

## THURSDAY, 26 MARCH 2009

IN THE CHAIR: MRS MORGANTINI

*Vice-President*

### 1. Opening of the sitting

*(The sitting was opened at 10 a.m.)*

### 2. Food distribution to the most deprived persons in the Community (amendment of the Single CMO Regulation) (debate)

**President.** – The next item is the report (A6-0091/2009) by Mr Sierkierski, on behalf of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, on food distribution to the most deprived persons in the Community (COM(2008)0563 – C6-0353/2008 – 2008/0183(CNS)).

**Czesław Adam Sierkierski, rapporteur.** – (PL) Madam President, Commissioner, today we are discussing an extremely important subject – the programme of food distribution to the most deprived persons in the Community. It is important because it concerns millions of people who live in poverty and need particular help. We support the proposal of the European Commission to increase the budget by two thirds, that is from EUR 305 million to nearly EUR 500 million annually, and to extend the range of products available under the programme.

Of course, the programme will not solve the problems of malnutrition and poverty among the Community's citizens, but it will certainly help to ease these problems. We are against the proposal for the immediate introduction – I repeat, immediate introduction – of co-financing from national budgets, because this could limit or even exclude some countries from participation in the programme. Countries where the per capita income is low and where there are also budget problems would be especially concerned. This is all the more significant because of the current economic crisis. I believe that the Council will manage to work out a compromise in this matter.

We also support the proposal that food products earmarked for distribution under the programme come from the European Union. As far as possible this should be fresh local food, and this will mean we will support home food producers by raising demand. We will also be sure that the food distributed is of the right quality.

Much controversy has surrounded the legal basis of the programme. As we know, the Council's legal services challenged the opinion of the Commission. The Commissioner can count on the support of Parliament in this matter. I share the opinion of the Commission on setting clear priorities and long-term planning. Extending the programme for three years will help to make the expenditure of available resources more effective.

By adopting the report Parliament will send a positive signal to our citizens. Since the EU gives aid to the poorest countries of Africa, and of course we support that, it must also remember its own citizens. The EU food programme for the poorest of the European Union, like the 'Fruit at School' and 'Milk at School' programmes, is changing attitudes towards the EU and the common agricultural policy, which have been so heavily criticised by many people. Our citizens should know that the food which they receive comes from EU programmes and from EU funds.

The programme confirms that the EU feels responsible for its most needy citizens. This group includes particularly the homeless, families in difficulty, the unemployed, single parents, migrants, asylum seekers and people of advanced age or with limited resources. Often they are people with disabilities, or even children.

It should be remembered that the transformations which have taken place in the countries which recently joined the EU have produced major stratification of income in their societies. What is more, in some of these countries disparities in income and living standards are growing all the time. Families living in small towns and inhabitants of villages are particularly affected by poverty. There are growing numbers of people who cannot afford the basic necessities of life.

We have a kind of stalemate in the Council, where everyone is waiting for the opinion of Parliament, and I am convinced that adoption of my report will persuade the Czech Republic, which currently holds the

presidency, to renew discussion and find a rational compromise in the Council. Let us hope that legislative work will finish in May or June this year. I would like to encourage those Member States which do not participate in the programme to join in. Finally, on behalf of the millions of inhabitants who benefit from the programme, the charitable organisations which distribute the food and on my own behalf I would like to thank all MEPs, and not only those who supported my report.

**Mariann Fischer Boel**, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, before going into the content of this proposal, I would like to thank the rapporteur, Mr Siekierski, and the members of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development for their work on this report.

I would like to start by putting today's debate into context, because this proposal is not about paragraphs, political power or promises: it is about people. Millions of Europeans are hit by difficult economic times and by the rapid rise we have seen in food prices since 2007. There are more people than we realise for whom the lack of adequate food is a daily concern: 43 million Europeans cannot afford a meal with meat, chicken or fish every second day. I think that is a striking figure.

The programme for the most deprived targets those in our society who are in need of food aid: people who worry whether they can feed their children tomorrow; people who do not think about what they will eat that night for dinner but about whether they will have anything to eat; people who enter no restaurant but the one carrying the name of *Resto du Cœur*.

With more than 13 million poor people benefiting from the programme, with 19 Member States participating and with the scheme being a stable outlet for intervention products, this programme has certainly shown its value. Parliament recognised this already in 2006, when it called on the Council and the Commission to place the programme on a permanent footing for the future and to extend the distribution of foodstuffs, without restricting it to the products for which intervention applies.

I am pleased to note that the report by Mr Siekierski endorses the Commission's approach and agrees that it is necessary to keep the programme within the common agricultural policy. This is particularly important at a time when some claim that feeding people has nothing to do with our agriculture policy.

Until now, the programme has been financed exclusively by the Community budget. Our proposal now includes cofinancing. That is a significant change, but I believe it is a fundamental improvement of the scheme. Cofinancing will enable the total funds available for this measure to be more in balance with the real needs; it will encourage Member States to take greater responsibility for the programme's management, and it is also a way to strengthen the cohesive element, since cohesion countries will have less cofinancing.

At the same time, I share the view that we should not run the risk of Member States withdrawing from the scheme. Therefore, we proposed a gradual phasing-in of cofinancing rates in order to maintain the difference between the cohesion and non-cohesion Member States.

I agree that we should do more to guarantee the nutritional quality of the food distributed. As the rapporteur mentioned, this could mean including fresh produce, in most cases produced locally. But it is not appropriate to outlaw foreign products or products coming from outside the European Union, as proposed in your report. That would mean additional and burdensome controls. It could be seen as a signal of EU protectionism, and it could even be questioned by our WTO partners. That being said, the large majority of the food distributed will in reality be produced in the European Union, mainly from intervention stocks and most probably from the tenders that we are now making, in particular in the dairy sector.

Given that charities are heavily involved in the scheme, our proposal gives the possibility to reimburse the transport and administrative costs of the NGOs. You suggest that storage costs should be covered as well. I am fundamentally in favour of this idea, but I cannot agree to your suggestion of leaving it to the Member States to fix the rates of reimbursement. We need to set the same maximum rate for all participating countries, not least to make sure that the programme remains efficient and keeps the focus on supplying food.

Finally, let me stress that the Council is waiting for the outcome of today's debate and vote before continuing its discussions. I hope Ministers have used the waiting time constructively. And from today's debate should, therefore, be sent a clear message: do not forget those waiting in line at the soup kitchen or waiting for the next food package. So do not wait too long! We need to put this food aid scheme on a permanent footing for the future.

**Florencio Luque Aguilar**, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Regional Development*. – (ES) Madam President, the present economic crisis throughout Europe will lead to an increase over the next few years in

the number of people finding themselves under the poverty threshold. This number has already reached 80 million, in other words 16% of the world population.

In the face of this crisis, it is of primary importance that we ensure continuity in the provision of food to those people most in need. The intervention stocks have so far been a useful tool both for providing the poorest people in the community with food, and at the same time ensuring stability in the prices received by European producers. However, these stocks are being progressively eliminated.

It would seem fitting that the new aid programme for the poorest would also serve as an outlet for European Community produce. In this way, we would be helping to keep farmers in rural areas.

The European Commission's proposal does not demand that the food involved in the programme be produced exclusively in the Community, since it considers that to be contrary to the rules of the World Trade Organisation. I would like to remind the Commission, however, that the United States devotes nothing more and nothing less than 67% of its agricultural budget to food programmes for the most disadvantaged, which also has the add-on benefit of preferentially helping its farmers and cattlemen.

This percentage is in sharp contrast with the expenditure proposed in the new Community programme, which would equate to only 1% of the common agricultural policy (CAP) budget.

**Agnes Schierhuber**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I, too, wish to express my sincere thanks to Mr Siekierski for his report. I would be so bold as to say that he has produced an extremely good piece of work.

For more than two decades the European Union has had a programme for food distribution to the most deprived people. Thus, in 2006, for example, it was possible to provide support to around 13 million people from 15 Member States by means of various aid measures. I believe this programme – and this is something that both the Commissioner and the rapporteur have already said – will play an important part in maintaining and promoting solidarity within our European community, because in my opinion the EU is, and remains, not only an economic common market, but also first and foremost a community of values and solidarity. Also in the context of a modern socio-environmental market economy with the three pillars of economy, environment and social affairs – all three being of equal importance so that all Member States can participate in this programme – I support the view of the rapporteur that, as previously, the programme should be funded 100% by the European Union.

I would like to emphasise that, although it is important for us primarily to use products produced within the Community, it should not, where necessary, remain solely limited to these products.

Finally, I would like to say that for me, personally, it goes without saying that we should help the poorest of the poor to the extent that we are able to do so. I very much hope that today, as the Commissioner said, a large majority will vote in favour of this report so that we can give a clear signal to the Council.

**María Isabel Salinas García**, *on behalf of the PSE group*. – (ES) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the first thing I would like to do is to congratulate the rapporteur, with whom we have very similar views as regards this programme, and secondly to congratulate everyone involved, because in such a time of economic crisis, it is fundamental to maintain a programme like this, with obvious positive social effects.

Although we are only involved in a consultation procedure, we must send out a clear political message from the European Parliament at this time of economic uncertainty. We must send a message from Brussels and Strasbourg, that we are not only or exclusively concerned with the recovery of the financial system, but that we are also fully aware of the need to develop our social policies, especially those which support the people most in need, the poorest in the European Union.

We agree with the Commission that this food distribution programme should continue to be considered part of the common agricultural policy for several reasons: because European agriculture has a marked social dimension, because this programme is a tool that works, because now we need it more than ever, and because it has to continue operating.

We in the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, like the rapporteur, are against this programme being cofinanced by the European Union and its Member States, since that would mean discrimination between states according to their wealth, which could then lead to a situation whereby the programme could not be put into practice in the most disadvantaged countries.

It is difficult to comprehend why, at a time when it is most needed, the Commission wants to save Community money from the CAPs most social facet, especially since there is a budgetary surplus every year in the agricultural budget.

Full Community funding is fundamental for us. We need to ensure that this programme will reach out to all countries, and especially those most in need. The 43 million potential beneficiaries of this programme require that we make a huge effort and do not avoid budgetary expenditure under any circumstances. Austerity, yes, but not where the poorest people are concerned.

This programme must cover the whole trajectory of the food distributed to ensure that it reaches citizens in all the Member States. In order to achieve this goal, we in the Socialist Group, for which I am the shadow rapporteur, have brought forward an amendment proposing that all expenditure arising from distribution, storage and administration be defrayed from Community finances.

We also agree with the rapporteur that the food should be of high quality, and preferably sourced from the Community. This approach is in keeping with this Parliament's position on other similar programmes which we were recently discussing in the House, such as the plan to hand out fruit in the schools.

Many thanks, that is all. We hope that the Commission will take into account the Parliament's position when it votes and, above all, we hope that it will put this plan into action within the Union as soon as possible.

**Willem Schuth**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, let me start by making it clear that the distribution of food to deprived people is, for me, not at issue in the forthcoming vote on the report by Mr Siekierski, particularly in these difficult economic times. I would therefore also like to make it clear at the outset that it was not easy to find a common line within our Group. I therefore respect the personal decision of any member of the Group to deviate from this and not to support our intended rejection of the report.

Why am I unable to support the result of the committee vote as it stands? There are a number of reasons for this, which have absolutely nothing to do with helping deprived people within the European Union in these difficult economic times. On the contrary, amendments tabled by my colleague Mr Busk on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, although unfortunately found not to be permissible, were intended to give the existing system a future-oriented foundation. The system in place up to now is an anachronism from the times of agricultural overproduction, which fortunately are now a thing of the past. Due to the successful decoupling of direct payments, the intervention stocks have been constantly decreasing in recent years, with the result that, today, up to 85% of the food has to be purchased on the free market.

However, that has altered the fundamental nature of the programme and has resulted in the loss of the agricultural dimension to the programme. Since we are now dealing with a social programme, we need to create an appropriate legal basis for it. In this regard, we share the view of the Council's legal services that the only possible legal basis in place of Article 37 of the EC Treaty regarding the common agricultural policy is Article 308, as otherwise it would clearly constitute an encroachment on the national competences of the Member States. In view of the impermissible nature of our amendments, the only solution can be a new draft from the European Commission. The Commission should also take to heart the principle of co-financing, as whether or not such programmes are meaningful in the mind of everyone can only be satisfactorily assessed at local level.

**Andrzej Tomasz Zapalowski**, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Madam President, in the European Union we are currently facing growing social stratification. We have millions of people living in poverty, and their number is rising all the time. This is happening in spite of the fact that the Socialists have been power in the Community and in many Member States for years, and they are said to be sensitive to poverty and inequality. The EU was itself supposed to be a region of general prosperity. Many people were naive and believed this, but the time for reflection has now come.

We must help those people in Europe who cannot cope on their own with poverty and rejection. There are many such people in the old EU countries and many more in the new. Besides the destructive action of the economic crisis, we can also see the effects of the colonial approach in the past of the old EU countries towards enterprises and banks in the new Member States. Workplaces are still being destroyed, as for example the shipbuilding industry has been destroyed in Poland.

Mr Siekierski's excellent report deals with how to distribute food to those most in need. I fully agree with him that the Community as a whole should finance aid for the deprived, and that the food should come exclusively from EU countries. The aid should reach orphanages, centres for the homeless and hungry children in schools, and should be distributed chiefly by local authorities, because they have the best information about what and how much is needed.

**Witold Tomczak**, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (PL) Madam President, Commissioner, the food aid programme is essential today. As the rapporteur has written, in 2006 in the EU-25 alone 43 million people were undernourished and 79 million were threatened with poverty, which is more than 20% of the total population of the EU. The programme has helped one in six of the people in need. So the problem is serious, and the phenomenon of poverty has worsened further following recent enlargements of the EU.

The statistics show that the programme only alleviates the problem of malnutrition but is not eliminating it. It is a programme which treats the effects but does not eliminate the causes. Is it not paradoxical that it is the inhabitants of country areas who are threatened by poverty and malnutrition? Those who should be producing food are in need of food aid, but rather than this being their fault, it is the effect of policy. It is the effect of unsound agricultural policy, which causes the bankruptcy of family smallholdings and increases the number of people who need food aid.

The sustainable European Model of Agriculture of 1997 is a propaganda myth. Family smallholdings were to be a key element in the model, but in fact it is the other way round. It is these farms which are excluded, although they make up at least 95% of all farms in the European Union. Is it not paradoxical that we give most of the money in agriculture to those whose production is expensive? To large animal farms which damage the environment, while farms which produce cheaply receive symbolic support? EU trade policy exposes us to sudden price rises, and competition policy has led to a monopoly on sales and to overpricing. It is high time that these policies were changed. It is these policies which have made food expensive, and which are the reason why the number of poor and undernourished citizens of the EU is growing.

**Jean-Claude Martinez (NI)**. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, the Lisbon Strategy is a great success in one area at least: the European Union has become one of the most competitive regions in the world where poverty creation is concerned. We have thus been able to create 80 million poor people and 43 million starving Europeans, a figure that includes the elderly, who may die quicker and reduce public spending as a result, meaning that the Maastricht criteria can be met more effectively.

In France alone, 80 million meals are served each year by the charitable organisation *Restos du Cœur*. In order to feed the poor since 1987, we have had a food distribution programme with an annual budget of EUR 300 million. EUR 300 million divided by 80, divided by 12, comes to 25 cents of food distributed each month to each of the 80 million poor. This food was taken from the intervention stocks, but, since the 1992 reform, where the mountains of butter, the rivers of milk and the bulging refrigerators came up for criticism, these stocks have been used up.

For 2010-2012, we shall be buying foodstuffs on the market, where non-European goods also appear, for the sake of the WTO and the fight against protectionism. This means that, since 1962, we have been feeding our herds of cattle imported oilseeds and, from 2010, we shall be feeding our poor imports, too. And all of this is cofinanced in the name of universality.

The problem, however, Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen – the real problem – is that there are still 80 million poor people after 22 years of having a food programme.

**Albert Deß (PPE-DE)**. – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, Mr Siekierski has done a great deal of work to produce this report and for this I would like to offer him my sincere thanks. I also share his view that a lot of people, particularly now during the economic crisis, are facing the threat of poverty. It would be an indictment of Europe if people here in Europe had to suffer hunger.

However, I have to disagree with the impression given that food has become more expensive. That may be true in certain countries, but in Germany it is certainly not the case. Partly as a result of erroneous decisions at European level, the price of milk and butter, for example, is lower than it has been for a long time and it has reached a level that is threatening the existence of many farms.

I have here some statistics which list the prices of food. In 1970, an industrial worker had to work for 243 minutes in order to be able to buy a kilogram of pork chops, a kilogram of beef, a kilogram of dark wheat and rye bread, ten eggs, 250 grams of butter, a kilogram of potatoes and a litre of milk; in 2008 he had to

work only 82 minutes. This means he only required a third as much time in order to be able to afford this food.

In the explanatory statement it is stated that in Germany alone 9 million people face the threat of poverty. A correction is also needed here. In Germany, every citizen, every person is entitled to minimum benefit from the state and therefore none of these 9 million people need suffer hunger.

It is therefore important for the money that is made available here for food aid to be used in places in Europe where people are really facing the threat of hunger. It would be a disgrace for Europe if we did not rectify this.

**Luis Manuel Capoulas Santos (PSE).** – (PT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the debate in which I should like to be taking part would be the one aiming to end all aid measures for the most deprived, due to these having become unnecessary.

Unfortunately, this is not the case at the moment in Europe and the world. In the European Union, many families affected by unemployment or social exclusion have seen their incomes become inadequate to meet their most basic needs and, as a result, we owe them our solidarity.

The Commission proposal that we are debating merits our approval, all the more so as we must now, as in the past, find yet another way of easily disposing of our surpluses. That is not the point today. It is even justified for the financial allocations for this programme to be increased.

I also congratulate the Commission for proposing that this assistance should come from the agricultural budget. No group shows solidarity more than farmers and no communities are more involved in mutual aid than rural communities. I am sure that European farmers will take great pride in sharing part of the agricultural budget with those who are most in need.

My political group will therefore reject the proposals of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, which question the legal basis of this regulation. The Commission proposal can and must, however, be improved.

The Siekierski report, and also the amendment that the Socialist Group in the European Parliament will table in plenary, are good contributions which improve the proposal, particularly with regard to the eligibility of storage costs and the comprehensive Community financing of the programme.

I therefore call on plenary to adopt this report and on the Commission to accept Parliament's contributions.

**Danutė Budreikaitė (ALDE).** – (LT) The report on the amendment of the Council regulation on food distribution to the most deprived persons in the Community is being presented by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development.

However, I would like to stress that faced with the current financial and economic crisis, support for the Community's most deprived residents takes on a new – social policy – dimension.

EU food aid is very important in a period of crisis, as the number of unemployed increases and the subsistence level falls.

The number of unemployed in Lithuania this February was 16 times the number of jobs available. At present in Lithuania about 20% of residents are considered to be living in poverty.

In 2006 in the European Union 13 million residents received food aid. It is forecast that in the nearest future 16% or 80 million EU residents will be living below the poverty level.

Mr Siekierski's report proposes leaving the food aid programme funding procedures currently in force, only allocating funds from the EU Budget, and disapproving the European Commission's proposal to fund the programmes from the EU and Member State budgets.

The Commission's proposal really does not match economic realities.

For many of the EU's poorer countries, fighting the consequences of the crisis, it would be difficult to contribute to the funding of the food aid programme in the current period. Funding from the EU Budget meanwhile, as has been the case since 1987, would be effective support for poorer co-citizens, which would show true solidarity.

**Giovanni Robusti (UEN).** – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, finally people are realising that with the new agricultural policy the storehouses are empty and, what is more, all funds have been transferred to direct aid and now we are resorting to the budget to feed the hungry.

Perhaps if we had used modulation to cream a bit more from those well-hidden persons who receive more than EUR 300 000 a year in direct aid, then today there would be more resources for our most deprived citizens. Perhaps if we were to decide what to set aside for the deprived before production takes place, we would spend far less than if we purchased it on the market and we would achieve a policy for supporting certain markets in crisis, such as the milk market. Perhaps if we could manage to use those products that are thrown away to rot because they are close to their expiry date or are left unsold on the general markets, we would kill two birds with one stone.

I do not even want to imagine that behind a noble cause a big market in aid is growing, putting its hands in the pockets of European taxpayers in defiance of those poor devils who are dying of hunger.

**Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM).** – Madam President, feeding the hungry is a basic precept. We rightly talk about it in the context of third countries, but rarely acknowledge real hunger in Europe. However, gnawing hunger and severe malnutrition deficiencies, even without actual hunger, is a reality even in the most prosperous Member States.

Hunger in the midst of plenty is, and has always been, a scandal, and, in this report, we are trying to improve schemes to address it more effectively. As an impoverished mother, I had reason to be grateful for the free milk given to families of young children in the 1970s in Ireland and for the low-cost milk my children received at school in the 1980s.

I would like to add one suggestion though, but not within the CAP. As a result of some of the policies in the common fisheries policy, thousands of tonnes of edible fish are dumped dead over the sides of fishing boats around our coasts. It is time we ended this waste. We should land these so-called 'discards' and give the fish to those who need it but cannot afford high-quality protein. It would be very hard to find a better and more nourishing food. Commissioner, can you speak to the Commissioner for fisheries on the extension of this scheme to include fish?

**Luca Romagnoli (NI).** – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I wholeheartedly endorse the Siekierski report on a common organisation of agricultural markets and on specific provisions as regards food distribution to the most deprived persons in the Community. This issue is all the more important given the financial crisis, the effects of which are being felt in the European economy.

The European Parliament, recognising the pressing need to meet the food requirements of the most deprived, has urged the Commission and the Council to put the European food aid programme on a permanent footing. For the rest, ladies and gentlemen, last March, when adopting a resolution on rising prices in the EU and in developing countries, we in this House stated that the right to a sufficient and varied diet suitable for a healthy and active lifestyle is a fundamental right to be permanently guaranteed to all.

I believe that the food distribution programme for the most deprived should continue to represent a significant element of the common agricultural policy, precisely because the CAP works by stabilising prices and thus protecting those on lower incomes from price fluctuations.

I do not agree, however, with the co-financing percentages proposed in certain amendments, because they could lead some Member States to limit their participation in the programme. Therefore I reject those amendments aimed at altering the legal basis. I would emphasise that what is needed is complete funding by the European Union for the food aid programme; thus I am in favour of the adoption of the draft legislative resolution.

**Struan Stevenson (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, you have heard some diverging views around the House this morning on this issue. I congratulate, of course, Mr Siekierski.

At a time of deepening economic recession and the tens of millions of people who are living in poverty and are hungry, of course, as a Parliament, we have to find ways of helping them and providing them with food aid. But, as the Commissioner pointed out, there are 19 participating Member States in this project. That means there are eight Member States not participating. The UK is one of them, and the reason is that they use their own social policy to provide aid for the poor. They withdrew from this scheme many years ago.

The question that many Member States and the Commission are asking is: why are we using the CAP to finance social policy? This used to be perfectly OK when we had massive surpluses – milk lakes, butter mountains and beef mountains – and were required to distribute this food to the poor, using the CAP budget to finance that distribution. But now, when there is very little in intervention – and we are hearing now that we have to buy in food even from outwith the EU and use the CAP budget to store and distribute this food – this surely is becoming something that should be better handled by Member States' social policy.

When you consider that there are people living in complete deprivation in some of the new Member States, like Romania, and many of these people, by the way, are subsistence farmers, they are the people who the poorest. Yet we are potentially taking money from them – money from the CAP budget that could help them – to distribute this food aid, the main beneficiaries of which are actually old Member States, like France, Italy and Spain. So there has not been a level playing field applied to this distribution of aid, and in future I think we should be very cautious about how we take this forward.

**Jean-Paul Denanot (PSE).** – (FR) Madam President, I believe that the issue of distributing food to the most deprived persons is extremely timely, but I do feel that, ultimately, the Commission's proposal does not match up to the problem.

The cofinancing issue is of concern to me, and I feel that it is more the issue of liberalism, which has ruled the CAP assessments over the last few years, that should be called into question. Food riots and sudden changes in the price of foodstuffs are constant indicators of the limits of agricultural market liberalisation. Such liberalisation has always been to the detriment of fragile populations, fragile producers and fragile areas.

I therefore call for agricultural policy to regain its rights, to resume control at both European and international level and, from both a quantitative and a qualitative perspective, for the strategic area of agriculture and food not to be subject to strict market forces.

Of course, this is an urgent matter, and the Siekierski report responds to this urgency, which I am pleased about. I hope, though, that, within the context of the discussions that are starting up on the future of the CAP, it will be pointed out that the main objective is to take a structural approach to combating the hunger and poverty that we are seeing throughout the EU and the world. The rural areas are ready to meet our food requirements with sufficient amounts of high-quality produce; they must be given the financial and human resources to assume this big responsibility.

**Leopold Józef Rutowicz (UEN).** – (PL) Madam President, food and housing account for over 90% of expenditure in many people's personal budgets. Keeping food prices as low as possible has great social and humanitarian significance. Seventy-nine million people in the European Union were affected by poverty and malnutrition in 2006. Now, as a result of the crisis and an increase in the number of inhabitants, the problem has grown significantly and the number of people in need of direct support in 2009 will definitely exceed 25 million.

Aid is an important element in the common agricultural policy because it releases intervention stocks while maintaining demand for food. I support financing food aid, especially from EU funds but supplemented by particular countries depending on their ability, setting clear principles for giving aid, increasing the aid fund by at least EUR 200 million in 2009, extending the list of food products and establishing principles of food purchase. Aid has great political significance, because it confirms the cohesion of EU action on behalf of its citizens. I congratulate Mr Siekierski on an excellent report.

**Christa Kieß (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner Fischer Boel, ladies and gentlemen, for 22 years the programme of food distribution to the most deprived persons in the Community has contributed to the implementation of extremely important aims of the common agricultural policy. This is about, on the one hand, stabilising the markets by reducing the intervention stocks, while on the other supporting the poorest levels of the population in the Community with food. In 2006 alone, 13 million people from 15 Member States benefitted from aid measures within this programme – valuable help that should be retained.

Now, however, there are justified concerns about the Commission's proposal, which deviates from the old principles and does not want to use food from the intervention stocks alone for the programme, but also food bought on the free market. Here, Commissioner, it is definitely a matter of social policy and not agricultural policy. The argument that it is only with the additional purchase of food that the range of food offered will be able to provide a balanced diet, in my opinion, goes beyond the remit.



The rapporteur, Mr Siekierski, is now proposing the removal of co-financing. However, this just emphasises once again the aspect of socio-political responsibility, which is why I would advocate co-financing. The European Union must be clearly focussed on the well-being of the people. There must be no hunger or want: that is something that all of the speakers this morning have once again clearly emphasised. However, we must ensure a clear allocation of responsibilities. It is not the case that agricultural policy wants to obstruct the aid and support for the poor. However, with a fair and correct allocation of tasks and aid, the prospects for coordination and optimisation are also good.

European agricultural policy is currently facing, and will in future face, great challenges. Changes to the content must always be seen in the overall context. I would therefore ask the Commission and the Council for appropriate decisions and coordination in terms of social and agricultural policy.

**Rosa Miguélez Ramos (PSE).** – (ES) Madam President, I should like firstly to congratulate Mr Siekierski on what I consider to be an excellent report, which has garnered a lot of support within the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development.

As we all know, the Community's intervention stocks have been used to provide food aid to those most in need for more than 20 years. The problem, Mr Stevenson, is that successive common agricultural policy reforms have been greatly reducing the stocks.

I would also like to point out here that if we suppress or attempt to suppress this programme we would send out a very bad signal at this very delicate moment in time, when many Europeans do not have enough to eat. In this respect, it is clear that when the stocks run out, and as I have already said they are gradually becoming more depleted, we will have to turn to the open market.

I would like to highlight here something that I see as a very positive element in the report, that when we turn to the market, there should be an obligation that the products be EU produced, locally sourced, and fresh. It would also seem appropriate to me that the scheme should remain 100% EU funded, since I feel that at times such as this the aid cannot and should not be dependent on each Member State's capabilities, if we do not wish to go into those capabilities in detail. Likewise, it would seem to be a good idea to extend the programme duration to three years.

Finally, I would like to point out that the European Commission still has time to use the interventions wherever they may be necessary or possible, and that more than one farming sector would appreciate it. I am thinking in particular of the dairy producers in my region, Galicia, for whom such an intervention would help to solve the difficult situation that they are facing, and would at the same time help to provide food for the most deprived.

**Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN).** – (PL) Madam President, around 80 million people in the European Union live in poverty, which amounts to 16% of the inhabitants of the EU. The economic crisis threatens to increase the size of that group. In Warsaw I see a line of people queuing for a bowl of soup every day. That is why it is so important to maintain continuity in the Community programme of food distribution to the most deprived persons. Direct supply of products will ensure a varied diet.

However, the Commission's proposal includes the condition of co-financing, which in the case of the poorest Member States may lead to their withdrawal from the programme. This would be inconsistent with the reason for introducing the programme, and in particular with the reduction of economic and social inequalities between regions, and would destroy the principle of solidarity. I hope that Amendments 17, 18 and 19 will remove this flaw. I appeal to the Commission to prepare a programme which will remove the structural causes of poverty and not just its effects, and also for monitoring aimed at establishing how much of the aid reaches the poor, and how much is retained by intermediaries. I congratulate the rapporteur.

**Filip Kaczmarek (PPE-DE).** – (PL) Madam President, Commissioner, the distribution of food to the most deprived persons is a very important area of EU activity. I therefore thank the Commission for its proposal on this matter, and I thank Mr Siekierski for the report which we are discussing today.

Member States have made huge advances in improving the quality of life of their inhabitants. However, poverty is still one of the most serious problems of contemporary Europe. It is estimated that 43 million EU citizens are at risk of malnutrition – that is a shocking figure. The distribution programme is helping many of these Europeans. I know that not everyone likes the programme. I understand that one may have doubts of a legal, economic or political nature, but I would like to know what alternative there would be to the

programme, especially because the programme of food distribution also has a beneficial effect on the agricultural market, which is more stable thanks to the programme.

The EU is a global leader in giving aid to the poorest people of the world. It is hard to imagine, that at the same time the Community could stop helping those of its own citizens who are facing serious problems, and therefore I hope that the Council will come to an understanding on this matter.

**Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE).** – (HU) I would like to congratulate the European Commission and the rapporteur, Mr Siekierski on this excellent initiative, a confirmation of the social sensitivity of the European Union and the Commission.

There are two things I would like to ask of the European Commission. The first has to do with co-financing: I agree with the report, but I would like Mrs Fischer Boel to consider the fact that she is asking for co-financing from poorer Member States, those on tighter budgets, just where the need for food is the greatest.

My second request: transport costs should not be set at 4.5% but, based on the principle of subsidiarity, should be left up to Member States, because lower rates may suffice to cover transport.

Finally, the EU logo should continue to be printed on product labels, since these are provided by the EU. Lastly, as I do not think I will speak up in debates any more, I would like to thank Mrs Fischer Boel for her entire five years of diligence. She has made her mark on the history of European agriculture.

**Maria Petre (PPE-DE).** – (RO) As a Romanian MEP, my colleagues and I support the proposals which our rapporteur made and we are going to vote in favour of them.

Families from small towns and rural areas are hardest hit by poverty. In the current crisis, extending the food programme and financing it from the Community budget are fully justified.

We all know that the measures adopted in 2008 and the allocated budget have been insufficient. The agricultural and social components can justify keeping the programme as part of the common agricultural policy.

In new Member States, such as Romania, the programme's administration must obviously be improved. Product storage and administrative costs must be managed efficiently so that they do not exceed 20-25% of the market price.

Finally, I would like to thank Mr Sikierski and congratulate him on the proposals which he has made.

**Francesco Ferrari (ALDE).** – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, first and foremost this proposal – from both the rapporteur and the Commission – is an important pact to provide funding to mitigate the impact of spiralling food prices in the Community, which is putting an increasing number of people in difficulty and making the supply of food aid more costly.

This new arrangement, which has my support, will make the programme more efficient and up to date both in terms of agricultural policy and from a social point of view. Furthermore, I agree that the initiative should be kept within the framework of the CAP, as suggested by the Commission.

As we know, the CAP currently provides food aid to those groups of the population that live in desperate conditions. Indeed, the measure we are about to implement has always inspired broad consensus, so much so that in 2006 13 million people, and 15 countries in 2008, actually 19 countries, I think that from this point of view ... *(The President cut off the speaker).*

#### IN THE CHAIR: MR MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ

*Vice-President*

**Zbigniew Krzysztof Kuźmiuk (UEN).** – (PL) Mr President, in this debate I would like to draw attention to three issues. Firstly, I would like to remind you that one of the main objectives of the common agricultural policy is to ensure access to food for the inhabitants of the European Union at appropriate prices, and so for those who have low incomes or who have no income at all this means free food.

Secondly, the income of the inhabitants of the EU, and in particular of the new Member States, leaves much to be desired. In all the new countries the number of inhabitants with incomes below 40% of the EU average

is as high as 50%, and so almost half of the people in these countries have such low incomes. These data come from before the crisis. As a result of the crisis, in the next few years the situation will only get worse.

I support, therefore, continuation of the programme of free food distribution among the most deprived people, for which the EU will set aside nearly EUR 500 million in 2009, which will include around EUR 100 million for my country, Poland. I hope that the Czech Presidency will achieve consensus on the final form of the programme in the Council ... *(The President cut off the speaker)*

**Ljudmila Novak (PPE-DE).** – (SL) While we have been busy trying to eradicate hunger in Africa and other impoverished countries, hunger and poverty have afflicted us at home, in our own backyard.

That has been the case in my own country of Slovenia, as well, where the need for solidarity assistance is, unfortunately, increasing, despite a high standard of living. According to media reports, humanitarian organisations' food supplies have almost been exhausted.

Given the fact that the majority of EU Member States still have abundant amounts of food, it would really be inhumane if our citizens had to suffer, or even die, because of hunger. Survival must definitely be given priority over any other investments, which can wait until better times.

If the Member States are unable to ensure new funds for food supplies, the most appropriate course of action would probably be for them to release their emergency supplies. I endorse this programme, but at the same time I would like to appeal to all of us and to our citizens to be attentive to the distress of the people around us.

**Donato Tommaso Veraldi (ALDE).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank Mr Siekierski for his report on the Community programme of food distribution to the most deprived, which represents a valuable tool for regulating the market and must therefore remain within the framework of the CAP.

Although the average quality of life in the European Union is among the highest in the world, some citizens are unable to buy enough food to eat. It is estimated that 43 million people in the EU are at risk of food poverty, a figure that has risen continuously in recent years.

The rising prices that have been seen for some time on a wide range of goods makes it more expensive to provide food aid, which makes the support provided by the European programme even more urgent.

**Mariann Fischer Boel, Member of the Commission.** – Mr President, I would like to thank everyone for all the comments. In general, I hear a very positive approach to the proposal for the most needy.

Mr President, could I just be allowed to focus on some of the comments that have been raised here today? First of all, I think that we have to keep in mind that poverty is not confined to certain areas or regions within the Member States. Unfortunately, it is an issue that all Member States have to face. It is true that the extent of the problem and the means available to remedy it are not identical throughout the whole European Community. The allocation of the budget to the Member States, as well as the differentiated rates for cofinancing for cohesion and non-cohesion countries, does of course already take into account the financial capacity of every country. This means that the bottom line will be that there will more money available for the so-called 'new' Member States than is the case today.

Regarding the budget, I would just remind you that we have actually increased the budget available for the programme for the most needy by two thirds – up to EUR 0.5 billion – and I think this, together with the newly introduced cofinancing, will help alleviate some of the problems. I think we also have to keep in mind that this scheme is a voluntary one. Member States that have a social system in place in their own country certainly need not use this scheme. We do not seek to replace social policies that are already implemented in Member States and, to a certain extent, also managed by NGOs. Our intention is to underpin them by the provision of food, which I still consider the central aim of the agricultural policy.

I believe that the changes that we have proposed go in the right direction. I think the provisions are reasonable and well balanced. The programme –when hopefully voted through this Parliament as well – will be able to meet the challenges of the future. It will be difficult to be against or to oppose this programme in a situation where unemployment is currently increasing dramatically all over Europe, thereby heavily increasing the number of people at risk of poverty. So I look forward to the votes of this extremely responsible Parliament.

**Czesław Adam Siekierski**, *rapporteur*. – (PL) I would like to respond to some of the problems which have been raised. Firstly, I said that I am against co-financing but I also stressed that we are now in a period of economic crisis, when the number of poor and unemployed persons is rising. We will evaluate the programme in 2011 or 2012 and we will think then about whether to continue with co-financing. Let us give ourselves time and not do this during the crisis.

Secondly, I share the view of the Commissioner that it is difficult to restrict ourselves to distributing only food produced in the EU, because that will increase costs and enlarge the administrative side of the programme. Thirdly, let us follow the example of the USA, where large sums, under the Farm Bill, have been set aside for the support of agriculture by financing free EBT cards. Fourthly, I encourage the countries which do not participate in the programme to join. The programme is open. Fifthly, funds allocated to this programme do not limit farmers' access to the common agricultural policy, because we have savings under the CAP.

Finally, I would like to go back to sources. As we know, the aims of the CAP were formulated under the Treaties of Rome. They talk about the need to ensure access for society to food at affordable prices, and to guarantee farmers an appropriate level of income. We can say that these are, firstly, production tasks, which define the amount of production which is essential. Secondly, they are social tasks, because we are talking about appropriate prices – so that consumers will be able to afford food products, and thus the Treaty of Rome defines certain social objectives. And thirdly, there are also economic objectives, related to ensuring that farmers have appropriate incomes.

When we are talking about affordable prices for the poor, often unemployed, consumer, food should be accessible at significantly lower prices, or simply supplied without charge, of course under special programmes and under specific conditions. In summary, it should be said that the CAP also includes certain elements of social policy.

**President.** – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place at 12.00 noon.

#### **Written statements (Rule 142)**

**Mieczysław Edmund Janowski (UEN)**, *in writing*. – (PL) Mr Siekierski's report on the distribution of food to the most deprived persons raises issues covered in Council regulations which refer to financing of the common agricultural policy and to specific provisions in that material. We have here a situation which proves that there are also large areas of poverty and want inside the European Union. Those affected are most often people living in villages and small towns, and this includes many children. According to official statistics around 80 million Europeans live below the poverty line. It is to be feared that the present crisis and rising unemployment will increase that alarming number.

The fact that the amount allocated to the programme of food aid for the poorest inhabitants of the EU will rise from EUR 305 million to EUR 500 million is in itself a positive sign. However, I think that it is necessary to make changes to the systems in Member States in order to eliminate or at least significantly limit this shameful situation. The main cause of this deprivation is unemployment and excessively high food prices (let us only compare the remuneration received by farmers for their products with the retail price in the shops). Our system of social care is also far from perfect.

Finally I would like to emphasise very clearly that it is essential that the food used for the purposes of the aid programme should be of good quality, and should ideally be fresh and come from local farms.

### **3. Collective redress (debate)**

**President.** – The next item is the Commission statement on collective redress.

**Meglena Kuneva**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, since the beginning of my mandate, redress has, as you know, been high on my list of priorities. I believe that substantive rights show their strength only when they are backed by enforcement and effective redress for consumers. More and more often, large numbers of consumers lose out as a result of the same or similar illegal practices by a trader and do not receive redress.

The Commission has been examining the problem that consumers face in obtaining redress for mass claims. We have commissioned studies, discussed the issue with stakeholders, conducted surveys and an Internet consultation, and recently published a green paper to which we have received more than 170 responses.

Although the consultation officially ended on 1 March 2009, comments are still coming in and I can already tell you that, the more evidence we gather, the more our belief that there is a problem is confirmed. This is why we need to find a solution in the interests of justice and a healthy European economy.

The green paper on consumer collective redress proposed various ways of tackling this problem. A preliminary analysis of the replies received indicates that stakeholders recognise the unsatisfactory present situation on collective redress in the Member States. There is consensus about the necessity of further action to achieve effective redress for consumers and thereby restore their confidence in the market.

Consumer organisations favour binding measures for a collective redress judicial scheme in all Member States in combination with other options, such as the extension of existing alternative dispute resolution (ADR) mechanisms to collective claims. Business would favour ADR mechanisms.

In a few weeks' time, once we have properly analysed all the responses, we will publish the replies, together with a statement on the feedback we received, and before the summer we will outline the different ways of addressing the problem of mass claims. This will not simply be a repetition of the four options in the green paper. Our thinking is developing further in the light of the responses to the green paper consultation. Based on the outcome of all the consultations, the Commission will carefully examine the economic and social impact on stakeholders, including the costs and benefits generated by the possible options. On 29 May we will hold a hearing to share our preliminary conclusions with stakeholders.

Let me stress that, whatever route we take, we will not go down the path of the US experience. Instead, we will follow our European legal cultures and take into account the existing experiences of Member States. Once the options become clear, the European Parliament, Member States and stakeholders will be convinced, as I am, that not only is there a problem but also that an effective solution must, and can, be found at European level.

Why should reputable businesses suffer at the hands of unfair competitors who profit when consumers are not compensated? And I stress 'compensated'. This is the very nature of redress that we are aspiring to. Why should consumers give up their legitimate expectations of compensation, and why should society put up with the welfare and justice gap?

I am confident that we will find a solution that strikes the right balance between improving consumer access to redress and avoiding unfounded claims. Effective redress will boost consumers' confidence in the internal market and in what Europe can do for them. This is particularly important in the harsh reality of today's economic and financial crisis. As you know, the coming months will be marked by many institutional changes, and this may influence the timing and the delivery of our work on collective redress.

Concerning the initiative taken by the Commission on damages actions for breach of the European anti-trust rules, I can assure you that the Commission shares Parliament's view that these two initiatives related to collective redress should be consistent. Indeed, being consistent does not mean that different policy initiatives have to use the same tools to reach the same goals. I can equally assure you that I remain personally committed to this issue and will continue to work on it until the end of my mandate with the same energy and vigour that I have devoted to it thus far, and of course with the kind help and support of Parliament.

**Malcolm Harbour, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.** – Mr President, it is a pleasure to welcome Commissioner Kuneva to the House once again. Commissioner, I only need to use your own words about your energy and vigour in pursuing the interests of consumers, which, I think from our side of the House and, indeed, for all members of our committee, we have admired, and we encourage you very much to continue that work.

As far as the collective redress proposal is concerned, I think you are approaching it in exactly the right way. We have consistently said that this is an extremely complex issue. It involves not just European-level measures but also very difficult issues about engagement with national law and regional law and, above all, as you indicated, the consumer has to be at the heart of it.

You have been really consistent in saying that consumer confidence in the internal market and cross-border trading is one of the fundamental issues that we have to raise, because otherwise consumers are not getting their rights of access and being able to use and exercise their choice across borders. I think that remains at the heart of what you are discussing today.

Above all, I think the timing and complexity of solutions is important, because you have evoked a wide range of solutions here, but it is quite clear that solutions that may involve some new European-level judicial mechanisms will clearly take far longer and potentially be more controversial than picking up some of the alternative dispute resolution measures or also using the existing consumer cooperation measures that have been put in place. I think all of us on this committee recall that, in fact, the enhanced cooperation on consumers was an aspect that was put through our committee in the last Parliament, and we would like to see that become more effective. I think there is a vehicle there that can be used to give consumers the sort of redress that we are looking for, not just in collective claims but also in dealing with cross-border claims themselves much more effectively. If we can get that sense of priority there and timing and speed to come up with the best solutions quickly, I think that is the way that I commend you to think about moving forward.

**Evelyn Gebhardt**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, thank you for taking up the Socialist Group in the European Parliament's initiative and addressing this matter, as this issue is important to citizens.

I have my mobile phone here. I have heard from many young people that they have a lot of problems because, for one contract or another that they have completely unwittingly entered into – for ringtones for example – a sum of money is deducted each month for five, six, seven, eight months. No one goes to court for the sake of EUR 5, but if a million citizens experience the same thing and an undertaking unduly pockets EUR 5 million, that is a case of unfair competition in relation to those competitors within the European Union that behave correctly. For this reason, it is very important that we address this issue.

However, it is also important for the people, for the young people, for parents, who are confronted with this to be provided with legal instruments to truly strengthen their hand. At a time when Europe is growing together, when people are shopping on the Internet, it is important that we establish these as cross-border instruments to enable them to really be used appropriately. Therefore, in the opinion of my Group, it is precisely the group action provided for by such instruments that must clearly be examined in order to ascertain whether they can be used in the European Union. However, as you have also said, Commissioner, we need to design these instruments in such a way as to prevent the extremes seen in the US, for example, from creeping in, and instead tailor them to our own legal system. We must work on this and we wish to pursue this matter further in the coming months.

Commissioner, you know that we are on your side with regard to this matter. When it comes to enforcing the rights of citizens, we Social Democrats are always involved.

**Andreas Schwab (PPE-DE)**. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, thank you very much for the opportunity to contribute to this debate. I am pleased, Mrs Kuneva, that at the request of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats you have been instrumental in getting the proposal relating to collective redress from the DG Competition, which to start with planned to regulate this according to the practice in the US, to be developed using a horizontal approach and to actually treat everyone equally within the European Union – small and medium-sized enterprises, consumers, workers and entrepreneurs. This is an important step forward, which we wish to support in a very constructive and positive manner.

We are aware that in many individual cases, of course, a Community claim for the enforcement of collective rights appears to be more successful than individual enforcement. However, we remain convinced that the way of skimming off summary actions that protects the consumer the most is not collective redress, but public enforcement of such claims, for example by means of a skimming claim as in the German Law against unfair competition, because individual consumers will consider very carefully whether in fact to file a collective action with a lawyer for EUR 4.99 or whether it would actually be more helpful if, for example, these claims were continually monitored at public level by an ombudsman and enforced by appropriate means. Thus, with regard to the question of how to link these two elements, I believe that we need to consider carefully how we can help consumers in the most effective way, as consumers often do not have the time to go to a lawyer, but instead want to find help quickly and easily.

The second point that I see as important – and here, too, your Directorate General has done a very good job – is that the most interesting element was a discussion in the Bavarian representation in Brussels, where in response to the question of whether, by using European legal means, we can actually rule out the type of collective redress found in the US, a representative of your Directorate General clearly said 'no we cannot'. That in our opinion means that we must not disregard this model completely. We must continue to discuss it, but to do so with great care and to include the Member States and their legal options in the discussion so

that ultimately we achieve what it is we all want, and that is a real European model that is particularly attractive to consumers and that also protects small and medium-sized enterprises.

**Arlene McCarthy (PSE).** – Mr President, I know the Commissioner is aware that tomorrow 4 000 consumers will go to the High Court in the UK to seek compensation for severe allergic reactions, hospitalisation and death as the result of the use of a chemical in sofas and household goods, which has now been banned in the EU. France, Sweden and Poland have reported similar cases and injuries. Across Europe there are potentially many thousands of consumers who have suffered severe injuries as a result of this toxic chemical.

I believe that citizens support European intervention when it is seen to give real help to consumers to tackle real problems. Real help in such cases means giving them the right to take action collectively, wherever they buy goods and services. So our committee launched an online consultation on the Commission proposal for consumer rights. We received many responses, many of which – from businesses and consumers – highlighted the need for effective access to cross-border remedies and redress.

There are, I believe, enough cases like the toxic sofa case with enough compelling evidence to prove that a range of options for collective redress is needed, not only to improve access to justice, but equally to deter illegal or unfair business practices. Of course in our committee we want consumers to have access to cheap, affordable means, such as ADR, but I believe today's debate is first and foremost about identifying practical ways to give real help to our consumers and citizens, to ensure they get a fair deal, real redress and real remedies.

**Klaus-Heiner Lehne (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to start by saying that we, too, in principle welcome the European Commission's proposal and this Green Paper.

As previous speakers have said, there is no doubt that there is a 'mass' phenomenon in which relatively small losses affect a large number of people. The individual losses are small, but taken together the overall amount is large. We need an instrument to deal with this problem. In my opinion, it is right to consider something like this.

Staying with the positives, I also very much welcome the fact that, in its Green Paper, the Directorate General for Health and Consumer Protection has also placed a definite emphasis on the issue of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms. That is very different to the White Paper from the Directorate General for Competition, which was also debated in this House yesterday and which has so far completely ignored the possibility of out-of-court dispute resolution mechanisms. I think that the Directorate General for Health and Consumer Protection has come further in its Green Paper than the members of the Directorate General for Competition.

However, I would like to make two things quite clear, which in my opinion should definitely be viewed as critical comments. In a few minutes at noon, Parliament will adopt my report on the White Paper from the Directorate General for Competition. With a huge majority in this House we will demand that the European Commission choose a horizontal approach in dealing with this issue.

We must not end up with sectoral instruments: one for the area of consumer protection, one of the area of antitrust law, another one for the capital market, perhaps another one for the environment, perhaps another one for social affairs, all contradicting each other, all encroaching on the legal systems of the Member States and leading ultimately to legal confusion that can no longer be managed by any practitioner. We have often seen such examples in the past. I am just thinking about the debate on the Professional Qualifications Directive, which we later also combined in a single instrument because this fragmentation was no longer manageable. The Commission should not make the same mistake again in this case. It should advocate a horizontal approach right from the outset. That is the clear position of Parliament, as will become apparent in a few minutes.

One last point: I very much welcome the fact that we have agreed that we do not want a claims industry based on the American model with a turnover of USD 240 billion a year from which ultimately only lawyers profit and the consumers get absolutely nothing. We want the genuine rule of law in Europe and we want to keep our traditional system and our understanding of the law.

**Martí Grau i Segú (PSE).** – (ES) Mr President, in a market without borders such as Europe, it is important that, as well as ensuring healthy competition, we equally zealously safeguard consumers.

Throughout the last half century, trade barriers have been breaking down for products, but largely these barriers still stand for the consumers.

Abusive commercial practices are often not reported by consumers or pursued by consumer organisations because of a general awareness that it is difficult to obtain compensation.

Collective redress saves effort when many people are affected and offers a much better chance of reaching a compensation agreement. Due to the cross-border nature of a large part of economic transactions in the European Union, this right of collective action cannot be restricted to national limits

We need a real initiative spanning all of Europe, which would have to bring about a certain degree of harmonisation or alignment among existing national systems in order to be effective. The model of choice must aim to provide easy consumer access to the system, and avoid exaggerated costs and bureaucracy.

Therefore, I consider that we must prioritise alternative conflict resolution procedures, since they offer more flexibility, as well as simplified and less costly legal proceedings.

**Reinhard Rack (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr President, there is a large consensus in this House that we must provide better protection for consumers, particularly where, in the case of small losses for individuals, large numbers of these losses cause a problem, because they cannot see any possibility of a meaningful individual claim. The question is how should consumer protection and the improvement of the same be organised? In this regard, I think it is very important – and I am very grateful to the Commission for this – that we should quite deliberately say that we want to examine all of the alternatives and all of the aspects of this complex issue and only after careful consideration decide on the solutions.

I would like to address one aspect in this context that has not yet been mentioned. We have already found – and in future this may increasingly be the case – that, for many non-governmental organisations and many consumer protection associations, the possibility of arranging mass claims is becoming advertising material. This danger should be included quite deliberately in our considerations so that we do not ultimately help those who do not need help and leave those who do need help out in the rain.

**Meglena Kuneva, Member of the Commission.** – Mr President, I should like to thank you for all your valuable opinions. In a way, I am familiar with most of them because we have been discussing, point by point, the most important parts of your concerns and hopes for having collective redress in Europe.

I should like to reiterate once again that I am totally with you in not wanting US-style class actions to be introduced into European culture. I know that is one of your most important preoccupations. As Ms McCarthy also mentioned, this is about damages. This is already happening in the UK, but this has nothing to do with what we are discussing and what I am proposing as our future steps in this direction.

In this respect, I would like to stress the following. Checking to see whether there is a real need for collective redress: yes, we are doing that and we will continue to do so after the green paper. Respecting constitutional constraints: yes. Avoiding US-style class action: yes. Ensuring that damages are compensated, including all costs incurred by the consumer but, at the same time, excluding any element of punitive damage: yes, that is what we have in mind. Discouraging unmeritorious claims, as referred to by Mr Rack: yes. Promoting alternative dispute resolution schemes: of course, because this is less time-consuming, more affordable and easier for both consumers and businesses, and also respecting subsidiarity.

With these few words, I would like to say that we are fully aware of the challenges and we are ready to face these challenges and make a good proposal, step by step, building consensus and common understanding with you.

What I really appreciate today is that all of us recognise that we have a problem and that we are ready to address this problem. So this really is a very good starting point for the next stage of debates. As this is a challenge we face, I would like in particular to stress what Mr Lehne referred to – the common approach, the horizontal approach with Commissioner Kroes. Commissioner Kroes and myself, as well as our respective services, are cooperating very closely in order to ensure that our initiatives are consistent and produce synergies.

The consistency principle does not necessarily rule out that specific situations require specific solutions. Each of the two initiatives has a distinct focus. Whereas the consumer green paper deals with redress for breaches of consumer protection law, the competition white paper is strictly about competition law infringements. Another major difference between the two initiatives is that, whereas the consumer green paper only covers redress for consumers, the redress mechanism suggested in the competition white paper is designed to benefit both consumers and businesses.



So my challenge is to achieve effective redress for our consumers and thereby restore their confidence in the market. From previous discussions, I know that the European Parliament is supporting us in our efforts to achieve this goal. Let me stress again that Parliament, together with Member States and stakeholders, will be convinced that not only is there a problem but also that an effective and balanced solution must and can be found at European level.

I should like to thank you for this fruitful debate and your valuable opinions, and I look forward to working with you on this file over the coming months.

**President.** – The debate is closed.

#### **Written statements (Rule 142)**

**Ioan Lucian Hămbășan (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) I would like to congratulate the European Commission's efforts to improve the methods which consumers can use to exercise their rights throughout Europe. The options presented in the Green Paper must be discussed in detail. However, one thing that is already certain is that option No 4, which would introduce a class of 'opt-out' type actions, offering consumer organisations a share of the compensation payments, is not sustainable (viable).

If we want to boost consumer confidence in the internal market, we need to consider a combination of options 2 and 3. In other words, we must create a European network of national executive public authorities which will enjoy greater powers to intervene effectively in the case of international claims (abroad). Furthermore, we must review alternative mechanisms for resolving existing disputes and, if necessary, introduce a new mechanism enabling consumer rights to be applied (exercised) more effectively outside the courts too.

I would like to conclude by emphasising that we must ensure that we adopt a horizontal approach with regard to the collective redress mechanism, thereby avoiding the fragmentation of national legislation and establishing a single, common instrument for all Member States.

(The sitting was suspended at 11.35 a.m. and resumed at 12.05 p.m.)

#### **IN THE CHAIR: MR ONESTA**

*Vice-President*

### **4. Voting time**

**President.** – The next item is voting time.

*(For details of the outcome of the votes: see Minutes)*

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**Monica Frassoni (Verts/ALE).** – (IT) Mr President, just a short aside, as Members are still taking their seats.

We changed the rules of procedure because too much time was being spent on fruitless debates, and we decided not to hold a debate on the Auken report. We have wasted a good half hour doing nothing, which we could have employed much better by debating a text that is of great importance to citizens.

**President.** – Your comment will be passed on to the competent bodies.

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#### **4.1. White Paper on damages actions for breach of the EC antitrust rules (A6-0123/2009, Klaus-Heiner Lehne) (vote)**

#### **4.2. Food distribution to the most deprived persons in the Community (amendment of the Single CMO Regulation) (A6-0091/2009, Czesław Adam Siekierski) (vote)**

*- Before the vote*

**Czesław Adam Siekierski**, *rapporteur*. – (PL) Mr President, by adopting today's report on the programme of food distribution to the most deprived persons in the Community we will send a positive signal to our citizens that the European Union is supporting the most deprived and the poorest inhabitants of the Community with free food. The programme of food distribution, like the 'Fruit at School' and 'Milk at School' programmes, is changing attitudes towards the EU, and because of this the EU is becoming friendlier and closer to two important social groups – the deprived and young people. Therefore I ask for a vote in favour of this report. In doing so we will show that the European Parliament is close to the people and their problems.

*(Applause)*

#### **4.3. on an EU-India Free Trade Agreement (A6-0131/2009, Sajjad Karim) (vote)**

#### **4.4. Social responsibility of subcontracting undertakings in production chains (A6-0065/2009, Lasse Lehtinen) (vote)**

#### **4.5. Food prices in Europe (A6-0094/2009, Katerina Batzeli) (vote)**

*- Before the vote*

**Katerina Batzeli**, *rapporteur*. – (EL) Mr President, it would be most interesting if we could compare the vote on the report by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the alternative motions for resolutions by 40 members and the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe group. We would find:

- firstly, that a total of 15 proposals have been amended without sending out any message;
- secondly, that over and above the quantitative issue there is also the political issue, with the alternative proposal deleting every reference to the role and responsibility of the large commercial retail and wholesale chains;
- thirdly, that the written statement by the European Parliament with its 439 signatures by members who want branches to be controlled and to operate properly lapses by default; and
- fourthly, that every unfair trading policy has been deleted or embellished and that it even goes as far as to refuse the recommendation to create a Europe-wide database on farm gate and consumer prices which is accessible to all citizens and consumers.

The objective of the Committee on Agriculture and of the High Level Group is to examine competitive practices and the transparency of the internal market in the food sector. Today we are all being judged.

**Astrid Lulling (PPE-DE)**. – (FR) Mr President, it is all the same astounding, that statement.

I simply wished to say to my fellow Members that I am one of the authors of the alternative resolution. We are in the European Union, not the Soviet Union.

*(Applause)*

**President**. – I am sure, Mrs Lulling, that this detail had not escaped the Members of this House, but I gave the floor to our rapporteur because she did not have the opportunity to speak during the debates. As you know, she is entitled to two minutes; therefore, for two minutes the rapporteur has total freedom. This has been respected.

#### **4.6. Impact of extensive urbanisation in Spain on individual rights of European citizens, on the environment and on the application of EU law (A6-0082/2009, Margrete Auken) (vote)**

*- Before the vote*

**Michael Cashman (PSE).** – Mr President, I wish to inform the House that, on a matter of principle, I wish to withdraw my name from the Socialist Group's alternative motion for a resolution on the Auken report. Furthermore, after five years of working on this issue, I wish to inform Members that I will be voting against both alternative motions for resolution and voting in favour of the Auken report.

*(Applause)*

**Margrete Auken, rapporteur.** – (DA) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, citizens of the EU, this report is the result of extensive work in the Committee on Petitions, involving Members from all political groups. I would like to thank both the Chairman and the shadow rapporteurs for their sterling work. As draftsman of the committee's opinion, I have personally been wholeheartedly committed to this matter. It has, of course, had a huge effect on the lives of tens of thousands of EU citizens living in Spain and has affected both the Spanish countryside and the Spanish economy. The report has now been approved by the committee after being adopted by a two-thirds majority. It is a comprehensive text, which differentiates between the many different aspects of Spanish urbanisation.

There is the problem of the fundamental rights of European citizens, which include the right to lawfully acquired property. The European Parliament has already committed itself to respecting these rights, and all Member States are bound by them. There is the problem of the disastrous impact of the extensive urbanisation on the environment, particularly in coastal areas and on the Spanish islands, but also in other areas such as around Madrid. There is the problem of the resurrection of the Spanish 1988 Coastal Law, which is now suddenly able to deny many people the right to live in their own homes – and in certain cases has even resulted in the demolition of these homes. Then there is the problem of the consequences of thousands of allegedly unlawful houses built with the approval of the municipalities but subsequently declared unlawful, whereby the innocent purchaser becomes the victim of corrupt urbanisation practices. Finally, there is the problem of the lack of legal certainty and appropriate compensation for the victims of the property scandals.

I have no doubt about where the responsibility for these extensive infringements lies and I regret that these violations by municipal and regional authorities have undermined attempts by many others to create sustainable development, where a healthy economy goes hand in hand with respect for the environment and for cultural heritage. The report deserves a proper debate in which all opinions can be heard. It is unacceptable that our new rules prevent this. These rules must be changed as soon as possible, particularly when it comes to reports that deal with complaints from European citizens. I ask you to reject the two alternative resolutions. Although they are based on my report, they are not impartial. They do not reflect the detailed and factual assessments that the committee has voted on.

#### **4.7. The state of transatlantic relations in the aftermath of the US elections (A6-0114/2009, Francisco José Millán Mon) (vote)**

#### **4.8. Interim Trade Agreement with Turkmenistan (vote)**

*- Before the vote*

**Daniel Caspary, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.** – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in accordance with Article 170(4), I request on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats that the final vote on the resolution and the report be postponed until the next plenary sitting.

It became clear in the debate yesterday that the majority in Parliament would be able to agree to the signing of the interim agreement, even if it pains them to do so. Many Members are hoping that, after years of deadlock, the agreement will enable a new quality of dialogue between the European Union and Turkmenistan. However, for the majority of Members it is important that we do not give the Commission and the Council a free ride. As Parliament, we need guarantees from the Commission and the Council that, if the human

rights situation continues to worsen, at the request of Parliament serious consideration will be given to the suspension of the agreement. Yesterday, the Commission unfortunately only conditionally agreed and the Council did not agree at all to this demand. I therefore request, on behalf of my Group, that both final votes be postponed until we have the corresponding commitments from the Council and the Commission.

*(Applause)*

**President.** – In accordance with Rule 170(4) of the Rules of Procedure, it was a political group that just spoke. The procedure asks whether a speaker wishes to speak for or against.

**Jan Marinus Wiersma, on behalf of the PSE-Group.** – Mr President, I totally agree with our colleague, Mr Caspary, that we should postpone not only the final vote on the resolution but also the vote on his report – the assent report – because it was very clear in yesterday's debate that the Council in particular was not prepared to give the European Parliament sufficient opportunity and the possibility to really monitor the situation in Turkmenistan and have an impact on the situation there on the basis of such an agreement. Since we did not get sufficient guarantees, we also support Mr Caspary's proposal to postpone these votes.

**President.** – I shall put the request for postponement to the vote.

*(Parliament decided to postpone the final vote)*

**Daniel Caspary (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr President, the request was for the final votes only to be postponed, not the vote on the amendments.

**President.** – We in the services were not in receipt of this information. Only the final vote shall be postponed, then. I should point out that we are going to vote first on the amendments.

**Daniel Caspary (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr President, my request was to postpone only the two final votes and for us to vote on the amendments so we only need hold the final votes in one of the forthcoming plenary sittings.

**President.** – In fact, this is absolutely not what the services had understood, but we shall of course go along with our rapporteur.

Therefore, if I have understood correctly, we are going to vote on the amendments to the report on Turkmenistan, not to your report. Then we shall stop before the final vote.

*– Before the vote on Amendment 2*

**Hélène Flautre (Verts/ALE).** – (FR) Mr President, the excellent amendment tabled by my group and which will enable us to carry real weight in the area of human rights would be further improved if we replaced 'the prospect of signing the Agreement' with 'the prospect of finalising the process of ratifying the Agreement', which is the appropriate phrase.

**President.** – This is a legal point.

Can those Members who oppose it please stand up?

I cannot see 40 Members standing up. Therefore, we shall include what Mrs Flautre said, and I shall now record this paragraph as having been orally amended.

*(The oral amendment was accepted)*

#### **4.9. Interim Agreement with Turkmenistan (A6-0085/2006, Daniel Caspary) (vote)**

*- After the vote on Amendment 1*

**Robert Goebbels (PSE).** – (FR) Mr President, I have a feeling that you have held a vote on the Caspary report, and the amendment tabled by my group has been rejected. I myself voted against, because I was on the voting list for the previous report. I believe that we should vote again on the Caspary report, for which there was just one amendment, and then not hold the final vote.

*(Parliament approved the request by Mr Goebbels to hold the vote again)*

#### 4.10. Strengthening security and fundamental freedoms on the Internet (A6-0103/2009, Stavros Lambrinidis) (vote)

- *Before the vote*

**Stavros Lambrinidis, rapporteur.** – Mr President, I am grateful to everyone for their support. There is just one slight point of confusion for me. The oral amendment is on the voting list but nobody stood up to support it. Does that mean that it fell and did not come to the vote at all? Is that correct?

**President.** – I can confirm that, if an oral amendment is to be adopted, it must be expressed orally, which has not been the case, in spite of my request. You have therefore understood perfectly.

#### 4.11. EU strategy for better ship dismantling (vote)

**President.** – That concludes voting time.

### 5. Explanations of vote

#### Oral explanations of vote

##### - Report: Czesław Adam Siekierski (A6-0091/2009)

**Zita Pleštinšá (PPE-DE).** – (SK) During the 22 years of its existence, the programme for distributing food to the most deprived people in the Community has contributed towards implementing two main aims of the common agricultural policy. It helps to stabilise markets by reducing intervention stocks and it secures necessary food supplies for the poorest inhabitants of the EU. I have therefore voted in favour of Mr Siekierski's consultation report dealing with the new programme for providing food to the poorest people, as proposed by the Commission.

In 2009 this scheme should include a sum of EUR 500 million, with additional resources from the Member States designated for cofinancing. Mr President, just as your own mother and father have been watching the vote today, we also have some visitors from the regions of Prešov and Nitra in Slovakia and I would like to welcome them to the Chamber of the European Parliament.

**Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, I voted in favour of Mr Czesław Siekierski's report and our resolution on food distribution to the most deprived persons in the Community.

The report and resolution are of great importance in the context of the financial crisis and economic recession. Growing poverty in the EU – when in some countries poverty affects around 20% of the population – clearly shows that the need for food assistance is quite high. Under the present circumstances, I fully support the European Parliament's position that the EU food distribution programme, which allocates nearly half a billion euros with the aim of diminishing malnutrition and poverty in the EU, should be fully funded by the Community. I would especially like to stress the importance of the Commission's proposal to improve the structure for selecting products supplied under the programme. The food should be chosen by Member States' authorities and distributed in cooperation with civil society partners.

**Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM).** – Mr President, feeding the hungry is an essential duty and we have to find a way to see that no person, especially a child, goes to bed hungry.

I abstained on this report, however, because I find changes in this scheme do not really make sense. To have a CAP policy buying in food from third countries – whose poor people are already hungry – to feed our poor, while other CAP policies prevent our farmers from growing enough food to feed the hungry of Europe, simply does not make sense. We need to feed the poor, especially in this economic crisis, and I will be advocating changes to the scheme that will achieve this end.

##### - Report: Sajjad Karim (A6-0131/2009)

**Philip Claeys (NI).** – (NL) Mr President, I voted against the three alternative resolutions, as I take the view that counterfeit goods constitute a serious problem and that we must endeavour to afford the European public the best possible protection against the import of such goods. This is to say nothing of the economic

implications of counterfeit goods. European customs inspectors must indeed have the right to monitor ships from Indian ports destined for the European Union – by which I mean that this monitoring must take place in Indian ports.

I also find it regrettable that, when the serious terrorist attacks that have taken place are mentioned in this House, the phrase used is ‘political groups’, when everyone knows that the groups concerned are Islamist groups.

**President.** – I believe that Mr Tannock wished to speak. Let me just remind you of the rule. It is not the same as under the ‘catch-the-eye’ procedure. You have to register before the explanations of vote begin, but I can be flexible.

**Charles Tannock (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, I was unaware of that – I thought you could just wave at the appropriate moment.

This had the makings of a great report. I drew up the opinion in the Committee on Foreign Affairs. India is the largest democracy in the world; it is now coming out from many decades of protectionism, embracing global free trade; it is surviving fairly robustly the global financial crisis. It would have been great to have achieved a deep free trade agreement between India and the European Union, which is also a very large democratic polity, and it would also be a nail in the coffin to those who are saying that protectionism is the way ahead in global trade.

So I deeply regret that this report was so amended by the Socialists as to make it unpalatable and unacceptable to those of us who support free trade. India also deeply regrets that: the Government of India had stored a great deal of political capital in the idea of this agreement going through in a way that would have been good for India and good for Europe. Therefore, we had to vote against it, I am afraid to say.

#### **- Report: Lasse Lehtinen (A6-0065/2009)**

**Jean Marie Beaupuy, on behalf of the ALDE Group.** – (FR) Mr President, I extend a very affectionate welcome to your parents, who are present here today. I should have liked mine to have been here too, but that is no longer possible.

We have just adopted the Lehtinen report. This is a crucial step in terms of our legislative arrangements, and I sincerely hope that the Commission will listen to Parliament in their regard. Indeed, we are well aware that, across the world, the development of techniques and organisations involves a growing number of subcontractors. That being said, the employees of our businesses must be better protected, and subcontracting businesses themselves must be on an equal footing, so that we have an economy that works in natural harmony.

Therefore, Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I sincerely hope that the Commission and the competent services in each Member State will implement our own-initiative report as soon as possible, in order, I repeat, to better satisfy employees, on the one hand, and the balance between subcontracting businesses, on the other.

**Elisabeth Schroedter, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.** – (DE) Mr President, I, too, welcome the fact that, with the alternative resolution, we have succeeded in assigning the Commission the task of submitting a directive on the liability of general undertakings throughout Europe. The basis of this resolution was the Lehtinen report, and therefore much of the work carried out in the committee and by the Groups, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, the Socialist Group in the European Parliament and ourselves, the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, has gone into this decision. Just how important this is can be seen from the fact that cheap labour can be found on building sites all over Europe and it even jeopardises safety, as shown by the example of the Finnish nuclear plant, where safety standards were not met by subcontractors.

We therefore urgently need a European directive, because the laws in the eight EU Member States that have general undertaking liability, although very effective, stop at the national border. If the present Commission does not issue such a directive, we Greens are firmly resolved to make this a matter of principle when the new Commission takes office, as we want safety for citizens and a minimum standard for workers. This is only possible by means of a European statutory regulation, a liability scheme for general undertakings. I hope that the Commission will comply with our request and submit a directive. Otherwise, we need to question whether it is still worthy of its office.

**- Report: Katerina Batzeli (A6-0094/2009)**

**Christa Kläß (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted against the report by Mrs Batzeli. In my opinion, it calls into question some of the essential cornerstones of our economic system, such as free competition and the basic principles of the social market economy.

It is clear that appropriate measures to stabilise food prices need to be found in order to ensure sustainable agricultural production. Practices which distort competition must be stopped. However, an EU-wide database containing reference prices for products and inputs would bring more bureaucracy and reporting obligations, the costs of which would be passed on by the trade to producers or consumers. The result would be higher end and consumer prices and lower prices for producers.

Complete transparency of all business cost factors such as pay, energy costs, purchase and sale prices and the profit margins would lead to monitoring and dirigisme. These are not the aims of a social and free Europe. The position of farmers in the food supply chain can only be strengthened by cooperation and the inclusion of shared responsibility.

**Jim Allister (NI).** – Mr President, I welcome this report as a shot across the bows of supermarket giants. Tesco, for example, recently announced profits of GBP 2.8 billion, while food producers in my constituency struggle to make a living. The major supermarkets have been abusing their buying power to suppress prices to suppliers to unsustainable levels and to impose, I must say, unfair and unilateral demands as the price of retaining the contract.

In the long run, as the UK Competition Commission has pointed out, this will equally damage consumers as choice, availability and quality are squeezed out of the market. Thus I support the call for an investigation into the margin share in the production and distribution chain. Someone, somewhere, is doing very nicely, but it certainly is not the producer.

**Leopold Józef Rutowicz (UEN).** – (PL) Mr President, I abstained from the vote on Mrs Batzeli's report, but I think it is a very useful contribution to further work on the subject of food prices. Retail prices are very different from the prices at which producers sell their products. Retail trade, which is the most visible to the consumer, has very limited contact with farmers, and when looking for better ways to stabilise food prices we have to analyse the whole chain of costs from producer to consumer. The proposed system of negotiation is unrealistic in view of the number of entities operating in the market, and limits competition.

**Hynek Fajmon (PPE-DE).** – (CS) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I have voted against the report on food prices in Europe presented by Mrs Batzeli. The report is based on the idea that free price-setting on the food market is a bad solution and it calls for the introduction of price regulation in this sector of the economy. This idea is contrary to common sense and with the historical experience of all the post-communist states, including the Czech Republic. We have experienced 100% price regulation and we well remember what a failure it was. Free price-setting is the foundation of freedom and democracy and any attempt to restrict it will lead to totalitarianism. Free price setting in the food sector has led in recent years to excellent results in the form of relatively lower food prices throughout the EU. It has also brought extensive modernisation which has provided consumers with better quality products at lower prices. The regulatory measures contained in the report would bring this positive development to a complete halt, resulting only in higher food prices. The fact that there is fierce competition in this sector is excellent news for the consumer. Those who have higher costs than market prices must adapt to the situation or withdraw from the market. It would be absurd to cover their losses out of taxes paid by customers. For these reasons I voted against this report.

**Hannu Takkula (ALDE).** – (FI) Mr President, first of all I wish to say that I voted against Mrs Batzeli's report. While I was reading it I wondered whether we were in the European Union or the Soviet Union, and I believe we are in the European Union. Basically, then, we cannot establish regulation of food prices along these lines over Europe as a whole.

We have to remember that we must ensure that we have good, safe, top-quality food. The local food principle is important, and, consequently, at national level these matters can be examined more closely.

I am concerned that the costs of inputs have risen. The prices for fertilisers and feed have gone up. The level of trade takes its share, and so when, for example, rye bread comes onto the market, it costs EUR 3, of which the primary producer, the farmer, gets just six cents.

This is not the direction we should be moving in, and that is why we need to ponder these matters nationally, and, more than anything, establish a system in which farmers, the producers of food, can survive, and in

which people can buy good quality, healthy food at a reasonable price. Healthy food is what must be made the heart of the matter.

**Martin Callanan (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, of course this report about food prices fails to reflect the reality of the situation – that food prices in the EU are kept artificially high by a brutal combination, on the one hand, of excessive EU bureaucracy and, on the other hand, by the now notorious common agricultural policy. Farm subsidies ensure that inefficient farmers are bankrolled at the expense of the European taxpayer and, at the same time, of course, ensure that the prices that we as consumers pay in shops and supermarkets for agricultural produce remain disproportionately high.

The one thing that the Commission could do to address the disproportionately high prices of food is to announce tomorrow that they are going to dismantle the common agricultural policy, but of course they will not do that because certain Member States, particularly France, benefit disproportionately from huge sums of taxpayers' money being poured into an inefficient, grossly disproportionate farming sector. That is the one thing the Commission should do, but of course they will not.

**Daniel Hannan (NI).** – Mr President, Fidel Castro lies in his sick bed in his sultry Caribbean island, fading away – and not before time. When eventually he passes, there will be only two Marxist systems of agriculture left in the world: the collective farms of North Korea and Europe's common agricultural policy, a policy based on price-fixing, a policy based on the storage and destruction of food stocks for which there is no market, a policy which wantonly passes on costs and unnecessary suffering to the Third World, which is deprived of its natural market.

We are penalised twice over – as consumers and as taxpayers – by high prices and by high taxes, and yet our farmers are penalised too. In my South-East region in England, farming is disappearing as a meaningful part of the economy. Our bluebell groves and our chestnut copses and our hop fields are gradually giving way to the spread of concrete. It has now been 50 years that our consumers and farmers have been crucified to pay for this bureaucracy. Enough is enough.

**Jean-Claude Martinez (NI).** – (FR) Mr President, we are all infuriated at the level of food prices and the way they are structured. Products start at a value of 1 in farms, rise to 6 in supermarkets, and sole starts at a value of 1 in Africa and rises to 14 in French shops, with the result that at 8 p.m. ... the supermarkets close and Europeans rummage through bins.

However, in the face of this situation which, at the two ends of the chain, does not make farmers rich but does make it difficult for consumers to put food on the table, it is not enough to call for transparency or denounce the distribution oligopolies.

There is speculation in Geneva on the price of rice, there is speculation in Chicago on the price of maize, there is major financial crime, and there is an International Criminal Court. Well, at the G20, the International Criminal Court's powers should be extended to cover major financial crime, and speculating on food is a major crime that is on a par with that perpetrated by Bashir in Darfur.

That is the real signal that must be sent out.

**President.** – I did not wish to cut you off in the midst of your lyrical musings.

#### **- Report: Margrete Auken (A6-0082/2009)**

**Jim Allister (NI).** – Mr President, I strongly support the rapporteur in her report and salute her sterling work on behalf of citizens right across Europe who have fallen foul of the outrageous property practices in Spain.

The right to own and enjoy private property is a fundamental right, recognised by the European Convention. Yet several constituents of mine, who put their life savings into a home in Spain, now find themselves ambushed and devastated by laws and claims which would deprive them of their property or cost them enormous sums of money in order to retain it. It appears that civic authorities in Spain, in cahoots with grasping, unscrupulous developers, have been a terror to those who thought they were buying legitimate homes and properties, and, if this report helps address that, then it can only do good.

**Cristina Gutiérrez-Cortines (PPE-DE).** – (ES) Mr President, I naturally voted against the Auken report, and I should like to state here that the report that has been adopted goes against the letter of the law. It does not comply in any way with the principles of law that the European Union has declared, and it is absolutely



appalling that the European Parliament has been capable of approving this document, which has been described by the Legal Services as non-compliant with the law and full of illegalities.

The report proposes the suspension of all building projects, as if that would solve the problems. That is something that the Socialist Group in the European Parliament has been advocating for several years. This document does not resolve the real problems faced by the people, which have largely been resolved by the changing of a law, as has already been done, and by the efforts that the Spanish authorities are making to correct mistakes that have clearly been made.

To sum up, I should like to point out that the destruction of the majority of the properties is due to poor application of the Coastal Law by Mr Zapatero's Socialist government, who are acting in an arbitrary manner, and arbitrarily seizing properties in just one area of Spain.

**Philip Claeys (NI).** – (NL) Mr President, I voted in favour of the Auken report, as I believe that all citizens in Europe have the right to proper application of all legislation and that the private property of each and every citizen in the European Union must be safeguarded by the governments of all Member States.

Many people have fallen victim to questionable decisions in Spain and many of them have addressed these to the Committee on Petitions – rightly, in my view. All the same, I have mixed feelings, as I think that we must be wary of adopting legislation that is tantamount to introducing yet more European interference to the detriment of the Member States. A specific example is the situation in the Flemish periphery of Brussels, where the European Union is starting to interfere in a housing policy that aims to enable young Flemish families to continue living in their local area.

**Martin Callanan (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, I also supported the Auken report. I supported it because many of my constituents in the north-east of England are among the petitioners who petitioned Parliament about this disgraceful and flagrant abuse of property rights by the Spanish Government and local authorities. Indeed they were recently the subject of a TV documentary by ITV North East, where some of these heart-rending cases were brought to life and were examined for the public of the north-east to see.

I hope even now, at this late stage, that the Spanish Government and Spanish MEPs will right some of the wrongs that have been done and will give some restitution to some of these people who have been unlawfully denied their property and recognise that, actually, what has gone on here is a scandal. It is a corrupt scandal. Many of the deals involving property developers and Spanish local government are, frankly, the result of corruption. We serve nobody by failing to recognise that essential point. The Spanish Government needs to act. I am, frankly, appalled at some of the abuses that have gone on in this Chamber by Spanish MEPs seeking to cover up these practices.

**Peter Skinner (PSE).** – Mr President, I, too, voted for this report as so many of my constituents – as has been the case across the European Union – have been so badly affected by this particular problem. The requirement to have legal certainty about purchasing property is essential and is brought about by this report, which seeks to get the kinds of insurances that are necessary to see change. It also addresses the specific issues of complaints concerning illegal practices by local builders and certain local authorities.

I voted for this report because I believe it is going to help secure a formal process; it is going to highlight something that I regarded in the past as being just a derogatory statement, i.e. 'Spanish practices'. I would like to ensure that term never sees the light of day again and I would like to see the Commission, the Council and the Spanish Government deal with this issue and come down hard, so that those who have lost out can get compensation or those who are there can feel secure.

**- Report: Francisco José Millán Mon (A6-0114/2009)**

**Christopher Heaton-Harris (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, before I start, may I say how pleased I am to find out that your parents are in the Chamber, not just because it is nice to have an audience, but so they can see how your fair chairmanship of these sittings has earned you respect across the Chamber, including even from British Conservatives.

It is 'so true, funny how it seems' that in just a few short days President Obama comes to Strasbourg. Looking through the barricades being erected he might reflect, if he thinks at all about the European Parliament, that its two-seats policy is absolutely mad, a complete waste of money. Indeed, he will think:

'Round and round it goes,

And oh don't you know,

This is the game that we came here for.

Round and round it goes.'

But soon he will be gone, looking at the hopeless nature of the one-size-fits-all regulation that cripples EU businesses, and doubtless he will think that there is no lifeline that he can throw.

And

'because [he has] nothing else here for you,

And just because it's easier than the truth,

Oh if there's nothing else that [he] can do –'

He will fly away – 'fly for you', out of this place, having felt that you should 'always believe in your soul'. 'Luck has left [him] standing so tall.'

And praise ring in the heavens, for Spandau Ballet have re-formed!

**Philip Claeys (NI).** – (NL) Mr President, transatlantic relations are a matter close to my heart, and I largely agree with the broad lines of the Millán Mon report. Nevertheless, I have voted against the report, as it contains a number of significant shortcomings. For example, it expressly anticipates the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon – yet another instance of that happening here – when the treaty concerned has by no means been adopted yet. The Irish voters should be respected.

The report also speaks of problems faced by Palestinians, but without mentioning Israel's security. Last but not least, it reiterates the call for Member States to accept some of the Guantánamo inmates, alleged terrorists. I consider this totally unacceptable. It is also unacceptable that the report does not clearly state that the United States cannot interfere in EU enlargement policy and that, therefore, Turkey has no place in the European Union.

**Hannu Takkula (ALDE).** – (FI) Mr President, transatlantic relations are very important for us Europeans. We always have to remember that the United States of America, as a world leader, shares the same values as the Member States of the European Union: democracy, human rights and freedom of opinion. I believe that these are values which unite us and which I hope will also strengthen our relations in the future.

Now that the United States has a new administration headed by President Obama, much attention has been paid to it and a lot of expectations rest on its shoulders, but we have to remember that neither Obama nor his administration can change the whole world. Certainly they will try to do their best, but massive challenges lie ahead, and for that reason the expectations need to be realistic.

We must nevertheless extend a hand to the United States, since we face common threats. These relate to international terrorism: Islamic fundamentalism, which is rearing its head. We also face common environmental challenges, and transatlantic relations allow us together to face these and the other problems that are at present so acute the world over.

**Martin Callanan (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, while I have the opportunity, can I also pay tribute to the fair and impartial manner in which you have always chaired our parliamentary sessions? It is a shame that President Pöttering does not somehow follow your example in so many ways in this.

This report is about the United States and US-EU relations. Of course America remains fundamental to Europe's security and prosperity. Sadly, in this House there are many examples of anti-American sentiment. All of us in the EU should be profoundly grateful for the role that the US plays in the world and particularly the role that it has played in our recent history. I laugh sometimes when I hear the suggestion that it is the EU that is responsible for 60 years of peace in Europe. Everybody seems to forget about the contribution of the US, and, of course, NATO, in contributing towards peace in Europe. America should not be a rival of the EU. It should be a partner and a friend and we should build closer transatlantic relations.

**Charles Tannock (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, British Conservatives are proud of our country's special relationship with the United States and the bridge between America and Europe. We support President Obama's commitment to multilateral engagement with the European Union.

However, this report mentions the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, which we strongly oppose. It also calls for the US to abolish the death penalty, which for us is a personal conscience issue. Given the British Conservatives' current opposition to the International Criminal Court, we also acknowledge America's right not to sign the Rome Statute. We also do not wish to be obliged to resettle dangerous terrorists from the Guantánamo Bay detention camp.

This report rightly reiterates that NATO is the cornerstone of transatlantic security and proposes a new transatlantic parliamentary assembly, which will reinforce a mutual commitment to our common values of democracy, liberty and human rights. Therefore, overall, the British Conservatives voted in favour of the Millán Mon report.

**Peter Skinner (PSE).** – Mr President, I particularly welcome this report and I share some of the points that were raised just now, but perhaps we should start off by formally congratulating Mr Obama on becoming President. I do not think that we have all done that here today, but it is quite clearly a breath of fresh air for what we hope will be a very positive relationship with the United States.

We are very quick to point out how that relationship can work for us, of course, but we do not point out quite so often what we have to do to strengthen it and work within it. For example, trade between us, according to the OECD, is the largest between any two trading blocs anywhere in the world. It is right that it also causes us to think hard about regulation and supervision. Anything that is decided between us, both economically and politically, is of great importance to the rest of the world and often sets the global standards.

I, as a member of the US delegation working on the Transatlantic Economic Council, hope that we can take further the work that we have already done there and transpose that into real efforts within this House, instead of seeing some of the silly efforts from some, on issues like chicken, which help blight that particular relationship.

#### **- Report: Stavros Lambrinidis (A6-0103/2009)**

**Philip Claeys (NI).** – (NL) Mr President, it is good that Amendment 5 has been rejected. This amendment sought to remove an essential passage from the report: essential in that it advocates freedom of expression. After all, it is a basic tenet of democracy that the expression of controversial political beliefs must remain immune from prosecution. Freedom of expression must be absolute and must certainly cover political views even on controversial issues such as immigration and Islam.

For the rest, I consider this a very well-balanced report, which strikes a good balance between rights and liberties and takes a stand against censorship. I therefore endorsed this report with great conviction.

**Hannu Takkula (ALDE).** – (FI) Mr President, this report by Mr Lambrinidis on strengthening security and fundamental freedoms on the Internet is a very important, topical subject. I share the opinion expressed in it that it is important to preserve freedom of expression. That is one of our fundamental rights and freedoms. We always have to remember, however, that when we speak of freedom of expression, that also incorporates a responsibility. Responsibility in this matter is the most important consideration.

When we view Internet sites today, we regrettably have to acknowledge that there is a lot of the sort of material that is of no good to society or human development. I am particularly concerned about children and young people, who are our most valuable asset – our future's most valuable asset. We need to take responsibility for them right now and must act in such a way that they can gain the best possible knowledge and skills and develop healthy attitudes, and the Internet is one key source of information for them.

For that reason I hope that we can improve children's safety by increasing the amount of material on the Internet that might encourage, educate and develop them, and not the sort of thing we see today, which there is, unfortunately, so much of there, and which can harm the growth of the overall personality of the young.

#### **Written explanations of vote**

##### **- Report: Klaus-Heiner Lehne (A6-0123/2009)**

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing.** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in order to ensure genuine access to justice for victims of breaches of competition rules, joint efforts must be made by the EU and the Member States. The White Paper presents a series of recommendations aimed at ensuring that those

affected by this type of infringement have access to really effective mechanisms to seek full compensation for the damage suffered.

At present in the majority of Member States there are serious barriers that discourage consumers and businesses from going to court to claim compensation on a private basis for damages suffered as a result of a breach of antitrust rules. While there have been signs of improvement recently in some Member States, very few claims have been made over the last few decades. The traditional laws and procedures on civil liability in force in the majority of Member States appear to be inadequate.

I welcome the drafting of a White Paper proposing a Community-level solution to the problem of ensuring access to justice for claimants, thus pursuing general policy objectives (specifically, ensuring broader access to justice by enforcing competition policy and discouraging unlawful practices on the part of undertakings) while at the same time preventing unmeritorious and opportunistic litigation.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI)**, *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I intend to abstain from the vote on Mr Lehne's report on the White Paper on damages actions for breach of the EC antitrust rules.

I agree with some, but not all, of the points highlighted in the report and for this reason I have decided not to vote for the report as it stands.

**- Report: Czesław Adam Siekierski (A6-0091/2009)**

**Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of the report compiled by Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE, Poland) as it proposes the extension of the European food aid programme for the most deprived.

As a former mayor of Bucharest's 5th district, I was always concerned about providing help to the poor, especially those of Roma ethnic origin.

Throughout the whole of the European Union 80 million people (16% of the population) are living below the poverty line, and their number is going to increase due to the economic crisis. In some of the states which have recently joined the EU poverty affects roughly 20% of the population.

Full funding is required from the EU budget for food aid programmes as some Member States will be unable to participate in the scheme when cofinancing rates apply.

We must reduce the load being shouldered by Member States with low per capita incomes or whose budgets are facing financial difficulties, which also includes Romania.

Products from intervention stocks or purchased on the market must be of Community origin, with preference given to locally-produced fresh food products, i.e. Romanian products to be purchased with European money for distribution to the poor in Romania.

**Koenraad Dillen (NI)**, *in writing*. – (NL) I voted in favour of the report on the amendment of a regulation on the financing of the common agricultural policy and the common organisation of agricultural markets as regards food distribution to the most deprived persons. According to the data, in 2006 approximately 13 million people from the Member States benefited from this programme. That is a good thing, but the assistance to the poorest in the EU should be greatly intensified.

To begin with, let us cut European Commissioners' pay in half or divide it by three. The European think-tank Open Europe has estimated that, pension schemes included, Commissioners earn on average EUR 2.5 million over five years, which is downright scandalous. The other half of that money would be better spent on poverty reduction. Perhaps that is a way of reconciling the European public with 'Europe'.

**Edite Estrela (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (PT) I voted in favour of the proposal for a regulation on food distribution to the most deprived persons. Poverty is one of the most serious problems currently facing the European Union. In 2006 nearly 79 million people were threatened with poverty, which clearly shows the need for food aid programmes.

As the Commission proposal aims to distribute food to the most deprived persons and improve planning so that funds can be used more efficiently, and also bearing in mind that, since it began in 1987, the food distribution programme has already benefited over 13 million people, I believe that the continuation of this programme is necessary and positive.

**Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing.** – (SV) We believe that the original purpose of the programme – to distribute intervention stocks to the most deprived persons – was strangely worded right from the start. Mixing agricultural policy with social policy may be commendable, but it gets complicated. Recently, the proportion of goods not coming from intervention stocks has steadily increased. At the last reckoning, around 85% of the food was bought on the open market.

We believe that the distribution of food to the most deprived persons in the Community should be abolished. The circumstances of the most deprived persons in the Member States should be dealt with by the Member States or the municipalities. It is these political levels of responsibility which should ensure, via their social policy, that all citizens get their right to a minimum level of subsistence. Whether this is done via social security benefits, the distribution of food or by other means should be their decision.

The European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development proposes that the food aid be funded in full by the EU. The views that are put forward in this committee simply to get agricultural products on the market are astounding.

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

**Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Jules Maaten, Toine Manders and Jan Mulder (ALDE), in writing.** – (NL) The Dutch People's Party for Freedom and Democracy (VVD) delegation in the European Parliament voted in favour of the Siekierski report, as we support food distribution to the poorest population groups in the EU. However, the VVD MEPs do not agree with the provisions of the report that state that the food distribution programmes must be funded exclusively from the EU budget.

**Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) I voted in favour of this report because the food programme whose extension is being considered is a key instrument for helping the deprived who are suffering a great deal in the current economic crisis, even when it comes to meeting basic needs. In addition, it is a sensible measure in terms of using the EU's food resources effectively because it distributes the products which have been left unused to those who need them, while, at the same time, boosting demand on the EU's food market.

I am in favour of such food aid assistance programmes receiving full funding from the EU budget as applying cofinancing rates would significantly impede the process and hamper the implementation of the measures in good time and the achievement of rapid results.

However, I think that national authorities must be granted more functions with regard to administering the aid on site because they are more familiar with the situation at local level and with the population's specific needs.

**Karin Riis-Jørgensen (ALDE), in writing.** – (DA) The Danish Liberal Party's MEPs have voted against the European Commission's proposal on food distribution to the most deprived persons because the proposal has been tabled with a legal basis in agricultural policy, even though it is not an agricultural policy instrument. The agricultural budget should not be used to implement social policy. This is the responsibility of the Member States.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted in favour of Mr Siekierski's report on food distribution to the most deprived persons in the Community.

I believe that the problem of poverty is highly relevant as, even in affluent Europe, more than 80 million people are at risk of poverty and the vast majority of these live in the countries that joined the EU in 2004 and 2007. I therefore agree with the rapporteur on the need to expand the range of products provided through this food aid programme and on the fact that the primary source of supply should be represented by reserves deriving from intervention in the agricultural markets, thus constituting an important aspect of the common agricultural policy.

I also welcome the rapporteur's call for the entire funding for the food aid programme to be provided by the EU, since the Commission's co-financing proposal could lead Member States to limit their participation in the programme, particularly at times of economic hardship such as many states are currently experiencing.

**- Report: Sajjad Karim (A6-0131/2009)**

**David Martin (PSE)**, *in writing*. – The EU is India's top foreign investor and biggest trading partner. Forging an economic alliance is therefore vital to both. I support this report because it stresses that the agreement should ensure that increasing bilateral trade brings benefits to the widest number of people and contributes to the Millennium Development Goals, including preventing environmental degradation. However I regret that the EPP text replaced the more comm. text which was more progressive.

**Rovana Plumb (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (RO) India was the European Union's 17th most important trading partner in 2000 and ranked 9th in 2007, while between 2000 and 2006 EU trade in goods with India grew by around 80%.

As a social-democrat, I welcome the fact that India has made considerable progress in terms of universal primary education, reducing poverty and increasing access to safe drinking water. However, I also note that India is still off track on most of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) such as infant mortality, maternal health, child malnutrition and the battle against malaria, tuberculosis and HIV/AIDS.

I voted for this report in order to approve the EU-India Free Trade Agreement, in the belief that an FTA offers future potential for an increase in investments, trade and business opportunities arising from the FTA, with an agreement being, overall, a win-win situation for both sides.

**Luís Queiró (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – (PT) The Free Trade Agreement with India marks another step taken by Europe and India towards opening up the world economy and expanding its benefits. It is also a particularly significant sign in the current context. I therefore welcome the conclusion of this agreement. Having examined it, however, I am forced to make a few more critical remarks.

In order for free trade to function properly, a set of rules preventing counterfeiting and the use of products prohibited in the destination countries must be respected. Indications of origin must also be clear. In short, information must be available and transparent and international agreements must be respected.

Another important aspect is the idea that the benefits of free trade are mutual. In other words, opening up borders does not only mean opening up the markets of developed countries to products from third countries. The virtues of free trade consist of the mutual opportunity to exchange goods and the opening up of economies; these virtues must be extended to developing or rapidly growing countries. This will only happen if the barriers to trade and investment in these countries are also reduced.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI)**, *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted against the report by Mr Karim on an EU-India Free Trade Agreement.

This is because I believe that the conclusion of such agreements should be entirely subject to respect for fundamental human rights and democracy, which is far from being the case in the country in question. The insertion in the agreement of a human rights and democracy clause is clearly not enough to ensure that such basic conditions are respected, nor is the promise to scale up consultations within the United Nations Human Rights Council. Sadly the persecution of religious minorities and human rights defenders in India continues to be reported by the international press. In my opinion it is therefore frankly unacceptable to sign economic agreements of this kind.

**- Report: Lasse Lehtinen (A6-0065/2009)**

**Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM)**, *in writing*. – (SV) This report claims that it is important for workers to be aware of their rights and have a good knowledge of labour law and collective agreements. The rapporteur also observes that the Posting of Workers Directive must be complied with and stresses the value of the principles of subsidiarity and proportionality. These are all desirable demands.

However, some of the wordings in the report are too far-reaching. We cannot support wordings that advocate the introduction at EU level of a Community legal instrument to cover wages, social security contributions, taxes and compensation in relation to work-related accidents. These issues are too important for us to be able to support this type of wording or requirement.

We have chosen to support the alternative resolution tabled by the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, as it restricts the wordings on the Community legal instrument. In the final vote on the report as a

whole we will abstain as, while parts of the text are positive, the wordings relating to the Community legal instrument are too far-reaching.

**David Martin (PSE), in writing.** – I support this report which demands responsible and clear rules for subcontracting in Europe. The report will protect employees who work for subcontracting companies by calling on the Commission to establish a clear-cut Community legal instrument introducing joint and several liability at European level.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted in favour of Mr Lehtinen's report on the social responsibility of subcontracting undertakings in production chains.

I agree with the rapporteur that subcontracting has reached very high levels in the European Union, which has given rise to various problems linked, for example, to the legal implications for employers and workers and difficulties in verifying compliance with fiscal and social security responsibilities.

I thus share the rapporteur's view that it would be advisable to adopt a system of 'joint liability' at European level, under which the main contractor would be encouraged to check that subcontractors comply with relevant legislation. This would also help to tackle the grey economy by preventing unfair competition on the part of businesses paying their workers at a rate less than the minimum rate of pay.

**Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), in writing.** – (NL) According to a study by the Dublin Foundation, outsourcing work to subcontractors is one of the most effective ways of undermining social legislation. Subcontractors are found in various sectors, of which construction is the best known. This report calls on the Commission to adopt definitive legislation on social responsibility in subcontracting throughout the whole production process.

All too often, clients pass on the responsibility to subcontractors, who then themselves outsource work. As a result, the application of labour law is no longer monitored. Those who work for a subcontractor and are near the end of the production chain do not always do this in the best working conditions, and violations of basic standards and lack of respect for fundamental employment rights result. It is difficult for social law inspectorates to monitor this, since it is not always clear who bears responsibility at any one time. This then tempts subcontractors to take a less careful approach to social-security contributions, to respecting statutory tariffs and to complying with statutory rest periods.

In some Member States it is already compulsory for clients to bear full social responsibility for all their subcontractors. The fact that the cross-border nature of work is now increasing greatly renders a European directive necessary. I therefore wholeheartedly endorse this report.

#### **- Report: Katerina Batzeli (A6-0094/2009)**

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing.** – (IT) In January 2009 food prices in Italy rose more than 40% above the average of the first 15 countries of the European Union, demonstrating severe distortions in the transfer of foodstuffs from field to plate.

According to ISTAT data, in January 2009 the trend rate of growth of food prices stood at 3.7% in Italy, compared with 2.3% in France, 1.9% in Spain, 1% in Germany and 2.6% in the European Union. The ISTAT analysis also showed that the main differences between Italy and its EU partners were in relation to bread, pasta and cereals, which contain raw materials such as wheat, the price of which is fixed worldwide and does not differ between the various countries. The increase in the price differential between production and consumption confirms the existence of serious distortions in the transfer of foodstuffs from field to plate in Italy.

The effects have been felt more keenly by low-income families, for whom food is the biggest item of expenditure. Small and medium-sized food-processing companies have also suffered severe consequences. The problem caused by the difference in the production price and the consumption price has reached the point where immediate action from the European institutions is required.

**Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) I voted in favour of the report submitted by Mrs Batzeli (Greece) as I believe that the EU must come to the aid of producers and consumers.

Due to abuses of their market dominance by large retail chains, the prices paid by European consumers are, on average, five times higher than farm gate prices. Farmers generally receive around 8% of the final retail price.

We urge the introduction of EU policies which facilitate direct contacts between producers and consumers. The EU must support the use of new technologies and the Internet to provide consumers with more detailed information about products, while, at the same time, facilitating producers' access to the market.

Measures are also needed to assign greater importance to the concept of 'local products' and to provide more effective support to traditional food markets or other traditional types of commerce.

Traditional Romanian products must be supported on the European market.

**Ole Christensen, Dan Jørgensen, Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, Christel Schaldemose and Britta Thomsen (PSE), in writing.** – (DA) The Danish Social Democratic Members of the European Parliament – Poul Nyrup Rasmussen, Britta Thomsen, Christel Schaldemose, Dan Jørgensen and Ole Christensen – have voted in favour of the report on food prices in Europe. It is the view of the delegation that the concentration of supermarkets and the lack of competition will mean that both consumers and farmers within the EU will lose out. However, the delegation does not agree with the statement in paragraph 6 of the report that it is deplorable that intervention measures are being dismantled. This is necessary in order to make European agriculture profitable.

**Esther De Lange (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (NL) I should like to give an explanation of vote on the Batzeli report on behalf of the Dutch delegation from the Christian Democratic Appeal (CDA). In our opinion, this is certainly not the most elegant of reports. Many points are worded in a long-winded way or duplicated. We also have our doubts about certain requirements that tend too much towards socialist state intervention, and also about a complete ban on selling below cost. This may sound like a nice idea, but is impracticable. In agriculture, we consider this an important point. With regard to dumping, action should of course be taken by the competition authority.

In spite of this, we have voted in favour of the Batzeli report, since it contains a number of important elements that the alternative resolution actually seeks to delete. I refer, in particular, to the study into the margins in the various links in the food production chain and to the call for the European Commission to look into the power of supermarkets in the field of competition, as the European Parliament has already requested more than once. We understand from the European Commission that the study into margins can be carried out partly on the basis of existing data known to the Commission, and thus we assume that this study will not entail any substantial increase in administrative costs.

**Edite Estrela (PSE), in writing.** – (PT) I voted in favour of the report on food prices in Europe because I believe that political action is necessary to tackle the rise in prices of agricultural and food products and the discrepancy between the price received by the producer and the price paid by the consumer. In Europe, the price paid by the end consumer is approximately five times higher than the price paid to producers, a situation which has impacted on low-income households, in which food expenditure accounts for the largest slice of the family budget.

**Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing.** – (SV) As usual, this 'opinion-soliciting' report by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development contains proposals that will entail increased costs for the EU budget.

We do not support the main ideas of the report, which, among other things, regrets the ongoing dismantling of Community intervention measures in the agricultural market. Neither are we in favour of the committee's proposal for 'market management measures'.

The European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development also needs reminding that the price situation is different in different Member States. The committee's proposal to create a Europe-wide database for citizens containing reference prices for products and inputs and information on the costs of energy, pay, rents, duties and taxes from all across Europe is, in our opinion, detached from reality. The prerequisites for comparisons between the Member States simply do not exist for numerous different reasons.

We also find the proposal for a special label for European agricultural products strange. What is the motive behind this? An attempt to encourage protectionism?

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

We have voted against this report on food prices in Europe.



**Astrid Lulling (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (FR) No one is challenging the aims of this report on the gap between producer prices and the prices paid by the consumer. Greater market transparency is required in order to ensure that producers are sufficiently remunerated and that the prices charged to end consumers are justified.

Unfortunately, the text adopted in committee contains proposals that are incompatible with the social market economy. These highly authoritarian proposals on price control, margins and markets merely call to mind too many formulas that have failed and that we thought had been definitively consigned to the past.

I regret that the report focuses solely on distributors instead of taking account of the production chain as a whole. Indeed, it is often large processing companies that buy produce from farmers and abuse their dominant market position in order to sell the produce on to distributors at exorbitant prices.

Furthermore, creating European databases on all sorts of costs and margins, as the report proposes, would result in a considerable administrative cost for businesses, which would be passed on and absorbed into retail prices.

In order to prevent such bad habits, I have tabled an alternative resolution, which 40 Members have signed to indicate their support.

**Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) Regulation at EU level of the problem of unfair practices used by the large retail distribution chains against producers is very important for Romania. Even here the issue of abuses practised by supermarket chains is a concern for both producers and consumers. Apart from the accumulation of 'hidden charges', which are compulsory for any product and borne by producers, supermarkets ban producers from selling their products at lower prices in other stores. As a result of all these regulations, products are up to 30% more expensive. The consumer is ultimately the one who pays the product's overrated price.

The measures proposed by Mrs Batzeli in her report are aimed at reducing the pressures exerted by supermarkets and promoting a direct relationship between consumers and producers. This is why I voted for its adoption.

The investigation proposed in the report on the distribution of profit margins will allow us to draw a series of conclusions about the right measures for ensuring price transparency in the producer-processor-retailer chain and penalising abusive practices.

The negotiation of prices between suppliers and retailers must allow the use of different prices on a case-by-case basis and therefore contribute to ensuring a healthy competitive environment.

**Athanasios Pafilis (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – (EL) The report makes repeated, well-known findings about the monopoly situation that has arisen in food processing and marketing. However, it does not state that this situation is a conscious choice by the EU and the governments of the Member States within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy and the CAP.

The liberalisation of the markets, the incentives for mergers and takeovers and the quest for profit and competitiveness in the food industry have resulted in the sovereignty of the multinationals, in higher consumer prices, in lower farm gate prices and in higher profits for capital.

The CAP made a decisive contribution towards this development by abolishing minimum guaranteed prices and selling out farmers with small and medium-sized holdings to the WTO, so that the multinationals could obtain raw materials dirt cheap, and persecuting or shrinking the cooperatives, the hypocritical pronouncements of the parties which support the European one-way street notwithstanding.

One example is milk production in Greece, where the milk cartel is pushing down farm gate prices and holding consumer prices sky high, thereby reaping huge profits. Nowadays it promotes the consumption of products with little reduced nutritional value, leaving thousands of livestock farmers, who are unable to market their produce in a country which produces 50% of its requirements, out on a limb.

The fight for cheap and safe food and for the survival of poor farmers requires a strong alliance of workers, farmers and the self-employed and grassroots power and a grassroots economy.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) The rise in food prices in Europe is clear for all to see. It is a terrible problem requiring immediate action from the European Union. I therefore voted in favour of the report by Mrs Batzeli, who, I believe, handled the matter comprehensively and has proposed very useful measures to address the issue.

It is imperative that we take steps to narrow the current gap between producer and consumer prices caused by the unhealthy price transmission mechanism that includes speculation on foodstuffs and a greater involvement of intermediaries. I agree with the rapporteur that the growing concentration of marketing and distribution of foodstuffs has contributed significantly to the increase in consumer prices compared with producer prices.

There is an urgent need for measures such as those suggested by Mrs Batzeli for greater transparency of the pricing structure and profit margins through coordinated action by national competition authorities, for better regulation of the market and of price trends for food in Europe and for effectively encouraging consumers to choose locally produced foods, which by definition help to shorten the distribution chain and support traditional food markets that are currently in serious difficulty.

**- Report: Margrete Auken (A6-0082/2009)**

**Michael Cashman (PSE)**, *in writing*. – I have decided together with my colleagues from the European Parliamentary Labour Party, to support the original Report, which offers the most satisfactory response to the hundreds of petitions submitted by European citizens, victims of the massive rush for urbanisation in Spain, overbuilding and coastal destruction.

The alternative resolutions tabled substantially modified the Report, and did not meet the consistent position we have held for 5 years now.

**Derek Roland Clark (IND/DEM)**, *in writing*. – The report is a cosmetic exercise designed to maintain false hopes, among hundreds of petitioners, during the approach to the EU assembly's elections. It purports to be able to take actions, which – as the Committee on Legal Affairs points out – the EU is not competent to take; so that even Auken's threat to oppose the next EU budget, if the report's demands are not met, could not help those who have bought, and then been deprived of, properties in Spain. The UKIP will not contribute to this imposture.

**Richard Corbett (PSE)**, *in writing*. – I voted in favour of this report, which follows a huge number of petitions to Parliament by victims and concerned citizens from across Europe. This report demonstrates that the massive urbanisation in several regions of Spain has been carried out in a way which abuses property rights, degrades the environment, undermines water provision and quality, and often leaves victims bereft of any redress or compensation when they may have lost their life savings.

I hope that this report will assist many of my constituents and citizens from across Europe who have been affected by this, in their battle for justice.

**Avril Doyle (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – Due to a conflict of interest, I abstained from all votes.

**Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM)**, *in writing*. – (SV) We understand that there may be major problems within the construction sector in Spain and that it may be the case that unsuspecting citizens purchase properties in good faith which it later transpires the construction company did not have the legal right to build. However, these are problems that can and should be solved within the Member State's legal framework. When all domestic remedies have been exhausted in accordance with Article 35 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, individual citizens can turn to the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg.

There is no reason to introduce any legislation at EU level to deal with these issues or for the European Parliament as an institution to get involved in this matter. Nor do we wish to have any involvement with the various alternative draft resolutions tabled by Spanish Members, which add domestic policy complications to the matter.

**Fiona Hall (ALDE)**, *in writing*. – I am submitting an explanation of vote on the Auken report in support of three separate constituents who have contacted me pleading for help. In each of these three cases, the constituent has spent his or her life savings on the purchase of a house and land in Valencia. In each case, proper legal procedures were followed at the time of the purchase. But, in each case, the constituent has subsequently had to suffer illegal land-grabbing demands by the Valencian authorities.

These are just three of many thousands of cases of injustice suffered by European citizens owning property in Spain. I ask the Commission to act swiftly and decisively in accordance with the recommendations of the Auken report.

**Mikel Irujo Amezaga (Verts/ALE), in writing.** – (ES) I have voted in favour of the Auken Report, since it clearly criticises the reckless town planning by the Spanish state, and highlights the misuse of Community funds in planning and environment matters.

I should also like to stress the ineffectuality of the Spanish Members from the People's Party (PP) and the Spanish Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE). They were incapable of reaching an agreement to table an alternative resolution that would achieve the majority they needed; hence they both ended up defeated. They have made it quite clear once again that the only issue they can agree on is their opposition to Basque nationalism. The Socialists and the PP tried to pressurise their fellow Members to vote in favour of their respective resolutions, which greatly mitigated the criticisms made by the rapporteur.

I want to make it clear that the Spanish Government participates in a practice that is systematically linked to mistreatment of its citizens, destruction of the environment and large-scale corruption. I feel that the powers in question should be immediately transferred to Euskadi.

**David Martin (PSE), in writing.** – Thousands of European citizens continue to be victims of a system of massive urbanisation, expressed in a very large number of petitions concerning the abuse of the legitimate rights of European citizens to their property and environment. The problem has been caused by public procurement with insufficient control of the urbanisation procedures by local and regional authorities. The resolution adopted should begin to bring concrete solutions to people living in the affected areas in Spain.

**Willy Meyer Pleite (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – (ES) Having been involved from the start in the formulation of the Auken report, which has garnered the support of both the Spanish and the European people, I have defended its content wholeheartedly. I fully support this report because it clearly reveals the involvement of all the Spanish administrations, from central government to the autonomous regional governments, to the local authorities, in developing an economic model based on urban speculation, which has been devastating for the environment, the economy and social development in Spain.

This report, which has withstood pressure from the People's Party (PP) and the Socialist Workers' Party (PSOE), highlights the leniency of both political and judicial resolutions on this issue, which has led to impunity within the authorities. It also includes the declaration of a moratorium on those development plans that do not comply with the criteria of environmental sustainability and social responsibility, so that irregularities can be investigated and a policy of *faits accomplis* can be avoided.

Furthermore, the report requires the Spanish Government to set up a working party in which all the administrations will participate. It calls for a public debate about urban planning in Spain, which will allow legislative measures to be adopted against speculation and unsustainable development, and will put an end to *à la carte* legislation practised in autonomous regions such as Aragón and Valencia.

**Bogusław Rogalski (UEN), in writing.** – (PL) I voted in favour of the Auken report on the impact of extensive urbanisation in Spain on individual rights of European citizens, on the environment and on the application of EU law, on the basis of petitions which I have received.

There is a great deal of evidence which shows that excessive urbanisation is being carried out in coastal areas, and responsibility for this lies with central, autonomous and local authorities. They have set in motion a model for unsustainable development that has had extremely serious environmental, social and economic consequences. As a result of this activity, irretrievable damage has been caused to the biodiversity and environmental integrity of many regions of Spain. In response to such charges procedures are slow and sentences handed down do not provide satisfaction to the victims. This has caused people to have reservations about the Spanish justice system.

It should also be emphasised that thousands of European citizens, who bought property in Spain in a variety of circumstances, have become victims of abuses connected with urbanisation. These abuses were committed by local authorities, but as a result the properties face demolition.

In connection with these facts the Spanish Government should be called upon to carry out a thorough review of legislation affecting the rights of individual property owners as a result of massive urbanisation, in order to bring an end to the abuse of rights and obligations enshrined in the EC Treaty.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) I would like to congratulate the rapporteur on her work and say that I welcome her report on the impact of extensive urbanisation in Spain on individual rights of European citizens, on the environment and on the application of EU law; this impact has been particularly negative, as testified by the numerous petitions received from residents in the area.

I think that in this case the Committee on Petitions has taken due account of the requests from citizens who are concerned about the destruction of the natural landscape, the failure to respect rules on contracts and environmental protection, and the huge-scale building activity. The evidence brought by this committee following fact-finding missions in the area have clearly shown the encroachment caused by the construction industry and the need to defend the rights of Spanish citizens as enshrined in the treaties.

I therefore support the report in question; it is perfectly in keeping with the principle of subsidiarity, and I hope that the local authorities in Spain will take the necessary measures without the need for the European Commission to resort to infringement proceedings.

**Søren Bo Søndergaard and Eva-Britt Svensson (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – We voted in favour of the report in sympathy with the complainants. However, we are of the opinion that the alleged breaches of Spanish, EU and international law should be dealt with and solved by the relevant Spanish authorities, the European Court of Justice and the European Court of Human Rights.

**Catherine Stihler (PSE), in writing.** – I am pleased Parliament voted in favour of this report. Many Scottish people have been affected by the Spanish land grab, losing their homes which many have saved a lifetime to afford. The Spanish Government must do all it can to bring justice to those people affected. Many people were misled and lied to over what they were buying and there must be a legal remedy to the situation.

**Diana Wallis (ALDE), in writing.** – We voted in favour of the report on urbanisation in Spain because it reflects the result of several years of detailed work by the Committee on Petitions to respond to hundreds of related petitions by several thousand petitioners, including fact-finding visits and discussions with all interested parties and it was adopted by a large cross-party majority in committee. We have a duty as elected representatives to ensure that European citizens whom we have encouraged to make use of their free movement rights should not then be subjected to arbitrary or unjustified restrictions in the host state.

We recognise that the primary responsibility under the Treaties for the monitoring of the application of Community law lies with the Commission. We also recognise that the Treaties explicitly exclude any effect on domestic rules governing the system of property ownership. However, we also believe, firstly, that Parliament's Petitions Committee, as the 'eyes and ears' of the institutions, should highlight any systematic problems affecting the free movement of thousands of our citizens which are brought to light by the petitions process.

Secondly, we consider that violations of Community law appear to be at issue, in particular environmental law and public procurement rules.

**Thomas Wise (NI), in writing.** – As a fervent opponent of the EU and its continual meddling in our lives, I have consistently voted against the vast majority of reports that I have been asked to consider. As is inevitable, a report will come along that simply demands a different approach and I believe that the Auken report is one. I have been approached by many expats, all of whom did everything they could to establish a proper, legal and sustainable life in Spain. That they became victims of a clash of bureaucracies is now a matter of history and hopefully this report will compel an equitable solution.

My action here does not imply a softening of my attitude to the EU and its impenetrable, inflexible and unaccountable structure. However, if subordinate bureaucracies will not solve the problems they themselves create, then a solution must be found.

I hope now that the myriad problems created by the various Spanish authorities will be addressed and that such will be promptly resolved in the best interests of my constituents.

I have a nagging worry that such intervention may not be the solution. In the land of the EU, the only continuing law is that of the unintended consequence.

#### **- Report: Francisco José Millán Mon (A6-0114/2009)**

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing.** – (IT) I voted in favour. I see in Obama's election an important opportunity for a new policy of global commitment, a turning point in the history of the United States and also for the whole world.

The way forward should be a new policy of global commitment, in which the EU will play its key role. We now have the opportunity to renew the global commitment through renewed institutions in view of the upcoming European elections.

The victory of the Democrat candidate is further proof of the extraordinary capacity for renewal that has been evident so many times at difficult points in US history. The new US leadership could lead to an improved EU/US common policy, the two sides working together in an effective partnership on many global issues that the leaders of both continents must face, such as climate change, global challenges, regional issues, defence, economic matters and trade. We must tackle these problems together, with determination and creativity. Obama embodies what is positive and impressive about the United States and today's complex and globalised world, in which change is constant.

The transatlantic link remains essential. I have faith in the role that the US will continue to play in this regard under the leadership of President-Elect Obama.

**Koenraad Dillen (NI), in writing.** – (NL) This voluminous report rightly advocates a deepening of relations between Europe and the United States. The Middle East, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia, defence, security and economic and commercial matters are discussed in detail.

It is unacceptable, however, that the rapporteur expressly anticipates the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, when it has become clear that the majority of citizens want nothing to do with the European Constitution or a carbon copy of it. It is good that the rapporteur devotes attention to the Palestinian issue, but why is there no mention of Israel's right to security? On account of this bias, I voted against this report.

**Mieczysław Edmund Janowski (UEN), in writing.** – (PL) The Mon report raises the subject of transatlantic relations in the aftermath of the presidential elections in the USA. I endorsed the report, because I think that today it is essential for there to be close cooperation between the United States and the European Union in practically all areas: politics, defence, the economy, energy, the environment, culture, science etc.

We should be aware that the combined gross domestic products of the United States and the European Union make up more than 50% of world GDP. The New Transatlantic Agenda, which has been in force since 1995, should be replaced by a framework understanding on the Transatlantic Partnership, which would be systematically updated. The USA and the EU are of necessity engaged in activities to uphold world security and order. Of course, this requires cooperation with other countries, especially China, India and Russia.

I also consider the remarks on the need to reform the UN to be correct, including the need to reform the working of the Security Council. Transatlantic cooperation must not ignore the role of NATO. Today, we should recognise rapid and effective action to slow down the growing economic crisis to be the most important. I will also add that in these relations we should also include a place for Canada, Mexico and South America.

We should hope that the words spoken by the current President of the USA, Barack Obama, that 'America has no better partner than Europe' will be confirmed by everyday reality. This is essential if we are to be equal to the challenges faced by our civilisation.

**Athanasios Pafilis (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – (EL) The European Parliament's 'huge expectations' from the election of Barack Obama as President of the United States of America in fact only concern the imperialists who, with good cause, expect their interests to be served more effectively. The people should not entertain any illusions that there will be a change of policy for their benefit. Moreover, the statements and pronouncements by the new US President himself leave no margin for doubt.

The report calls for closer and deeper cooperation between the EU and the US and NATO, following the election in question. It therefore proposes the creation of a body to coordinate the foreign and security policy of the two imperialist centres (EU and USA) at an even higher level.

At a time when competition and antagonism are escalating between them as a result of the capitalist financial crisis, European and American imperialists are, at the same time, endeavouring to coordinate their cooperation in order to deal with grassroots opposition. That is the aim behind the call for joint and effective action to tackle 'global challenges', 'defence and security questions' and 'regional issues'. The willingness expressed in the report to accept Guantanamo inmates in the EU, should the US so request, is a typical example.

The people must set up their own common front against the united attack on them by the EU, the USA and NATO and overturn the imperialist order.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) I voted against Mr Millán Mon's report on the state of transatlantic relations in the aftermath of the US elections, because I do not think it is right that the European Union, with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon and the corresponding foreign policy instruments, will take on

a stronger and more coherent role on the international geopolitical stage. Furthermore, I do not entirely agree on the roles of the transatlantic partnership and NATO in collective security.

**Geoffrey Van Orden (PPE-DE), in writing.** – I attach enormous importance to the transatlantic relationship and have consistently argued for revitalising and strengthening NATO. Contrary to the main thrust of this report, however, I do not believe that this should mean replacing the strong links between the United States and individual member states (Britain in particular) with an 'EU-US partnership'. The references to the Treaty of Lisbon, which our people do not want, and the proposal that the putative Commission Vice-President/High Representative should co-chair a new 'Transatlantic Political Council', are examples of this. In addition, I have specific objections to aspects of the report dealing with EU defence. The report welcomes 'an enhanced European defence capability' and explicitly endorses the European Security and Defence Policy, to which Conservative opposition has been constant.

For these reasons I abstained on the report.

#### **- Turkmenistan (B6-0150/2009)**

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) I would prefer to abstain from the vote on the motion for a resolution on an EC-Turkmenistan trade agreement. While I recognise the importance of economic and trade relations in the opening up of Turkmen society, I doubt whether an interim agreement is the best solution for both parties.

#### **- Report: Daniel Caspary (A6-0085/2006)**

**Philip Claey's (NI), in writing.** – (NL) I voted against this resolution because, in my opinion, it would mean Parliament undermining its own credibility. This House is always making rhetorical declarations on human rights and emphasising that human rights are the most important objective of foreign policy – yet now it is going to sign an agreement with a country that violates these very human rights on a massive scale. The underlying belief is always that the mere fact of signing such an agreement improves human rights in the country concerned. We hear the same story from the advocates of Turkish accession: yes, human rights are violated and torture is widespread, but once Turkey joins the EU that will all be a thing of the past. The facts prove the opposite, however.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) I have decided to abstain from the vote on Mr Caspary's report on the interim trade agreement with Turkmenistan. I can only endorse certain points of the proposal and not the document as a whole. This has led me not to vote against it, but rather to abstain.

#### **- Report: Stavros Lambrinidis (A6-0103/2009)**

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing.** – (IT) I voted in favour. Nowadays the Internet has become the basis for all our personal and institutional relations. Our personal information is now owned by many companies who frequently make use of our private data without due permission. For all these reasons it is clear that we need to protect the fundamental right to privacy on the Internet.

The Internet can also provide considerable support for other fundamental rights, such as freedom of speech, of political action and of association. On the other hand, however, it opens up a wide range of criminal activity. An example of this perverted use of the web is the rising scourge of child pornography that is now flooding the Internet and which we have a responsibility to curtail.

It is therefore necessary to take concrete steps to protect and promote the fundamental freedoms of individuals when surfing the web. Our action must be founded on privacy and security, paying constant attention to the fundamental right to education and access to information systems.

**Carlos Coelho (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (PT) The Internet constitutes a huge technological advance, which allows users to connect with each other, personal, professional and educational relationships to be established, knowledge to be disseminated, and culture to be promoted and enhanced.

Internet crime has proliferated, however, and the Internet has become a favoured tool of criminal networks, given that it is easily accessible, cheap and very powerful. In the last year, cases of Internet abuse of children have risen by 16%, without there having been any effective punishment in most cases or even the ability to find these criminals. As regards terrorism, there are already around 5 000 terrorist propaganda sites, which form a means of radicalisation and recruitment, as well as serving as a source of information on terrorist methods and resources.

I recognise the urgent need to find solutions and develop appropriate legislative instruments to fight crime, without this leading to excessive and unreasonable control through censorship and the secret monitoring of Internet data traffic.

**Koenraad Dillen (NI)**, *in writing*. – (NL) This is a good resolution that strikes a careful balance between rights and obligations and represents a courageous appeal against censorship. Recent years have indeed seen too many attempts, in the name of political correctness, to subject even the Internet to censorship, so that controversial ideas are excluded from not only the printed press but also the World Wide Web. Indeed, the Web has long been a thorn in the side of the inquisitors controlling the media, who wish to outlaw any criticism of the multicultural society, for example, via 'racism legislation'.

Freedom on the Internet is the best guarantee of freedom of expression.

**Edite Estrela (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (PT) I voted in favour of the Lambrinidis report on strengthening security and fundamental freedoms on the Internet, because I deem it essential that the European Union takes steps to reconcile the fundamental rights of Internet users with the fight against cybercrime, in order to protect citizens, particularly children. As a result, I feel it is essential to develop legislation on data protection, security and freedom of expression.

**Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM)**, *in writing*. – (SV) The freedom of expression and the right to a private life are absolute rights that must under no circumstances be undermined. Naturally enough, we believe that these rights also apply to the Internet, thereby guaranteeing the individual's right to free expression.

We also think that the possibility of removing personal information from databases and websites should be considered a given and we would urge companies to guarantee that individuals can have their personal data deleted from databases. However, we believe that the lack of such a guarantee is first and foremost an international problem which is therefore best solved by means of international regulations and conventions.

The June List is very much in favour of the guarantee of security and the fundamental freedoms on the Internet, but we are opposed to some of the wordings in the report. For example, the report expresses the desire to proceed with the adoption of the Directive on criminal measures aimed at the enforcement of intellectual property rights. We are strongly opposed to this, as we do not want the harmonisation of European criminal law. The rapporteur also seeks to compare the right to the Internet with the right to access to schooling. We are of the opinion that this is an arrogant statement, as the right and opportunity to attend school are far from foregone conclusions in many EU Member States.

However, the good intentions of the report outweigh the negatives and we have therefore chosen to vote in favour of it.

**Genowefa Grabowska (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (PL) I fully support the Lambrinidis report on security and fundamental freedoms on the Internet. I think it is very important and necessary, mainly because our presence on the global web is almost universal. In a word, the Internet has become part of our daily life.

We cannot imagine a better source of information, whether we are writing a book, or whether we want to make a sophisticated dish and are looking for an interesting recipe. But we are not always aware that our presence on the Internet leaves traces which can be used against us, for example by people engaged in marketing, by intelligence services, and even by identity thieves.

On the other hand, the Internet can also be a convenient communication tool for criminals and terrorists. That is why it is so difficult to prepare reasonable legislation, which in a balanced and effective way will allow people to use all the benefits of the Internet safely, while at the same time curtailing the very real and serious threats connected with its abuse.

Therefore I support the rapporteur's proposals, which aim to strike the right balance between the privacy and security of individuals on the web, while fully respecting their fundamental rights and freedoms. I also think that alongside concern for quality of service, the public authorities are responsible for ensuring Internet access for the poorest people and for those who live even in the most isolated regions of the country.

**Carl Lang and Fernand Le Rachinel (NI)**, *in writing*. – (FR) Internet use and development are without doubt a source of important progress, especially where freedom of expression and democracy are concerned. Striking a balance between such freedom, the protection of privacy and the need for Internet security represents a real challenge for us all.

This is particularly the case where political action is concerned. Indeed, some people on the opposition side or who may hold controversial political views do not have access to the various media and see in the Internet an opportunity to convey their message throughout the world. Such freedom should not be censored. China, Cuba and Burma, as true totalitarian states, have no hesitation in gagging such freedom of expression by systematically censoring and filtering information with contempt for all the principles of democracy and freedom.

Internet filtering for the sake of combating pornography, child pornography and terrorism is crucial, but such vigilance must be strictly defined and controlled.

**Nicolae Vlad Popa (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO)** The Lambrinidis report is the first report to deal with the problem of the Internet from the user's perspective as its main topic. I voted in favour of it because I believe that it is a balanced, relevant report which deals with the main topics of interest in this area.

As rapporteur for the PPE-DE Group on this report, I think that the recognition of the user's rights over the posted content, particularly the right to delete this content permanently, and the request that the future regulatory mechanism define the digital identity and propose specific measures for protecting it are important contributions.

The report highlights the importance of cooperation between the entities involved in developing the Internet, with a view to devising instruments for self-regulation or coregulation (for example, codes of good practice) supplementing existing legal regulations. Given the rapid pace of the Internet's development, these regulatory methods are far more effective than traditional legislation as they are approved and applied by the majority of entities concerned, without any coercion from the state.

The Internet is the largest public access area in the world and the rate of its development may take us by surprise if we do not decide to deal with this topic in a balanced, realistic way so that future regulation of cyberspace focuses more specifically on the user.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT)** I have voted in favour of Mr Lambrinidis's report on strengthening security and fundamental freedoms on the Internet.

I wholeheartedly support the aims of the draft, which are to involve all interested parties, to act on different levels using existing national, regional and international instruments and, lastly, to exchange best practices, in order to provide a response in line with the requirements and problems of different kinds of Internet users and the numerous types of online activities.

**Catherine Stihler (PSE), in writing. –** I support this report's aims to strengthen security and fundamental freedoms on the Internet.

### **Ship recycling (B6-0161/2009)**

**Edite Estrela (PSE), in writing. – (PT)** I voted in favour of the motion for a resolution on safe recycling of ships as I feel that it is vital for this issue to be tackled as an integral part of a ship's lifecycle. End-of-life ships should be regarded as hazardous waste, as a result of the hazardous substances that they contain, and should therefore fall within the scope of the Basel Convention.

I am happy to see that there is a Community will to improve ship dismantling practices.

**Luís Queiró (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT)** The EU's environmental protection goals can only be fully achieved if they are integrated into the various sectors of Community policy. As a result, this motion for a resolution aims to speed up all the steps that the Union must take to ensure that the dismantling of end-of-life ships occurs under safe conditions for workers and with adequate protection of the marine environment.

The global phase-out of single-hull oil tankers and the backlog of old vessels now being withdrawn from the market, many of which contain hazardous substances, allow us to predict an uncontrolled expansion in sub-standard facilities in South Asia, which may even spread to African countries. All these reasons lead us to support this motion for a resolution and also all the steps aimed at ensuring compliance with international rules on safety and the environment.

**President. –** That concludes the explanations of vote.

Our sitting is now going to be suspended. It will be resumed at 3 p.m. – shortly – with an oral question on the role of culture in the development of European regions.



## 6. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

*(The sitting was suspended at 1.15 p.m. and resumed at 3 p.m.)*

**IN THE CHAIR: MRS KRATSA-TSAGAROPOULOU**

*Vice-President*

## 7. Approval of the minutes of the previous sitting: see Minutes

## 8. The role of culture in the development of European regions (debate)

**President.** – The next item is the debate on the oral question to the Commission (O-0064/2009) by Doris Pack, on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, on the role of culture in the development of European regions (B6-0226/2009).

**Doris Pack, author.** – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, we are meeting at an unusual time, but still, the oral question that we put today was born in the 'A Soul for Europe' intergroup. We believe that we will find this soul in our oldest units – the regions – where people communicate with one another with their particular accent, a specific dialect or even a regional language, where the local cuisine has its own specific taste, where truly local fruit and vegetables are sold at markets, where particular folk songs still reside, where particular tales and myths originate: in short, where people feel they belong, where they feel at home.

The march of globalisation threatens to standardise so much, and many unique features will disappear. Only Europe's wonderful regions can safeguard that specialness and they must be able to rely on the protection of the European Union. The richness and variety of the regions of Europe – they were often enemies, they were occupied, they were divided up, they were destroyed by war and re-united – must be retained. The regions are like our stem cells. The European Union has maintained something like a culture of the small and is bound by human rights in this area, too.

Our brief debate today and the resolution should spur the Commission into finding ways to make the cultural richness of the regions even more visible and into finding ways for the EU to contribute to its preservation and continued development. Europe's cultural potential must be used strategically. In 2009, the year of creativity and innovation, the possibilities of integrating ideas and initiatives from the public and civil service sector at the local and regional level should be exploited in a meaningful way.

I would like to say to the Members of the Committee on Regional Development that we have absolutely no intention of curtailing existing regional policy – we merely wish to add to its cultural dimension. We implore the Commission to do its part, too.

**Joe Borg, Member of the Commission.** – Madam President, allow me first of all to thank you for the opportunity, on behalf of Commissioner Figel', to address the place of culture in our policies and its particular contribution to the development of European regions and cities. The importance of culture is taken into consideration in different ways at Community level.

In the context of the EU's cohesion policy, regional and local strategies have successfully integrated culture to support creativity and to promote innovation. Cohesion policy supports, for instance, the protection of our cultural heritage, the development of cultural infrastructure and services, the development of regional attractiveness and its link with sustainable tourism, but also the regeneration of local economies and the development of cross-border strategies.

In 2007, the Commission launched the European Agenda for Culture, which is now in its first stages of implementation. This new strategic approach to culture sets common objectives and aims to propel the economic, social and political value of culture by strengthening its transversal role. In this framework, the Commission and the Member States are cooperating under a new open method of cooperation to strengthen joint efforts in areas with a direct impact on local and regional development strategies. This will, for instance, help maximise the potential of creative and cultural industries, in particular SMEs; promote access to culture, and encourage the mobility of cultural professionals.

Feeding into the ongoing reflection, the Commission will soon launch an independent study on the contribution of culture to local and regional economic development as part of the European regional policy.

The results of this study will help underline the value of investing in the cultural and creative sectors and will illustrate the links between such investment, specific regional development objectives and the Lisbon Agenda for growth and jobs. The study will also contribute to the preparation of a green paper on the potential of cultural and creative industries, which is currently under preparation and is due for adoption by the Commission in early 2010.

The Commission regularly organises conferences with representatives from local and regional authorities. Let me simply highlight the open days, which every year bring together in Brussels a large number of stakeholders to debate a wide range of issues relating to regional and cohesion policy. Aspects relating to culture have been regularly considered in the context of these workshops.

Moreover, within the context of other European policies, such as the EU's integrated maritime policy, the Commission also endeavours to involve civil society actors in highlighting Europe's rich maritime heritage. Thus, next May, during the European Maritime Day celebrations in Rome, stakeholders will examine the links between maritime heritage and sustainable regional tourism, amongst others.

Finally, I also wish to mention the European Cultural Forum, which will be organised for the first time by the Commission, in the context of the European Agenda for Culture in Brussels, on 29 and 30 September, and will bring together representatives of the cultural sector and national authorities, including local and regional authorities.

**Manolis Mavrommatis**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (EL) Madam President, Commissioner, I should like to start by welcoming the initiative on such an interesting issue as the role of culture in the development of the regions of the European Union. Cultural heritage is an important element in the identity and in the history of the development of the peoples of Europe. Protecting and maintaining it is therefore especially important to the education of the young generation and, at the same time, to respect for the European identity. Regardless of its European, national or local dimension, cultural heritage is a fundamental value for European citizens. We all know that the focus is on the large towns where the most famous museums and monuments are to be found.

However, it is a fact that the European countryside, which accounts for 90% of European territory, is suffering from abandonment and economic stagnation. European programmes with a cultural content therefore help considerably in developing economic activity in the regions. It is not only the supply of work and employment, it is the creation of poles of attraction for cultural and historic tourism that will contribute to the sustainable development of these areas.

We therefore consider that culture contributes directly towards the development of the cultural education of Europeans and indirectly towards economic prosperity, especially in the regions which are most in need of focus and development.

**Mary Honeyball**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – Madam President, I am very pleased indeed to have this opportunity to discuss this debate. It is only unfortunate that we are doing it on a Thursday afternoon when it is not quite as well attended as perhaps it should be.

I do think this is an important debate in the context of the current economic climate. We have already heard discussion about culture and jobs and how culture industries and people working in culture can contribute to the economy and can really help. At the precarious times we are facing now – which we have heard already in this Parliament – it is important that we discuss these matters as fully as we can.

I am here also because I do actually represent one of those big cities that the previous speaker mentioned. London, as you all know, is one of the cultural centres of the EU with – as we all have – enormous history and very much to offer. It is also the centre of, certainly the British, cultural industries. So I think I have a role here to speak for the people that I represent and to fight for those jobs which, when things get bad, are very often the first jobs to go. So I very much welcome what the Commission has said about the role of cultural industries, about how we want to preserve and to build on those and how there is an economic role for culture. I feel that, very often, that economic role is ignored, and we do not talk about it; we do not even think about it, and we relegate culture to second-class status. That is not acceptable, particularly when culture can be so very important in our national and regional development. I hope that one of the things to come out of this debate today – that we take back to our Member States, and the Commission and the Council take back – is that we are very concerned about how this regional development happens, how we deal with this and the role that culture can play in that.

Also, as Mrs Pack has already said, there is the whole question of cultural diversity. I think one of the great strengths of the EU, and of the European Parliament, is that we all come together – now with 27 Member States – and are actually very different, in many ways: different backgrounds and cultures, and obviously different languages. That is just a start. Although the world is getting smaller and although people come together more, there are still these significant differences. We should be celebrating them, because those differences are at the very core of the things that we talk about. We all want to preserve our identities and how we feel about ourselves, and we need to do that.

In this context, I think we also need to take on board that we are getting people coming into our continent. We are getting people from other parts of the world – many of whom are now in second and third generations in some of our Member States – who come from different backgrounds again. I think we also need to take on board that they come with their own culture, tradition and languages. Although we integrate them and they learn our languages, they are still there with their own separate identities. That is an issue which has not been mentioned in this debate, which I think is an important one and one that we, I hope, can integrate, particularly when we talk about issues such as multilingualism, which we have had good debates on. It is an extremely important issue, and I think one we should perhaps give more prominence to than we have done, but in the context of a Europe which is changing. We therefore need to preserve our existing cultures and our existing diversity and actually absorb the new diversity which has come, and which is continuing to come, into our continent. For all of these reasons, I welcome the support that we are giving to culture and to cultural industries, support to small and medium-enterprises, which I think – in the current economic climate – are possibly going to be the backbone of what we will be looking at. If large corporations and large enterprises are losing people, making people redundant and laying people off, it may well be up to the smaller outfits – the SMEs – to pick up this slack and to actually go out there and create employment for those who can work in this sector.

So I hope we will all recognise just how important the role of culture is in our continent and our society and that those of us who have actually turned up for this debate will take the message back to our Member States, to the regions and to the people we represent. I know we have got a good message to say, so let us go out there and spread the word.

**Grażyna Staniszevska**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (PL) Madam President, regions are an extremely important place for the development of culture. It is there that most long-lasting exchange programmes and joint projects between areas of different traditions, customs and achievements arise. Regions stimulate the development of culture, and culture – important, attractive projects and events – becomes a magnet which attracts economic investment. This is the classic knock-on effect, which is best illustrated by the effects of the splendid European Capital of Culture programme. Economic revival always follows the year of cultural events. This is understood by the numerous European cities trying to take part in the project.

Culture is a great opportunity, especially for areas which are underdeveloped but rich in natural resources or tourist and recreation attractions due to their geographical location. Therefore it is particularly important to be aware of the significant role of regional authorities and to stimulate their activity by special European Union programmes. I expect the Commission to submit a green paper shortly, presenting a broad concept of measures in the area of culture, including the key matter of the level of regions.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me finally to draw attention to the initiative to establish the year 2013 as European Year of Learning the Languages of our Neighbours. Dynamic development of regional cooperation in Europe is often hampered by problems related to a lack of knowledge of the language and culture of neighbouring countries and regions, and a lack of ability to communicate fully. Learning the language of an immediate neighbour can be a great leap forward for mutual understanding and communication, and therefore for strengthening cultural and economic cooperation and consolidating the entire European Community.

**Ryszard Czarnecki**, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Madam President, I think that in this debate it is worth recalling the characteristic words of Jacques Delors, the former President of the European Commission. When asked, after he had finished his term of office as President of the Commission, if there was anything he regretted or if there had not been enough of something, he admitted that the European Union and the Commission had devoted too little time to matters of culture. And I think that his characteristic self-criticism could be a signpost for us.

I agree with the speaker who spoke about the strange priorities of our Parliament. We say that culture is important, and that it is not only priorities like institutions, administration and regulations which are

important. Then we speak about these things on Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday morning. Only the debate on Thursday afternoon is about matters which could be called fundamental – about culture, because culture is in fact the foundation of European unity. Not only the culture of regions, but also national culture, because the heritage of Europe is in fact the heritage of European nations, and this is perhaps especially true of our cultural heritage.

I am glad that this subject has been raised. I am glad because I suppose it will become increasingly important in the work of Parliament and also of the EU executive, especially the Commission and the Council.

**Věra Flasarová**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (CS) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I agree with the wording of the questions as formulated by my colleague Doris Pack. In my view multilateral support for the European regions is very important. There used to be borders in Europe separating states and nations from each other for centuries, creating a kind of psychological no-man's land. Fortunately we have now succeeded in eliminating borders through the Schengen agreement, but regions remain divided, cities are cut in half and psychological problems in particular persist, as one piece of territory belongs here or there and another somewhere else. In an increasingly integrated Europe these ancient scars on the map and in people's minds are healing safely but slowly. The fastest way to make them whole, much more effectively and practically than all of the top-down measures, is to support civic initiatives and the activities of cultural organisations and regional institutions. The regional institutions and ordinary people living in this or that territory know best what needs to be done to revive their region.

There are many projects whose implementation would represent both a step forwards and an impulse for further action. I come from the region of Northern Moravia, from Silesia, an area where Czech, Polish and Slovak territory all meet. And it is precisely there, in the historic Těšín region which today comprises the Czech town of Český Těšín and Polish Cieszyń, that a project has been created called "A Garden on Both Banks of the River" since there is a river flowing between the two towns which once formed a single urban unit. The project is putting in place links between the two river banks that are not only of an urban nature, but are also architectural and above all cultural. Both divided sections of the formerly homogenous whole must be linked through the cultural activities of the inhabitants. The river between the two towns and their surroundings must become a place of cultural exchange and cultural overlap. However, an important aspect of such projects is the new employment opportunities created not only during the implementation of the work but also afterwards. The service sector will certainly expand, increasing the attractiveness of the area and supporting the potential for tourism and other sorts of related enterprise. The authors of the "Garden on Both Banks of the River" project were inspired by the example of Strasbourg in France and Kehl in Germany, which were also such close neighbours that they formed a natural urban structure. Also here the Rhine flows between both cities. What is happening in France and Germany can also happen in the Czech Republic and Poland or anywhere else in Europe. There are many more examples of this in Central Europe. When we talk of the share of culture in developing Europe's regions it is precisely these projects that come to mind.

The EU, the Commission and the European Parliament should support cultural projects of this type even more than they have done to date. The authors of civil initiatives often complain that these activities are unduly held up by complicated bureaucracy or overly-complicated structures in the relevant ministries and offices.

**Christopher Heaton-Harris (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, I come with two questions for the Commissioner. One: what is culture? And two: what on earth has it got to do with the European Union?

In my region lies the historic county of Northamptonshire. Part of its cultural identity, its history, its fabric, comes from its historic ties with the shoemaking industry. Shoemaking in the county was first recognised in the year 1202, when Peter the Cordwainer was almost famous within the county. In 1452 the court regulated prices and weights for various traders, including the cordwainers, and Northampton itself has served as a home to the shoe industry for all that time.

In 1841, according to the census list, there were 1 821 shoemakers within the county. The county's football team, Northampton Football Club, is still referred to as 'the Cobblers', and in Northamptonshire now we have 34 shoe factories still open, all over 100 years old. I am wearing a pair of Barker shoes today from a village called Earls Barton in the wonderful Westminster constituency of Daventry. We have a museum, we have cultural events around the shoemaking industry – and it all came before the European Union.

So, whilst I completely understand the role of culture in countries' regions, I wonder if or how the European Union can help us in these things. And what are Europe's regions? I think we should leave it to culture in Europe's regions to develop as it always has done – locally, organically, and not centrally government-led.

**Vittorio Prodi (ALDE).** – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for accommodating me. I would like to expand our vision slightly and look to the future, not just the past. We are in a situation where we are seeing that growth cannot always be continual, rather it is restricted by the limited nature of natural resources and the limited capacity of the earth to absorb and metabolise our waste. We can no longer base our view solely on material growth – our concept of development – instead we must see development with stronger reference to quality of life: we must, in essence, *dematerialise* our society.

From this perspective, regions are equally important for their cultural wealth – meaning the richness of their quality of life – which is extremely important at a time like the present when our lifestyle must change completely. In this context of *dematerialisation*, a region's wealth in terms of its quality of life is thus extremely important, I would even say absolutely indispensable.

I would therefore like to direct both the Commission and Parliament towards an understanding of the change in lifestyle that we must effect, a *dematerialisation* of our societies and therefore a cultural work, which will become irreplaceable as we have to substitute immaterial wealth for material assets. This regional experience is thus something that we must try to understand and preserve before it is swept away by a whole series of oversights.

For this reason I would ask that we proceed with this debate, because it is so essential and because we must simply change our way of life.

**Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański (UEN).** – (PL) Madam President, the beauty of culture comes from its regional and local diversity, which changes with the development of society. Regional cultures, which are deeply founded on tradition, form a strong basis for national cultures and their many variations. With their colourfulness of form and expression they have great appeal, and they provide artistic stimulation, carry experience and emotion, and strengthen the bonds of local society.

Regional cultures are being pushed aside by the professional artists who draw inspiration from them. It is often thought that regional culture has to be an amateur movement, whereas a professional movement should be given strong financial support. This is probably the source of the tendency, also seen in the EU, to finance big and expensive projects, including international projects which involve professional artists from different countries. Regional and local cultures are gradually dying, and numerous forms of their expression, and their disciplines and creative skills are disappearing.

Today we can talk of the traditional and folk culture in historically undeveloped regions, but we cannot say very much about their existence in developing regions. There is, therefore, an urgent need to develop a programme of research to document the protection and development of regional culture in all its spiritual and artistic expressions. These expressions are stated in more detail in my amendment to the resolution under discussion. I hope that it will receive the support of Members.

**Pál Schmitt (PPE-DE).** – (HU) Culture creates value in both an intellectual and a material sense. Cultural and creative industries employ millions all over Europe, with films, book publishing, musical compositions and publications – what is often called the music industry – being among the most dynamically growing sectors.

It is no accident that the most successful and popular initiatives of the EU are closely linked to culture. Within the exchange programme for European art collections, the public in Budapest can currently view an unparalleled Gustave Moreau and an Alfons Mucha exhibition in an important museum.

Another such initiative is the cultural capitals of Europe programme which highlights and promotes not only cities but entire regions. Less than a year from now, in 2010, this proud title will be held by a little-known small city in the southern part of Hungary, Pécs, where the hundreds of thousands visitors drawn to the area will give a boost to the growth of the entire region.

I am convinced that it is through culture that the EU can grow closer to its citizens and bring citizens closer to one another. When we speak of regional identity in the European Union, it goes without saying that we invoke culture. I hope that in the period following the Lisbon strategy there will be even more initiatives and resources available for culture and education than now. For the modern, knowledge-based society's economic engine is the inventive and original spirit, that is to say: innovation and creativity.

**Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Madam President, thirty years ago I was here in Strasbourg when the directly elected European Parliament met for the first time. The Oldest Member was Louise Weiss, after whom this wonderful building, itself a splendid piece of European culture, was named. Her speech was the intellectual

foundation document of the European Parliament. She talked at that time of the type of Europeans we need, united on the basis of a common European culture.

This European culture is not something new, as many people think, but it is the rediscovery of something that is much older than the nation states, Mr Heaton-Harris. Borders, at least on the continent, are mostly rather artificial. Culture is deeply rooted in regions that are often divided by artificial borders, and regional culture is of enormous importance as a link between nations. One of the greatest cultural figures was the Bohemian Forest poet Adalbert Stifter, who worked in Bavaria, Upper Austria and Bohemia and united Czech and German people. This tradition must be kept alive – the culture that is destroyed by nationalism and displacement, the culture of minorities, the regional culture, the culture of European regions that span borders and, in particular, the diversity that we will only be able to preserve together.

Franz Josef Strauß, the great Bavarian European, once said that we will only be able to remain Bavarians, Basques, Germans or Britons if we become Europeans in time – Europe not being a centralising factor, but a common roof against the rain of globalisation and standardisation.

**Iosif Matula (PPE-DE).** – (RO) The European Union project, conceived rather as a mechanism for economic integration, owes a huge debt to the ‘cement’ represented by European culture. At the same time, encouraging diversity is among the objectives of the European cultural agenda launched during this legislature, along with promoting culture as a means of economic growth and incorporating it in relations with third countries.

Culture must be viewed from a slightly different perspective if we think about the fact that this sector generates more wealth than the European chemical industry, for instance, providing a living for millions of employees.

This sector can contribute to the development of disadvantaged regions through grants for cultural cooperation projects in the fields of art and culture. For example, Romania has demonstrated that it can implement large-scale projects in partnership with European regions through the programme ‘Sibiu, the 2007 European Capital of Culture’, which had a major economic impact on the area.

At the same time, we must encourage programmes promoting cross-border mobility among those working in the cultural sector and the staging of cultural and artistic events on a transnational basis.

I mention these matters as a member of the Committee on Culture and Education and of the Committee on Regional Development, as well as being a former chairman of a European border region.

**Zbigniew Zaleski (PPE-DE).** – (PL) Madam President, people must eat, move about and take shelter from the cold or rain. These are elements of production and commerce which serve to meet fundamental needs. However, the kind of fork we eat with, or what our bicycle or the roof of our house looks like, has nothing to do with the economy, but is an expression of culture. People have a spiritual need to create, quite simply for the sake of creating. They take pride in their work when those who see or touch it express their appreciation and feel better because of it. An important point is the fact that cultural diversity is often associated with regions. We should never unify those regions and their culture – indeed, we should support that diversity. Culture is an expression of the soul of the regions. The EU would be a most uninteresting place without the cultural riches which it possesses today. Maintaining culture is expensive, and our role is to support culture. Without it there will not be an economy or happy people in the European Union.

**Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN).** – (PL) Madam President, the cultural wealth of Europe comes from the great diversity of its regions. That diversity needs to be protected. Koniaków lace is completely different from Bruges lace. The mixture created by a superficial reproduction of ideas taken from culture leads to impoverishment. We must preserve that diversity of all forms and expressions of culture, including multilingualism and material culture, because our diversity is our identity, it is a source of creative development and of enriching cross-fertilisation. It also gives a purpose to cultural tourism. The culture of the regions needs support and protection. I would like to ask the European Commission to develop a programme for this.

**Janusz Onyszkiewicz (ALDE).** – (PL) Madam President, the motto of the European Union is ‘United in Diversity’. That diversity makes the entire EU exceptionally attractive, and also means that we are very different from countries such as the United States. Cultural diversity is in fact based, among other things, on the huge diversity of our regional cultures, a diversity which makes those regions and entire countries extremely attractive to tourists. They are attractive to us, Europeans, and they are also extremely attractive to others, who can come to Europe to see, experience and appreciate that unusual diversity.

Regional culture should therefore be supported if only for this reason. But we should also remember that regional culture is a bridge which enables people who live in the regions to participate in what is known as high culture. Without this it is difficult to talk of the harmonisation and popularisation of certain models of culture and their perception.

**Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE).** – (PL) Madam President, achieving the unity of Europe while preserving its diversity, identity and cultural heritage is the great value of our Community. Individual nations, regions and different local communities cultivate and develop their culture and tradition, and bring that heritage into a united Europe. They share their culture with other regions, and in exchange learn about the accomplishments and achievements of others. And so they give something to others, and they take something from others.

In order to maintain the cultural heritage in regions and smaller areas it is also important that funds are available from the EU budget. Those who were afraid that after integration they would lose their culture and identity are realising that the opposite is true – that the EU supports regional, folk and local culture.

**Christopher Beazley (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, I rise to support my colleague, Zbigniew Zaleski.

Somebody once said: ‘When I hear the word “culture”, I reach for my revolver’. I think that the European Parliament today underestimates, as indeed do our national parliaments and national governments, the importance of education and culture. We are always bottom of the pile.

They say that ‘the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world’. I think – and this is just my personal point of view – Greece was the cradle of European civilisation. One or two Englishmen – Lord Byron and others – did a certain amount of things. Perhaps Commissioner Borg from Malta, the country of the George Cross, could answer this question: why can we not spend a little more money on supporting the future of our culture of our civilisation? We spend I do not know how many million billion euro on this, that and the other; please – music, poetry, history, harmony. Give us a chance.

**Joe Borg, Member of the Commission.** – Madam President, I would like to thank the honourable Members for the number of points that they have raised. I will certainly forward your points and the concerns that you have expressed to Commissioner Figel. I would, however, like to express some general points and reactions.

Mrs Pack spoke about the harmonising of rules at European level and how this impacts on regional diversity. I would like to point out that having harmonisation at European level is necessary in order to ensure a level playing field across the European Union so that its citizens can fully benefit from the single internal market. This would not, however, mean that such harmonisation leads to less cultural diversity. In fact this was also the outcome of the European Year on Intercultural Dialogue.

Furthermore, the Commission, through its regional policy, promotes cultural diversity and invests in culture, both directly and indirectly, indeed by involving regional authorities and stakeholders. In a number of policy areas the Commission seeks to promote diversity and take account of regional specificities across the European Union.

Concerning the point raised on the issue of culture and the economic crisis and the overall contribution to growth and jobs, let me just recall that the Commission is undertaking a study this year to analyse how the cultural dimension has been integrated into the regional development strategies for 2007-2013. The results of the study will highlight the value of investing in the cultural sector, including cultural and creative industries, and will underline the links between such investment, the specific regional development objectives and the Lisbon Agenda.

On the Green Paper I would like to inform you, as I said at the outset, that this policy document is due in the first quarter of 2010 and its aim is to launch an open consultation process. It has three main policy objectives. Firstly, to advance a more strategic approach. Secondly, to unlock the potential of European cultural and creative industries, and, thirdly, to contribute to the development of strategies aimed at encouraging better linkages between cultural and creative industries and other sectors of the economy, and thus to connect culture and creativity with innovation and the wider economy. The regional dimension will of course be fully taken into account in this context.

I would like to conclude by referring to the statement made by Mr Posselt that culture is often destroyed by nationalisms. Certainly not by the European Union: it firmly believes in and upholds unity and diversity.

**President.** – I have received three motions for a resolution in accordance with Rule 108(5) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

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

**9. Documents received: see Minutes**

**10. Decisions concerning certain documents: see Minutes**

**11. Written declarations included in the register (Rule 116): see Minutes**

**12. Forwarding of texts adopted during the sitting: see Minutes**

**13. Dates of forthcoming sittings: see Minutes**

**14. Adjournment of the session**

*(The President declared the sitting closed at 3.50 p.m.)*