. In our opinion, this will provide all Member States with the opportunity to participate and gain open and fair access.

Galileo, our joint European project, was a pioneer in many respects. To name but a few: it set up the operational model of the Galileo Interinstitutional Panel to create closer cooperation, and in the case of larger projects, we were able to secure joint funding built into the Community budget. This is only the beginning, however. The Galileo programme, as Commissioner Verheugen mentioned, secured the participation of SMEs because we know by now that spin-off companies are the ones most capable of accomplishing great things in the high-tech world.

The European People's Party and European Democrats have made countless proposals, concerning, in part, our industrial policy where we still have a lot of catching up to do before it might serve as a solid base.

Furthermore, we have to strengthen our role in research and development. Besides, these competencies are essential for defence and security policy as well. In this way, the European space policy will come to be part of Europe's identity. Thank you for the floor.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău, *on behalf of the PSE Group.* – (RO) Satellite navigation systems and satellite-based telecommunication networks, services and applications are tools which the European Union needs to invest in.

Research is one of the fundamental pillars on which the Lisbon Strategy is based. The GALILEO programme is one of the priority projects for European research in view of its potential use for managing traffic, monitoring the effects of climate change and for intervening in situations involving emergencies and natural disasters.

Last year, the European Parliament, along with the Commission and Council, managed to identify sources of funding for the GALILEO project, which was regarded as one of the Union's strategic projects. I would like to stress the importance of developing a space-related industrial policy.

I would also like to remind you that the GALILEO Regulation sets a benchmark for the involvement of SMEs in European space-related industrial policy. It is time for Europe to develop a common vision and strategic planning for space exploration.

Anne Laperrouze, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, it seems that we are all in agreement here on the fact that space policy has become an essential component of the future of our society.

We could sum up three important strands to this: security and defence, protection against environmental crises and the supply of new services to human activities.

Yes, ladies and gentlemen, we must, as Europeans, recognise that space is taking on a strategic defensive dimension. I know that some of my fellow Members dispute this. Yes, the observation of the planet must be assured in the long term so as to study its slow, dynamic variations and, in particular, those caused by the actions of man that affect the global climate, natural resources and biodiversity.

At the same time, a large number of public policy groups and economic activities need information and forecasts from observation systems based in space. This, in particular, is the importance of Europe's GMES in the world GEO process. Yes, space policies are having a growing impact on scientific research, technological innovation and, beyond that, on the stimulation of imaginations. In this respect, space and planetary exploration programmes have an essential role to play from now on.

Telephony and television, GPS, but also weather forecasting or even long-distance medical care have dramatically changed our way of life. We can no longer imagine what would happen if satellites stopped working.

The experience acquired in space technologies – notably through the success of the Ariane rocket – in itself justifies implementing a real European space policy. To respond to our ambition of independence, it will be necessary to achieve not only good governance, but also, of course, good funding.

In conclusion, the space policy that Europe pursues will demonstrate its willingness, either to remain an influential actor on the world scene, but one that is more or less reduced to a partner role, or to be a strong Europe, a major player in world governance capable of resolving the key problems facing the future of humanity.

Patrick Louis, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group.* – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in my former capacity as rapporteur for the Committee on Transport, I held a enthusiastic viewpoint on the Galileo project.

Today, we see that this central project was bogged down due to the omnipotence and technocratic inertia of our institutions. Every time that the Union refused free and variable cooperation between States, they sterilised private initiative, increased costs and impeded the emergence of rival, competent and coherent consortiums. Yet on each occasion that states have united together freely, projects have succeeded.

Hence, here, as elsewhere, the role of our institutions is to maintain a simple substitute role, wishing to be the manager of all, whereas we ought to be the guarantors of little. We should bear one thing in mind: when dealing with space matters, Europe must, first of all, keep its feet on the ground.

Giles Chichester (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I had a childhood ambition of being one of the pioneers in space – I daresay many other children had the same – and when I grew up, in 1969, I was inspired by those images that came back to us from the Lunar Landing Project, particularly the television image of the Earth from space. Space is now less of a headline grabber, but it is extremely important for all the reasons that other colleagues have given and I applaud the European Union commitment to a space policy.

I visited the NASA Goddard Center in Washington a year ago and, very recently, ESA, the European Space Agency Centre in Rome, and to me the images they can show us of the work that they undertake make space as exciting as ever. In fact, the more people see these images, the more perhaps we will bring space down to earth. But what it also showed me anew was the relevance to science, to research and to the economy of the use of space, and the importance of the satellites and their launchers.

Commissioner, I have been made aware of concerns felt by satellite operators about the need to observe international agreements with regard to spectrum usage and satellite footprints. There is a concern that if any breach of international arrangements is tolerated, other regions will breach them too. It seems to me that effective exploitation of space depends crucially on observing common agreed laws and principles, so I hope the Commission can reassure us and them on that point. We have a good story to tell of achievements and prospects in space.

Teresa Riera Madurell (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, Mr Pribetich, in my opinion your proposal is very comprehensive and balanced. I therefore want to congratulate you on shedding more light so that we can see the stars better.

The European Union must, without question, be responsible for defining Europe's political aspirations in terms of space, by using it for the European people and economy, and by guaranteeing independent and reliable access to it.

I am also pleased with the Council's conclusions from September which make a useful political commitment to develop the European Space Policy.

The priorities must clearly be the timely application of the Galileo and EGNOS programmes and the Global Monitoring for Environment and Security programme which will assist in the assessment and implementation of European policies impacting on the environment.

As regards financing, we must find instruments appropriate to the European Space Policy which, in addition to that specified in the Seventh Framework Programme, will enable medium- and long-term planning. The possible inclusion in the budget of a specific chapter will show the European Union's commitment to this policy and increase its clarity and transparency in anticipation of the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty provisions.

Janusz Onyszkiewicz (ALDE). – (PL) Mr President, I am very pleased that we are developing our space programme in cooperation with the Russians. However, we must remember that in the background there is another partner with which we need to establish cooperation – Ukraine. The best Soviet rockets were built in Ukraine. Its potential in this area is enormous. I think that we need to recognise it and use it for our common good.

My other comment relates to the Galileo programme. We must remember that this programme can and should be extremely important to our military operations and our military missions as well. The important thing is that the use of this system for military purposes must be adequately safeguarded, so as to ensure that other programme participants – I am thinking of China above all – should not know how to and should not be able to block it.

President. – Before handing over to the Council, may I bring to your attention ladies and gentlemen the fact that there are three Members of this House born on 5 August – that is to say, the birthday of Neil Armstrong. I happen to be one of them, which is why I am aware of this. I will leave you to reflect on this while listening to the Council.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, President-in-Office of the Council. – (FR) That does not surprise me, Mr President, and I am very happy for you, you are well worthy of it!

Mr President, Mr Vice-President of the Commission, honourable Members, I will be very brief as much has already been said.

Firstly, your speeches and debates have shown the mobilisation of your House around the issue of European space policy. We are in search of a unifying European project. We are in search of European projects that truly stimulate and ensure that new generations of Europeans can take part in this unique adventure.

We are, as has been underlined, in search of projects targeted to improve the practical lives of our fellow citizens. We are in search of projects with a real purpose to develop competitiveness, to associate different European industrial partners and to support activity during this period of depression. We are in search of projects aimed at improving research, development and innovation. We are in search of projects – to be truly comprehensive – that make Europe more visible, make it a global actor and influential in dealing with the global challenges that await us, whether they be the fight against climate change, or matters of development, or the strategic balances with our other partners.

I believe that your debate shows us clearly that we absolutely must not relax our efforts. On the contrary, we must concentrate all of our means, all of our abilities of cooperation on that most symbolic of European projects: the European space policy.

Günter Verheugen, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am grateful for the broad support for European space policy demonstrated by this debate. I would very much like this broad support to be shown during the process of creating the financial foundations for a permanent and lasting European presence in space. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that our competitors are not sitting back and doing nothing. Other regions in the world are already far ahead of us when it comes to the vision of what should be done next. If we cannot identify new projects and develop new technologies, we will not be able to retain our leading position in the field of space-based applications, because we will simply not have the necessary foundations in science and research.

For this reason, I would like to repeat that I was very grateful that all of this has been made clear today. If we can work together to raise awareness, we can tell all the citizens of Europe the story referred to by Mr Chichester, the story that European space projects can be the cause that brings us all together.

President. - The debate is closed.

13. Need for the Convention on Cluster Munitions to come into effect before the end of 2008 (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on the oral question to the Council (B6-0481/2008) on the need for the Convention on Cluster Munitions to enter into force before the end of 2008, by Mrs Beer, on behalf of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, Mrs Gomes, on behalf of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, Mrs Neyts-Uyttebroeck and Mrs Lynne, on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Mr Kristovskis, on behalf of the Union for Europe of the Nations Group, Mr Pflüger and Mrs Zimmer, on behalf of the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left, and Mr Zappalà on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats (O-0110/2008/rev. 1).

Angelika Beer, *author*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, on 3 December 2008 in Oslo, we will at last reach the point of being able to sign the convention banning cluster munitions. In Dublin, 107 states adopted the convention and promised to sign it. Two weeks before the conference, we would like to call on countries throughout the world to keep their promises, to sign the convention and, above all, to ratify it quickly.

The war in the Caucasus and the use of cluster munitions both by Georgia and by Russia, represent a challenge to us. We must not waste any more time. We have high expectations of the European Commission and the Council. We expect all the Member States of the European Union to sign the convention on 3 December, in particular those European states which are still in doubt, that is Greece, Latvia, Poland, Romania and the Republic of Cyprus.

We expect that the European Union will continue to campaign for a legally binding ban on cluster munitions as part of the UN Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW). We unanimously condemn the unbelievable attempt by the USA, Russia and China at the last Geneva conference to legalise cluster munitions within the CCW.

We would like, in future, to evaluate the synergies and links between the future Oslo convention and the Ottawa Treaty, which resulted in landmines being banned. Our resolution will act as a call to the Commission to make more funding – significantly more funding – available to protect people in the contaminated areas and to remove the cluster munitions. This applies to Lebanon, the Balkans and all other contaminated regions. We do not have any reliable sources of funding there and this should not be the case. If we are to take this cause seriously, the Commission must find ways of funding it.

I would like to emphasise once again on behalf of my group that our objective is a legally binding ban on the use, stockpiling and production of these inhumane weapons which have, for decades, been a source of suffering for the civilian populations of affected areas.

I would like once more to make it quite clear that the use of these weapons, including in countries where the European Union has police and military forces in operation, such as Afghanistan, Bosnia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, represent just as much of a danger to our mission as to the people themselves.

Ana Maria Gomes, author. – (PT) On 3 December, the leaders of the 107 countries which adopted the Convention on Cluster Munitions in May of this year will meet in Oslo to sign it. The choice of 3 December is not fortuitous. On this same day in 1997, the Convention on Anti-Personnel Mines was opened for signature in Ottawa. These instruments do not only share their date of signature. Shamefully, neither Convention has the support of countries representing a large part of humanity, such as the United States, China, India, Iraq, Pakistan, Russia and Israel.

The Oslo Convention was negotiated in Dublin and 22 out of the 107 signatories are members of the European Union. We hope that Cyprus, Poland, Romania, Latvia and Greece will shortly abandon their reservations, thus allowing the European Union to present a united front in its opposition to these weapons which kill and maim indiscriminately.

These weapons are not only immoral, they are increasingly useless in military terms. The European Defence Agency itself explains, in its 'Long-Term Vision Report for European Defence Capability and Capacity Needs', that:

'serious thought needs to be given to the future utility of unguided munitions, as well as cluster bombs, mines and other weapons of indiscriminate effect'.

(PT) European military forces, and not just them, are increasingly operating in the midst of civilian populations and the objective is less and less to destroy an easily identifiable enemy. As a result, cluster munitions are not only incompatible with humanitarian law, they are also of limited use. International law, moral imperatives and the most basic military logic agree on the urgent need to eradicate these weapons. It is therefore essential to ensure the universal ratification of the Oslo Convention.

Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, author. – (FR) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, on behalf of my group, I supported this oral question in order to express our disapproval of cluster bombs and munitions, for reasons that are entirely evident, and to show our support for the attitude of those Member States who have given their agreement to the convention banning them.

I hope, as do my colleagues, that in the coming weeks, all Member States, without exception, will sign this convention and will adhere to it because, as you well know, it is said that either under the leadership of the United States or inspired by them, some states, several of whom are Member States, plan to get around the convention by, if I may say so, playing with the definition of what constitutes cluster bombs and munitions and their reduced risk of inadvertently injuring people who touch the unexploded fragments.

I hope that this does not occur. My group hopes that this does not occur and I therefore take my opportunity to ask the Council what steps it plans to take to ensure that this convention enters into force.

Finally, turning to another matter, Minister, I read that in the near future, you may be moving on to new challenges, as we say. Should that be the case, my best wishes and those of my group go out to you.

Girts Valdis Kristovskis, author. – (LV) Mr President, representatives of the Commission, representatives of the Presidency, first of all, I would like to say that I was defence minister in my country for nearly six years, during the period leading up to our accession to NATO. Therefore, I can say that I understand very well what it means to look after one's country through defence measures, through the requisite weaponry and ordnance. However, on my own behalf and also on behalf of the UEN group, I have supported all the measures which the European Parliament has taken, including this issue regarding the prohibition on cluster munitions. In

my view, everything has already been said here. It is clear to all that this weapon is not accurate enough and that to date, as we can see, it has mainly struck civilians and has wounded children.

I would therefore like to say that the European Parliament and I myself believe that the EU Member States ought to come together in a united position and use their joint forces to unite on banning this kind of weapon. On the other hand, I would also like to advocate the use of this requirement in bilateral talks with countries such as Russia, the United States of America and China, who are the main holders of this type of weapon. I believe that this is very important, when we recall that quite recently, during the war between Georgia and Russia, unfortunately Russia used this type of cluster munitions against Georgian civilians. This confirms that the argument for retaining this munition in our arsenals, namely, the argument that it is a defence tool, does not withstand criticism. Unfortunately, as we see, this instrument is used in other countries as an offensive tool against civilians.

Luisa Morgantini, *author*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, cluster munitions are, to all intents and purposes, weapons of mass destruction, inhumane devices, if it is possible for a humane device to exist in a war.

A US army publication, *Field Artillery*, states: 'Unexploded bomblets are a problem for innocent civilians and our light forces, our dismounted infantry, who come after the bombardment of an urban area', and nonetheless they continue to be produced and used and land polluted with unexploded devices continues to sow death year after year, as we have also seen in Georgia.

In Oslo, at the conference to combat the use, production and stockpiling of cluster munitions, a young Lebanese man aged 24, Ibrahim, whose body had been devastated by wounds, and who had an amputated leg, introduced himself, saying: 'Pleased to meet you, I am a survivor'. I would have wanted to die, and instead I just embraced him. I went to meet him in his village, in the south of Lebanon, and I saw in the yards of the houses, the schools, in the grass, under the trees, unexploded bombs, launched from Israeli planes. They launched over 1 400 000 of them, and they launched them in recent days, when the truce and ceasefire had already been declared. This was pure cruelty, and I met many children, men and women in Afghanistan in the emergency hospitals, with mutilated bodies; there are thousands of children in the world mutilated because they played with fragments of cluster bombs, attracted by the coloured objects.

In Dublin, 109 countries undertook, after 10 days of debate, to sign the prohibition on the deadly weapons, to provide assistance to victims and to provide financial help to the areas involved, but the agreement also stipulates that all the arsenals must be destroyed within eight years. They will certainly not do this unless there is strong pressure from all the signatory countries of the United Nations and the countries which are responsible for crimes against civilian populations countries such as Israel, the United States, Russia, China, India and Pakistan, which did not go to Dublin and which have refused to ban cluster munitions.

Robert Gates, Defence secretary, has attempted to explain US resistance: cluster munitions are an effective weapon against many different objectives. The dead in Iraq, in Afghanistan and in the former Yugoslavia have certainly tested this. Once again, Europe is showing its sensibilities, with the 22 countries that have signed and acceded to the Dublin Convention, but concrete action is needed.

On 2 and 3 December, the treaty will be officially signed in Oslo, but it will have to be ratified. We must do so quickly and block any attempt to get round the treaty, and I believe that the Council will really have to lay down effective political and financial instruments to ensure that the treaty is implemented and that there are no more deaths of this kind, namely deaths caused by weapons of destruction.

IN THE CHAIR: MR COCILOVO

Vice-President

Stefano Zappalà, *author*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, this is just a point of information for the Presidency of the Council, if you, as current President, can pass it on to your predecessor: Earlier it was said that here, in this Chamber, there are three people who were born on the same day as Neil Armstrong. In fact, a European astronaut of Italian origin was a Member of this Parliament between 1994 and 1999; and during this legislature, there is also a European astronaut in this Parliament, again an Italian.

In any case, coming back to cluster munitions, on behalf of my group, I joined the initiative on this subject because I believe it to be a matter that goes to the heart of civilisation and humanity. My fellow Member was minister of defence in one of the Member States, and I also come from the military world. I believe this plan

to ban cluster munitions globally to be a matter, as I was saying, that goes to the heart of civilisation and humanity.

Why is this? It is because civilisation and humanity are two of the many constituent principles of the European Union; they form part of the foundation of our treaties and I therefore believe that we must not merely take this matter as a starting point, but we must make it our serious business to consider what the EU's attitude ought to be as a whole with regard to munitions of this type.

What these weapons and munitions give rise to around the world is, however, clear. In all forms of war, the facts are what they are, but the most serious point is that it does not all finish with the end of the war, but continues afterwards because the land is contaminated, and continues to be so. Unfortunately, another point is that war also takes place in countries that certainly do not have a very advanced level of civilisation, and therefore there remains that readiness, including at the local level, to use objects found on the land and which are then the cause of the majority of disfigurements that happen in childhood to young people. Many films have been submitted to us and continue to be sent to us from around the world showing the results of using these weapons.

I therefore call upon the Council, on behalf of my group, and upon the European Parliament, to persist with this issue. I hope that all this work will translate into the ratification of this convention which I believe is one of the most important aspects, in fact, of civilisation and humanity that the European Union can act upon.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (FR) Mr President, honourable Members, Mrs Beer, Mrs Gomes, Mrs Neyts-Uyttebroeck, whom I thank personally for her kind wishes, Mrs Morgantini, Mr Kristovskis and Mr Zappalà, you are all profoundly correct: as Mr Zappalà said, it is a question of civilisation and humanity.

All Member States of the European Union share the humanitarian concerns raised by cluster munitions. The European Union supports the adoption of an international instrument prohibiting cluster munitions, which cause unacceptable harm to civilian populations. It was for this reason that all the Member States of the European Union attended the conference in Dublin, either as stakeholders – like the large majority of Member States – or as observers. It is, of course, the European Union that is the stakeholder; that is what one must understand from this rather complicated phrase.

With regard to the decision to sign or ratify, this is a sovereign decision that falls upon each Member State, but like Mrs Neyts-Uyttebroeck, I regret that they will not all have signed by this December.

The vast majority of Member States of the Union have announced their intention to sign the convention in the coming weeks, I would like to point this out and say that Mrs Morgantini is right; we need to take practical steps before the convention enters into force. In this spirit, France, the country that I know the best, decided, in May 2008, to withdraw from service 90% of its stock of cluster munitions, without delay.

As you know, however, a number of Member States have yet to take such a decision. As far as the French Presidency is concerned, it announced in May, following the Dublin Conference, that it will sign the convention in early December. The Presidency wishes to draw the attention of all Members to the on-going negotiations on cluster munitions within the context of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) which is the only convention that the largest military powers – the United States, Russia, China and India, or countries such as Georgia – agree to participate in, which is not the case for the Oslo convention. I would point out that these countries have not expressed an intention to sign this convention.

All Member States of the European Union are party to this convention and are calling for the adoption of a protocol on cluster munitions. It is also through commitments made in this arena, and Mr Kristovskis is entirely right to emphasise this, that it will be possible to achieve changes on the ground. Furthermore, the deaths caused by cluster munitions, such as we have seen in Georgia, could be avoided in the future if the negotiations taken within the framework of this universal convention are successful.

Honourable Members, as you can see, cluster munitions are an issue that presses the European Union to act, and it must continue to press at an international level for the adoption of a universal instrument. It is, in any case, with this aim in mind that the French Presidency is going to great lengths to convince all its partners, and will continue to do so.

Charles Tannock, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Mr President, I am no pacifist – anybody in this Chamber who knows me well would say that – but there is much about warfare and the arms trade which we must

regret. Cluster munitions to me are one of the most horrible ways of waging war which should always, of course, only occur as a very last resort.

There is much evidence to suggest that these weapons disproportionately affect civilian populations, who must be protected above all in international law. Cluster bombs can fall across a huge area and remain unexploded for very long periods of time, posing a lethal threat to civilians who could be killed or maimed long after a conflict has ended.

They are also costly to locate and remove and cannot be formally mapped in the same way that a minefield can. Sometimes children have picked these things up, thinking of them as toys, and losing limbs or perhaps even their lives as a result. As a father of very young children myself, few things could be more horrendous to think about.

If we are serious about creating a European Union of common values and sharing those values with the world, we must take a common position to promote an eventual ban on these terrifying and terrible arms, which are very blunt in their effect on the battlefield.

We must also use all diplomatic means at our disposal to persuade others to do the same. We, as the European Parliament, can rightly be proud of what we have done to try to rid the world of the scourge of anti-personnel land mines. We must approach this issue of cluster bombs with equal vigour and commitment, in order to build a better, more humane world and not see innocent civilians suffer in the aftermath of armed conflict.

Richard Howitt, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – Mr President, today we are appealing to the EU countries who are not currently planning to sign the Convention against cluster munitions to do so. Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, alongside EU aspirants Serbia and Turkey, please join the other EU countries and more than a hundred states worldwide in signing this Convention.

For whom are we making this appeal? For Suraj Ghulam Habib of Herat in Afghanistan who, when six years old, lost both his legs when he found a cluster bomb he thought was a kind of food. He now finds it almost impossible to get to school or to play with his friends from within his wheelchair. For Mrs Chanhthava of Sepone District in Laos, who lost a leg and damaged her sight after she accidentally struck a cluster bomb while working to gather food for her family in the rice fields. She now has to send her daughter out to the same dangerous fields to collect the rice. For the 13-year-old Georgian boy, Beka Giorgishvili, who, this year, whilst at a friend's house, became one of the newest victims as he was helping to pump up his friend's new bicycle tyre. Beka lost part of his skull and shrapnel remains inside.

It is hypocrisy for EU countries to condemn Russian aggression in Georgia, yet fail to condemn the means of that aggression, which causes excessive harm to civilians wherever cluster munitions are used. It is also a hollow excuse for countries to seek to justify stockpiling cluster bombs as part of adhering to the landmines ban, when cluster munitions are equally deadly and have caused even greater humanitarian damage in the world.

My own Member State, the UK, has already started the destruction of some 30 million explosives, changed its export control regulations and directly contributed to the clearing of ordnance, including cluster munitions in Georgia. Europe is where these weapons were first used by German and Soviet forces in the Second World War, Europe currently stockpiles an estimated one billion bomblets, and it is Europe which should take the lead in the world in securing their obliteration.

Elizabeth Lynne, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, as many people have said, civilians, many of them children, are indiscriminately killed or injured by cluster bombs every day. Many of those child victims are disabled by cluster munitions and have to live with that disability for the rest of their lives. Yet the shocking fact is that cluster munitions are stockpiled in over 15 EU Member States. Horrifyingly, there is evidence that at least seven EU Member States are still producing these weapons. In my view, these countries, as well as those that have used them – including the UK, my country – have blood on their hands.

Banning the production, transfer and stockpiling of cluster munitions will save many lives. This Convention will also ensure the provision of much needed resources, such as medical care and rehabilitation to aid victims of cluster bombs. I urge all EU Member States to sign and ratify this Convention and not to try to redefine what we mean by cluster munitions so as to wriggle out of their responsibilities, as certain Member States are trying to do.

Seán Ó Neachtain, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (GA) Mr President, I strongly support the proposal requesting that the Convention to ban cluster bombs be implemented from the end of this year onwards.

All of the governments which implement the Oslo Declaration of 2007 are willing to draft a legal document before the end of 2008 that would stop the use of cluster bombs; and that would put a system in place to encourage cooperation and help for those who fled from these kinds of attacks until now and that would destroy any stocks of cluster bombs still in existence.

I am very proud that it was in Ireland – in Dublin in my own country – that the settlement under this Treaty was reached during an international convention that took place there earlier this year. All those who took part were very clear about what they wanted to achieve at this convention - that cluster bombs would be banned from now on. And, just as my colleagues have already asked in the House today, I would ask that the other countries which have not signed it yet would sign it now.

We must put an end to these terrible weapons once and for all.

Satu Hassi, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FI) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is an excellent thing that the Convention on Cluster Munitions has been introduced. It is very important that all the EU countries join the Convention, including Finland, Greece and Poland, otherwise, we will be giving other countries an all too easy excuse to continue using these inhumane weapons.

I greatly regret that my own country, Finland, intends to remain outside the Convention. The justification for this is that cluster munitions have been acquired to take the place of another type of inhumane weapon, the anti-personnel mine. This, however, is like using Beelzebub to cast out the Devil. At the end of the 1990s, when the Finnish government of the time decided to phase out anti-personnel mines, the army did not say it was going to replace them with that other killer of civilians, cluster munitions.

The EU and all the EU countries must now show consistency in their opposition to cluster munitions and also refuse to engage in any military operations in which they are used. As many as 98% of the victims of cluster bombs are said to be civilians. We have well over 20 years of experience with these weapons, showing that they indiscriminately kill civilians, including children. It is now time we put a stop to this.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (FR) Mr President, honourable Members, solemnly and seriously, I have to tell you that I was truly proud to participate in the debate that we have just had on cluster munitions and, on behalf of the Presidency, I join all those who have called for the ratification of the convention.

The European Union has already recognised, in 2007, the urgency with which these humanitarian concerns about cluster munitions must be addressed. I know that the Member States of the Union have played an active role both in the Oslo process and within the framework of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons. In our view, this Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons and the Oslo process are mutually reinforcing, and it is to the credit of your House, and to those who have taken the floor, to have reminded us of the values that Europeans believe in. We call on all Member States to act for those reasons that you have, better than I, movingly set out during the course of this debate.

President. – I have received two motions for resolutions⁽²⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 108(5) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday at 12 noon.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Proinsias De Rossa (PSE), *in writing*. – I urgently call upon all EU Member States to immediately ratify and implement the Convention on Cluster Munitions. Cluster Munitions visit unspeakable and indiscriminate horror on civilian populations worldwide, most recently in the Georgian conflict.

The Convention on Cluster Munitions prohibits the use, production, stockpiling and transfer of Cluster Munitions. The Convention was adopted by 107 states at a conference in Dublin in May this year. However, the Convention will not enter into force until at least 30 states have also ratified it.

It beggars belief that eight EU Member States have no immediate plans to sign the Convention. Thus the EU, the most successful peace project ever, a community founded on the very principles of respect for human

⁽²⁾ See Minutes.

rights and the rule of law, fails to endorse the extension of international humanitarian law to ban one of the most insidious anti-civilian weapons in use today.

I call on Cyprus, Estonia, Finland, Greece, Poland, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia to ratify the Convention on Cluster Munitions without delay and help bring an end to the use of cluster bombs.

Kelam, Tunne (PPE-DE), in writing. – We should take into account that cluster munitions are one of the most damaging weapons, which do not see a difference between military and civilian targets.

Today, in the 21st century, making war can no longer be led by the idea of ravaging or by the idea of maximum damage. Targeted attacks with a minimum effect on civilians can be the only way to act in a war situation. Therefore using cluster munitions has to be clearly rejected and forbidden.

I call upon the European Union and its Member States first of all to urge other states in the world to sign this convention on 3 December this year. Furthermore I call upon the EU and its Member States to commit ourselves to pursuing the implementation of this convention efficiently and as fast as possible. I also call upon the EU and its Member States not only to tackle the technical parts of the Convention, but to seriously dedicate themselves to helping in the areas where cluster munitions have been used, to assist the societies concerned and to provide effective and tailored help to those civilians affected by the harm caused by cluster munitions.

14. Question Time (Commission)

President. – The next item is Question Time (B6-0484/2008). The following questions have been submitted to the Commission.

Part I

Question No 33 by **Stavros Arnaoutakis** (H-0800/08)

Subject: Information for citizens on EU measures to protect them from the international financial crisis

In reply to my oral question H-0075/08⁽³⁾ on the impact of the international credit crisis during the plenary sitting of the European Parliament held last March, the Commission stated that we should expect a fall of 0.5% in the EU's growth rate, an increase in inflation and an external trade deficit of EUR 185 000 million in the EU of 27. The Commission stressed that the best way of dealing with this international crisis was to continue with structural reforms and macroeconomic policies, pointing out that protectionism is not a solution. Currently, we are witnessing the further spread of the financial crisis, which is now also affecting the big conglomerates.

Have the data which the Commission previously provided changed? How will it inform European citizens of the implications of this crisis and what practical measures will it take to protect them?

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the Commission. – The Commission presented its autumn forecast on 3 November, which indicates that the economic outlook is bleak: economic growth is expected to come to a standstill in 2009, increasing by a meagre 0.2% in the European Union.

2010 should see a gradual recovery for most EU economies, with growth projected at 1.1% for the EU as a whole. As a result, unemployment is expected to increase to 7.8% in the EU in 2009, with a further increase projected for 2010.

However, next year we expect inflation to fall back quickly to 2.4% in the EU and to decelerate further in 2010.

There is no question that the challenges we face are substantial. Hence, the Commission is now developing a comprehensive strategy to manage the financial crisis and limit the economic downturn. The basis of this strategy is set down in the communication entitled 'From financial crisis to recovery: A European framework for action', which indicates how the EU should tackle the next stages of the crisis in a united, coordinated manner.

⁽³⁾ Oral answer of 11.3.2008.

Action should be geared towards three objectives: first, building a new financial market architecture at EU level; second, dealing with the impact on the real economy and, third, coordinating a global response to the financial crisis.

On 26 November, the Commission will propose a more detailed version of this EU recovery plan, under the umbrella of the Lisbon Strategy for Growth and Jobs. Our aim is to bring together a series of targeted short-term initiatives that will help counter adverse effects on the wider economy, while adapting the medium to long-term measures of the Lisbon Strategy to take account of the crisis.

Stavros Arnautakis (PSE). – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, thank you for your reply. However, what we need to say to European citizens today is that we are responding to the credit crunch and shall be injecting money into the real economy. European citizens also want this crisis to be an opportunity for Europe, for civil Europe.

My question is: will money be injected into public investment and public works over coming years?

Reinhard Rack (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam Vice-President, when the latest information is available, rapid decision-making is needed. The problem is that it generally takes a very long time for the Commission, which takes the form of a collegial body, to put things into motion. Are there special rules for situations like the one which we are currently confronted with? In other cases, it really is a long time before the Commission, as a collegial body, produces a result.

Danutė Budreikaitė (ALDE). – (LT) Mr President, Mrs Wallström, as experience shows, the Member States themselves are seeking a way out of the consequences of the financial crisis and the economic recession.

What is your opinion of the pre-crisis measures? Do increased taxes, an expansion of the tax base and the VAT increase offer an effective way out of the crisis during such a difficult period?

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the Commission. – The most important question right now is: what are the next steps for the Commission in the coming week to actually deal with the effects on the real economy?

We are going to present a package – which is being worked on at the moment – where we identify the different policy fields where we think we can mitigate the impact on the real economy in the short run, whilst sticking to the existing medium-term reform priorities of the Lisbon Strategy. That will be the framework within which we work. We hope that we can find actions which will help to bolster aggregate demand; on the demand side, we want to reduce inflationary pressures and help the purchasing power of households.

We have to do more on the labour market and, as you say, front-load investments. We hope that this will also help the issues and the actions taken when it comes to the energy and climate change package, because we will need money for investments. We hope that will help to push in this difficult period. On the labour markets, for example, activation policies can be very helpful.

In reply to the last question, I would say that we want Member States to coordinate action. We think the worst thing would be if everybody went in different directions doing whatever they thought was the right thing to do in their respective Member States. We want them rather to discuss, coordinate and cooperate as much as possible, because the effects will be felt on the whole economy in Europe. We prefer actions in a coordinated way.

What about the long lead time or the long time to prepare? You would be surprised. As I said yesterday in the debate on the financial crisis, the Commission, for the first time, has managed within 24 hours to get proposals on the table. We have to respond to this very serious crisis in such a way that we do not take too long to prepare the different proposals.

We have all been instructed or we have all wanted to see in our respective policy areas how we can help, how we can overcome the long period to prepare, how we can do it more quickly, yet do it in a coordinated and respectful way. We are trying to get the proposals on the table as quickly as possible and we are stretching all our possibilities as much as possible. This is the starting point for the Commission at this moment.

President. – Question No 34 by **Bogusław Sonik** (H-0850/08)

Subject: Disparities in driver blood-alcohol limits in EU Member States

In many Member States – for example, the United Kingdom, Italy, Ireland and Luxembourg – the limit on the amount of alcohol that anyone driving a vehicle may have in their blood has been set at 0.8 mg/l. In

Slovakia and Hungary, which do not allow anyone who has consumed even the smallest amount of alcohol to drive, any driver with that amount of alcohol in their blood would be committing a serious offence. The rules governing the driving of vehicles, as laid down in the Polish Road Traffic Act of 20 June 1997 (Official Journal No 108, 2005, Item 908, as amended), set the permissible blood alcohol level at 0.2 mg/l. Driving with a blood-alcohol level of more than 0.5 mg/l is a criminal offence subject to imprisonment for up to two years.

Given the current trend towards the standardisation of road traffic legislation within the EU, does the Commission intend to take steps to standardise permissible blood-alcohol levels for drivers in the EU Member States?

Antonio Tajani, Vice-President of the Commission. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in fact, in 1988 the Commission proposed a directive on the maximum rate of blood-alcohol permitted for drivers, but in the absence of an agreement between the Member States and the Commission, the Commission had to content itself with adopting, on 17 January 2001, a recommendation that a maximum rate of 0.5 mg/ml be imposed in all the Member States. Today, in the European Union, only three Member States, Ireland, Malta and the United Kingdom, have maximum rates of blood alcohol greater than that value.

The recommendation of the Commission also envisaged lowering the blood-alcohol rate to 0.2 mg/ml for certain categories of driver, including learners, who are the subject of the first question posed by the honourable Member. In fact, learner drivers are the main victims of danger on the roads and therefore it is vital to reduce as far as possible the risk factors in relation to them, for instance, by permitting for this category a blood-alcohol rate no greater, as I have said, than 0.2 mg/ml. This is linked to the measure known as 'zero rate', laid down for this category of driver in the communication adopted by the Commission in October 2006 and which lays down a strategy to support the Member States to reduce the damage caused by alcohol.

Ladies and gentlemen, given this background, the Commission unfortunately does not consider that the political conditions are in place that would allow the adoption by the Member States of a piece of legislation designed to further harmonise the level of blood-alcohol permitted within the EU. Having said that, the Commission does not intend to remain inactive with regard to something which remains one of the main causes of deaths on Europe's roads.

The Commission has taken various measures on this issue. First and foremost, with regard to road checks, in the recommendation of 6 April 2004, the Commission pushed to intensify random checks on blood-alcohol levels through an effective device to measure alcohol in blood through an analysis of exhaled air, to be used in those places and at the times in which excessive consumption of alcohol by drivers is regularly observed.

Ladies and gentlemen, I must also stress that driving under the influence of alcohol is one of the offences covered by the proposal for a directive facilitating cross-border enforcement in the field of road safety, adopted by the Commission in March of this year, and currently being debated by the Council and Parliament.

At the last Transport Council, I was able to emphasise this to the ministers: faced with the loss of human lives, we cannot stalemate ourselves with legal quibbles or discuss whether it is an issue relating to the first or third pillar because unfortunately, legal debates serve for very little in tackling and resolving problems as serious as road accidents.

I would like to take the opportunity of this parliamentary debate to point out that the four offences envisaged in the directive under discussion which, in addition to driving while drunk, are speeding, not wearing seatbelts and driving after having taken narcotic substances, are responsible for three out of four road accidents. This means that much can and must be done by the European Union, and I therefore call once again upon Parliament to go forward in the direction already embarked upon through the vote in the Committee on Transport and Tourism.

Additionally I am just about to finish, Mr President, in order to be able to draw up in the near future concrete proposals regarding driving under the influence of psychoactive substances, in October 2006 the Commission launched a research project set to last for four years designed to improve knowledge in this field and formulate solutions. This is the DRUID project, of which you are well aware.

Finally, the financial support supplied by the Commission for awareness-raising campaigns should be stressed. These are, in particular, those campaigns conducted by young people aimed at other young people to make them aware of the danger of consuming alcohol and drugs when driving a car. One example of many is the campaign called 'Bob' which was very successful throughout Europe, and we should also remember the commitment of the Commission, which called Kimi Raikkonen, outgoing world Formula One champion,

to Brussels to be a witness for the European Union's campaign for road safety, as well as the day dedicated to road safety in large cities which was held in Paris on 10 October, and which is a further indication of the European Commission's huge commitment on road safety. I made this one of my priorities during the debate on confidence following my appointment as European Commissioner for transport.

Ladies and gentlemen, unfortunately more cannot be done, but I hope that I have been comprehensive in answering your oral question.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, may I thank you for your response and encourage you to take bolder steps. We need to adopt and update a directive introducing a total ban on drink driving. We must not surrender to the alcohol manufacturers' lobby and its influence, and we must not be afraid of them. We have a right to safe roads, and we should start with the young. We must be bold in tackling these projects.

Jörg Leichtfried (PSE). – (DE) Mr Vice-President, I would like to take this brief opportunity to ask two questions. Firstly, you have said that the political background for a regulation of this kind is not entirely in place. What I would like to know is, where does the major resistance lie? Does it come from individual states or from large lobby groups? What is preventing the Commission from doing something in this case?

My second question concerns the fact that increasing numbers of studies have shown that smoking in cars is very dangerous. On the one hand, it is very unhealthy and, on the other, it is distracting and tiring. My question is whether the Commission is considering doing something with regard to this at a European level.

Colm Burke (PPE-DE). – My question concerns Ireland, where a large number of young people have been involved in tragic accidents as the sole occupants of vehicles.

I should like to know whether any research has been done across Europe on this topic and if we could revitalise the programme about educating young people in driving. A lot more work needs to be done, and I would ask that we revitalise that education programme at the earliest possible date.

Antonio Tajani, Vice-President of the Commission. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the questions that have been tabled, because they make it possible to clarify further the European Union's position.

Mr Leichtfried, when you rightly spoke about the political problems that we have encountered, the political problems concern the Member States, but we have seen that unfortunately, the Commission's proposal was not accepted, despite a huge effort. In spite of the lack of agreement with the Member States on the proposal for a directive, we have persisted, and will continue to do so. I repeat now what I said at the hearing at which I gained the confidence of the Commission and Parliament: I will continue to make road safety one of my priorities.

I intend to continue to support all the DRUID projects and programmes – this is my response to the honourable Member – with regard to the issue of provision of information to young people, and educating young people. This should be a priority. It is not tools that cause accidents; of course, it is important to have safe tools. It is important to have safe roads and this Parliament has decided to take, together with the Commission, certain decisions relating to infrastructure, but the main problem is educating those who sit behind the driver's wheel or on a motorbike saddle.

We have a duty to start to educate young people, and therefore I am fully in agreement with your position and I will do all I can to ensure that programmes are always funded by the European Union and the Commission to educate young people at school. Ladies and gentlemen, it is not by chance that I chose the former world champion as the Commission's witness, who is a young man.

We should seek to communicate to young people, through young people who do not preach, as a head of the family may do, but who are able to explain to them what the actual risks are, because all young people, in fact, when they come out of a disco, feel themselves to be invulnerable. Unfortunately, that is not the case, and we must work with schools, we must work with families, to ensure that all young people are shown the risks that they run every time they sit at the wheel and, above all, if they drink alcohol or take drugs.

With regard to the issue of smoking, I will ask the Commission departments to carry out an investigation to find out whether there are, in fact, additional risks for smokers or not. I am not able to give you an answer, because, from the scientific viewpoint, I do not know, but I will commission the departments, as I say, to check this.

I believe that I have also answered Mr Sonik by confirming my commitment, and I think that I can make this commitment on behalf of the Commission – Vice-President Wallström is also responsible for communication – that we will do all we can to provide information to citizens and above all to young citizens, who are therefore learners, of the risks and dangers that they run every time they travel in a vehicle.

President. – Question No 35 by **Katerina Batzeli** (H-0861/08)

Subject: Interinstitutional agreement on 'Communicating Europe in Partnership'

On 22 October 2008, representatives of the European Parliament, the Commission and the Council signed the first ever political declaration on an interinstitutional agreement on communicating EU priorities. This is an agreement of the utmost political significance since it seeks to provide an effective solution to the major democratic problem that European citizens are not adequately informed, but it also comes at a critical time since we are in the run-up to elections in the EU.

What will be the priorities and the basic messages of the Community's unified communications policy for the year ahead, in particular during the run-up to elections?

How will cooperation between the three Community institutions be promoted in jointly selecting the priorities and objectives of this communications policy and also their cooperation with the relevant national authorities? In particular, what will be the relation between Community and national communications policies relating to the EU?

What resources will be allocated to implement its new Community communications policy and what role will the new communications technologies play? What will be the role of multilingualism in this context?

What Community funds will be used to fund individual actions under the newly established communications policy?

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the Commission. – Parliament, the Commission and the Council have boosted their cooperation on EU communication and signed the political declaration on Communicating Europe in Partnership on 22 October this year. Thank you very much for your strong support on this issue. This is the first time that we have agreed on a common approach to communication.

Communicating is more efficient and effective if done in a coordinated way on priority issues. Besides, it requires a political commitment of all actors, including Member States. All institutions have a responsibility to communicate with citizens about the European Union. However – and let me stress this firmly – the political declaration also respects the individual responsibility of each EU institution and Member State for its own communication strategy and priorities.

Common communication priorities are at the centre of the political declaration and they will be agreed by the interinstitutional group on information (IGI) co-chaired by representatives of each institution. We have already identified and agreed to have four common priorities in 2009: the European elections, energy and climate change, the 20th anniversary of the democratic changes in Central and Eastern Europe and, of course, sustaining jobs, growth and solidarity in Europe.

Implementation will be assured together by Parliament, the Commission and the Council, as well as by Member States. Therefore, we will aim to develop synergies with national, regional and local authorities, as well as with representatives of civil society. Our representations and Parliament's information offices in the Member States will work with national authorities on joint activities adapted to national conditions. If needed, we will enter into appropriate administrative arrangements between the services at EU and national levels and action will be financed appropriately.

It goes without saying that in their actions, our institutions and Member States will respect multilingualism and cultural diversity. In this context, let me mention that the Commission is very active in facing the challenge of multilingualism. Among other measures, translators have been assigned to our representations in the Member States to serve local needs and help to communicate Europe in the language of its citizens.

Finally, implementation of the common communication priorities will provide excellent platforms for European, national and regional politicians to debate with citizens on EU issues before the European elections. I hope it will have a positive influence on the turnout.

Katerina Batzeli (PSE). – (EL) Thank you very much Mrs Wallström for your reply. I should like, firstly, to state that this interinstitutional agreement aims, first and foremost, to introduce a single European communication policy which must be adopted, at a steady rate, slowly but surely, by all the Community institutions, so that citizens receive standard information.

Secondly, I should like a number of clarifications on the question of financing for the new proposed actions. Will they be integrated into existing programmes? Will a new line be created, so that there is a budget for information? How will sectoral programmes be financed? Will the communication policy be an independent or cofinanced policy?

Reinhard Rack (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam Vice-President, paper may be versatile, but it is becoming increasingly clear that it is no longer very informative. The electronic media – television and the internet – must be given priority in our information policy. Therefore, my question concerns whether we can identify a trend of this kind in current policy. Secondly, I was pleased that the local and regional television companies, in particular, are to be involved in this. This makes more sense than covering the deficiencies of the large public television companies.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – Again I am pleased to hear what the Commissioner has to say but I share the concerns of the last speaker. I am concerned about how the message is going to be conveyed out there and I agree about the electronic media.

There is a real danger that brochures and books will remain in offices unread. I have seen this happen so many times. I suppose the question I want to ask is: how do you intend to get the message out there to those who are interested? Are you going to try to target interested groups, or is it simply a blanket approach?

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the Commission. – Thank you for these important follow-up questions.

Let me say what I think is necessary. For the success of any campaign or information, we will need five elements.

First, to use the internet and new technologies intensively. We can only dream of the Obama campaign. I think they had USD 1.2 billion for their information campaign, but the way they used the internet proved to be decisive. Therefore, we need to do that.

Second, we need to use audiovisual tools: 60% of citizens use mainly TV and radio for any information about what goes on at EU level.

Third, we need to engage with multipliers, such as civil society and local authorities' different networks. Therefore, we have other faces and other messengers about the added value of working together at European level.

Fourth, we need to cooperate with 'ambassadors', i.e. people who are willing to stand for the cause of democracy and who can reach out more than we, the politicians, can do.

Fifth, we need to reach young people and women, who tend to vote less and be less enthusiastic about the European Union which, not least, the referendums in Ireland, and previously in France and the Netherlands, showed us.

These things are necessary.

What about the money then? What kind of budget do we have? We have been able to identify some EUR 8.5 million in our budget for next year to cover centrally and decentrally managed actions that are linked to next year's elections. Our representations have been instructed to devote the bulk of their modest communication means to the EP elections and, in fact, out of the decentralised monies that they have, they have allocated 60% to this task. We also now have meetings at a technical level with your services in Parliament to compare notes on the different activities in the different Member States.

This year, we have activities aimed at the elections that represent around EUR 6.2 million. We have projects targeting young people; we have special Eurobarometers etc. There is also money for communication on Structural Funds, on agriculture and on research in each policy area, but we do not have any extra money or special money allocated to this. I have asked all my colleagues to integrate the elections in their communication plans. They will be reporting to me on how this is being done.

Next year's budget has not yet been finalised, so there is still an opportunity to add extra money – but this is what we can identify today in the budget. So there is not an over-allocation of money, but we will have to use the already existing channels. We will also help and assist the European Parliament as much as we can with all our resources and through our normal activities, i.e. producing audiovisual material, video clips on EUtube – all of the things that we do on a daily basis we will make sure are used to mobilise voters and to inspire good and lively discussion in the EP elections.

Part II

President. – Question No 36 by **Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou** (H-0809/08)

Subject: Information for Europeans concerning participation in European elections

The recent international financial instability, which put a severe strain on international and European banking systems, was a cause for deep concern among ordinary European citizens, who did not see any solutions proposed at EU level or any sign of European solidarity during that critical period.

What steps and what measures does the Commission propose in order to inform European citizens about European policies and solutions at EU or Member State level during times of crisis and exceptional political and economic developments? What plans does it have to provide European citizens with information in the run-up to the election and induce them to take part in the European elections in the context of unfavourable developments affecting issues of importance to the EU concerning international economic and trade relations?

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the Commission. – I know very well that the financial crisis and its impact on the real economies are of huge concern to many Europeans and, as such, this will also have a particular impact on the European elections. It is no wonder, then, that most people would like the election campaign to focus on economic issues affecting their everyday lives, such as unemployment, economic growth, inflation and purchasing power. More recent opinion polls also show that people now see the EU as a 'shelter' from the current crisis and want the EU to regulate at global level.

The Commission keeps pace with developments. On 29 October, we adopted a framework focusing on dealing both with a crisis in the markets, preventing future crises through reforms of economic governance, and minimising the impact on jobs and growth. Proposals to follow this up are in preparation and are central strategic priorities for our legislative and work programme for 2009, which we presented to Parliament yesterday, and which was debated.

It is important that the need for action has been recognised by the Commission, Parliament and Council and that we are about to propose sustaining jobs, growth and solidarity as one of the interinstitutional communication priorities for next year. This means that it will be one of the themes on which EU institutions and Member States will work in partnership to communicate on EU activities in this area. Plans will be drawn up on how best to do this.

I have already mentioned the EP elections, which are another of the interinstitutional priorities. Here, preparations are more advanced, as we have all known for some time that it would be a priority.

Our institutions are working in close cooperation on all election-related communications activities, and the Commission will contribute actively to the framework communication strategy adopted by Parliament. The Commission's goal is to raise people's awareness of the elections and generate debate on substantive EU policy issues. This will be partly achieved by the use of our central tools, including the use of audiovisual media and the internet, and complemented by many decentralised activities organised by the representations in each Member State in close cooperation with Parliament's information offices.

Those events should make people aware of the fact that the voter has a choice between different policy visions of Europe and that these choices will make a big difference to the lives of all our citizens.

Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, my thanks to the Vice-President for her reply. I trust that the measures proposed by the Commission will be implemented, because a great deal of time passes between proposal and implementation; there is the bureaucratic process and I do not know if there will be enough time before the elections for citizens to see the results.

Financing and the information strategy can also bring about contradictory results, which is why particular care is needed to ensure that we do not hit a nerve among our citizens, who do not want to see money being squandered unnecessarily on the events, publications and decentralised activities you mentioned.

Also, debate does not always convince. Perhaps we should therefore recognise the means at our disposal and be more honest with the citizens.

Josu Ortuondo Larrea (ALDE). – (ES) Mrs Wallström, do you believe that the issue of whether electors feel close to or distant from candidates has an impact on the level of participation in European elections? Do you agree with a State of 45 million inhabitants having only one electoral district for the European Parliament elections? What can the Commission do to ensure that States with a larger population have electoral districts which are closer to the people?

Gay Mitchell (PPE-DE). – I just want to say to the Vice-President of the Commission that we should look at the situation in Denmark, where they are now talking about applying for membership of the euro; in Iceland, where the country has been torn apart; and in Sweden, where clearly they are looking again at joining the euro.

For example, who is telling the people of Ireland that, because they were under the euro and the European Central Bank, they have been able to weather this storm much better than these other countries? Is it not time that we actually start talking up the European Union? This week, we have Members of the European Parliament from Ireland in this House making negative comments about the European Union. Who is going to make the positive comments and claim the good things for us so that people know the benefits of being in the European Union and the euro?

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the Commission. – I tried to do my bit by visiting Ireland last week. I tried to explain what I think are the added values of European cooperation. I think the debate about the euro and why it has been to the advantage of Ireland to belong to the euro area is going well now, but it raises the basic question of who will advocate the European Union. Who will speak for the European Union? Where does the responsibility lie? We can never count on Brussels doing all of that. It has to be shared and done in partnership.

Actually I think that the political controversy and debate are good, because there are different versions, different programmes etc. I think that helps to raise interest, and it is also ultimately good for voter turnout. Of course we want to encourage and stimulate a lively debate and discussion on the European agenda and European issues. We all have to be advocates. That is why I am proud and happy that we, for the first time, have this kind of framework of an agreed partnership on communication. We have never had that before.

So we should decide to share the responsibility to be advocates and also to listen to the concerns of people across Europe, because really it is communication, not only information, that matters. Listen better, explain better and go local: that is what I repeat with regard to communication. The campaign will be carried out differently in different Member States because it will have to be adapted to national conditions. This is what we are trying to do now. We are trying to speed it up as much as we can, but we also have to respect the Financial Regulation and all the rules. We have to be correct in everything we do. We had a meeting today, which we will follow up. We will try to respond as best we can to the Parliament's detailed timetable for planning for the EP elections.

I think that we will already be able to allocate and spend money this year but, of course, more resources becoming available would help us to organise more activities next year. I repeat that I think we also have to look at using audiovisual media and the Internet more extensively in order to be effective and to reach out to young people.

Josu Ortuondo Larrea (ALDE). – (ES) Please forgive me, but I did not hear the Commission Vice-President answer my questions.

President. – We note the reply given by the Commission, but we do not have the powers or the skills to assess the scope of the reply as regards its substance.

Question No 37 by **Georgios Papastamkos (H-0811/08)**

Subject: Commission's communications strategy for the Irish referendum

What was the communications strategy of the Commission and its members during the run-up to the referendum in Ireland?

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the Commission. – I would like to stress that, on the Lisbon Treaty, the European Commission has worked through its representations and in close coordination with Member States to provide factual and objective information to EU citizens. We have supported this work with

communication kits including various materials such as fact sheets, presentations and key messages. We also provided training and briefings for Commissioners, representation staff, Europe Direct information centres and other information multipliers.

Recognising the importance of the web, we have created a dedicated website with comprehensive information on the Lisbon Treaty which was launched in the 23 official languages. On that basis, the Commission representations in Member States have developed materials adapted for local needs and better suited for informing citizens. Further to this, the representations, including the one in Ireland, have drawn up communication plans in close cooperation with the national government and EP information offices in Member States.

Activities that we planned include training for journalists and multipliers, publications of brochures and leaflets, organisation of discussions with civil society and local authorities, and also public events at schools and universities. As such, the citizens get tailor-made information in their language and which address their real concerns.

Georgios Papastamkos (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, my thanks to the Vice-President. My supplementary question includes a proposal: Madam Vice-President of the Commission, you – not just you, the College of Commissioners – should visit Ireland at a politically convenient time for the Irish question and the entire College of Commissioners should start a debate with the citizens of Ireland and answer their questions *in toto*.

Organise a debate with all the interested agencies with television coverage, so that the Irish people, the Irish electoral body can watch it and reply to their anxieties and questions *in situ*.

Armando França (PSE). – (PT) Mr President, Commissioner, for two months the political and media agendas have been dominated by the financial and economic crisis. The referendum in Ireland or the difficulties in the Czech Republic over the Lisbon Treaty have gone virtually unreported in the media. Do you not feel that the Commission's information and communication strategy should now be reinforced, given the need and urgency for the Lisbon Treaty to enter into force, and also as a political response to tackle and overcome the current crisis?

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – I will be brief. First of all, I would like to compliment the Commissioner in particular for her efforts on this issue. As a former journalist, can I suggest that while a meeting of the Commission might be interesting for the Commission, we cannot force people to watch it.

The problem is, information without emotion will not be taken up and I am afraid Europe is pretty dull and boring – except your good self – so you need to address that.

Can I also say as a former journalist – and this is terrible that I am saying this in public – I was brought here, and to the Commission, on many occasions, and the grey walls and the dull presentations did not stimulate my European genes. You need to tackle that issue. Finally, if the Irish government had, as you said, listened better, explained better and gone local, there would have been a 'yes'.

President. – Questions Nos 38 to 41 will receive written answers.

Georgios Papastamkos (PPE-DE). – (EL) Could the Vice-President please reply to my supplementary questions?

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the Commission. – I think that maybe the President forgot to give me a chance to reply to your specific questions. Of course we are learning important lessons from what happened in the referendum, and I think you are right in pointing out that there should perhaps have been more visits on the 'yes' side. We followed the advice at the time and we fully respected the wish not to be seen as interfering with the debate in Ireland, but maybe now the Irish will want to send out invitations much more widely. I have encouraged all my colleagues to go there and engage in a discussion with the Irish. If they broadcast it on TV, I am not sure it will always be that convincing, but we appreciate the media attention.

We are working now with the Irish government to conclude a memorandum of understanding, where we look at the things that have to be done, both in the short term and the longer term, in making sure we have better civic education, that we work with journalists, that we perhaps have a more emotional approach to some of these issues yet, at the same time, respect the laws and rules that exist in Ireland.

We are learning lessons and I think we will very much follow your advice to go there and to respond to everything from agriculture to fisheries policy to trade etc. This is the way to meet the challenge. I hope that we will stimulate a good discussion. Thank you for giving me this time.

President. – Question No 49 by **Manuel Medina Ortega** (H-0797/08)

Subject: Intra-African migration

The build-up of internal problems in a number of African countries and the prospects of emigration to Europe have triggered the migration of tens of thousands of Africans from the sub-Saharan countries to countries further to the north, such as Libya, Morocco, Mauritania and Senegal.

Is the Commission aware of this situation? If so, is it considering any measures to improve the miserable living conditions of those inter-African migrants and relieve the pressure on North African countries arising from that abnormal demographic migration?

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the Commission. – Now we are into a completely different policy area. The Commission is perfectly aware of the poverty which, combined with other factors such as instability, climate change and human rights violations, drives migrants to embark on a hard, sometimes tragic journey. The Commission is active on all these fronts, primarily via the political dialogue conducted with these countries and via the European Development Fund and its aim of combating poverty.

In response to the tragic events in Ceuta and Melilla and as part of the global approach approved by the European Council in late 2005, the European Union wanted a structured dialogue with Africa on the link between migration and development under the Rabat process in respect of the West African migratory route, shortly to be followed up by the Paris Conference on 25 November, and the Tripoli Process in respect of Africa as a whole.

The partnership on migration mobility and employment was launched at the December 2007 EU-Africa summit in Lisbon. The underlying idea is that the partnership should find solutions to migration by linking it to employment issues.

The Migration Information and Management Centre, inaugurated by the Development and Humanitarian Aid Commissioner and Malian President Touré in Bamako on 6 October, exemplifies the practical application of the integrated approach that the Commission is striving to promote. It is, moreover, ready to reproduce this example elsewhere in West Africa.

As regards migrants' living conditions, one of the objectives of the migration and asylum programme is to protect migrants' rights, inter alia, by strengthening the capacity of administrations and stakeholders in countries of transit or destination such as the North African countries to assist migrants, especially in certain conditions.

By way of example, the European Community has recently granted funding under the programme for the following projects: the continuing financing of the Libya office of the High Commissioner for Refugees, which plays a key role in promoting the rights of refugees and asylum seekers; improving the protection of the living conditions of international migrants in North Africa; strengthening the capacity of civil society organisations in the area of promoting the rights of migrants in North Africa; and a programme enabling migrants in Libyan Morocco to return home voluntarily in decent conditions.

Lastly, the Commission is using the programme to finance many projects in sub-Saharan Africa addressing the prevention of illegal immigration, the promotion of legal migration, the link between migration and development and the promotion of refugee and asylum-seeker advocacy.

Manuel Medina Ortega (PSE). – (ES) Thank you very much, Madam Vice-President, you have given me plenty of information on the issue that I raised and I thank you for this detailed information. I feel that the Commission's new phase is important. In particular, the Bamako project provides a focus for the European Union in terms of immigration. I know that this has only just started, so my question is probably premature, but I wanted to ask the Commission the following. If this Bamako (Mali) project produces good results in terms of immigration, does the Commission believe that this experience can be extended to the other countries around the southern rim of the Mediterranean?

Colm Burke (PPE-DE). – Mr President, on a point of order, I just wanted to mention something in relation to the last session. I am sorry for raising it at this stage, but during the last session less than 15 minutes were given for three questions – 38, 39 and 40 – which were very much connected.

I think it is unfortunate that they were not dealt with, because I think they could have been dealt with, and yet only 15 minutes were granted to the last session. I had understood it was 20 minutes.

President. – I think that you are right. I will make a note of it, but I have no other option for action at the moment.

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the Commission. – I am also learning all the time in this job. I am learning that similar projects – like the Bamako project – are planned for other countries in Western Africa such as Senegal. So apparently this is already on the agenda and the Commission is fully engaged in developing similar projects in other countries.

President. – Question No 50 by **Luis Yañez-Barnuevo García (H-0799/08)**

Subject: Opening of dialogue in Cuba

The Council Conclusions of 23 June 2008 on Cuba have been very well received in Cuban democratic circles, which appreciate the fact that the unconditional release of all political prisoners is a key priority for the EU and that it supports respect for human rights and genuine progress towards a pluralist democracy.

In line with the commitments made in those Conclusions, can the Commission indicate whether its members have already had contacts with the representatives of civil society and the democratic opposition? What effective measures is the Commission taking to further develop dialogue with those representatives, and how is it ensuring that measures intended to benefit civil society (such as microprojects to promote social integration and cohesion) do not end up being supervised by official bodies?

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the Commission. – The Commission maintains regular direct contact with civil society in all countries of the world, including Cuba. The Commission's role in Cuba is appreciated and supported by civil society and by opposition groups. The Commission delegation in Cuba regularly receives representatives of civil society and opposition groups, and the Commission's departments in Brussels pursue an open-door policy vis-à-vis any person or organisation that wants a constructive discussion on Cuba or any other country.

The meeting that relaunched political dialogue between the European Union and Cuba, following the Council conclusions of 23 June which terminated the diplomatic measures adopted in 2003, was an EU ministerial troika meeting on Cuba in Paris on 16 October 2008. The positive spirit that reigned at that meeting allowed frank and open discussions to take place on subjects of common interest, such as the international financial crisis, human rights, cooperation with Cuba and reform of the United Nations.

The Commission is firmly convinced – and the Commissioner for Development and Humanitarian Aid has said this on several occasions – that frank and open dialogue between the EU and Cuba provides the best framework for discussion on matters of common concern to the two sides, including questions of human rights.

Antonio Masip Hidalgo (PSE). – (ES) On behalf of Mr Yañez-Barnuevo, I thank you for your answer. However, Commissioner, I must say to Mr Michel that his actions, words and gestures are vital in the direct contacts made with the Cuban democratic opposition in terms of implementing the Council's priority conclusions, reducing the effects of Castro's terrible dictatorship and encouraging freedom.

Margot Wallström, Vice-President of the Commission. – I will, of course, convey to my colleague all Parliament's responses and reactions. I think he recently visited Cuba but, of course, to date, we have not had the chance to develop this context. If I know him well enough, I think that this is definitely in his interests and that he will show openness and willingness to listen. This is, of course, part of what we have to do from now on. It is definitely in the Commission's interest as well.

President. – The Members who tabled the other questions are not present, and therefore written answers will be given for Questions Nos 51 to 58.

Question No 43 by **Emmanouil Angelakas** (H-0810/08)

Subject: Europe - a more attractive place for researchers

Statistics show that the European Union produces more graduates in the pure sciences than the USA or Japan. Nevertheless, studies reveal that Europe is unable to retain its high percentage of graduate research scientists and that there is a 'brain drain' to countries outside the EU. This situation gives just cause for concern, particularly at a time when Europe is aspiring to become the most dynamic, knowledge-based economy in the world.

What are the main reasons for this phenomenon and what are its implications for the EU? Does the Commission have statistics on the employment of graduate researchers for each Member State?

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Researchers are at the heart of knowledge creation, transfer and exploitation. They are the key for Europe to turn the fifth freedom – the freedom of movement of knowledge – into reality, and with that to shape the knowledge-based economy.

The supply of human resources for research is indeed best reflected in the number of new university graduates. The benchmark adopted by the Education Council in 2003, to increase by 15% the number of graduates in Member States and decrease gender imbalance by 2010, has been reached. In 2006, there were in the EU-27 about 200 000 more mathematics, science and technology graduates than in 2000.

It is clear that not all university graduates go into research. For the European Union, an additional factor here is that, due to the lower share of private research investments in Europe compared to other continents, the market for researchers in the EU is relatively smaller than those of our competitors.

On top of that, there is strong competition for attracting and keeping the most talented researchers. This is, first and foremost, a competition between research and other economic sectors. But there is also a competition between countries and world regions – in particular the US, but also, increasingly, China and India.

The European Union is facing the upcoming retirement of generations of researchers in Europe, with no prospect of their complete replacement. The situation will get worse if young people are not attracted into the research profession. What is at stake is whether Europe in the long term can remain and further develop as a world-class location for research and development.

The fact is that researchers in Europe are still faced with serious obstacles and a lack of opportunities. When I talk to researchers across Europe, I hear about unattractive working conditions and career prospects, an often precarious status and short-term contracts. Furthermore, many researchers are still trained in a way which does not equip them with the skills needed in a modern knowledge economy. There are strong disincentives for researchers wishing to move jobs within academia and industry and vice versa. Finally, the structural fragmentation of the European researchers' labour market hinders the transnational mobility of researchers within the European Union, due to, in particular, a lack of open, merit-based recruitment and to cultural factors, as well as problems encountered by highly mobile workers in such fields as social security, taxation and transferability of supplementary pension rights.

It is therefore high time for Europe to step up its efforts to ensure the availability of the necessary researchers in the years ahead. That is precisely why the Commission, last May, proposed a European Partnership for Researchers: a partnership with and among Member States entailing a focused framework to make rapid progress across Europe in key areas determining better careers and more mobility.

The Council has responded favourably to this initiative and we are about to embark on its implementation, centred on national action plans and mutual learning. Evidence-based monitoring of progress, data-collection on mobility and career patterns are also foreseen. So, while we currently have very few data, the aim is to provide ourselves with the better statistics that the honourable Member is looking for. We have many of the other data but not exactly these specific data.

The Commission Communication on the European Partnership for Researchers is currently under consideration in this Parliament. The Commission looks forward to Parliament's opinion, which will hopefully reinforce this common endeavour for the future of research in Europe.

Emmanouil Angelakas (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, my thanks to the Commissioner for his reply. I have a supplementary question about the Seventh Framework Programme for Research, which has a package of EUR 54 million. Do you have any details, Commissioner, 18 months in to this Seventh Framework

Programme, as to how it is developing, which countries have a satisfactory take-up rate, what the main problems are and if the Commission intends to produce a progress report on this financing framework?

Paul Rübzig (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, the attraction for researchers naturally also depends on the net income that they receive. Are we working together with Commissioner Kovács to develop a proposal which will allow researchers to pay no tax on their earnings and which will ensure that donations to research organisations are also tax-free or can be regarded as operating expenses? A system of this kind is already in place in the United States. Would it not be possible to carry out a comparative study so that we can also provide incentives in this area?

Gay Mitchell (PPE-DE). – I would like to ask the Commissioner, when he is revisiting these questions and listening to Parliament, if he will again revisit the question of ethical research and ethical researchers. It is very clear that the destruction of embryos is no longer required and there are many other avenues for exploration. Will he now start putting resources into those other avenues so that we can return to a fully ethical research base within the European Union?

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – I wish to begin by saying that of course we are following all the data and everything that concerns the framework programme. This is available and we can provide you with the data.

We also have regular monitoring reports, which are envisaged until the end of the year and, in addition, we will have a progress report – I think at the end of May 2009. But the progress report is much more: it is about providing the input of ideas on how we should proceed in the future. Part of the logical implementation of the framework programme is to follow what you do and where you are investing or spending the funds.

Concerning tax-free income: I was always in favour of using those instruments which would stimulate science and research, including tax-free incomes. One of the problems which we have to deal with in this crisis and difficult situation is how to stimulate research and development so we are not in the same situation as companies. Because of the pressures, they would certainly consider reducing investment in research and development.

This avenue is one of the possibilities, but we also have to be aware that we have a flexible growth and stability pact, which has to be followed, and we have to consider that the situation is certainly not the same in all Member States. Member States have different kinds of manoeuvres which they have established during the good times, when economies were better.

Finally, you asked me about the ethical approach, which was also mentioned in another question. I think we have truly invested a lot in order to reach an agreement on which to base our ethical approach in science and research and also when we are using the framework programmes. Agreement is difficult. There are different views across the European Union Member States, and we can be quite proud that we have established something like clear ethical procedures which are, in reality and in practice, proving to be based on true ethics.

Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, I would like to apologise. I am normally very punctual, but there are always two sides to punctuality and this question time has been delayed. Therefore, I was in the Group meeting and, as soon as I saw on the screen that Commissioner Potočnik was starting, I came running over and arrived at the very second when he began. I would ask you to be so generous as to call my question 42, because I arrived at the plenary session at the very second that Commissioner Potočnik was called. You may not have seen me, but I came running in.

President. – Mr Posselt, we had already seen that you had arrived, although slightly late. Clearly, you are not responsible for this lateness, which is fully justified, and the Bureau had, in the meantime, intended to follow the order with the next question. We will, however, do all that we can to cover your question during this round.

Question No 44 by **Seán Ó Neachtain** (H-0820/08)

Subject: Funding for green technology

In today's climate of economic downturn and greater energy insecurity, citizens are looking to the EU for leadership. It is now time that the EU and its Member States raise the tempo and support increased funding for innovation and technology. We need to get the message across that the EU can be a world leader in green

technology if we act now, not later. The challenge of climate change is an opportunity for investors, research and development, business and jobs.

Can the European Commission lay out the current and future plans for investment funding for green technology under the 7th Research and Technology Framework Programme?

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – The Commission fully supports the analysis made by the honourable Member in his oral question.

We are the leader in green technology and we need to maintain and reinforce this position. This will also back the position of the EU in its leading role in the international fora for combating climate change. With the seventh Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development, the European Union is well equipped – and Parliament played its full role in its outcome – to mobilise EU R&D funds in support of the development of new green technologies.

The Commission is putting a lot of effort into making the most of FP7. Two of the joint technology initiatives adopted so far are fully dedicated to green technologies: ‘Clean Sky’, with a European contribution of EUR 800 million; and ‘hydrogen and fuel cells’, with a contribution of EUR 450 million from the European Community.

With the European Strategic Energy Technology (SET) Plan, we are strongly endorsed by Parliament and the Council. The Commission has initiated a process that will enhance the effectiveness of Research & Development spending in energy research. The SET Plan is committed to green technologies. It calls for the implementation of six new priority European industrial initiatives (industry-led programmes: wind, solar, CCS, grids, bioenergy and sustainable fission) and the establishment of the European Energy Research Alliance (research-led programmes).

The FP7 Energy Community Programme is the main instrument available in the short term to support the implementation of these actions. But more than EU effort alone is certainly needed. Therefore, the Community Programme should be used to catalyse actions of Member States and, of course, of the private sector. This requires a shift in the approach: rather than just cofinancing projects, steering and enabling the deployment of a joint effort through joint programming is truly needed.

Analysing the whole set of work programmes from the first three years of implementation of FP7, the Commission estimates that 37% of the topics supported by R&D funding are for green technology. Forty per cent of the budget committed after the 2007 calls, under the ‘Cooperation’ Specific Programmes, also support green technology R&D.

In order to be able to monitor the contribution of FP7 to sustainable development, in general, and to green technology, in particular, the Commission is setting in place a monitoring system that should be operational in the first semester of next year.

In its Communication ‘From financial crisis to recovery: A European framework for action’, adopted on 29 October this year, the Commission also emphasises the role of R&D investment and education as well as enhancing European competitiveness by continuing to green our economy.

In more general terms, it should be noted that, in addition to FP7 funds and activities, there is a wide range of policy initiatives and supporting programmes related to environmental technologies in the EU like the Environmental Technologies Action Plan, the Competitiveness and Innovation Plan and more recently, the Lead Market Initiative and Action Plan on sustainable production and consumption.

The Commission hopes that, with this element of response, the honourable Member will be convinced that we are fully engaged in harnessing FP7 funds to really greening our research and our economies.

Seán Ó Neachtain (UEN). – (GA) Mr President, I would like to thank the Commissioner for that comprehensive answer.

As regards marine research, sea research, and marine technology and science, is there help available under the seventh Framework Programme of the European Union to increase marine research and marine technology under that programme?

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – The answer is certainly ‘yes’. We discussed only yesterday in the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy this specific activity which is devoted to marine and

maritime matters. We want to make more progress in this area, because the situation is extremely complex. This whole area of oceans is extremely complex, but our life, the way we live, also influences the ecosystems there. It deserves special attention, and this attention should take the form of a new way of organising the system of research in this area: bringing marine and maritime researchers together, and also combining the efforts from the Member States in a different way than is the case today. This is a new way of thinking, which could be named 'pilot thinking' in the context of joint programming, which is something which I mentioned before. Certainly this will have our attention in the future also.

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, we must try to deal with the effects of the reversal of the Question Times that we have had, by attempting to respect all and give everyone the chance to put their questions. In order to do this, we will try to deal with all the remaining questions, but once the Commissioner has given an answer, I will be able to give the floor only to the Member who tabled the question. We will not accept any other requests to speak, because that would make it difficult to achieve the final result.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I know I have just joined you, but I have been watching the monitor at a very important group meeting and I just wonder why we are not going seriatim. I really cannot stay. I came precisely when my question was scheduled and now you are reverting out of order. I would urge you please to stick to the order, Mr President.

President. – Mrs Doyle, I am not changing the order. Unfortunately, an incident occurred for which Mr Posselt bore no responsibility. Since there was a round of questions for which the time was changed for the Commissioners, Mr Posselt was 30 seconds late. I am therefore going back to the question by Mr Posselt and immediately afterwards we will have the question by Mrs Doyle.

Question No 42 by **Bernd Posselt** (H-0795/08)

Subject: Cloning

The Commission is currently conducting a general discussion on cloning. What is the purpose of this debate, and what are the essential principles on which it is based?

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – This is certainly a difficult and complex area. The debate on cloning at the Commission refers to the use of a technology called somatic cell nucleus transfer (SCNT) with particular reference to farm animal breeding and how to deal with food produced from these cloned animals and their offspring.

In the case of the use of this cloning technique in livestock reproduction and breeding in the agrofood sector, the questions are, in particular, related to animal health and welfare. In the case of the safety of food derived from cloned animals and their offspring, the questions are, in particular, related to any possible risk to human health and to the consumer's right to be informed.

The debate does not cover the use of SCNT in research. The Commission has been following the development of SCNT since 1996, when the first cloned mammal, Dolly the sheep, was born. In 1997, the Commission asked the Group of Advisers on the Ethical Implications of Biotechnology to issue an opinion on the ethics of cloning.

In 2004, the Commission financed the project 'Cloning in public' under the sixth Framework Programme. This allowed an EU-wide debate to be launched as a first opportunity to have preliminary discussions with academics and civil society on ethical, legal and other societal aspects of farm animal cloning. The study concluded that the public is not well informed about the use and implications of cloning. The JRC published a study in 2007 in *Nature Biotechnology* on the prospects for future commercial use of cloning technology. The study mapped the state of the art of the commercial applications of animal cloning worldwide and produced a pipeline of products and their estimated time of arrival on the market. The conclusion was that cloned animals were not expected to arrive on the EU market before 2010 and that reproductive materials – semen – from cloned animals may be the first products to be traded.

Over recent years, the Commission has received information that the technology of somatic cell nuclear transfer for the reproduction of farm animals is about to reach its commercial stage, in particular, in third countries, notably the USA. Based on the final risk assessment, a report written by the US Food and Drug Administration scientists and issued in January 2008 concluded that the consumption of food from cloned animals and their offspring is safe as long as the food comes from healthy animals, which is a general principle in food safety. Only healthy animals enter the food chain.

In order to prepare for an informed political debate, in 2007, the Commission asked the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) to assess the actual and potential risks associated with the use of this technology in food production and also asked the European Group of Ethics (EGE) to issue an opinion on the ethical aspects of animal cloning for food supply. The Group released their opinion in January 2008 and the Authority in July 2008. According to EFSA, 'based on current knowledge ... there is no indication that differences exist in terms of food safety between food products [derived] from healthy [animal] clones and their progeny, compared with those from healthy conventionally-bred animals'. Concerning the general health conditions of clones, the EFSA opinion states that there is no indication of adverse effects for the sexually reproduced progeny of cattle or pig clones. However, clones and their progeny have not yet been studied throughout the whole of their natural life span.

At present, the EGE does not see convincing arguments to justify the production of food from clones and their offspring.

The Commission also asked for a Eurobarometer survey to be carried out on the attitude of Europeans towards animal cloning. The results were made available in October 2008. The study showed that 58% of the respondents were against cloning for food production purposes.

The Commission is now carefully considering these various elements to prepare an informal political debate on the use of somatic cell nucleus transfer for the reproduction of farm animals and food production. Should it be considered necessary to further develop the regulatory framework, it is important to recall that the new provisions would, of course, have to comply with the EC Treaty and with World Trade Organisation rules.

Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, I would like to thank the President for his generosity and the Commissioner for his positive response. I have only one question. Can the Commission definitely state that cloning humans, in whatever form, is not and will not be part of this strategy?

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – Under the rules which we currently apply, this is ruled out. The rules which we are using certainly do not allow research where the purpose would be the cloning of people.

President. – Question No 45 by **Avril Doyle (H-0827/08)**

Subject: European Research Council

On 27/28 February 2007, the European Research Council (ERC) was officially launched at an inaugural conference in Berlin hosted by the German EU Presidency. One of its aims is to 'promote wholly investigator-driven or 'bottom up' frontier research'.

Could the Commission clarify what is meant by investigator-driven or 'bottom-up' frontier research? And what progress has been made to date in this area?

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – Here, I will be brief. The 'investigator-driven' approach followed by the European Research Council means that it supports projects at the frontiers of knowledge carried out by researchers on subjects of their choice, in any scientific field. So they have the freedom to choose.

The European Research Council, by supporting 'frontier research', puts particular emphasis on interdisciplinary projects and on pioneering research.

So far – and now I am talking about the progress – two calls for proposals have been implemented by the European Research Council, and Europe's research community has responded with huge enthusiasm. A massive 9 167 proposals were submitted by young researchers in response to the Starting Independent Investigators Grants call last year and more than 2 000 proposals were received for the Advanced Investigators Grants call this year. This high level of participation demonstrates the appeal of the European Research Council and confirms that funding for frontier research on a bottom-up basis corresponds to an urgent need in Europe.

The Commission is convinced that such investment in frontier research in the long term will substantially contribute to improving our knowledge-based society and also our innovation capacity in research.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – In the light of the French presidency's objective of establishing a governance process for the European Research Area (ERA) by the end of 2009, could the Commission specify what measures it plans undertaking, in cooperation with Member States and Parliament, to put in place science

policy evaluation methodologies to ensure evidence-based policy options for science and research and development in the EU?

With the announcement of the European Research Area's '2020 Vision' agreed by the French Presidency, the Council and the Commission, what progress is being made in the whole area of governance here in the ERA?

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – To be honest, this is quite a far-reaching question. We believe that it is important that we agree with the Member States on '2020 Vision', because if we do then this would certainly reduce the length of further debates about what we want to do in Europe. We should not repeat again and again where we are going: that is the whole idea. Of course, the debate is not starting now: the idea was launched with a Green Paper in 2000. I think it is great, especially for the new changed reality in which we live.

The structure and governance of ERA are extremely important, and that is why we have to be patient. It is clear that we will not be successful if the Member States are not in the driving seat. When we talk about the European Research Area and stimulating that, we do not talk predominantly about increasing funds at the European level, but rather about how we can all cooperate better – something that is inherently in the basics of the institutional framework of some of our major competitors, such as the USA, with which we want to compare ourselves. So we want to create a voluntary commitment of the Member States through which we cooperate more and better than at present.

Concerning science policy methodologies, this is all part of the discussion which we are focusing on. I think that this question will certainly have to be addressed, but I cannot elaborate on that. I know that ERA's approach is, in essence, one of the developments that Europe most needs at this time.

President. – Question No 46 by **Gay Mitchell** (H-0833/08)

Subject: Ethical review of funding for research under FP7

In the rules for submission of proposals, and the related evaluation, selection and award procedures (COM(2008)4617) under the Seventh Framework Programme for research and technological development (FP7-1982/2006/EC⁽⁴⁾), it was made clear that funding would not be given to research activities that involved the destruction of embryos. Is the Commission satisfied that the ethical review of proposed projects has been successful in the implementation of this policy?

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – The ethical review of research funded under the Seventh Framework Programme is a system that safeguards the protection of fundamental rights and respect for ethical principles.

In the case of research involving the use of human embryonic stem cells, the procedure consists of five steps, including the scientific evaluation, the ethical screening and review, the national/local ethics committees' approval for the proposed research and the submission of the proposals to a Regulatory Committee, so this relates to which project we decide on a single project basis.

In July 2007, the European Group on Ethics also delivered an opinion to the Commission on ethics reviews of Seventh Framework Programme research projects using human embryonic stem cells.

In following the above steps, the Commission considers that the established ethical review mechanism has been successful in implementing the relevant EC provisions. In particular, as all research activities that involve the destruction of human embryos are excluded from the scope of the Community funding, no research proposals in this area have been funded under the Seventh Framework Programme.

The ethical review is meant to verify that no EU funding is granted to research activities involving the destruction of human embryos. In this sense, it is an integral part of the whole implementation of the Framework Programme.

Gay Mitchell (PPE-DE). – Would the Commissioner tell the House if the framework can be used to carry out research on human embryos which have already been destroyed before the research starts, or is this semantics and are we just playing with words?

⁽⁴⁾ OJ L 412, 30.12.2006, p. 1.

I return to the question I asked earlier and ask for more detail. Will the Commissioner take steps to ensure that everything possible is done to keep abreast of that form of research which does not raise the same ethical questions and which may well give the same or better results?

Marco Cappato (ALDE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in any case, my concern is the opposite from that of Mr Mitchell. Research is certainly permitted on cell lines that have already been extracted. The problem, in my view, is that the obstacles are so great anyhow that this type of research finds itself being penalised for reasons which, on the face of it, are ethical, but which actually are no such thing.

Gay Mitchell (PPE-DE). – Mr President, you said earlier you would not be allowing questions to the Commissioner from people other than from the questioner. People can then come in and go on the record. Why do they not put their own questions down about these issues? You have to follow the ruling consistently, Mr President.

You said you would not allow anybody other than the person who put down the question to ask questions and then you allow a gentleman here to get in on the back of my question. If I knew that this sort of question was put down, I would have gone on much longer about the point that I want to make.

Unethical research is totally unnecessary...

(The President cut off the speaker.)

President – Mr Mitchell, when I give the floor to an MEP for a 30-second speech, I do not know whether he will ask a question or make a comment on the questions which have already been put. In any case, you had the opportunity, through Mr Cappato's speech, to make a further speech in reply. I believe that we can all be satisfied and, thanking Mr Potočník for his patience, let us give him the floor for his final answer.

Janez Potočník, Member of the Commission. – You have seen how difficult this debate is when we talk about ethical questions. That is exactly what Europe is and how it looks.

To be precise, human embryonic stem cells research is allowed under conditions which were agreed and voted in the European Parliament and also in the Council. We have had a very thorough and in-depth debate and the procedure which is used is – I can say – based on a really ethical approach.

I have explained in the introduction which steps we have taken and how the decision is made. Firstly, we need to have a scientific evaluation. Then we have an ethical evaluation at European Union level, then an ethical evaluation at individual Member State level. If any Member State is against something being funded in their country, we do not fund it. Then this project goes to the committee where the decision is taken by the Member States on the individual project basis.

When we do the scientific evaluation, the first question is: is it possible to attain this with any other kind of approach? And only if the answer is 'no' will we continue in the other direction.

Normally, there is an overwhelming majority of scientists who believe that the combination should be used. But if you look at the structure in our programmes, you would definitely find that the overwhelming majority of the programmes we finance are programmes which are connected with adult stem cell research. That is quite clear. So we try to follow the rules which were voted and agreed here and which we believe that, in practice are working.

Colm Burke (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I was here at 18.15 this evening for these questions. My question was No 3 in a session. Fifteen minutes were given to it. Thirty-five minutes were given to this session. I think it is an unfair system when someone who is here on time does not get their question dealt with and I am extremely disappointed. I want my annoyance noted.

It is extremely frustrating to come in here, to be here on time, and then find that questions are skipped so as to accommodate other people. I find it very annoying.

President. – Mr Burke, I understand your frustration, but the period of time laid down for every period of questions this evening has been complied with. Unfortunately, when it happens, as a result, that some questions are included in a question time period and are not dealt with, this depends, unfortunately, not on the President, but on a matter of chance which I can do nothing to remedy. The only opportunity that I had was obviously, as you can very well verify, to lengthen the time for the last period of questions by a few

minutes, thanks to the Commission's availability and kindness. No time was deducted, however, from the other question periods.

Questions which have not been answered for lack of time will be answered in writing (see Annex).

(The sitting was suspended at 7.50 p.m. and resumed at 9 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ROURE

Vice-President

15. Composition of committees and delegations: see Minutes

16. Demographic tendencies - Economic and social impacts (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on demographic tendencies – economic and social impacts.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, President-in-Office of the Council. – (FR) Madam President, as we are unfortunately required to spend part of this evening together, I shall try, on behalf of the Council and also of Commissioner Potočník, to summarise the Council's aims concerning demographic trends and their economic and social impact.

Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the ageing population, in other words the increase in the proportion of older people, is primarily the result of economic, social and medical progress which offers Europeans the opportunity to live long lives in a level of comfort and safety which is unprecedented in history. However, this is also one of the greatest challenges facing the Union in the coming years.

This ageing is the result of four factors. The first is that the number of children per woman is low, with an Union average of 1.5 children, which is far below replacement rate, which needs to be slightly higher than 2 – 2.1 – in order to stabilise population size.

The second factor is the decline in fertility over recent decades, which followed the 'baby boom' of the post-war years and which means that today these 'baby boomers' are swelling the 45 to 65 age group.

Having increased by eight years since 1960, life expectancy at birth – and this is the third factor – may well continue to increase, with an additional five years added between now and 2050, or perhaps even more.

The fourth and final factor is that Europe, as you know, is experiencing growing migration from other countries. In 2004, there were 1.8 million immigrants, which is more than the United States experienced relative to total population, but this level of immigration only partly compensates for the effects of low fertility and increased life expectancy.

We therefore find ourselves in a situation in which the level of dependence, in other words, the number of people aged over 65 compared to the number of people between 15 and 64 years of age is set to double, and will rise to over 50% between now and 2050, which means that the Union, which previously had four people of working age for every person over 65, will see this figure fall to just two.

The demographic change that I have just described, taking into account these factors, is accompanied by profound social change affecting family structures, all of which results in an increasing number of older people living alone and very old people being dependent on others.

As you know, most of these issues fall within the scope of Member States. This is the case for family policy, social security systems and, in large part, fiscal policy, and the Council, given these facts, believes that the Lisbon strategy and the open coordination method form the framework within which Member States should work in this area, and most Member States agree that no new structures should be put in place.

For the Council, the truly important guiding principle is that, in addition to better balance between work and private life, there should be more efforts to balance the roles played by men and women within households, and to offer more good quality infrastructure to care for children and other dependent people.

In an ageing society, the contribution of young people will become all the more important. We will have to intensify our efforts to combat youth unemployment and reduce early school-leaving. Investing in children must be our top priority if we want to improve young people's prospects.

We must also recognise that Europe is affected more by retirement than by ageing, although these trends are worrying and, without healthy public finances, it will be impossible to tackle all the consequences of demographic ageing.

This means that we must pay close attention to the viability of retirement schemes, and pursue the reforms underway to modernise these schemes and make them sustainable, which is in line with the current strategy within the Union. It will also be useful to encourage older workers to carry on working and, in particular, to provide meaningful incentives.

The Council is fully aware of all of these challenges and has adopted the recommendations of the social protection committee concerning views on demographic change in Europe and the challenges this poses. In addition, the Council adopted, on 30 May, the conclusions concerning policies that are in line with families' needs, and established a series of initiatives to support family policies.

In this context, an informal meeting was held on 18 September, organised by the French Presidency, involving ministers responsible for the family. At this meeting, the discussions centred on child care, as a way of ensuring balance between work and family life, and the protection of children on the Internet.

To conclude: the Council invites the Commission to view the first forum on the future demographics of Europe, which took place in Brussels on 30 and 31 October, as a starting point for a structured and lasting dialogue, within and between Member States, and to act so that the Commission may provide support to the relevant bodies to find the best strategies for responding to this demographic change.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, I might take a bit longer but I promise to compensate for that in the second response.

Parliament's request for a statement on demographic trends from the Council and the Commission comes at the right time. This Friday, the Commission services will present their second demography report – in time for the European Demography Forum on 24 and 25 November.

The European Union is going through a major demographic transformation. All the Member States have seen life expectancy rise and fertility rates decline among their populations as a result of scientific, economic and social progress. Today, Europeans live longer, healthier lives than their forbears did, and we can expect life expectancy to increase in the future.

This ageing of Europe's population is no longer an abstract scenario for a distant future. The baby boom began 60 years ago and the first baby boomers are now reaching retirement age. So the European Union's demographic development has reached a turning point. From now on, the number of those aged 60 and over will rise by two million people every year for the next 25 years.

Meanwhile, the rate of growth of the working age population is falling fast and will stop altogether in about six years. Today there are four persons of working age – between 15 and 64 – for every person aged 65 or over in the 27 Member States. In 2060, the ratio will be two to one.

Some see ageing as a threat and paint a bleak picture of conflict between the generations. But demographic change need not be a threat if we look at the opportunities it holds. Living a longer, healthier life can mean staying active longer. Most of the baby boomers are better educated and better trained than previous cohorts. Today they are still fit and healthy.

I am convinced that demographic change offers the chance of stronger solidarity between the generations. But I do not expect that to come about by itself. Society will have to make better use of the abilities of all generations and give everyone the chance to develop his or her full potential. That means modernising our social policies – in line with the renewed social agenda the Commission adopted in July. The renewed social agenda identified Europe's ageing society as a priority area for action and recommended a number of policy responses. Our goal is to help the Member States make the most of the possibilities and manage the impact of an ageing society effectively.

The approaches and recommendations set out in the Commission's 2006 communication 'The demographic future of Europe: From challenge to opportunity' continue to be valid. That communication expressed confidence in Europe's ability to adapt to demographic change. But it also stressed the need to act in five key areas: promoting demographic renewal in Europe, by creating the conditions for our fellow citizens to fulfil their desire to have children, in particular, by helping to reconcile work and family and private life; promoting employment in Europe, by ensuring that more and better jobs are created and people can work longer, in

order to improve the balance between active and inactive people; promoting a more productive and more dynamic Europe, by optimising skills at all ages; taking in and integrating migrants into Europe, by attracting skilled and unskilled workers from abroad and facilitating their integration in order to alleviate labour shortages; ensuring the sustainability of public finances, by consolidating budgets and reforming social protection systems in order to guarantee adequate social protection and public services in the future.

The Lisbon Strategy already covers the most important of those policy responses, but it focuses less on the long term than the demography debate. That is why the Commission has proposed additional tools in the form of biennial reports on the demographic situation in Europe and two-yearly demography forums.

In the 2008 report, the focus will be on the potential of the baby boom cohorts. A growing number of people in their 60s and 70s will probably be willing to continue playing an active part in social and economic life.

The employment rates of older people have risen in recent years, reversing the past trend towards ever earlier retirement. But more needs to be done: when they reach 60, only 40% of men and 30% of women are still in employment. Yet most people in that age group are still fit and capable of contributing to the economy and society. The ageing baby boomers can also make a major contribution to society as informal care providers and volunteers. Their contribution deserves to be recognised and supported by public policies. It is crucial to ensure that the growing number of older people can lead an independent life for as long as possible.

A key objective of demography forums is to promote mutual learning based on good practice among the Member States. The next European Demography Forum – to take place in Brussels on 24 and 25 November – will focus on family policies and active ageing. It will also provide an opportunity to take stock of how prepared the Member States are for demographic change and to identify the most important opportunities for further action.

Early next year, the Commission will present an update of the implications of demographic change for future public spending, in particular, in the area of pensions, health and long-term care, based on Eurostat's new population projections.

To wind up, I want to emphasise that it is the responsibility of the individual Member States to implement the right policies in the face of demographic change. But demographic change is a challenge we all face together. The Member States can learn a lot from each other's successes and failures in responding to this demographic change. That is why the Commission encourages a Europe-wide debate on demographic change and is offering a platform for the exchange of experiences and mutual learning.

John Bowis, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – Madam President, the two opening speeches have rightly highlighted longevity as the most significant change in demography. That, of course, means people are living longer, mainly healthier lives, but in later years they become frail in body or mind.

That has meant an enormous growth in neurodegenerative diseases and the cost of that is vast. Drugs for Parkinson's disease in many countries cost more than drugs for cancer. UK research predicts that by 2051, there will be an increase of 154% in the numbers of people with dementia.

Long-term care: that comes later now. It used to come in the 70s. Now it comes in your 80s and is increasingly coming in your 90s, but it is coming at an ever greater cost to individuals and families with implications for their savings.

The challenge is to ensure longevity as a reward and not a punishment. We need to rethink our assumptions on ageing, moving from just 'How do we care?' to 'How do we promote healthy later years?'. That means healthier lifestyles earlier in life of course; keeping off tobacco and drugs, sensible drinking, healthy eating, exercise, but also management of stress.

Flexible working lives: time for leisure and families. It means preparing for life after work with flexible retirement ages and the gradual movement into retirement that I have seen in the Netherlands. It means greater social support in new and innovative ways, more domiciliary services so that people can stay in their own homes for longer. Services and devices to match changing needs.

When my mother reached 80, she needed a fax machine for communication. At 90, she needed a stair lift. At 100, she needed stimulation as her hearing and sight and mobility diminished. But the mind inside was good and needed to be protected and stimulated if she was to have a real and full life.

Jan Andersson, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (SV) Madam President, the trend for there to be fewer and fewer workers and more and more elderly people could be described as dramatic, yet, at the same time, the fact that we are actually staying healthier further into old age is a positive development.

It poses a number of challenges for us, however. I shall describe a few of them. Fewer children are born nowadays than in the past. That said, this situation varies greatly between the Member States. We can see that the outcome is better in those Member States where a system has been set up to allow parents to combine a working life with parenthood, both the women and the men in a family. We must learn from each other in this regard.

Despite the fact that our population is ageing, the long-term trend is for working lives to shorten. This is due both to the fact that people are starting their careers later and also – with the exception of the last few years, when the development has been more positive – to the fact that career spans have been getting shorter. We need to do something about both sides of this problem in order to lengthen working lives and, above all, before we retire, to come up with flexible solutions.

We have been discussing the 'Blue Card' today, but we must ensure that everyone who has come here from other parts of the world where there is currently high unemployment is integrated and enters the working world, including those with disabilities and other issues. We must do all this within the framework of the Lisbon process, so that we can meet these challenges over the long term.

Marian Harkin, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Madam President, there are many issues that arise in the context of this evening's discussion, but I would just like to look at one of them: care and carers.

If we are lucky enough to live long enough, we will most likely need care, and, while there are differences between Member States, the likelihood is that this will largely consist of informal care.

Carers form the foundation of formal care and social care, and are an indispensable part of long-term care provision. If carers are expected to keep providing care – which they are – then their needs must be an inherent part of health and social care policy development.

In this context, I am pleased to see that the DG SANCO website has a short section devoted to carers, and I have no doubt that this came about as a result of the submission the carers' interest group in Parliament made to DG SANCO on its annual work programme.

However, carers need more than just a mention. We believe it is time to design a new social contract for care that goes way beyond the traditional view of a contract between the state and the individual, and which calls for new commitments involving employers, local agencies and communities. Indeed, the recent ECJ judgment on discrimination by association points the way.

Caring cannot be the sole responsibility of the informal carer or, indeed, of the Member State. The informal care system will collapse without proper support, while with an exclusively state-based approach, the costs will simply be too high. That is why we need this wider social contract.

Finally, there are approximately 100 million carers across the EU. They are unpaid, undervalued and, in many cases, inadequately supported. I welcome the mention on DG SANCO's website, but this is a first step only. By its very extent, this is a European issue and action will have to be coordinated between Member States.

Policy on carers should be part of the work of DG SANCO, and also of DG Employment and Social Affairs.

Guntars Krasts, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (LV) Thank you, Madam President. Europe's residents are getting old! Alongside this trend, the organic increase in the number of inhabitants may become negative. In many Member States, this is already a reality. The number of people working in proportion to the number of pensioners is falling in all Member States. A low birth rate in conjunction with longer life expectancy and immigration is increasing pressure on pensions, health protection and social services. There are, however, also some Member States which have succeeded in changing Europe's negative demographic trend.

In these countries, a balance has been achieved between life and work, which enables parents to bring up their children, without sacrificing their careers, and to obtain the economic and social benefits linked to them. I have no doubt that Member States will have to find the main economic, social and cultural solutions to combat the ageing of their populations. There are also tasks, however, which ought to be carried out at the European Union level. The EU labour market still conceals enormous reserves. We need to ensure that

in the internal market, there are no barriers to the free movement of the labour force. However complicated it may be, we need to return to the liberalisation of the market in services, and we need to review the services directive that was adopted. The implementation of both these basic freedoms would help to offset the financial deficits created by the demographic process. Of course, we should also adopt a non-discriminatory attitude towards gender and age. Thank you.

Jean Lambert, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Madam President, it is interesting how we often see the declining birth rate etc. as a problem. This is not necessarily the case if it means that we are then starting to share some of the inordinate wealth that we have at European Union level with people coming from other countries and that we look at technical innovation and how we can increase productivity and maybe even produce fewer of the rubbishy goods that clutter up our lives and our planet at the moment.

Of course, there is also an issue about making the best use of the potential labour force. This is why the anti-discrimination directives in the field of employment are crucially important and why it is essential that Member States implement those properly. They should also look at the barriers to phased retirement – issues such as: if you cut your working hours, what does that do to your pension; what does it do to your life and access to benefits?

We also ought to consider what is happening in the current financial crisis with regard to a lot of our thinking in this area. We are likely to see more older workers being laid off, because people are not implementing the anti-discrimination legislation properly, with all the implications for many of them of perhaps never getting back into work.

There will be others who will find it even more difficult to start their working lives or to find promotion to build up their pensions: all those aspects of what happens if you are not working for a period of time. There is the question of disaffection amongst the young who cannot find work, for whom it becomes more difficult, and of course the problems that many people will face when their private or occupational pension schemes are not able to pay out in the way that they thought they would.

So we also need to look at the demographic situation in the context of the current crisis and how we are going to use this opportunity in terms of increasing training. We should use that as a way of helping people to improve their skills, perhaps to find pathways to less physically demanding work – something that we have been saying for a considerable period of time needs to be done. We should look at how we might increase the higher-education qualifications of a number of people who never had that opportunity in their youth.

We now have the opportunity to look at certain of the elements that we know are problematic and really begin to look forward to how we are going to tackle the demographic situation.

Pedro Guerreiro, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (PT) In our opinion, instead of being entitled ‘demographic tendencies – economic and social impacts’, this debate should be entitled ‘economic and social policy and its impact on demographic tendencies’.

The demographic tendency projections for a country or region should not be disassociated from the policies adopted in that country or region, given that these policies determine and condition the demographic development.

For example, the 50-year projections are made based on assumptions that should be explained, including the economic policies determining the scenarios put forward. In other words, given the projections made, what we should be discussing today are the consequences for demographic development resulting from unemployment, increased job insecurity, deregulation of working time, a monetary policy focused on moderation and devaluation of wages. What we should be discussing today are the consequences of the European Union’s interest rate policy on thousands and thousands of families who have taken out mortgages to buy houses, the consequences of liberalisation and privatisation on public services, and the consequences of low pensions on the independence and quality of life of millions of pensioners. What we should be discussing are those policies which promote the centralisation and concentration of wealth and the increase in social inequalities.

In essence, what is actually at stake is the observance or non-observance of human rights, such as the right to food, employment, dignified wages, housing, health education and leisure.

Kathy Sinnott, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – Madam President, we are facing a crisis in Europe to which we will not find a solution until we face the fact that the crisis is of our own making.

In the EU, we kill over one and a half million children before birth every year. We destroy our future and then wonder why we have a crisis. We talk about a fertility problem, but this is not a fertility problem: it is a refusal to let millions of babies conceived be born. Unless we are honest in identifying the problem, there can be no solution. The solutions are that we must respect life and support the family, in order for that life to find a nurturing environment. By taking these steps, we can begin to tackle the challenge of skewed demographics. Improvement will not happen overnight, but at this point we can still avert disaster.

One should study the case of Japan closely. Two decades ago, it was the second largest economy in the world, and one of the most advanced. In 2007, the Japanese population peaked and entered decline. In 1995, twelve years before the downturn, Japan entered deflation as negative demographics began to take their toll. It has never got out of it. Japan is 20 years ahead of Europe in this, but it was also 20 years ahead of European countries in legalising abortion. We peak in 2025 – which is only 17 years away. I wonder if the deflation we are now entering, in 2008, is here to stay, with the banking crisis being replaced by a demographic crisis, which will be with us until we learn to respect life again.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Madam President, I am delighted that the Council and Commission are issuing a statement about the economic and social impact of present demographic trends. Many politicians have a bad habit of thinking in the short term and of neglecting long-term policy. Our demographic challenge is a vital problem in the long term, which also requires long-term solutions. The average birth rate in women in the European Union is 1.5, which is too low to replace the current generations. This is also where the problem lies. One option is to reach out for an easy solution in the short term by pleading in favour of an even greater immigration wave from outside Europe. Whilst this may seem like a good idea in theory, day-to-day reality in our big cities bears witness to the total failure of lax immigration policy over the past 30 years. The European unemployment figure is 20 million, and still the Commission would like to import more immigrants. Might I, in fact, point out that the unemployment percentage among non-European immigrants is considerably higher than among the native people in the Member States?

A lack of time prevents me from mentioning the social problems, including the social breakdown, which large-scale immigration causes. What we need is policy in the Member States that supports young European families in their desire to have children. Tax measures are needed in the Member States in order to make having children more attractive. Child care should be improved and extended. We should also dare to contemplate the introduction of a wage for the stay-at-home-parent who chooses to commit most of his or her time to raising the children.

Othmar Karas (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I welcome this debate because it raises awareness, rather than arousing fear. We must take action now, without waiting until tomorrow.

Demographic change has its causes, consequences and challenges, which include falling population levels, fewer people in gainful employment and the likelihood of us living longer. The children born during the next few minutes may live to the age of 100. Indeed, this will be the case for half of these children. The population is ageing and we are having fewer children. This is resulting in dramatic changes to the age structure and the population structure. We in this House are faced by new infrastructure requirements, new requirements on public services and on business, education and social systems. This is an ageing continent. Jean-Claude Juncker once said, 'If we do not rapidly redesign our social, pension and health systems so that they are fit for the future, we will become the losers in the globalisation process, instead of the winners.'

What is to be done? There is a great deal to do. Ensuring that people have a good work-life balance. No longer forcing people to give up working. New forms of care, child care and mobile services, such as meals on wheels, are required. In all Member States, responsibility for financing care must be taken away from social security systems and become a community responsibility. We are facing a challenge in the field of education. Our goal should be to become the most child-friendly and people-friendly continent in the world. We must credit time spent bringing up children and providing other forms of care, because 80% of carers are family members. Equal pay for equal work is also important. Much remains to be done and our problems have a wide range of different causes.

Françoise Castex (PSE). – (FR) Madam President, Minister, I have a few words to say: the stumbling block that we will encounter when tackling this demographic challenge is that the number of working people is falling. Two figures: in 2010, there will be 217 million people of working age, and in 2050 this figure will be 180 million; a deficit of almost 36 million people.

Should we fear a shortage of labour? Should we fear an imbalance between the working population and those who are dependent?

We are suggesting two solutions to this problem, which aim to achieve optimal management of human resources. Firstly, full employment. We must work towards full employment. There are currently very significant employment opportunities, given the under-employment among young people, women, over-55s and underqualified individuals. We are witnessing a huge waste of skills. We may well find that if employment levels among women and those aged between 55 and 65 increase, by 2050, to rates similar to the best in Europe, we could make up for this shortage of labour.

Finally, lifelong education and training. We would like to work towards an optimal length of working life. It is unacceptable that a worker, a project manager, a 50-year old manager has little more by way of career prospects than stagnation. The social responsibility of our firms is at stake here.

(The President cut off the speaker.)

Marco Cappato (ALDE). – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the world population has doubled within a few decades with devastating consequences for the planet and so the fact that the European trend is at least partly different is a positive point.

There are problems in terms of social welfare, certainly, but the answer is not to encourage people to have more children, but rather to raise the retirement age, to eliminate discrimination against older people in countries such as Italy where the disincentives to working after retirement age are so high as to make pensions into obligations rather than rights.

On the world stage, I call upon the Presidency, in particular, to take action to bring about the convening of the new United Nations conference on population which has, for years now, been blocked because of pressure by states such as the Vatican State and by those who fear responsible policies on the provision of information on sex and family planning.

Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, Europe's demographic trends have been deeply alarming for over a dozen years now. The replacement fertility rate is 2.16. In Poland this rate is 1.2. At the same time, the progress of medicine and healthier lifestyles mean that people live longer. Europe is getting older, but it is also dying out. By 2030, the ratio of working to non-working population will be 1 : 2.

Anti-family, socio-economic policies, the promotion of family models with few children and childless marriages by the media, as well as policies conducive to family breakdown, are significant causes of the adverse demographic changes in Europe. Their most important outcomes will be a shortage of workers in the labour market, threatening economic development, a dramatic loss of pension system efficiency and increased cost of health care systems due to the special needs of an ageing society.

Irena Belohorská (NI). – (SK) I welcome the debate on these issues and I feel that it is particularly important now, when we must solve both a financial and an economic crisis at the same time. Demographic trends show that we have an ageing population, due to a combination of improvements to health care and falling birth rates. Therefore, we have to prepare for this reality and to make provision in the relevant areas.

In the social area, it will be a relatively difficult matter to provide pensions. In the area of health, we must think how to provide treatments, especially for diseases associated with old age. We know, for example, that up to two thirds of cancers are associated with an age of over 60.

The sustainability of the social system will require increased, improved and better-adapted conditions of employment for older people. This mainly concerns women over 55 and men in the age range from 55 to 64. It is possible to make up for the population loss through immigration of young people from third countries, but we must try, above all, to create the conditions for stabilising the population of young educated people who we are currently losing to the USA.

In view of the worsening reproductive health of young women, we should support assisted reproduction. Many young families cannot afford this. In my opinion, we will not be able to comply with the Lisbon strategy. Let us try at least to renew the idea of a European family support alliance, either through tax bonuses or through improved facilities for pre-school children. Maternity leave should be provided at full pay and not at the minimum level.

Gabriela Crețu (PSE). – (RO) Minister, I apologise for contradicting you, but we have several problems, not just one. We do not only have demographic problems, but political, social and ethical ones too. We state that we want a higher birth rate, but 30% of children already born live below the poverty line. The

consequences for the future will be poor education, bad jobs, lower productivity and small insurance contributions.

The Council's position on the Working Time Directive blatantly contradicts the intentions of achieving a balance between work and private life. Infertility is a condition which is recognised by the World Health Organisation, but not by many Member States. As a result, insurance does not cover the cost of treatment. To pay for a single attempt at IVF in Romania, a person earning an average salary and saving all of it would need to work for nine months. 3-4 attempts are required for conception and then another nine months before the child is born.

Fellow Members, the most effective solution would be for us to promote a consistent policy among states and to ensure equivalence among the statements made and measures adopted.

Samuli Pohjamo (ALDE). – (FI) Madam President, the challenges posed by demographic trends seem especially great in the sparsely populated areas of the north. Migration takes young and educated people out of a region, whilst the ageing population quickly grows in relation to the rest. This results in increased costs for organising social and health care services, a problem exacerbated by the long distances involved. New technology and innovation have, however, succeeded in establishing new services to help the ageing population and which can be exploited throughout the Union.

Another way to turn challenges into opportunities is effective regional policy. Effective regional policy is a way to make use of the opportunities that areas provide, create new jobs and deliver added value for Europe as a whole. At the same time, trends in population can be made a more positive phenomenon.

Jan Cremers (PSE). – (NL) Madam President, Commissioner, Mr Jouyet, ladies and gentlemen, when this House discussed the effects of demographic developments before the summer, the full extent of the current economic crisis had not yet hit us. This crisis will increase pressure on our social systems. As a result of expected growth in unemployment, some relaxation may perhaps be expected within the labour market in the short term. In the long term, however, this does not solve the specific problem of an ageing population.

If a worsening economic climate brings increased pressure to bear on the older workers to leave the labour market prematurely, we shall lapse into old errors. The emphasis should now remain, as it should do in future, on flexible pension arrangements on a voluntary basis, combined with organising work in such a way as to ensure that continuing to work longer becomes a real option. The financial crisis has demonstrated once again why we must handle pension funds wisely. The sustainability of the pension system, aligned to both demographic and economic developments and based on risk-avoiding investment strategies in the long term, should be accorded high priority. Additionally, the European Commission should turn its attention to regulating and monitoring pan-European pension products.

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE-DE). – (SK) The changing lifestyle of the younger generation is such that after completion of studies, everyone wants to spend some years travelling and then building their career. By this time, young people, including young women, are over the age of 30 and most of them then produce only one offspring. A family is seen today as a negative burden and, in addition to this, young men are not capable of promising marriage and security to women.

The number of abortions is at an all-time high and a large proportion of women use hormonal contraceptives, so the number of women who are actually physiologically capable of conceiving children is very small. The fertility index in European countries varies between 1.1 and 1.3. Only France, which has long provided financial support for families, has an index approaching 2. A recent European congress on the family at the University of Ružomberok ...

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Madam President, it seems we will all live longer but enjoy fewer grandchildren. I suppose the reasons why that is the case are very complex and varied. I think children are seen as a 'problem' and you hear that when you talk to people who do not have children. We also talk about a child care 'problem' rather than a 'solution'.

Older people, too, feel that they are a burden and worry about who will look after them into their old age. I think that those of us in the middle somewhere fear this impending doom because there will be even fewer people around to pay for our pensions and to look after us when we, too, are unable to do so.

The role of carers in society, as Marian Harkin rightly pointed out, is totally undervalued and that needs to change. And I wonder – listening to tonight's debate – in the context of the financial and economic crisis,

can the Commission perhaps answer this question, and see that this problem of the demographic trend could actually get worse because of the situation we are now in? That would be regrettable.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE). – (RO) Madam President, Commissioner, the European Union needs to be prepared to face up to the demographic challenges. Social Europe needs to be able to meet the expectations of its citizens by offering good-quality education, an efficient and accessible health care system and jobs which support a decent living and the guarantee of a decent pension on retirement.

The EU has an ageing population. At the same time, there are few Member States where the birth rate has grown, apart from Ireland and France which have performed well in this area as a result of specific policies that have been adopted. At the same time, although the infant mortality rate has fallen at Community level to 4.7 in a thousand inhabitants, there are still some Member States where this figure is 12 in a thousand inhabitants.

Europe needs to invest in health, education and social welfare. Guaranteeing well-paid jobs means a decent living for workers, but it also guarantees the resources required to pay for pensions. The pension system is a system based on solidarity between the generations.

Toomas Savi (ALDE). – Madam President, the European Union is an ageing society. There are many people in the EU who choose to advance professionally instead of concentrating on their family lives, until it is far too late for them to have children.

Having recently become a grandfather, I am a fierce advocate of an Estonian family planning measure that allows one of the parents to stay at home for 18 months after the birth of their child, guaranteeing social benefits more or less equal to the parent's salary before his or her leave – the parental allowance.

It is my strong opinion that, unless we want to burden our children with unreasonably high taxes, we ought to start implementing a similar approach across the EU. In Estonia, for example, such a policy has brought the nation out of a seemingly interminable decrease in population.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – Madam President, the most important work done by any citizen is the rearing of the next generation. And, without any hectoring or lecturing of the young women of today, married or single, what we need to do is restore the freedom of choice to all women who want to stay at home to have the second or third child and to ensure that they are not forced to remain in employment because of economic and financial circumstances.

We must ensure that full pension credits or a parental pension or a maternal pension are preserved for the women working in the home so that their old age will be financially secure and that they can be properly rewarded by the state for doing that most important work for all of us: rearing the next generation.

On another point, given the increased average number of healthy years available to most of us, the compulsory retirement age – the traditional retirement age – of 65 must be revisited, and revisited urgently. On average, women are now well into their thirties when they give birth to their first child. We must review this situation as quickly as possible.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, we are all aware that European society is ageing, but are we all aware what consequences this will have for our economy and for our labour market? In an era of globalisation, demographic problems acquire a much broader dimension. For this reason, the European Union needs integrated action on a large number of levels.

On the one hand, we must ensure that the goals of the Lisbon Strategy are attained, strive to raise employment levels, increase the participation of women in the labour market and arrest the early retirement trend. We must also place greater emphasis on education, especially in engineering and information technology, essential for a knowledge-based economy. It is also vital to promote life-long education and to prepare workers for being open to new challenges.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, President-in-Office of the Council. – (FR) Madam President, I will try to adhere to your advice. Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the debate has been very fruitful and it is clear from the various interventions that there are multiple points to address if this demographic challenge is to be met.

Various courses of action can complement each other, as I shall describe later. To a certain extent, it is true that we must increase employment rates, and it is true that we will need immigration in order to solve this demographic deficit, and it is also important that immigration be controlled and organised. It is also true

that we need family policies and support for the existing birth rate, and there is a requirement to care for elderly people and to improve the way in which they are treated. In this context, we must pay close attention to the development of education infrastructure, child care and the alleviation of dependency in the elderly.

As several speakers have said, we must consider our strengths, in particular, new information technologies and research and development, with all the flexibility available in medical and health care services, and all that can be done to assist with prenatal diagnosis, early years assistance and community child care. There are therefore several challenges, but we already have the resources to tackle this demographic deficit.

We must be ready to monitor the consequences of demographic change, as was emphasised in the debate. We need to oversee the viability of our social security and pension systems, which are one of the characteristic features of the European solidarity model. We must take long-term measures, despite the economic and financial crisis that we are experiencing at the moment, in order to ensure that these systems are viable, and we must also consider the future effects of this demographic change on various aspects of labour organisation. Mr Cappato used a specific example to illustrate this point, and he is right to do so.

In conclusion, I believe that the Commission, as Commissioner Potočnik will undoubtedly say, Parliament and Council must continue to engage in dialogue in the same spirit that pervaded the debate today. Europe undoubtedly faces a long-term challenge, and we must anticipate, organise ourselves and not allow the economic and financial crisis to prevent us from taking action and initiating reform.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, we have heard today a clear message that we have a very serious challenge – that of the ageing of society.

In many ways, the 21st century is an era of fragility, and we have to deal with this. We all have to do everything possible. As was mentioned, longevity should be a reward and not a punishment. It was also mentioned that it would be consistent to do this in the context of the Lisbon Agenda, and I agree. We can understand the Lisbon Agenda in a simple way, going towards a knowledge-based society and being concerned about sustainability, whether it be in relation to social security, the environment or the economy. What we have learnt from this crisis is that even the profits have to be clearly sustainable.

So the present financial crisis should not divert our attention from any of the problems which we have been patiently discussing in recent years, including the problem which we are discussing today. It is only one additional problem. When we have dealt with it, we have to come out of the financial crisis with a structure that is capable of dealing with all the challenges which the 21st century brings us. So it is important that in this context, we are aware of all the possible aspects of sustainability – sustainability of the planet on which we live, between living beings on the planet, between us humans and between generations, which is very much the essence of the demographic question which we are discussing today.

Our policies should definitely address this. The demographic forum to be held on 24 and 25 November – which I mentioned in my opening address – is certainly one good opportunity to do so. We should certainly continue the dialogue between the Council, Member States, Parliament and the Commission. Your discussions today prove that the debate is very timely. I would like to thank you on behalf of the Commission for those views. All the things you have mentioned are extremely important – promoting demographic renewal, reconciliation of family and working life, the questions of carers, mobility and anti-discrimination and other policies. All this is valid when we talk about this problem.

President. – The debate is closed.

17. Social security systems and pensions (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0409/2008) by Mrs Stauner, on behalf of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, on the future of social security systems and pensions: their financing and the trend towards individualisation (2007/2290(INI)).

Gabriele Stauner, *rapporteur*. – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, preparing an initiative report on the subject of the future of social security systems and pensions is a fascinating task because this area is so topical and so complex. However, it involves the significant risk of the report becoming a long wish list and catalogue of requirements for all right-thinking people.

We did not succumb to this temptation, as the relatively brief and highly technical text, which carefully avoids flowery wording, indicates at first glance. I would therefore like to thank all my fellow Members, in particular the shadow rapporteurs and Mrs Lulling, as draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, for their self-discipline.

My aim was to produce a report which provides a description of the developments over the next 30 to 40 years for all decision makers and interested parties and which offers food for thought and recommendations for action for the individual areas of social policy. Social security and pension systems in the Member States have traditionally been designed, developed and financed in very different ways, which is why it will not be possible to harmonise them at an EU level.

Nevertheless, all of the systems are in difficulty because of demographic developments and the changes to the labour market resulting from globalisation. This means that reforms are necessary in every case. Scientific findings have shown that continuing as before is not an option for any of the existing systems. That is the first important result.

The type of reforms needed in each Member State obviously varies depending on the structure of each system. In our opinion, all the systems need, among other things, more and improved measures to bring about a better work-life balance, which will help to prevent the employment rate from falling, and which will ensure that social problems are not aggravated by the large-scale immigration of workers.

Secondly, despite the introduction of so-called atypical employment relationships, we must retain the traditional model of full-time employment for an unlimited period, because this is the only way of guaranteeing stability for living conditions and social security systems.

Thirdly, as well as ensuring that social spending is financially secure through the use of joint contributions and hybrid fund-based solutions, we must put the focus on social investment.

Fourthly, we must improve productivity and increase the ability to innovate, because in Europe we are reliant on our human capital.

Fifthly, we must ensure that high-quality health care is available to everyone, with medical progress and falling contributions guaranteeing basic care for all citizens.

Sixthly, special measures must be introduced to protect women against the specific risks which they are exposed to, in particular poverty in old age, by crediting child care and family care time in pension insurance.

A sense of solidarity across generations and social groups must lie at the heart of all our efforts in future. This is particularly true in a world characterised by change resulting from globalisation, which is becoming increasingly depersonalised and anonymous. Solidarity and subsidiarity are the basic principles of the European social model. In this context, we must ensure that globalisation has a social side, so that well-qualified and adaptable workers can support themselves and their families with dignity, receive high-quality health care if they are ill and have financial security in old age.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, despite being drafted before the current turmoil erupted on our financial markets and the economic downturn became apparent, this report is remarkably timely and also relevant. I wish to congratulate the rapporteur on her sound work.

The report underscores the long-term social demographic and economic changes that are driving the modernisation and reform of our social protection schemes. It highlights the importance of our shared values in the field of social protection. It also shows how they can help to make our pension and health care systems sustainable.

More people working more and longer is the key of the long-term adequacy and sustainability of social protection. It is also a win-win strategy. The report links sustainable, adequate social protection with the Lisbon Strategy and our commitment to guarantee sustainable public finances. The renewed social agenda proposed by the Commission gives substance to that link by advocating a broad holistic approach to future social policies and priorities.

I welcome the emphasis on promoting women's full integration into our labour markets and on fighting all forms of discrimination to ensure that everybody can acquire adequate social security and pension rights in particular.

The report emphasises the need to combine the move to funded pensions in many Member States with sound national and EU regulatory frameworks for effective supervision and careful monitoring of outcomes for citizens.

That is a very timely message. Access to quality medical treatment and preventive care is a cornerstone of EU social models. It is both a goal to be attained for itself and a necessary condition for a productive labour force to exist in a phase of rapid population ageing.

The Commission shares your concern about health inequalities and the need to guarantee high-quality health care for all and solidarity financing covering the whole population. These points will be taken up in a Commission communication on health inequalities to come out next year.

The report is a strong plea for us all, not only to keep working to achieve our basic objectives of access for all, solidarity, adequacy and sustainability, but also to work to strengthen them through modernisation.

The Commission will provide its full response to the financial crisis and the downturn in the real economy in a communication to be published on 26 November.

It will also elaborate on the constructive social and economic role of social protection in the joint report on social protection and inclusion for 2009.

May I assure you of the Commission's willingness to look again at the various points in this report in close cooperation with Parliament.

President. - This item is now closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 20 November 2008.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Bogusław Rogalski (UEN), in writing. – (PL) Sadly, population ageing and population shrinkage are the inescapable future of Europe. Demographers say that the birth rate will not ensure generational replacement, while average life expectancy will increase. The low birth rate is associated with the difficulty of combining professional work with family life – we lack the necessary number of crèches and kindergartens, as well as economic support for families. By the end of 2030, the ratio of working to non-working population will probably reach 2:1.

Mitigating the consequences of the shrinkage of working population through immigration is only one possible solution. It will also lead to increased ethnic, cultural and religious diversity. We must therefore raise employment levels among the disabled and older people (by arranging for training and retraining). Retirement must also be made more flexible, through the introduction of voluntary retirement, change of employment and the use of new technologies.

Member States must also conduct a balanced financial policy, dividing the tax burden fairly between workers, consumers and businesses.

Demographic changes will have a major impact on public expenditure on retirement and old age pensions, which can be mitigated by being partly privately funded. Expenditure on health care will also rise.

In the circumstances, providing the populations of Member States with health care and appropriate benefits delivered at an appropriate level is a task requiring immediate action on many social and governmental levels.

18. HIV/AIDS: Early Diagnosis and Early Care (debate)

President. - The next item is the Council and Commission statements on HIV/AIDS: Early diagnosis and early care.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, President-in-Office of the Council. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner Potočnik, ladies and gentlemen, it is twenty five years since HIV was discovered. Today, it is of the utmost importance, now that the epidemic has claimed more than 25 million lives, that the European Union reaffirm its commitment to combat the global HIV/AIDS pandemic.

Universal access to prevention, testing, early treatment and support in this field is essential, and the European Parliament, your House, emphasised this in its resolution of 24 April 2007. There is an urgent need to increase

the rate of development, and also to increase implementation of prevention, information, education and awareness campaigns, and to invest in research and development of new prevention and testing strategies, which must be kept up-to-date with changes in the nature of the pandemic.

In particular, it is of prime importance that testing and treatment are done as early as possible, and that anti-retroviral drugs are made available at an affordable price. When diagnosis is made too late, or if the immune system is too badly damaged by the disease, patients have an increased risk of death in the four years following diagnosis.

In order to screen earlier, it is necessary to use new strategies and tools, such as rapid screening tests. It would be useful to offer testing more widely, providing that patients consent, of course. It is useful to remember that these rapid screening tests can be carried out where there is no medical laboratory, and that the results may be given to patients within a relatively short time.

In order to encourage people living with HIV/AIDS to be tested early, it is also essential to overcome discrimination barriers. The fear of the stigma attached to a positive test result can prevent patients from accessing early screening. For this reason, the European Union must speak out clearly and consistently against all forms of discrimination against people living with HIV anywhere in the world.

This strongly held conviction is shared by the French President Nicolas Sarkozy and by Bernard Kouchner, who have brought this matter to the attention of the United Nations. HIV is to be treated as a transmissible but non-contagious disease, and any restrictions on freedom of access, travel and residence for HIV positive people, because of their HIV status, are counterproductive. Any such practices will dissuade patients from obtaining screening and treatment, which is harmful to the individual and to society.

In conclusion, I should like to make two observations. The first is that our common goal is as follows: people who test positive for HIV must receive high-quality treatment, regardless of their origin, nationality, opinions, age, sex, sexual orientation, religion or any other factor.

The second observation is that, in this context, international coordination is essential if this pandemic is to be defeated. I would like to pay tribute to the EuroHIV programme, which has, since 1984, been disseminating essential information about HIV/AIDS to the WHO, UNAIDS and the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control. In order to make prevention, screening and early treatment available to all, in order that people with the disease are no longer stigmatised or discriminated against, in order that the countries of the South have proper access to drugs, cooperation between UN agencies and regional agencies must be increased.

More than ever, the European Union must be involved in this fight.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, I would say to the honourable Members and to Minister Jouyet that, as we approach World AIDS Day on 1 December 2008, this plenary session provides a good opportunity to reflect on some significant achievements in combating HIV/AIDS and to focus on the serious challenges that lie ahead.

This year's Nobel Prize for Medicine was awarded to two European researchers at the Pasteur Institute – Professor Françoise Barré-Sinoussi and Professor Luc Montagnier, who were the first to isolate the Human Immunodeficiency Virus back in 1983.

That landmark discovery paved the way for many important developments and diagnostics, and the treatment of HIV infections, and allowed us to understand more about the pathogenesis of HIV infections and its devastating consequences.

However, 25 years later, we still do not have a cure for HIV/AIDS and still witness millions of new infections per year worldwide, including tens of thousands of new infections in Europe.

How can this happen? It is well known how HIV transmission can be effectively prevented.

Successful campaigns in the 1980s and the early 1990s have shown that awareness and knowledge are essential elements of prevention strategies against HIV infections.

Determined political leadership and civil responsibility are two further elementary prerequisites for successfully combating HIV/AIDS – as is an open and constructive partnership with the stakeholders.

Today's plenary session is also an excellent time to reaffirm our political commitment – a time to be ambitious. I should add that I appreciate very much the European Parliament's commitment in keeping HIV/AIDS high on the political agenda.

Indeed, we recently had a very useful exchange of views on HIV/AIDS in a round-table meeting organised by Vice-President Miguel-Angel Martínez Martínez and Zita Gurmai on the need for HIV testing and subsequent early 'state of the art' care and support. Experts estimate that an average of 30% of people in Europe infected with HIV are not aware of their status. That incredible figure carries two risks: first for the person concerned, since he or she may not receive treatment and care on time; and second for his or her partner(s), who may be exposed to the infection.

So what can we as politicians do to address and overcome this situation?

Our common humanistic core values and a strong commitment to human values, solidarity and our position against discrimination must be the basis of all policies to fight HIV/AIDS, and should be the foundation for all activities in combating the disease. The European position and response is clear: we concentrate on prevention and raising awareness; we promote HIV testing and access to treatment and care for all in need; we fight for affordable medication; we oppose and fight any form of discrimination or stigmatisation; we seek to identify best practice and support civil society. In areas within our political responsibility, we have to create the conditions for effective actions on the ground, serving both society and people living with HIV and AIDS.

Clearly we cannot be complacent. We have to keep up the momentum.

The EU also looks beyond its borders to the devastating impact of HIV/AIDS in sub-Saharan Africa and other developing countries, which represent an exceptional challenge to social growth and development.

Eastern Europe and Central Asia continue to experience the fastest growth of the epidemic in the world.

In this context, we reaffirm our commitment to supporting partner countries in scaling-up towards universal access to HIV prevention, treatment, care and support.

On behalf of the Commission, I welcome the resolution on early diagnosis and early care of HIV/AIDS and fully endorse and support the principle of breaking down barriers to HIV testing, treatment and care.

The Commission further encourages people to use the possibility of HIV testing and reiterates to Member States the need to establish testing centres that meet international standards and operate according to agreed principles.

The Commission is currently developing its second strategy on combating HIV/AIDS in the EU and also our near neighbourhood, which will further concentrate on prevention and will focus on the regions and groups most affected by the epidemics. However, what a successful prevention approach needs most of all is openness and tolerance on a political and societal level: openness to the realities of our lives today, of sexuality and behaviours; openness to means of harm reduction; openness to fight inequalities, discrimination and suppression; and openness to other cultures and habits.

In facing up to the challenge of HIV/AIDS, the Commission will continue to play its role to the full. I know that we have Parliament's support in this endeavour, and we treasure it highly.

Let us continue together the strong political momentum, together with the Council, to ensure that we all live up to our responsibilities.

John Bowis, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – Madam President, in the United Kingdom, we have 80 000 people living with HIV and, as the Commissioner has said, 1 in 3 of those is undiagnosed. We also have 1 in every 360 pregnant women HIV positive. Ten per cent of new cases in Europe are multi-drug resistant strains, and that is heading in the direction of the 20% that we see in America.

We see increasing numbers living with multi-drug resistant TB as well as with AIDS. The ECDC shows new cases of HIV infection doubled between 1999 and 2006. It showed 11% of cases are in young people aged between 15 and 24. We saw 53% heterosexual transmission, largely from people who originate from epidemic countries, but a third are men who have sex with men and, perhaps surprisingly, less than 10% are injecting drug users.

But on top of all this – and I very much welcome what the minister said – we impose stigma. Stigma is a cruel added burden to the pain of the disease and, what is worse, it encourages people to hide and not to come forward for testing and treatment. The solutions stem from these figures, from these facts. We need early diagnosis, as everyone has so far said. We need confidential testing, we need education, we need the understanding that flows from that and can counter that stigma. We need the on-going research and development, and we need care because fewer people are actually dying of AIDS; more people are living with it.

Zita Gurmai, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – Madam President, I was very happy to hear the Commissioner mention the Round Table which I co-hosted and co-chaired. Miguel Angel Martínez and Commissioner Vassiliou also participated and were actively engaged in it.

AIDS is one of the most serious diseases of our century. Within the European Union alone, 215 000 people were newly infected with HIV in the last 10 years. According to estimates this year, almost one third of the AIDS infection – as my good colleague mentioned – still remained undiagnosed, posing a real threat to the health of European citizens. It is high time to take concrete steps so we have put forward practical suggestions on how to combat HIV/AIDS effectively by focusing on evidence-based HIV/AIDS early diagnosis and early care.

It is not only a health-related question. It is a strategic matter for the future enlargement of the EU and crucial in the field of neighbourhood and migration policy. We should combine the different EU policies to emphasise the right of each single European citizen to better health and living conditions, not forgetting the role of women. They are the most endangered groups when it comes to HIV/AIDS.

Ensuring accurate monitoring surveillance of the disease is of the highest urgency. Early diagnosis and the reduction of barriers to testing are regarded as an urgent necessity. Steps must be taken to ensure access to free and anonymous testing in order to facilitate more people seeking testing. HIV/AIDS reduction strategies must be worked out in each Member State and these must focus on vulnerable groups and groups known to be at high risk.

The strategy shall also include information and education campaigns on the preventing, testing and treatment of HIV/AIDS. We must recognise that increased investment in research and development for more effective therapeutic and preventive tools, such as vaccines and microbicides, will be essential to securing the long-term success of HIV and AIDS responses.

Discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS must be effectively outmoded across the European Union. The struggle against HIV/AIDS must not result in any discriminatory effect on HIV-positive citizens, including restrictions that impact on their freedom of movement. The cross-party EP resolution tackles all the situations together. The aim is common and the enlarged Europe can become the initiator of enhanced international cooperation on evidence-based HIV/AIDS early diagnosis and early care in the near future.

I am convinced that, if early diagnosis and an early care system work as a pilot programme, it may be possible to use it as a common European tool for other health-related policies. I am really thankful to all my colleagues who supported this initiative and worked on it.

Georgs Andrejevs, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Madam President, ever since I had the honour of drafting the report on combating HIV/AIDS within the EU and neighbouring countries, I have been very committed to this issue, with all its implications and ramifications, of people living with HIV.

One year ago, in the framework of the conference ‘HIV in Europe 2007’, participants developed a comprehensive call to action on measures regarding how to effectively tackle HIV/AIDS in Europe. Some elements of this call are now also reflected in this joint motion for a resolution.

The aim of this resolution is to contribute to the fight against HIV/AIDS on a political level. Therefore, it calls on the Council and the Commission to formulate a comprehensive strategy on HIV to promote early diagnosis, ensure early care and communicate the benefits of earlier care to all European citizens.

It calls on the Commission to commit substantial resources to deliver the above-mentioned strategy and asks Member States to step up information and education campaigns on prevention, testing and treatment.

I am aware that the Commission is planning to bring forward a new communication on combating HIV in the EU and the neighbourhood and also that Commissioner Vassiliou confirmed her personal commitment to take further action in this field.

To conclude, this situation needs to be urgently tackled.

Vittorio Agnoletto, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I have been working as a doctor fighting AIDS for 21 years and every year I still hear the same debates.

From a clinical viewpoint, the situation is very clear: we have about 30 anti-retroviral drugs that are able to prolong the lives of those with the HIV virus. We do not have any drug that is able to destroy the virus and, as a result, in the West and in Europe, we have seen a decrease in mortality and an increase in the number of people living with the HIV virus, who can technically be described as 'potential vectors of infection'. This means that today, we have a greater risk of coming into contact with people with the HIV virus than in the past, because the number of HIV-positive survivors is increasing. In the midst of all this, what is being done? Nothing.

The majority of European countries have not had any stable prevention campaigns for years. Prophylactics cost a lot and let us give the words a precise, recognisable name: prophylactics cost a lot and are one of the main ways of preventing the HIV virus.

That is without mentioning damage-reduction projects aimed particularly at drug addicts to prevent the sharing of needles. How many countries carry out projects of this kind nationally? In Italy, 50% of confirmed AIDS diagnoses come at the same time as diagnoses of the HIV virus, which means that many people do not know they have HIV until they are ill.

Where are the campaigns for increasing access to tests, which should be free and anonymous? We know that if there is discrimination, people will try to hide, they will not go to have the test, and this will entail risks for their own health and the health of others.

One last point: today, again, the Council has spoken of aid to the global South, but I would like to know what happened to the proposals made by Parliament when we voted for the most recent version of TRIPS, which committed the Commission and the Council to increase funds for combating AIDS in the global South and, in particular, to transfer technologies and to transfer pharmacological aid.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – Madam President, in 2006 over 86 000 newly-diagnosed HIV cases were reported, and over 13 000 AIDS cases were diagnosed in the WHO European region.

In Western Europe, 10% of the new infections occurred amongst the 15-to-24 age group, and 25% of those newly infected were female. The main route of transmission was heterosexual contact, as the Commissioner has said.

In Eastern Europe, the main route of transmission was via drug injection. Very worryingly, 27% of new infections there occurred in the 15-to-25 age group, and 41% of the newly-infected patients were female.

Currently, 30% of HIV-infected patients do not know that they are infected and are responsible for over a half of all new HIV infections. In addition, late diagnosis implies late use of anti-retroviral therapy, with increasingly limited opportunities for the drugs to have effect.

There is an urgent need for European-level guidance on HIV testing and counselling. We must have comprehensive and flexible guidance on best practice in reporting, in testing, in treatment and in care.

In my own country, Ireland – while data on HIV and AIDS should be interpreted with caution owing to considerable under-reporting and late reporting – the total number of AIDS cases reported up to the end of December 2007 is almost 1 000. That figure is, however, expected to rise owing to that under-reporting. The cumulative number of HIV infections reported in the same period was 4 780. Prevention strategies need yet again to be top of the news, on the front pages of our e-newspapers. Complacency has set in. Fear of infection has evaporated. We need to spell out the facts, in an open and tolerant way. John Bowis is so right when he says that while fewer people are dying of AIDS, more and more are living with it.

Michael Cashman (PSE). – Madam President, I wish to congratulate the French Presidency for its commitment to the fight against AIDS and HIV, and also congratulate those who have spoken in the debate this evening.

It is a late-night debate on an issue that actually affects every single one of us every single minute of every single day. As a gay man living in the 1970s and 1980s, I could so easily have contracted the HIV virus. I was lucky. I did not. However, I watched as swathes of generations were cut down by a virus and cut down by discrimination and stigmatisation.

That is why the message we need to send tonight is that we are committed to making available treatment and to having early testing but, above and beyond all that, and the brilliant and excellent work Mr Bowis did as a Health Minister in a Conservative government, we have to say that what happens to you is as if it happens to me, or my daughter or my son. People do not go for early testing for one simple reason: fear of the discrimination that they will have to live with – that stigmatisation.

I remember once in the early 1980s visiting a hospital to try and cheer up the patients – which I always failed to do! – and walking into an HIV unit to find that in one of the beds was one of my close friends. He could not even tell me that he was living and dying with an AIDS-related illness. That situation still exists, not only in our countries, but also on other continents. What happens on other continents affects us directly because, unless we engage with the communities most at risk, they will never hear the message. A sex worker who gets trafficked into the EU is as vulnerable as a visitor from the EU to Africa or one of the other continents.

That is why I welcome this resolution. 1 December 2008 is the 20th anniversary of International AIDS Day, but little changes except the lives that accumulate, that go past and are destroyed. That is why I congratulate the House, the Presidency and the Commission, and all of the speakers, for being here to send a signal that what happens to them happens to us.

Toomas Savi (ALDE). – Madam President, I have come to realise that HIV-positive people are sometimes treated like lepers, not knowing that with early diagnosis and care they may be active members of society for a number of years before AIDS develops and the disease starts seriously to affect their lives.

Such prejudice is a sign of ignorance. It is extremely important to promote support and understanding towards the HIV-infected. As a result, people would have more courage to have their viral infection diagnosed at an early stage instead of opting for a nuisance that might pose a threat to others.

It is vital that HIV-positive people can be open about their condition with no fear of being discriminated against, so we can increase awareness and tolerance in society of HIV and AIDS.

Colm Burke (PPE-DE). – Madam President, HIV prevention and treatment capacity varies across different socio-economic and geopolitical settings. Promoting the early diagnosis of HIV infection should be a component of all comprehensive approaches to addressing AIDS.

Even in countries where anti-retroviral treatment options are severely limited, important contributions to health can be achieved through the diagnosis and treatment of sexually transmitted diseases, tuberculosis and other opportunistic infections among HIV-infected persons.

In a recent US research publication, it was found that the time between self-reported dates of HIV diagnosis and presentation for care had, in fact, increased. The interval between diagnosis and presentation was substantially greater among injection drug users than among other risk groups. Combined with this is a problem of the growing perception that AIDS is now a treatable condition, which undermines the public health message calling for frequent testing and prompt treatment of HIV.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I thank Michael Cashman for the passion he has brought to this debate. I am very glad that I stayed to listen to his words, and I hope that others will hear them and act upon them.

My concern in relation to this issue is that the fear we had in the 1980s has been forgotten and, as a result, we are taking our eye off the situation, when there is a whole generation of people who did not grow up in the 1980s who need to hear the message again.

The challenge for us all is to try and bring a message of prevention into the public domain while not bringing back the stigma that sometimes comes with it. We have to be able to do this, because while testing is vital and treatment is absolutely vital for those who have the disease, we also want to stop people getting AIDS, living with it and tragically dying from it.

Jean-Pierre Jouyet, President-in-Office of the Council. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner Potočnik, ladies and gentlemen, this is a truly fascinating and, at times, moving debate. I would particularly like to thank Mr Cashman for his striking account, and I know that he has often been in contact with Mrs Bachelot, who apologises that she cannot be here this evening and who has said that we must act as though we were all affected and that we must work with those communities that are most at risk. Mr Savi has also said that people should be able to talk freely about their condition. Mr Burke emphasised the value of tolerance and

the importance of equality of access. Mrs McGuinness said, very pertinently, that we must not forget what happened during the 1980s.

I should like to come back to what Mr Bowis said – and I believe this can be a common approach with full support – which is that an increasing number of people are living with AIDS now, and that there are increased levels of resistance to anti-retrovirals. We must therefore accept these two phenomena and because of this, we must, for the reasons you have given, oppose all forms of discrimination even more strongly. Secondly, we must do all we can, as all have agreed, to ensure that early diagnosis is available. Mrs Gurmai was entirely right to emphasise the fragility of women's situations and the need to promote prevention in particular. Mrs Doyle stressed the fact that the virus is developing in young people and that efforts at prevention must be strengthened while ensuring that freedom of movement is not hampered, and Mrs Gurmai agreed with this. These aspects all seem to me to be extremely important; transparency, Mr Cashman's remarks about anonymity, free medical care, improved distribution of condoms, equal access to testing for all population groups.

The remarks of Mr Agnoletto, whose expertise in this field is widely known, told me that retroviral drugs will prolong life but that no drug could cure the disease, which means that we must improve preventative measures, whatever the cost. Mr Bowis also added that it is necessary to strengthen research and development.

I believe that these are the aspects on which we should continue to work together, that we have the necessary resources, and I completely agree with Mr Andrejevs about the proposed resolution which aims to develop all aspects of early treatment.

I believe this debate will encourage us to remain alert and vigilant, to combat all forms of discrimination and to act on what has happened in the past, and not to act as though the situation has returned to normal.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, I took part in a conference either at the beginning of this week or last week – sometimes I am probably like you these days, a bit lost in time. It was a conference on poverty-related diseases. Of course, HIV and AIDS are among the three big killers nowadays, malaria and tuberculosis being the second and the third.

Every year, five million people still die from these three diseases globally, which is the equivalent of the population of Denmark disappearing every year. The problem is so clearly still present that it would simply be immoral not to give enough attention to it.

We have to do everything possible on the preventive campaigns. We have to do more because we have slept a bit there. We have to do everything possible to ensure early identification if somebody is infected. We have to do more to find a cure; we have to do more about taking care. Since, as you know, I am responsible for financing research in the Commission, I can clearly give a commitment that we will also, in future, use our funds to actively search for an HIV-AIDS vaccine.

We have one excellent project which has now been running for many years. It is called the EDCTP. It is the clinical trials partnership with the sub-Saharan countries. It had a lot of problems at the beginning but now it is really running smoothly and only last year, in 2007, we gave a commitment here; the Member States are working here together with the Commission. All the Member States are cooperating with African member states in building their capacity. In one year alone, they committed between EUR 80 million and EUR 90 million and this is, of course, doubled because we commit the other half.

So research should continue in this area too. Just as Commissioner Vassiliou, my colleague, is committed in her area, I am also committed in my area to continue in the search.

One thing which was not mentioned here today, and I think it should be mentioned, is the importance of the neighbourhood policy and structural cohesion policy, because these are precisely the countries in Europe or in our neighbourhood where this is a critical issue. This could and should also be used for these purposes.

To conclude: in simple terms we have a moral obligation as human beings to take action. I am really happy that our voice today was so clear. It was so united and even passionate.

President. – I have received six motions for resolutions⁽⁵⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

⁽⁵⁾ See Minutes.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 20 November 2008.

19. Amendment of the single CMO Regulation (debate)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0368/2008) by Mr Parish, on behalf of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, on the amendment of the single CMO regulation (COM(2008)0489 - C6-0314/2008 - 2008/0156(CNS)).

Neil Parish, rapporteur. – Madam President, we are tonight talking about the single CMO on wine. We actually very much support the idea of bringing all the common market organisations together into one organisation. However, we are concerned that we can identify exactly where the chapters on wine are, that we can access them properly and that, in the future, when we are dealing with wine and Member States are dealing with wine, that you do not open up the whole 20 odd chapters – which are included in the whole single CMO – at the same time.

We have now had many meetings with the Commission to get reassurance on this. At the moment, you are probably at the stage of bringing all these CMOs together. We are seeking reassurance that we will be able to get the information we need. The industry itself, of course, is also concerned that it will be able to identify the rules within the single CMO.

There is no doubt that the Commission is telling us that this will mean a reduction in bureaucracy. We very much welcome that, but we want reassurance that this is exactly the case. We have been told that the technical organisations that give information on wine to the Commission will be the same as they were previously and this will now work within the single CMO, so – provided this is the case and that we can actually go on to a computerised system in the future and identify all the regulations – we welcome this proposal. But we must be assured, at the end of the day, that this will actually be beneficial for the whole industry.

I think there will be Members tonight who will be seeking that reassurance from the Commission. We look forward to the Commission giving us these answers. I actually think that the way forward is to reduce bureaucracy in the Commission and in Europe. What we seek now is those reassurances. I welcome the single CMO. I am sure there will be other Members here who have comments to make. What is absolutely apparent is that we must get this voted on now so that Parliament gives its opinion and the Commission can come forward and conclude this. I therefore recommend this to the House.

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, first of all, I would like to thank the rapporteur and Chair of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, Mr Parish, and the members of the Committee on Agriculture, for the report.

I could be very short and just reassure you but I have to read the speaking points.

We have been working very hard at simplifying the common agricultural policy (CAP). A single common market organisation (CMO) covering all agricultural sectors is a keystone of this effort. It allows for streamlining legislation across sectors whilst taking into account the specifications of particular products. It has also substantially reduced the volume of CAP legislation.

This Commission proposal aims at completing the single CMO project by integrating the wine sector also. Without wine, the single CMO would simply remain incomplete. We would stop part way through the process and lose many of the benefits of the projects.

We have always intended to include wine. Indeed, both the initial single CMO proposal and the recent wine reform were drafted and adopted on that basis. I am glad to say that the European Parliament has always fully endorsed the single CMO project, including the integration of fruit and vegetables and wine after the completion of the reforms in those sectors.

The single CMO, and its management committee, has been working very well for other sectors and there has been no particular criticism of it.

The proposal for integration might seem complex at first sight. But this is inherent in the nature of amending legislation. After incorporation, consolidated versions of the single CMO will become available, which will show very clearly the wine provisions.

The integration of the single CMO will not make any substantive changes to the policy decided in the wine reform. The services of my colleague, Mrs Fischer Boel, will work hard with the European Parliament and the Council to ensure that this is the case. We did this very successfully during the integration of the equally complex fruit and vegetables sector.

I would therefore ask you to help the Commission, to help my colleague, to continue her and our simplification work and give a positive opinion on this proposal.

Christa Klab, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, I must say that I am disappointed by your remarks because we have entered into discussions with the Commission on the basis of what Neil Parish has said.

I had hoped for something more concrete than simply the constant repetition of the fact that it will become simpler. It will not become simpler. A common market organisation for wine will be the 21st market organisation in an extensive series. The objective of making things simpler by reducing bureaucracy is not something that I or the wine growers of Europe are able to recognise. In future, everyone who wants to find out something about the wine sector must search through a long regulation, the common market organisation for all the agricultural products, which previously consisted of 204 articles and an appendix that is twice as long, to find all the points which refer to wine, across 98 articles with 21 headings and the 10 accompanying appendices.

This is not a reduction in bureaucracy, Commissioner. This is bureaucracy in its purest form. I call on the Commission to at least simplify the technical applications, because it is possible to do so. Younger colleagues of mine, such as Anja Weisgerber, tell me that it must be possible. Please could the Commission consider this? A technical simplification would include, for example, a search tool on the Commission's website which would allow people to download and print only those parts of the common market organisation which are relevant for their particular agricultural products. Neither wine growers nor milk producers are interested in the special regulations on fruit and vegetables or hemp, and vice versa.

We must make use of these technical possibilities in order to make things simpler. In future, whenever a change is made in one agricultural area, there is the possibility that changes will be made in another area. This means that when an amendment is made in the milk sector and the single CMO is modified, all farmers and wine growers must make sure that a change has not been quickly pushed through in their area.

I would like to ask two specific questions, Madam President.

Commissioner, in future who will be the monitor? ...

(The President cut off the speaker.)

Rosa Miguélez Ramos, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (ES) Madam President, the single CMO Regulation has been in force since December 2006. The Commission describes this as an essential component in the plans to streamline and simplify the common agricultural policy.

Some people, myself included, regard this statement as highly debatable. However, I do not believe that this is the time or the place. We had a debate at the time and yet, despite this Regulation having only been in force for a few months, we are now voting on its amendment.

Today we are adding even more pages by incorporating Regulation (EC) No 479/2008 on the common organisation of the market in wine. This Regulation will be repealed by the present proposal and its substance will be fully incorporated into the single CMO Regulation.

This sector has conveyed to us, myself included, its concern about the wine CMO articles being scattered among the various chapters of the single CMO Regulation and about the risk of this diluting the specific nature of this product.

We believe that this incorporation is actually inevitable and we have all had the opportunity to read the letter sent by the Commissioner to the Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, Mr Parish, assuring him that this legislative measure will not fundamentally alter the rules in this sector. This should be solely a technical incorporation which will in no way affect the content.

As a result, while understanding and sharing some of the misgivings, I can only support Mr Parish's report.

Vladimír Železný, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (CS) Madam President, we are actually voting here for a provision which will incorporate winegrowing legislation into the provisions for the common organisation of agriculture on a principle of 'scattered tea'. Wine legislation, despite its fundamentally specialist nature, must, in other words, be randomly sprayed between lamb, cereals, goats, fruit and vegetables. The Federation of Winegrowers from the Czech Republic has pointed out that a small producer from South Moravia with an output of perhaps 2 000 litres of wine will find it hard to deal with the enormous, impenetrable and widely-scattered body of legislation applying to his wine. I have received requests for help, not only from our 20 000 strong federation of winegrowers but also from the federations of winegrowers in Spain, France, Italy and Germany which belong to the Assembly of European Wine Regions (AREV). The Commission, however, has had the temerity to turn a blind eye to this. The DG AGRI insisted that it knew nothing and that winegrowers were happy. And now that Commissioner Boel has conceded that winegrowers are not happy, she tells us that nothing can be done. Something can actually be done, however, because we are the Parliament. Let us either create a transparent chapter for wine within agricultural legislation or reject the report. We must not allow arrogant officials to burden the lives of winegrowers, who themselves, through their taxes, help to pay the wages of the same officials.

Esther Herranz García (PPE-DE). – (ES) Madam President, the European Commission has presented this amendment to the single CMO Regulation, saying that this will now include wine in a new presentation that supposedly tries to avoid paperwork and red tape.

However, producers tell us that it will create more confusion, that it makes them concerned about a lack of legal certainty, and that it will not change the basis of the wine CMO (as laid down by law, this could not actually happen without passing through this House, even if only for the purpose of consultation).

In any event, it must be said that the wine CMO is more than a market CMO. It involves other requirements, such as the labelling issue. Therefore, if milk is not the same as vegetables, and vegetables are not the same as cereals, and clearly cereals are not the same as wine, why are we putting them together as if they had some connection?

I believe that this proposal has some technical shortcomings which, as I have said, have been denounced by producers. I wonder what will happen now if, for example, a proposal is made to amend part of this single CMO Regulation. Will this open the door to all the other sectors? Will it be possible to amend a sector without us realising? Will the door be open to the amendment of each and every one of the sectors included?

I believe that we cannot move a motion of confidence in the European Commission if the Commission does not guarantee that, firstly, there will be a search engine – as requested by Mrs Klaß – guaranteeing producers security, speed and confidence when searching the Regulation and, secondly, if the Commission does not guarantee that there will be legal certainty so that a door cannot be opened or left open constantly to the amendment of any CMO which is included.

With this proposal, the European Commission is presenting a *fait accompli*, but they cannot say that we did not warn them that this would be a mistake and that it would not, in any way, avoid paperwork or red tape, but that it will actually create more paperwork and red tape and also more legal uncertainty, which is what is worrying producers most.

Astrid Lulling (PPE-DE). – (FR) Madam President, under a pretext of simplification, the European Commission is relentlessly pursuing integration of all CMOs for all products, from wheat to chicken, from fruit and vegetables to tobacco, into a single CMO. The result was a large tome amounting to several hundred pages, in which one could seek the pertinent information in vain.

As has already been said, the wine sector, because of its extremely specific requirements, has been subject to very detailed regulation, which differs from that pertaining to other products and which ensured clarity and transparency. Because of this, it was understood that the wine CMO would remain separate.

However, today it appears that the wine CMO has been swallowed up in this large volume. The Commission does not wish to let go of this issue, as wine and wine products are the last to remain outside this tangle that is the single CMO. If it is legally impossible to take a step backwards, and if we must submit to this for reasons that are not entirely reasonable, Madam President, I would at least like to see Mrs Klaß's suggestions followed.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I really will not take a minute because, being from Ireland, I have not been lobbied by wine producers.

I think there is a general concern about the pulling together of so many different sectors in a single CMO. We really will not know if it works until it is done. I will therefore listen to the concerns of those who know more about the wine sector, while realising that we do have to move this process on. I hope that we will get better reassurances from the Commission because we do need to listen to the concerns of the producers.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, we are including wine market regulations in a general regulation covering all markets, which had been adopted at an earlier date. Will this be better for wine producers? Let us hope that it will represent a true simplification and reduction of the existing administrative burden imposed on farmers.

The common agricultural policy health check adopted today is also intended to limit controls and reduce the administrative burden on farmers. The consolidation of regulations relating to very specific markets into a single regulation was also a debatable point, but has been agreed. It would be worth considering whether we really need to include in it the wine market, which is a highly specific market functioning according to an individual formula in terms of production, processing and traditions.

Christa Klauß (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, you have just switched off my microphone and therefore I am taking the opportunity of using the ‘catch-the-eye’ procedure to reformulate my questions.

I wanted to ask the Commission specifically, who in future will be monitoring existing legislation when the common market organisation is amended and who will be making sure that nothing is pushed through in other areas, for example in the area of wine when we are talking about milk?

My second specific question is as follows: Can the Commission put in place the technical requirements to simplify management of the system, on the internet or in a portal, to allow users to access each market area separately, such as wine, milk, fruit and vegetables?

Those were my questions. Thank you, Madam President.

James Nicholson (PPE-DE). – Madam President, we are all well aware that the creation of the single Common Market Organisation is an attempt to improve transparency and to streamline and simplify legislation on the Common Agricultural Policy. Most sectors have already been successfully incorporated into the CMO.

Like Mrs McGuinness, I do not come from a wine-growing area, so I will be very careful what I say – thank you Mrs Lulling. I support Mr Parish’s view that the wine sector should now be included in the amendment, and while I understand the concerns expressed by some colleagues, I feel we should be aiming to complete this technical process, which will ultimately mean a reduction in red tape for farmers. That has got to be good. For wine-growing farmers, it will be a bonus at the end of the day.

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, first of all I would like to thank all the contributors to this debate.

I would like to reiterate the importance of this proposal in the simplification of the CAP.

The concerns you raised seem to be quite similar to those expressed at the very start of the single CMO project. But I think that experience has been quite reassuring. The single CMO is currently working really well.

The CMO for wine was never simple, to be quite straightforward. On the contrary. What we are proposing is, in fact, bringing more clarity and credibility – to the extent, of course, it is possible – on the basis of a very complex existing text of the wine reform itself.

No substance changes to the CMO wine reform will be done. We are talking about technical – and only technical – adjustments. There will be separate chapters. There will be issues unique to the wine sector which will be kept intact in the appropriate place of the single CMO, like those on production potential, support programmes, designations of origin, GI and traditional terms, labelling and presentation, oenological practices. But there will also be issues which are common to wine and other sectors, such as the provisions on trade with third countries or state aids, which will be combined into a single simple provision.

I would also like to add that the possibility of using our search engines was mentioned. EUR-Lex has a search engine that allows extraction of all provisions from the single CMO that mention the word ‘wine’. But, of course, from a technical point of view, it is not yet possible at this stage to provide for a consolidated electronic version of the whole wine CMO extracted from the consolidated single CMO. Of course, however, this should be possible when completed.

I should also mention in the context of the questions of the honourable Members of Parliament that there is no possibility that wine issues would get mixed up in reforms with the other sectors. This is not a realistic prospect, simply, in practice. It is hard to see why a proposal on, for example, the dairy sector should somehow attract the attention of wine policymakers. In any event – from a purely legal point of view – integration into a single regulation does not change the situation. What would matter would be the substance of any changes proposed, not the precise legal framework in which they were proposed.

To finish, I think we need to take the final step to complete the single CMO. I would therefore like to underline that the determination of the Commission to do so is very strong. But it is truly about simplification; it is truly about transparency; it is nothing more than that.

Neil Parish, rapporteur. – Madam President, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, as they say, so we look forward to the Commission actually delivering on what it is saying, because we will need this in an electronic form in the future so that we can access it.

The Commission is promising that it will bring everything together in the one CMO, meaning that when we want to look into wine, we will be able to do so and will not be accessing the milk CMO at the same time, thereby reducing bureaucracy. We have had all these assurances tonight, and most of us will vote in favour tomorrow because we have had those assurances. As I said, we then look forward to checking what happens. We take the assurances of the Commission in the good faith in which they have been presented tonight, and look forward to working together on these CMOs – or rather on the one CMO – in the future.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 20 November 2008.

20. Situation in the bee keeping sector (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on the oral question to the Commission (B6-0480/2008) by Mr Parish, on behalf of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, on the situation in the bee keeping sector (O-0104/2008).

Neil Parish, rapporteur. – Madam President, I would first of all like to thank Astrid Lulling very much because it is very much on her initiative that we are presenting this. As Chair, I will be presenting the report here tonight because we are extremely concerned about the situation regarding bees. What is happening to bees is very important to Europe – to the world, in fact.

For the last two years running a third of honey bees in the USA have mysteriously died. In 2007, some 800 000 colonies were wiped out. In Croatia, five million bees disappeared in less than 48 hours. In the UK, one in five honey bee hives is falling and, around the world, commercial beekeepers are reporting losses of up to 90% since 2006.

What is happening and just how serious is it for us and the future of mankind? Albert Einstein predicted that man would only have four years of life left if the bees disappeared from the Earth, so we need to take this very seriously. If you look at honey bees, they are responsible for pollinating plants and flowers which provide about a third of all the food we eat. They are nature's top dog when it comes to pollination and without them we can say goodbye to soya beans, onions, carrots, broccoli, apples, oranges, avocados, peaches and many other foods. There would be no more strawberries. You can imagine how Wimbledon would not be able to survive without strawberries! We would not have lucerne, which is used in cattle feed. We are therefore absolutely dependent on the honey bee. Of course, they also pollinate cotton so we would not have any clothes either. We really do have to take this matter very seriously.

In China, for instance, there are virtually no honey bees in some regions and they are having to pollinate a lot of crops by hand. The 90 commercial crops grown worldwide which rely on pollination generate around GBP 30 billion a year. Bees contribute over GBP 100 million a year to the UK economy and around EUR 400 million to the European economy, so you can see quite clearly that there is a huge problem.

Therefore I would ask the Commission – and if possible I want to be able to hand over some of my time to add to Astrid Lulling's because she was very much the driving force behind this – whether it can draw together more money for research. Having talked to the professional beekeepers and others, we know there is some mystery as to why bees are dying, partly because their condition has been very poor in the last few years and

they seem to be dying literally like flies. Also there is a problem with having the right chemicals in place to cure the diseases of bees.

I think as a Commission you need not only to make money available for research but also to draw together what all the Member States are doing. It is essential that we act now. We cannot wait until all the bees have died out because the problem will be incredibly serious.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, thank you to Mr Parish and, of course, also to Mrs Lulling for this oral question and resolution on the EU beekeeping sector. The Commission clearly recognises the importance that bees play in the EU's ecology and its ecosystem. The Commission is also aware of the reports made in several Member States concerning significant losses in bee colonies.

Let me go straight to your specific questions – there were quite some of them – and try to point out straightforwardly what the Commission is already doing in this sector.

As regards bee mortality and research, in February this year the Commission requested that the European Food Safety Authority (EFSA) study the mortality in bees and its causes in the European Union. EFSA collected information from Member States and now intends to analyse it in order to provide the Commission with a clearer picture of the epidemiological situation of bee colony collapse, and this would provide the basis for further action in this area. Besides this EFSA action, the Commission is, and will be, supporting a number of research projects relating to honeybees in its Research Framework Programme. If you are interested I can mention some of them later on.

Concerning ecological pollen zones, despite the fact that it seems difficult to set up zones as such, I would like to remind you that financial support is already granted for the efficiency of moving of beehives. This measure, which is provided for by Council Regulation No 1234/2007, is intended to assist the management of the movement of hives in the Community and provide locations where high concentrations of beekeepers can gather during the flowering season. This measure may also include enrichment of apicultural flora in certain areas.

Concerning your third question, I would like to remind you that the placing on the market and authorisation of plant protection products is regulated by Council Directive 91/414/EEC. This Directive provides that pesticides may only be used if it has been demonstrated that they pose no significant risk of unacceptable effects to human and animal health, and the environment. Therefore, this assessment also covers the acute and long-term risks to honey bees and their larvae and the tests applied are based on standards developed by intergovernmental organisations such as, for example, the European and Mediterranean Plant Protection Organisation, in which 47 governments collaborate.

It is important to note that the Community legislation is risk based. It is evident that insecticides are, by their nature, toxic to bees. However, their use may still be possible if exposure does not occur or is minimised to levels which do not generate harmful effects.

Classic examples of such risk mitigation measures are: well adapted agronomic practices, appropriate rates and timing of the applications (for example in the evening after honeybee flight, or outside the flowering period of the crop and possibly other adjacent weeds), direct incorporation of the product in soil, uses in glasshouses inaccessible to bees or treatment of seeds in specialised facilities.

As regards the quality of the surface waters, the Water Framework Directive has established protection of all waters; an obligation to achieve/maintain good water quality for all surface waters and groundwaters, by 2015; plus a prohibition of deterioration of water status; an obligation to establish a monitoring system; an obligation to develop the necessary plans and programmes by December 2009, in broad public consultation with local municipalities, stakeholders and non-governmental organisations.

Concerning support to apiaries in difficulty, I would like to tell you that the Commission is glad to see that the number of hives increased between 2004 and 2007 – and this not counting enlargement.

Regarding losses of bees, you should know that, since 2004, a new measure on restocking of hives has been added to the list of eligible measures in the national beekeeping programmes. Therefore, it is now possible to compensate for losses of bees (and production) by funding activities to promote queen production, purchasing of bee colonies, or even purchases of hives.

I think that the question which you are raising is of course extremely serious and we have to take it with similar seriousness.

Astrid Lulling, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, when it is dangerous to delay, I can rely on the entire Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and its Chairman, my colleague Mr Parish. I thank them for their quick, effective response to my initiative of an oral question with debate and resolution to the European Commission to deal with the apiculture health crisis.

In a situation in which bee colonies are becoming weaker and suffering excessive mortality, it is necessary to analyse all of the factors causing this increased bee mortality and to propose a plan of action to remedy this disastrous trend.

The Commission has just read to us a long paper about what it has already done, but I have to say that, in recent years, whilst I have been rapporteur on the apiculture situation – since 1994 – it has needed a lot of persuading to act, whilst with my colleagues I have strived to draw its attention to this alarming situation, which is widely known and which has been perfectly described, especially by my colleague, Mr Parish.

I do not have the time to repeat all that or to add anything but, as no one now dares deny that bee mortality is a deadly danger for our fruit and vegetable production, which is dependent on pollination, we demand that the Commission acts with greater persistence and more resources. It must contribute to an analysis of the causes of this bee mortality and finally include research into and the fight against apiculture disease in the European veterinary policy.

It should promote the measures required to limit and remove the risk of an insufficient pollination and assure sufficient and diversified food production to meet human and livestock needs. It must be understood that apiculture's health crisis is as dangerous to human survival as the financial crisis is to the real economy.

I will not quote the figures, except for one world figure: the value of pollination to the cultivation which feeds mankind is estimated at EUR 153 billion. The solutions we recommend are much less onerous than those mobilised for the financial crisis, and, even if we were finally to introduce the pollination bonus and financial assistance to beekeepers in difficulty to ensure the survival of bees in Europe, it would be peanuts in comparison with other budget lines. If you have a billion to send to Africa without any checks – as you wish to do – to fight hunger, with all the disastrous consequences that would entail, you should be able to find some EUR 60 million to do something worthwhile here.

Madam President, as I have the office of rapporteur, may I still say something about the amendments? I have not used up Mr Parish's speaking time...

(The President cut off the speaker.)

Rosa Miguélez Ramos, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (ES) Madam President, I want to congratulate Mrs Lulling on the determination that she has shown in getting this issue, which some may feel is relatively minor, onto the agenda of this Parliament, albeit at such a late hour.

Beekeeping is a farming activity with important economic repercussions and beneficial effects on rural development and the ecological balance.

In my country, beekeeping involves around 27 000 producers who manage more than 2 300 000 hives. This makes my country the leading honey producer in the European Union.

Spanish beekeepers, together with all other beekeepers, are facing problems deriving not only from the reduction in pollen and nectar, but also from the appearance of new diseases which are decimating hives. The Commission should be working on a line of research into the origin of these diseases and, in this respect, a budgetary effort seems vital to us.

However, I want to add that imports – and I am referring to honey imports – must meet the same requirements as our products and offer full guarantees to consumers. In this respect, good labelling of our products is fundamental and the Commission has an important role to play in this.

A high level must be maintained, in terms of both frequency and number of controls at border inspection points, to guarantee that no beekeeping products containing residues enter the European Union from third countries.

For many of our farmers, beekeeping supplements their almost always limited income. It is also work which employs many women. Honey occupies an important place at small fairs and markets and beekeepers have made a major effort to diversify their products, provide labelling, ensure better hygiene and health guarantees, and open new channels of distribution.

Commissioner, we cannot simply allow all these efforts to go to waste.

Francesco Ferrarì, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the beekeeping sector is not only a productive operation with age-old origins in the history of our agricultural activities, but currently it is one of the systems that is vital in maintaining the level of productivity of tree and herbaceous crops, thanks to cross-pollination.

I would like to point out that 80% of plants grown produce fruit because of the pollen carried by bees, also ensuring genetic variation of species in reproduction. It is clear that, at the moment, the beekeeping sector and its operations cannot be replaced and are the only way of maintaining biodiversity on target. The products of the hives must increasingly frequently compete on the global market under competition conditions that lack transparency and through the mass importation of products, including those from outside the EU, which are not guaranteed. It is not always possible to guarantee their quality, partly because of pesticides which are banned in Europe but are used outside. For this reason, it is necessary to carry out labelling and to place the origin of the product on it.

I also believe it is important to point to the serious consequences for beekeeping operations of the virus, as a result of which over 50% of the European beekeeping sector has been destroyed. I ask the European Commission to make further efforts in terms of scientific research to find a way of dealing with this serious disease, by banning any type of phytosanitary treatment during flowering periods.

Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Madam President, Commissioner, natural wealth is decreasing before our very eyes. Whole species are dying out, decimated by parasites, disease, chemicals and the irresponsible behaviour of humanity. In many regions, ecological equilibrium has been disturbed and major, irreversible losses have occurred.

We witness with concern the mass extinction of bees, with hives falling silent one after another, and many species of plants dependent on pollination perishing with them. The status of beekeeping determines the yields of as many as 84% of plant species cultivated in Europe. In this way, bees largely determine the abundance of food on our tables.

Bees are being decimated by disease and pests with which beekeepers cannot cope alone. Additional funds are needed to control and study them. Nor can beekeepers cope alone with protecting their markets and ensuring the viability of their products. We therefore need to protect our internal market from the influx of poorer-quality third-country honey, frequently breaching public health requirements. Beekeepers must also receive aid in the form of subsidies or cheaper sugar as well as large-scale promotional campaigns.

In summary, it is high time for us to start working like bees. As a beekeeper, I can only wish that the European Commission would pattern itself on the bee, so that we do not have to wait for fifteen years for a sensible programme which Mrs Lulling has been striving so hard to promote.

Alyn Smith, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Madam President, I would also pay tribute to Mme Lulling, who has been tenacious to say the least in promoting and bringing this issue to the floor of the Parliament. Commissioner, I would also thank you for an impressive list of activities that the Commission is undertaking into this grave issue and, if anything, I think we are looking for a greater degree of funding and coordination as well. There is a risk that different bits of the institutions are doing a lot of good work but we do not necessarily tie it together. I think that is where this debate can shed some light.

It is a serious issue. The miners of old took canaries down into the mines with them to warn of poisonous gases. They warned of poisonous gases by dying. That was bad news for the canaries but good news for the miners. Our concern is that the bees of Europe are doing essentially the same sort of service for us. A third of the EU's food – one in three mouthfuls of food – can be linked to bee pollination.

There is a catastrophic decline in bees, and we must take action at European level. Scientists are agreed that there has been a decline. We have heard already how severe it has been, but we are less clear as to what has caused it. Is it the use of pesticides? Is it climatic conditions? Is it parasites and mites and other diseases, perhaps beyond our control?

Commissioner, I would also mention to you specifically the Bumblebee Conservation Trust at Stirling University in Scotland which has done groundbreaking work into this. Europe is not short of expertise. What we need to do is to tie it together. I think the text before us has a number of concrete actions which would take us in that direction – particularly apicultural set-aside, biodiversity zones, even alongside roads and unproductive land, research on pesticides, surface water and consideration of aid.

As we have heard already, if we can find a billion euros to inflict on African development, I think we can find money to fund our own research. It is right that we see EU action on this and – dare I say – this does constitute a pretty coherent plan B, where plan A, the common European agricultural policy, has failed Europe's bees. I do think we need to see a greater complementarity of actions already on-going to alleviate that situation.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, beekeepers and bees are experiencing tremendous problems and need help. We are witnessing a dramatic fall in the number of bee colonies, not only in Europe but throughout the world. Unfortunately, the profitability of the profession is falling and, with it, young people's interest in it. There are several issues which we need to address as soon as possible.

First, we need to develop research into the parasites, diseases and viruses decimating these hard-working insects. Second, we need to introduce testing of honeys imported from third countries. All products must meet the appropriate quality requirements. In addition, labels should carry information about countries of origin. Third, we need to launch an information campaign explaining the beneficial influence of bees on the natural environment and of honey and other bee products on human health.

Due to the scope of the problem, we need to consider providing financial support to apiaries threatened with extinction. The beekeeping community has been calling for cheaper sugar with which to feed the bees. It would be worth considering the introduction of a special support system for the beekeeping sector, in view of its highly beneficial impact on the natural environment.

Janusz Wojciechowski (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, may I congratulate Mrs Lulling and thank her for her indefatigable and passionate concern for the interests of the European beekeeping industry. It is a good thing that we are debating this problem, because beekeepers in Europe and throughout the world are alarmed and worried by the deaths of their bees.

Investigations of the causes of this phenomenon are under way. Among the causes suggested by researchers is the possible impact of biotechnology and more specifically of the cultivation of genetically modified crops, which could have an adverse impact on the functioning of bees.

I would therefore like to ask the European Commission, which approves the cultivation of genetically modified crops in the European Union, the following question. What are the relevant test results and what, in general, is the understanding of the impact of GMO on the condition of bees in Europe?

James Nicholson (PPE-DE). – Madam President, let me first of all begin by congratulating Astrid for her work on this issue. As far as I am aware, she has been talking about bees now for quite a long time so I am glad to see that this resolution put forward by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development has given Parliament a chance to debate the problem currently facing the beekeeping sector.

While this issue has attracted a lot of attention and publicity, possibly because it is somewhat of a novelty item, we are well aware that in reality, the problems which we are facing are very serious and could potentially have devastating consequences.

I am sure that I do not need to remind anyone of the importance of bees – and it has already been pointed out here tonight – not only for the production of important by-products such as wax and honey, but also for the role they play in pollination and the maintenance of healthy ecosystems.

Coming as I do from the county of Armagh in Northern Ireland, which was well known within the island as the Orchard County, where bees are very necessary to pollinate the apples, and I can say that it is already telling a tale in that particular area. In this regard, the Commission urgently needs to step up its research on what exactly is causing such a sharp decline in the bee population and hopefully come forward with some solutions. The situation will only deteriorate if we cannot find a way to improve bee health and reduce bee mortality and stop the colonies of bees dying and disappearing. This is a source of great concern to all involved, not only within the whole of Europe, but even in the United States and beyond.

I recently addressed a beekeepers' conference in my region of Northern Ireland and it reaffirmed to me, as I listened to the many contributions during that morning, the concern that the beekeepers have at the loss of their hives, especially during the winter period. We need extra funds to develop through further R&D in an attempt to assess what is the reason for this calamity hitting the beekeepers. If we are doing something wrong, we need to find it out urgently. Is it pesticides, or some other reason? There may be lots of theories and such speculation, but the truth is we do not have the answer, and we need that and to be given the extra support.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Madam President, we know the importance of bees. Everyone has spoken about it. However, one of the issues that has not been addressed in the debate is the reality of a substantial trade in commercial bumblebees. There is literally free movement of bees globally and, as far as I know, there is very little regulation of the movement of bees when there needs to be. We do it in other live categories and in livestock, and we know that it works in terms of disease control. The movement of bees has the potential to import the varroa mite, as has happened in Ireland. There is now the problem of the small hive beetle, which is causing havoc for bee-keepers.

So we have a huge problem, to which we do not know the answer. There are at least half a dozen reasons why these things may be happening, and research is absolutely necessary. We need to coordinate that research across the European Union so that we find answers. We also need to address the issue of beekeepers themselves, because it seems they are an ageing population, and we need more of them, not less.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – Madam President, if Mrs Lulling will stay quite long enough for me to congratulate her, I will be delighted to do so on her consistent interest and support for apiculture in the European Parliament for some time now.

The decline in bee populations and the frightening implications for plant pollination and biodiversity generally deserve our full attention and we must support research and join with scientists worldwide to try and find the causes. Parasitic infections, climate change, pesticides: we can only speculate at this stage.

Twenty five per cent of our food depends directly on bees, apart altogether from their contribution to maintaining our grasslands. Regrettably, in Ireland, our only research centre in this area, in Clonroche in County Wexford, was closed down by the Irish government some years ago. Therefore, I am not sure that Ireland can contribute; we have the scientists and the knowledge, but we certainly do not have the support from the government. I look forward to hearing from the Commission on how Europe and the European Union can support the research and what we are doing to date in this area.

Astrid Lulling (PPE-DE). – (FR) Madam President, as Mr Parish has had to leave, he has asked me to state our position on the amendments which reached us at the last minute.

The Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development has unanimously adopted the resolution, with all its amendments, which I considered in their entirety. However, the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, which did not offer any sparkling contributions when the resolution was being discussed, is now making a last-minute attempt to restore its reputation by proposing four amendments. The latter not only provide no new material, but would also confuse the text, which is currently coherent and legible.

Amendment 1 stems from an error in the German translation, since what Mr Graefe zu Baringdorf is proposing is exactly what I proposed but, as I said, the German translation of my recital is inadequate.

Amendment 2 is stating the obvious, Amendment 3 is unintelligible, and Amendment 4 duplicates paragraph 8, which clearly calls for intensified research into the effects of pesticides on bee mortality, and furthermore states that authorisation for such products should be made dependent on this research, as is already the case.

I therefore suggest that these amendments be rejected, because they add nothing, and they would spoil a text that is clear and properly worded. I insist on a good draft, because this resolution is very important, and we want it to be worded properly. This is why we wish to reject these amendments.

Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, the beekeeping debate in the European Parliament has attracted considerable interest from beekeepers. As a beekeeper, I have personally met in Puławy with beekeepers who had travelled from all over Poland. They asked me to put just one question to the European Commission, and to obtain a definitive answer – what can beekeepers actually count on in the coming years??

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, I truly believe that this was a very fruitful discussion with many ideas not only for my colleague but for the DG AGRI services, as well as for my services and others. Many of the Directorates General other than DG AGRI are working on the issue we are discussing today: DG SANCO, DG Research and DG Environment. It is really a multidisciplinary issue. When we talk about how much funding is actually committed to this, I think that we will have to look at various other areas as well.

Let me come first to many of your questions concerning what we are doing, what is in the pipeline and what we actually mean when we talk about research in the bee sector. In the Sixth Framework Programme, a

specific target research project on food quality and safety priority was named 'Bees in Europe and Sustainable Honey Production' (BEE SHOP). This gathers together nine European honey bee research groups specialising in honey quality, pathology, genetics and behaviour. Do not be misled: FP6 projects are the ones that are already running; FP7 projects are just starting.

In addition, the specific support action 'Bee Research and Virology in Europe' (BRAVE) has enabled the organisation of two large multidisciplinary conferences, involving experts working in fundamental and applied research on bees – experts on virology, diagnosis, immunology and epidemiology – as well as international trade, policy formulation and disease risk assessment. A call for proposals was published on 3 September this year, on the theme of food agriculture and fisheries biotechnology, on the identification of emerging honey bee pests and diseases, and the re-emergence of pathogens, aimed at elucidating the intimate mechanisms and reasons for the increased honey bee mortality. So it is exactly linked to this topic and many of your questions.

The environmental aspects, including chronic exposure to pesticides, will also be taken into account. The integrated project ALARM, on assessing large-scale environmental risks for biodiversity, is also funded under the Sixth Framework Programme and includes a module on pollinator loss. ALARM will develop and test methods and protocols for the assessment of large-scale environmental risks in order to minimise negative direct and indirect human impacts. Research will focus on assessment and focus of changes in biodiversity structure, function, dynamism of ecosystems – in particular risk arising from climate change, environmental chemicals, biological invasions and pollinator loss in the context of current and future European land-use betterance will also be assessed. These are all current initiatives.

One thing which I would like to underline – since this was also stressed by your colleague – is that Europe is not short of expertise. I think we have to be aware of this and also be fair. At European Union level, we deal with 5% – I repeat, 5% – of European Union public money which is devoted to research. So it is of the utmost important that we join forces and do as much as possible practically. The creation of the European research area, which I fully support, is actually exactly this idea – that we all know what we are doing and that we join the scientific expertise which we already have across Europe. This is certainly a missing element in Europe today.

I will ensure that the Commissioner responsible for research hears your calls for further research – that is me, but today I am in a different role. One thing which I would also like to mention – because it was perhaps not fully understood in my introduction – is the EFSA full assessment on bee mortality and bee surveillance in Europe. This was published on 11 August 2008, so it is a new thing. It is exactly the analysis of the programme which you are searching for and I think it is important that we all look at what we have before us.

I must also answer the colleague who asked about GMO crops. The only GMO crop currently cultivated in the European Union is Bt-maize MON 810. Bt-maize, and Bt-toxin in general, have been extensively analysed with regard to the possible impact on bee health. Forced feeding trials, where healthy bees are exposed to high doses of bt-toxin, have not shown any negative effect. Overall, the overwhelming majority of studies show that this bt-maize pollen diet has no impact on bees. I can add to this that the recently observed massive losses of bees, termed 'colony collapse disorder' (CCV), in North America and also in Europe do not appear to be related to the use of GMO crops as they are also reported from other areas where no GMO crops are grown. For example, bee losses observed in southern Germany have been clearly attributed to poisoning by the pesticide Poncho Pro. It also has a Latin name, which is so difficult that I would rather not read it out.

In conclusion, Commission actions will certainly continue and be strengthened. They will help beekeepers to face the current difficulties and encourage them to continue their activity. I also hope that will encourage new entrants to the profession since this activity plays an extremely important role, not only for our EU biodiversity, but also economically.

As regards my colleague Commissioner Fischer Boel's direct responsibilities, she will continue to make sure that the national beekeeping programmes are used in the most efficient way. However, in the first instance, it is up to the Member States to spend their budgets in an appropriate way. Today we have EUR 26.3 million in European money each year. This is doubled by adding the money from the Member States – but we are not spending it. We are spending 80% of that money. Member States are not spending what is currently at their disposal.

Finally, the best solution to guarantee a future for the sector is to encourage consumption of EU honey. Since 2004, honey has been added to the list of eligible products for promotion on the internal market and several programmes have been accepted.

My answer was longer because I just wanted to make it clear to you that we are taking these actions seriously and that you should count on us – definitely also in my area – to continue to do so. Thank you for your attention and for staying so long.

President. – I have received one motion for a resolution from the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development in accordance with Rule 108(5) of the Rules of Procedure⁽⁶⁾.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 20 November 2008.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PL) Bees are important to many different cultures in many different parts of the world. Their universality has not come about by accident. Beekeeping has been an important component of the economy since prehistoric times, that is to say since before the inception of written history. In Spain, honey was gathered 6 000 years ago.

Today, the efforts of the bees and the beekeepers could go to waste due to the phenomena affecting the natural environment and also, indirectly, humanity. In Europe, we still have people whose livelihood depends on their work and that of their bees. They sell the honey they have themselves produced. We should be happy that this is so. Return to traditional forest beekeeping has also been attempted. In Poland, these attempts were supported by beekeepers who had come from Bashkiria, because no one in our country remembered the ancient methods any more. Beekeeping is of cultural, social and economic importance. This is why we should protect European beekeeping. Sadly, there is a lot to protect it against.

Economic threats, such as unfair competition by third countries, and threats to bee health, as well as biological threats such as diseases, parasites, environmental pollution and the unconsidered use of pesticides. The European Commission and Member States should support the beekeeping sector, which is facing major challenges. Beekeepers by themselves may find it hard to save biodiversity, to whose riches bees contribute so much.

21. Agenda of the next sitting: see Minutes

22. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting was closed at 11.45 p.m.)

⁽⁶⁾ See Minutes.