

WEDNESDAY, 16 SEPTEMBER 2009

IN THE CHAIR: MR BUZEK

President

1. Opening of the sitting

(The sitting was opened at 09.05)

2. Appointments to interparliamentary delegations (deadline for tabling amendments): see Minutes

3. Forest fires in the summer of 2009 (motions for resolutions tabled): see Minutes

4. G20 Summit in Pittsburgh (24-25 September) (debate)

President. – The next item is the comments of the Council and the Commission on the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh, to be held on 24-25 September 2009.

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Mr President, it is a great pleasure for me to be here today representing the Swedish Presidency. The Presidency and the Commission will jointly represent the EU at the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh on 24-25 September. We will hold an informal European Council in Brussels tomorrow to prepare the EU's common position. As you will all be aware, the global financial crisis has necessitated unprecedented global measures:

Firstly, rapid and forceful financial and monetary policy measures to support the financial sector and the real economy. Secondly, coordination of global efforts and development of the role of the G20 as a forum for such coordination, including for measures concerning regulation of the financial markets. The financial and monetary policy measures that were able to be taken quickly were entirely necessary to get us through the worst of the crisis.

The overall support to the EU economy this year and next year is estimated at 5% of GDP. The central banks have responded to the crisis by keeping interest rates close to zero. Today we are cautiously optimistic that the worst is behind us as far as the acute problems of the financial sector are concerned, but the economic situation remains unstable and there is a considerable risk of further setbacks. We are very aware that rising unemployment will be a very dominant issue in the time ahead. The situation remains uncertain, but it could have been much worse.

Coordination and cooperation at international level will be incredibly important if we are to ensure a broad recovery and to set the tone for a return to long-term, sustainable growth based on a firm foundation. The G20 has played, and will continue to play, a central part in this. The G20 will also work with the international financial institutions of the IMF and the World Bank to guarantee that they have sufficient resources and a well-functioning internal organisation so as to be able to support economic growth and ensure financial stability throughout the world.

The G20 process has had the following significant results:

Firstly, that we have a common analysis of the problems that have affected our economies. That may not sound like great progress, but a shared view of the financial sector and the real economic problems that lie behind the crisis is essential for effective countermeasures.

Secondly, we have made real progress with a number of specific measures that we agreed on in London at the spring summit. These include a comprehensive stimulus package for our economies and a strengthening of cooperation on the supervision and regulation of the financial markets. Furthermore, we have ensured that the International Monetary Fund has sufficient resources to meet demand for borrowing. We have also undertaken to improve the ability of the international financial institutions to give warning in good time should similar problems arise in the future.

Much remains to be done, but we have made clear progress that has been driven forward by coordinated international commitments. I feel that we in the EU, along with the other members of the G20, have made great progress on a number of central issues that are crucial if we are to provide a strategic response to the economic and financial crisis. Our coordinated EU strategy means that Europe is leading the debate, rather than following it. It is our solutions that are being noted when global solutions are drawn up. That is why the Presidency is inviting the Heads of State or Government to a dinner tomorrow evening. The aim is to build further on the successful work of the informal Ecofin lunch and the meeting of G20 finance ministers in London, so that we will be well prepared on arrival in Pittsburgh.

I expect the meeting tomorrow and the summit in Pittsburgh to continue to result in progress on the main issues that I have mentioned, but also in a few other areas besides. One issue that has been raised in strong terms by a number of European finance ministers is the question of the part played by bonus systems in financial stability. EU finance ministers are unanimous that we should lead demands for effective global standards to ensure that such bonus systems do not have destabilising effects and that the bonus payments are reasonable in relation to performance. This is an important part of the overall initiative to ensure greater transparency and better supervision of the financial sector and it is crucial if we are to be able to secure future stability.

The Financial Stability Board has been asked to report to the Pittsburgh Summit regarding its work on developing principles for bonus systems. I hope that this report will contain specific strategies that can be implemented in practice and which guarantee the introduction by financial institutions of sensible, responsible remuneration and bonus structures. Moreover, I hope that we can agree to continue to provide the necessary stimulus to our economies as long as it is needed, but it is also important that we undertake to remove the measures when they are no longer required so that we can return to balanced public finances when the recovery comes.

We have only just begun to reflect on these exit strategies. Their form and coordination, and how they are implemented, will be a highly important component if we are to achieve a balanced, long-term economic recovery. Employment is another major challenge. We need to carefully design the measures required, while at the same time maintaining a good balance between financial and structural policy. I am sure that we will also repeat the need to maintain a stand against protectionism and to ensure fair play on the global markets. This will require significant coordination of financial regulation and supervision, but also as regards the removal of extraordinary measures taken to support the financial sector. Extensive work will continue to be required both at national and EU level.

Discussions concerning reform of financial institutions will continue tomorrow and in Pittsburgh, but also during the rest of the year. We want them to be strong, with sufficient resources, the right mandate, with political guidance and management structures that correctly reflect their composition. These matters are complex and interlinked, but we must get to grips with them as a matter of urgency so that the financial institutions can do this work which is becoming increasingly important.

Finally, I would like to say that naturally there is a great need for political decisiveness if we are to make progress in the discussions ahead of the climate summit in Copenhagen. This is a very high priority for the Swedish Presidency. We want to ensure that the right incentives are in place for everyone to take action to limit global warming and to adapt economic strategies so as to favour climate-friendly development.

Our goal is for the Pittsburgh Summit to make progress on guidelines for financing global climate measures. I cannot promise that we will achieve everything we want to, because these issues are highly complex, but we promise that the Presidency will assert and defend the EU's views in a responsible manner. In this spirit I look forward to fruitful discussions with the Heads of State or Government tomorrow evening and the real results that the world is expecting from Pittsburgh next week.

(Applause)

Joaquín Almunia, *Member of the Commission*. – (ES) Mr President, Mrs Malmström, ladies and gentlemen, this is my first time before the House in this new legislative term. I want to start by congratulating all of you on your election, or re-election in many cases. I am sure that we all share a sense of responsibility with regard to tackling one of the greatest political challenges of our generation: how to overcome this deep economic and financial crisis. We have to restore confidence and stability for our citizens, while increasing their opportunities and ensuring the highest possible level of social cohesion for everyone.

The issue that will be on the table at the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh next week is at the heart of this challenge and this concern. I am convinced that this issue will keep coming up throughout the next period and throughout this Parliament's legislative term, regardless of whether these issues are discussed at G20 summits or European Councils, in your own debates or in the proposed initiatives that the next Commission will bring before this House.

The G20 Summit in Pittsburgh is the third to be convened at the level of Heads of State or Government since the collapse, one year and one day ago, of Lehman Brothers and the start of a crisis of proportions not seen for many decades.

In light of the first two top-level G20 meetings in Washington last November and in London in April of this year, it is clear that the G20 is playing a decisive role in coordinating the global response to this crisis.

The G20's contribution to the development of a coordinated response has been vital in avoiding an even deeper recession than the one we are currently experiencing. It has also been vital in establishing the foundations of an economic and financial system that will, in the future, prevent a repeat of the imbalances and excesses that have led us to the current situation.

The European Union has played an active and decisive role in encouraging the G20 in this respect. As recalled yesterday in this House by President Barroso, the first summit in Washington was a European initiative by the French Presidency and President Sarkozy, together with the Commission. The European Union also made a decisive contribution in terms of setting ambitious objectives for the two previous summits and actively participating in the preparatory work for these summits, in order to achieve not only declarations of principle, but also concrete results and commitments.

All Europeans, as well as the European institutions, should feel satisfied about all this. We can also be reasonably satisfied about the level of coordination that has existed between the various European representatives on the G20: the European countries that are G20 members and participate in the G20 meetings as such, plus the Presidency of the European Union together with the Commission, the latter representing the voice of all Europeans and the common position of all Member States.

The Washington Summit last November allowed the world's main economies – the G20 countries account for around 90% of world GDP – to agree on the implementation of stimulus plans to support economic activity at that time, last autumn, when credit, international trade and investment came to a sudden halt as a result of the tremendous financial shock, which first occurred in August 2007 and which then gained incredible momentum in September 2008.

A few days after the Washington Summit last year, the Commission proposed the European Economic Recovery Plan, which received the political support of the European Council in December. This plan has formed the basis of the European response in terms of fiscal policies and policies to stimulate demand through instruments which are in the hands of national governments and parliaments, or which are in the hands of the European institutions themselves.

Based on the most recent information available, these discretionary fiscal stimuli, together with the action of the automatic stabilisers, which are very important in the European countries due to the weight of our taxes and social welfare system, are predicted to add, as a contribution to total demand, the equivalent of 5.5% of EU GDP between 2009 and 2010.

The new US administration has also adopted a very significant stimulus plan. Given that its automatic stabilisers are not as extensive as ours in Europe, the total sum of direct stimuli plus automatic stabilisers means that similar support is being given on both sides of the Atlantic. In addition, countries such as Japan, China, Canada and other G20 members have also adopted equivalent fiscal stimuli.

The London Summit at the beginning of April insisted, in this respect, on the need to quickly put these plans into practice. It called for close monitoring of these plans and said that, if necessary, they should be supplemented by additional measures. We can now confirm that these stimulus plans, together with the very significant monetary stimuli adopted by the central banks, plus the mobilisation of public resources in support of financial institutions, particularly the banks, have managed to halt the economy's freefall. They are also now allowing us to see, this autumn, the first signs of stabilisation, as is apparent from the economic forecasts that I had the opportunity to present two days ago in Brussels. For the first time in two years, these forecasts have not revised the previous forecast downwards.

However, we are not yet able to say that economic activity could sustain itself if these stimuli were removed. It is also true that, even with the stimuli that are being applied, there are risks of a relapse given the extremely worrying rise in unemployment and the as-yet unresolved weaknesses in the financial system.

As a result, one of the messages that the G20 Finance Ministers agreed on with regard to the Pittsburgh Summit, when they met in London at the beginning of this month, was the need, for the time being, to maintain the temporary support measures, without ignoring the need to start developing a coordinated exit strategy. I will come back to this briefly at the end of my speech.

The first two G20 summits in Washington and London were also decisive in terms of setting a global agenda for reforms in the systems of financial regulation and supervision. It may be said that we are witnessing a radical change in tone after nearly three decades dominated by the model of deregulation and theories on the alleged infallibility of the financial markets.

In Washington, the G20 countries established the foundations, laid down the principles and defined the agenda for subjecting the financial markets to stricter and more effective regulation and supervision, leaving no areas, products or financial players outside the control of the regulatory and supervisory authorities. These authorities must cooperate and coordinate their actions with one another much more closely in order to rectify the evident ineffectiveness of national supervisory systems vis-à-vis globalised markets and financial institutions operating across borders in these markets.

Extensive work was carried out at the London Summit in April to bring about concrete and significant progress in the implementation of this reform agenda. From prudential accounting rules, applicable to financial institutions, to the firm requirement for transparency in non-cooperative jurisdictions, namely tax havens, and including the regulation of hedge funds or other financial institutions, the organisation of transparent derivative markets, and the adoption of rules on the pay of senior executives of financial institutions and traders operating on the markets, the London G20 Summit took definitive steps towards fulfilling the promise of reform.

As a result, the European Union has performed a very important task not only in promoting these agreements at G20 level, but also in applying these G20 agreements. This has involved intensive regulatory work over the last year. Some of these proposals have already been adopted here in this Parliament and by the Council. Others are currently being discussed in this House and by the Council and, by the end of the year, the Commission plans to adopt another series of proposals, starting next week, one day before the Pittsburgh Summit, with the proposal to create the European Systemic Risk Board and three European micro-supervisory authorities, based on the recommendations of the de Larosière report, which both the Council and the Commission have taken on board.

The US administration has also revealed an ambitious financial reform plan, which President Obama confirmed this week as a priority of his term of office. He has recognised the responsibility of the United States as being the place where this crisis was born and developed.

The objectives set for the Pittsburgh Summit include checking on the positive progress of these reforms and ensuring the necessary regulatory convergence on both sides of the Atlantic. Any regulatory divergence will or could be used in the future by investors for arbitration strategies, which could once again create major distortions in the markets. However, in addition to ensuring compliance with what has already been agreed and encouraging the implementation of the measures adopted, the Pittsburgh Summit must send out a clear political message. The absolute desire of governments, political leaders, institutions, our own countries and the European Union to establish a solid regulatory framework with a firm commitment and dissuasive message must now be made clear. This message must say that 'no one should think that, having got over the worst part of this crisis, those former practices which led to the crisis can be allowed to redevelop, as if nothing had happened'.

The public expect guarantees that the financial institutions and their executives will be required to comply with rules, particularly on pay, which will prevent them from once again endangering the financial system and the real economy as a whole. It must be said that the European Union is totally united on this point.

Another issue that has been high up on the agenda of the various G20 summits is the reform of the international financial institutions, as already mentioned by Mrs Malmström.

The only point I wish to add is that an extremely important step forward was taken in London in terms of the financial capacity of these institutions, particularly the International Monetary Fund (IMF). Its lending capacity has been increased by no less than USD 500 billion, as a result of which the total funds now available

to the IMF for its operations are USD 750 billion. In addition to that, it was agreed to distribute between all the IMF's member countries, in proportion to their quota, special drawing rights amounting to USD 250 billion. On top of that, it was also agreed to increase the IMF's financial capacity in order to boost its concessionary loans to the poorest countries. All that is already in hand. A great deal more progress has been made in the space of six months than over many years before that.

As a result, the European Union has, of course, agreed to duly contribute to this increase in the IMF's funds. The Member States of the European Union have agreed to add EUR 125 billion to their usual contributions, in proportion to the financing of the new objectives.

The G20 leaders will also discuss changing the representation of the various countries on the governing bodies of the international financial institutions. Emerging and developing countries quite rightly aspire to a more appropriate representation. This is an aspiration that the European Union supports, but it must be translated into concrete agreements. That is why the European Commission – although this is not the official position of the Presidency of the European Union – continues to say that, in line with what this Parliament has thought to date, the best representation for the European Union on these bodies is a single representation.

The Pittsburgh Summit agenda will also cover other issues: financing of climate change, in preparation for the Copenhagen Summit; the need to resume international trade negotiations and not to give in to protectionist tendencies; and increased support for the weakest and most vulnerable countries in tackling this crisis. As you know, the Commission adopted a communication on the financing of climate change last week.

Finally, please allow me to conclude by mentioning the wish expressed at the last meeting of the G20 Finance Ministers, and which will be discussed at the Pittsburgh Summit: the need to establish the foundations of a future model of more balanced and sustainable growth. This will firstly involve developing exit strategies, not to be applied immediately, but to be applied when appropriate and in a coordinated manner. This is because the development of such strategies is not only key to a sustainable exit from this crisis, but also to offering, at the same time, a prospect of medium-to-long-term sustainability following the profound effect that the crisis has had on public finances, on levels of employment and on the capacity for growth of our economies.

Corien Wortmann-Kool, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (NL) Mr President, Minister Malmström, Commissioner Almunia, we are in a global crisis. We have a financial sector that operates on a global basis and we therefore need, as far as possible, to agree binding rules for the sector on a global basis. That is why the G20 in Pittsburgh is so important, though the European Union itself should, of course, take vigorous action. Efforts must be focussed on restoring the balance between freedom and responsibility, the values that form the basis of our social market economy, the core of our electoral platform in the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats).

Mr President, the G20 Summit is an important summit where it is more than vision that will be needed – I am happy that you have said so too. It is a summit where decisions have to be taken. This relates to structural reformation in risk management, more transparency and better rules for financial supervision. Commissioner Almunia, you said that there are proposals in place for hedge funds. What do you hope to achieve in this regard at the G20 Summit? A rapid reform of the IMF and the World Bank is also very much needed, and – I am pleased that you have both said this too – there must be timely work on a coordinated exit strategy, or new problems will arise once again.

Mr President, it is of the greatest importance that the flawed bonus culture be tackled with binding rules, as bonuses that reward short-term profits pose a great risk to the stability of financial institutions. That is not all, however, as there is rightly a great deal of public indignation and, for that reason, too, it is very important that we show ourselves to be decisive in this regard.

Mr President, the summit will only be a success if binding agreements are reached. I have talked about financial regulation, but climate change, preparing for a successful Copenhagen Summit and fighting protectionism in the interests of jobs are, of course, very important issues. You, the European Union, all of us together, must play a pioneering role in this regard, and it is therefore important that you get the Member States to pull together.

Udo Bullmann, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (DE) Mr President, President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, first and foremost, there can be no 'as you were' in the current economic situation. That will only allow us to make a slow recovery and we shall see a further dramatic increase in

unemployment figures, including here in Europe. You must therefore be bold. That is the most important message this Parliament can give the Pittsburgh delegates. Be bold!

Mr Almunia, I have listened to a refreshing speech from you, on which I should like to congratulate you. Now you need to start putting it into practice. It is good to start with the bonus systems, but it is not enough. We need a gear shift wherever short-term speculators are at an advantage on the international financial market, because the rules are wrong, over those who wish to make long-term investments in jobs, in products of excellence and in the long-term success of their company. It is right to say that no risky players, no risky financial centre can remain without reasonable regulation, which is why we need regulation of the offshore centres from which dubious products are flooding the entire world. That is the most important task that we must now set ourselves.

Nor should you be frightened of discussing fiscal policy – it is not prohibited. A global transaction tax which benefits long-term investors would take us forward in this discussion as a whole. We need strong, improved coordination of our international, as well as our European, economic policy. It is right to think about an exit strategy, but it is even more important at the moment that we work out how we can give more solid support to the economy and improve the coordination of our economic policy.

Sylvie Goulard, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Minister, Commissioner, we clearly appreciate all the efforts that you have mentioned and which have, in fact, already gone quite far, but we want more. We want a number of the G20's elements and commitments to be formalised. In particular, I would like to draw your attention to the gap between the rather encouraging figures in the financial sector and the terrible unemployment figures in the European Union. If we have long-term unemployment, we will have, firstly, a human tragedy, and also a burden on public finance and no hope of a recovery through consumption.

We, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, very much fear a Japanese scenario and a sort of sluggish growth for several years. I think that your country, Mrs Malmström, Sweden, has unfortunately also had experience of this. Please help us to take advantage of this experience.

For me, there are three essential tasks. Firstly, we have to carry on cooperating internationally, and carry on fighting against protectionism and strengthening global institutions such as the IMF. We cannot get out of this on our own. Europe must hammer home this message tirelessly.

Secondly, we must successfully put in place effective supervision and a much more demanding form of bank stabilisation. In this respect, we should be wary of the G20's publicity stunts. There are executive powers, but there is work to be done at a legislative level and, for us, Mr Almunia, the Commission's proposals on supervision are a step in the right direction, but they are not enough. Ultimately, we want more European entities. Then I think we will have to consider joint strategies for exiting the crisis while preserving the euro, making sure that the deficits do not place a strain on common monetary discipline.

To conclude, I would like to thank Commissioner Almunia for saying that he was in favour of the European Union as a body adopting positions in international institutions, thus defending the Community method. We are counting on you to make sure that it is not only the large States that make their voices heard, but that the whole of the European Union and the whole of the internal market are defended.

Sven Giegold, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Mr President, I thank the Commissioner for his speech. I have several concerns. The first is that the Committee on Development in this House drafted a motion for a resolution. I quote from that. It 'notes with great concern that the crisis already bears major human costs, and has devastating effects for the vulnerable in the poorest countries with an expected increase of 23 million more unemployed, up to 90 million more extreme poor in 2009 alone, life-saving drug treatment for up to 1.7 million people under threat, and 200 000-400 000 more infant deaths per year on average between 2009 and 2015'.

Unfortunately, this motion was not passed, although it was written together by all groups of this House. We strongly deplore and we think it is a shame that this House was not able to draft a resolution on the G20 on development issues.

The big question is how to finance the consequences of the crisis, and there the German Minister of Finance, together with the Chancellor, suggested that the G20 discuss the possibility of a global transaction tax. I ask the Commission, and I also ask the Presidency of the Council. Do you support this proposal?

The second question is about tax havens. The G20 wants to tackle it on the basis of case-by-case information exchange. We know that this will not work. The Development Committee suggested a country-by-country reporting regime so that transnational corporations have to report back on a country-by-country basis. We suggest introducing automatic information exchange so that information really flows between the different countries.

A global financial system needs transparency. We also want to know your position on these concrete proposals to get out of the crisis and finance the consequences.

Kay Swinburne, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, thank you for the speeches we have had this morning. I was particularly pleased to hear Mrs Malmström's comments about the G20 Pittsburgh representatives needing to agree to significant coordination in the continued support of stimulus measures, in the unwinding of these support measures when appropriate, and a determined coordinated effort on future regulation.

However, the backdrop to this summit is nations spending trillions of dollars on bailouts and stimulus packages and in two of the largest world economies we are seeing some protectionist measures, particularly with regard to tyres and poultry, as well as two of the most complicated regulatory structures in the world, namely the EU and the US, looking to completely overhaul their financial systems. Therefore, I hope that the important issues of how to coordinate financial services, particularly now that some countries are showing early signs of coming out of this period of negative growth, will be the main topic of discussion and not the distraction of controlling bankers' bonuses.

This summit should focus on how we achieve a common regulatory framework in a common timescale so that we do not create an opportunity for competitive advantage by individual nations or regulatory arbitrage opportunity for speculative trading. There will be no first-mover advantage in financial regulation. A global, coordinated approach is the only one which would benefit the businesses looking to raise funds in Wales, the EU and beyond.

If my Welsh businesses cannot access funds from the US, if the banks they rely on will require so much capital that the taxpayers of the EU need to take even more risk, we will not be thanked for moving first on overly burdensome regulation. My plea is that a global, coordinated approach is adopted at all times and maintained to ensure the future access to capital for all our businesses in Wales, the EU and beyond.

Miguel Portas, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (PT) In Portugal, bank profits grew by 18% in the first quarter of this year. The only thing that rose more than bank profits was unemployment. Portugal is not an exception, but an example of an unfulfilled promise made by the G20, which was that we would resolve this crisis with a new economic and world order.

That is not true, and 50 million more people out of work and 200 million more people in poverty prove that it is not so. That is why I call on the Commission and Mrs Malmström to deal with bonuses and hedge funds, certainly, but most of all to deal with what we have not mentioned here: the end of off-shore banking, tax havens, the tax on financial transactions and the end of banking secrecy. They should do anything that can be seen if they want people to believe in them.

Mario Borghezio, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, how can the people have faith in financial market regulation when it is entrusted to the high priests of the global financial temples such as Mario Draghi?

In the United States, a popular uprising, a new conservative revolution of the people against the financial oligarchies, is taking place. We the people do not believe in making taxpayers fund policies to rescue the financial powers, whether in the United States or in Europe. Rather, European governments should give adequate resources to the real economy; they should worry about production and jobs. We can see the results of the G20: they include nothing about ceilings and bonuses, nothing about the elimination of tax havens!

The measures are instead aimed solely at rescuing those responsible for the financial bubble: EUR 23 trillion have already been spent, EUR 5 trillion of which were spent by the European Central Bank. The money in our economy has been gifted to those responsible for the financial bubble. In comparison with the EUR 850 billion given to the banks, only EUR 50 billion has been earmarked for welfare support provisions and production incentives. The reality is that high finance gives the orders and politics obeys them.

In the United States as in Europe, politicians appear merely as servants of the global banking power. Wake up, Europe! Follow the example of the US population, which is starting a second major revolution: the conservative people's revolution!

Hans-Peter Martin (NI). – (DE) Mr President, we need democratic revolution. That is clear from this process, which has luckily gained momentum with what is presently the G20, because more may join; one could even imagine a G3. How would it be if the Council helped in establishing a democratic control mechanism, especially given its tradition of consensus? It need not be a world parliament straight away, but what is being promoted needs democratic scrutiny by elected parliamentarians within a far bigger forum than the European Parliament.

I should also like to specifically point out that the question of systemic risks must be approached at its core. With reference in particular to the tiresome situation we keep finding ourselves in, starting back in 1998, with LTCM, Hypo Real Estate and, of course, Lehman, and the knock-on effects, rules should emerge from this that make it impossible to end up with the basic problem of 'too big to fail'. This can, of course, be done through cartel legislation, but it is certainly also a fundamental global question.

As far as a global transaction tax is concerned, the Tobin tax group was set up here in the European Parliament back in 1999. It is good that there has been progress here. As far as the supervisory package is concerned, we urgently need to act on a European scale and not to allow ourselves to be held back by those who want the wrong Europe.

Othmar Karas (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the statistics are improving. However, the multiple causes of the crisis – and it is not just a question of loopholes in regulations – are far from being removed. For that, political will, decisiveness and courage must not fail us; on the contrary.

Today we are talking about the G20. It is a good process. We need new or different structures, priorities and bases for valuation in order to build up a global economy and a financial, social and judicial order in the world.

There are three conditions for this: firstly, we need to develop a democratic, parliamentary legitimisation process; secondly, we need more EU in Europe and more Europe in the world, which also means that the values of our Charter of Fundamental Rights are our export articles, that our model of a responsible eco-social market economy is the basis for our global order and, thirdly, European regulation is needed in areas in which no agreement is in sight within the framework of the G20.

We say yes to integrated European rather than simply coordinated financial market supervision on the basis of the model of the European Central Bank. The de Larosière report is too little. We say yes to the debate on bonus payments, but changing the payment methods is not the right way to go about it. We must change the basis for assessment and, wherever there is a bonus, it must also have a penalty component.

As far as I am concerned, the debate on pro-cyclicity is too brief at the moment. We need to remove the procyclic effects of the crisis and the current regulations for 2009 and 2010. The political will must not fail us. That is why, following the speeches of the President-in-Office of the Council and the Commissioner, we are going to Pittsburgh with optimism.

Pervenche Berès (S&D). – (FR) Mr President, President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, one year on from the collapse of Lehman Brothers, the position that the European Union adopts at the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh is absolutely critical if we want to prevent a repeat of past events and want the dynamic of change to remain at the top of the agenda. I have four observations on this matter.

Firstly, at the G20 Summit in London last April, the Heads of State or Government made a commitment to increase the IMF's funds. Very well. We have seen that there was significant support to fulfil this objective. I fear that behind this there has been less determination to play a part in the much-needed reform of the governance of the IMF.

My second observation is that we must not fall for gimmicks. I would not like the omnipresent debate on the bonuses and salaries of both CEOs and traders – which is absolutely critical if we want to develop the system into one which focuses less on the short term and more on long-term investment – to overshadow what is an equally important campaign concerning the eradication of tax havens, which was the highlight of the London Summit.

My third observation – and this picks up on what Mr Bullmann said earlier – is that this is an historic moment for us to raise the question again of the banks' contribution to financing the aftershocks of the crisis. This will enable us to reopen the debate on the taxation of transactions, which itself must also allow funds to be made available for long-term investment. Once again, given the way the banks have been supported and assisted to cope with this crisis, the only right, proper and effective course of action is for them to contribute today to the financing of the economy.

My final observation is that, when we look at the employment picture, I think that from the start, our G20 meetings have fallen short when it comes to tackling the macroeconomic question, the question of a global pact for employment, and the question of a return to a strategy which, tomorrow, will enable us to correct the global imbalances that caused this crisis.

Wolf Klinz (ALDE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I welcome the fast and decisive reaction of the G20 to the global financial crisis. A great deal has happened. The fire appears to have been put out, but the foundations of our financial system are still shaky. The citizens are unsettled. Profits are being ploughed back for the benefit of shareholders and losses are being socialised, that is how the citizens see it. In the meantime, it is back to business as usual for more and more market players, who are making big moves, rather than focusing on what they should really be doing as service providers, namely supporting the real economy. Financial ethics and responsibility appear, as ever, to be foreign words to many of them.

I am expecting specific – and fast – measures from the G20. I hope that the EU Member States will all pull together. In addition to new supervisory structures, we also need bigger equity bases, which increase in line with the risk, long-term – not short-term – incentive systems, a coordinated exit strategy from State aid, contained protectionism, congruent regulation, rather than regulation arbitrage, an end to pro-cyclicality and a solution to the 'too big to fail' problem and, above all, we must abide by the tried and tested social market economy.

Cornelis de Jong (GUE/NGL). – Mr President, so far the G20 has concentrated on measures for the financial sector. However, everyone seems to forget that the real economy also suffers from greed and an obsession with short-term profits.

I have deep respect for small enterprises which, against all odds, try to survive. They deserve to get the loans to which they are entitled. However, I have no respect at all for the management of some of the bigger companies which have no affinity with the products or services they deliver and can only think in terms of expansion and speculation.

I therefore call upon the G20 to discuss ways of making the economy more democratic and how to make sure that, within the company, workers and others who represent the general interest have enough power to control the management.

Within the EU, we have to look again at the statute for a European company. We should make sure that it becomes impossible for shareholders and management to engage in speculative growth strategies to the detriment of the long-term interest of the companies themselves and of those who work for these companies.

Krisztina Morvai (NI). – Mr President, the majority of Europeans are not corporate leaders and not bankers but family farmers, small entrepreneurs, state employees.

The majority of Europe is completely fed up with the present system, in which global multinational corporations and banks rule the world. They need, and they want, a fundamentally new paradigm, in which there must be a shift from globalisation to localisation, from completely profit- and money-centred decision making to human-centred and community-centred decision making, from WTO-ruled free trade agriculture to food sovereignty, local production and local farming.

Please do not fail to represent at the G20 Summit the views of the majority of Europe.

Werner Langen (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, who should regulate whom and how? That will be one of the controversial questions at the G20 Summit. Even if there is unanimity on the fact that there can be no return to unbridled developments on the financial market, the methods and extent of regulation are still the subject of fierce argument. It will still be possible to reach agreement on equity rules, on rating agencies, possibly even on questions in connection with derivatives and their licensing, but there will be argument on the question of unfair competition, taxes and control. There will be arguments over bonuses and there will be arguments over Europe's demand for a Tobin tax.

In other words, as Europeans we have a responsibility to do our own homework, regardless of the outcome of the G20 Summit and the Commission is on the right path by not relying solely on it. The motto must be: no financial market players, no financial products and no financial centre with no supervision in future.

However, global economic recovery is also on the agenda. We cannot carry on here as in the past and maintain the imbalances in the world for the benefit of the US and for the benefit of the large industrial countries. We must devote ourselves to overcoming poverty and hunger in the world and the G20 Summit must give new momentum to this.

I should like to add one point that no one, with the exception of Commissioner Almunia, has addressed so far. It will be necessary to abide by the Stability and Growth Pact in Europe, not to bury it. It is only because we had this pact, because we revised and maintained it, that it was at all possible for Europe to remain capable of action. This should remain a European objective: a fast exit strategy out of excessive debt into a stable economy, to the Stability and Growth Pact as we know it.

Edward Scicluna (S&D). – (MT) Mr President, currently, one of the most popular topics, at least on the news tied to the G20 Summit, is that of bonuses. It is evidently a much talked about issue, yet we have to understand that the actual problem is rather more complex. What has to be said is that if these bonuses are to put the financial system at risk then, undoubtedly, they must be checked. However, we must keep in mind that there were large deficits in the external trade between countries that led to this crisis, as well as other internal fiscal deficits.

We must also take employment into consideration. We know that the employment lag approximately requires about a year or so to catch up with the impact of previous GDP performance. Therefore, when analysing employment issues, fiscal stimulus packages that are applied must keep being applied until positive results begin to emerge. The Commission should ensure that there are no inconsistencies and should require that a reduction in deficit be registered before doing so.

IN THE CHAIR: MR ROUČEK

Vice-President

Kyriacos Triantaphyllides (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, the G20 Summit, the main topic at which was bonus management, does not by any stretch of the imagination get to the root of the problem and, unfortunately, is not a step towards improving the present system.

The series of proposals to amend the regulations is confined to an analysis of superficial issues and does not focus on social objectives. The objective should be a total overhaul of the financial system and public and social control, a more democratic summit which would include all states and would address issues such as increased unemployment and the spiralling cost of basic goods and fuel, a summit which would take fundamental decisions to intervene in the market in order to put a stop to continual privatisation and the destruction of the social state.

These are the people's real needs. Citizens today want overall structural change, far from a neo-liberal system which leads to under-development instead of development, far from the rampant speculation which works against the people's interests.

Jean-Paul Gauzès (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, I welcome your determination.

Europe has begun to put in place effective regulation, but Europe must not find itself isolated. Close international cooperation is necessary, and this is exactly what we expect of the G20. It must pursue the reforms, which were initiated at previous meetings, with rigour and vigour. The international framework for regulating the financial sector must be completed, so that it can aid investment, growth and employment. Guiding principles must be affirmed. The crisis is not over. We must not return to the situation *ex ante* and abandon measures needed to avoid, as far as possible, the renewal of crises which are particularly damaging to the real economy, growth and employment.

The strengthening of supervision and regulation is equally necessary. The obligations for supervision should reflect the level of systematic risk that the financial institutions impose on this sector. Speculative activities, which represent a significant risk, should be discouraged by increasing the capital requirements and applying the Basel rules internationally.

As for salaries in the financial sector, we should recommend pay committees, increase transparency of these salaries with stricter disclosure requirements and supervise variable salaries, notably bonuses. The strengthening of global financial institutions is likewise an imperative, as is the reform of governance and representation at the IMF.

Commissioner, these are some of the expectations citizens have of the next G20, where Europe must speak with one voice, with determination and conviction.

Alejandro Cercas (S&D). – (ES) Commissioner Almunia, Mrs Malmström, I would ask you not to forget in Pittsburgh that we are experiencing not only a financial and economic crisis of unprecedented dimensions, but also a huge social crisis with devastating effects on those most in need, on those who only have their job, on small entrepreneurs, and on the most disadvantaged regions and countries. I hope it is made clear in Pittsburgh that the economy is important, but that people are more important and that the economy serves the people.

Furthermore, Commissioner, Minister, please do not forget in Pittsburgh that Europe exists. Please make your voices heard above those of the three tenors. I have here the letter of 3 September from the three European Prime Ministers. There is not one word on Europe. They say that it is important that Europe speaks with one voice, but they keep drowning out Europe's voice.

You must speak louder than them. You must make clear that Europe has a right and an obligation, and that our vision of the social market economy is the solution to this crisis, and to preventing its reoccurrence.

José Manuel García-Margallo y Marfil (PPE). – (ES) Ladies and gentlemen, I agree with many of the points that have been made, but must qualify some others.

I agree that it is too soon to take away the patient's crutches, but that it is time to get him ready to walk without them. We still have to absorb excess liquidity in the markets, correct the imbalance in public finances and re-establish respect for competition rules. In Pittsburgh we must do several things that we cannot do alone: we have to set up early warning mechanisms that work, because those that we had did not work; we have to revise the regulatory framework, because the existing framework has not worked.

I agree that it is important to regulate bonuses and tax havens. These are all necessary, but inadequate, measures. In my opinion, it is more important to re-build the muscle of financial institutions, limit debt and set up reserves in good times so that we can weather the bad times. It is more important to make an effort in terms of supervision.

The Commissioner knows that I supported the de Larosière report, although I felt it was inadequate, because I would support more centralised supervision. However, it is clear that European supervision cannot function without close coordination with the supervisory authorities of the other major economic areas of the world. We also need to do something about trade. It is all well and good helping the emerging countries, but it is more important to lift the barriers that are still preventing trade in goods.

Commissioner, the most important point is that we need to establish the foundations for stable and sustained growth over a generation. For this we need free markets, markets open to innovation, markets open to entrepreneurs, but also markets subject to a certain level of regulation.

I will end with a quotation, which will be familiar to my compatriot Mr Almunia: 'Publish not many edicts; when you do enact pragmatics and decrees, see that they be good ones and, above all, that they are well observed', so said Don Quixote to his friend Sancho.

Peter Skinner (S&D). – Mr President, I thank the Commissioner. I especially agree with him on his Charter for Sustainable Economic Activity. I think this is what we must take to the G20 but I do not agree that we should use all our capital to focus on bankers' bonuses. I think this is a distraction in many ways although it should be dealt with. Neither is a wish list for solving the world's problems frankly likely to win the day.

The financial services industry is on fire. We need first to make sure that we have put out that fire and that it stays out. For this we need a consistent approach. The G20 is a leading forum, but we also need permanent structures in place as well like the Transatlantic Economic Council to deal with issues like IFRS. If systemic risk is to be truly dealt with, we need to stop looking in the rear-view mirror and start focusing on the road ahead.

Kader Arif (S&D). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the crisis that we are going through is profound and long lasting. It is therefore urgent and absolutely essential to put in place the necessary regulations and supervision of the financial sector and the banks, to prevent an even more drastic repeat of today's crisis. The financial system must once again serve the real economy and not continue to destroy it.

From this point of view, the last G20 Summit in London, which has been mentioned, ended in what were, to say the least, partial proposals, but, above all, the words have not been turned into deeds, and the financial drift is there once again.

In view of this situation, and so that the Pittsburgh G20 Summit really is useful, the European Union must defend strong regulatory measures that have real consequences. Beyond the essential measures to supervise finance listed by a number of my fellow Members, I personally would like to raise the issues of trade and development, because in Pittsburgh there will also be talk of relaunching the Doha Round. Relaunch it, yes, but with the condition that the initial and central objective of this Round, that is to say development, is not sidelined again. Our southern partners, quite rightly, will not accept that their concerns continue to remain unanswered.

The issue at stake in this G20 goes beyond that of the financial crisis: it is about laying the foundations of new global governance.

Ramon Jauregui Atondo (S&D). – (ES) Mrs Malmström, Mr Almunia, I will give you three ideas in one minute.

Firstly, we need more Europe. This is because, given the global situation, Europe must be united and strong. If we fail to achieve this, Europe will not count and will not be involved.

Secondly, we need more State. This is because, in addition to developing a new governance for the world, in addition to new regulation and supervision, and also greater international coordination, we need to put an end to tax havens and review transnational taxation. This, in my opinion, is an urgent issue for the future.

Finally, we need a better market. I feel it is vital to reiterate the need for new business ethics and also the need to encourage a new culture of corporate responsibility. I believe this is essential. Companies must become part of society and, as such, must be held liable to these interest groups and to these stakeholders.

Rachida Dati (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, Minister, Mr Almunia, first of all, on 3 September, Germany, the United Kingdom and France reached an agreement, spoke with one voice to express a European consensus on the matter of the supervision of traders' bonuses.

On Thursday, the 27 members of the Council will meet to prepare for the G20. I encourage you to work actively to find a solution, a common response, but one that is especially ambitious as regards the matter of traders' salaries. Indeed, the rules enacted and the decisions taken at the last G20, in April, have not been respected, as the banks, which had also received State aid, swiftly set aside sums to pay traders.

European citizens cannot and would not understand why such breaches have not been punished, when measures were taken at the time of the G20 Summit. When it is a matter of State aid, breaches absolutely must be punished. It is therefore essential that concrete and, above all, joint measures be adopted at Pittsburgh. We cannot be the only virtuous ones.

In short, salaries must be better supervised through rules of transparency, governance and responsibility, and penalties must be applied where these rules are breached.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D). – (SK) In my opinion, what you have presented here is a rather ambitious plan, which you want to present to the G20. I am concerned, however, as to what the conclusions of the G20 will be and what the real effects will be on society, since the results that have filtered through at the level of EU Member States are so far neither tangible nor visible.

Mrs Malmström was saying that the issue is one of proportionate levels of pay for managers, but it must be said that all of the data indicates that it is precisely in those sectors which we supported financially and which we protected from ruin that managers receive disproportionate levels of pay. In addition, nothing has happened with offshore banking - the mechanism has simply not been brought into play.

All of this leads to mounting unemployment and problems for small and medium-sized enterprises and, in my opinion, we should perhaps focus on fewer issues in the future while ensuring that those issues we do focus on are implemented in full.

Pascal Canfin (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, you spoke of the governance of the IMF. I would also like to know if you intend to raise the issue, at the G20, of the conditionality of the money that the IMF lends to states. We have seen that what were previously very liberal conditions have not been changed, and this applies in particular to the loans that were granted to some European States. What is your position on this?

My second question is: what is the position of the Commission and the Council on the Chinese proposal to put in place a slightly different international currency, in an effort to regulate the financial system using an alternative to the dollar?

My third question is: the G20 is also part of the preparations for Copenhagen. The Commission has proposed a total sum of between EUR 2 and 15 billion to help the countries of the South adapt to climate change. What is the Council's position? What sum will you put on the table at the G20 next week?

Vicky Ford (ECR). – Mr President, the G20 came up with many sensible responses: the need to rewrite financial regulation and supervision, and the need to act in a coordinated fashion. Our national politicians are saying one thing, but here in the EU we seem to be doing another. The detail of the regulation that is already being considered by some of my colleagues shows divergence both in the timetable of implementation and in the detail of the regulation.

Our economies are still very fragile. Unemployment is rising, and access to finance is a huge concern, especially for small and medium-sized businesses. Do we want our British or European businesses to be at a competitive disadvantage when they need working capital? Do we want to make it so expensive to borrow from a European bank that our customers, our corporates, just go and borrow from Wall Street and end up handing another coup to Wall Street at the expense of European banks?

(The President cut off the speaker)

Enikő Győri (PPE). – (HU) Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to approach this subject from one of the perversities of the crisis. Hungary's citizens were shocked that, while the country is currently subsisting on aid from the IMF and EU, following seven years of socialist government, Hungarian banks' half-year profits reached two-thirds of their pre-crisis level. The banks are also able to amend unilaterally their agreements, thereby putting in a vulnerable position citizens who have taken out foreign currency loans in the hope of buying their own flat.

I firmly believe that we must take action against such trends. We should subject the banks and other financial market operators to proper supervision. We should prevent the continuation of the damaging bonus culture prevalent before the crisis. We should set in stone rules of professional ethics because we have seen where we end up with excessive deregulation. Let us create a world which gives rewards, not for making a quick, short-term profit and immoderation, but for proper work, and which regards social responsibility as a basic value. We must work together on sensible rules to win over our G20 partners.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (S&D). – (HU) There is a clear message from what has been said so far, namely, that in order to regain the trust of ordinary citizens, we must take action against bonuses and tax havens. I would like to ask Commissioner Almunia and Mrs Malmström about when the European financial supervisory authority proposed by the Hungarian Prime Minister will come into operation. I would also like to point out that it would be an extremely important task for this Parliament, nothing to do with G20, to protect the interests of European consumers and citizens.

They are completely at the mercy of the banks, which do not provide sufficient reliable information. A code of ethics has been drawn up in Hungary. I would suggest a code of ethics in Europe at EU level, governing the behaviour of citizens and banks, because I strongly believe that there are a huge number of innocent victims as ordinary citizens do not understand the risk entailed when obtaining credit. This is an extremely important task for Europe.

Corinne Lepage (ALDE). – (FR) Mr President, Minister, Commissioner, the very ambitious programme you have presented to us is interesting, but do you not think that we ought to tackle the issue of the advantage that is still to be gained, today, by favouring very short-term transactions and very short-term profitability over the medium and long term?

The lack of funding for our businesses, particularly in Europe, is precisely due to the advantage that is still to be gained by very short-term investments. Do you not think we should tackle this issue?

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Mr President, I would like to thank all the Members who have contributed to this debate. I feel there is a very high level of agreement in this House about what is important in the European position and which issues we must concentrate on ahead of the G20. The EU now speaks with a clear, coordinated voice on the international stage and I really would like to thank the Commission and, in particular, Joaquín Almunia, for the work that he has done to help bring about this consensus.

Many Members have raised the issues that both I and the Commissioner have looked at. Yes, we need better supervision and better regulation of the financial markets. We hope that a supervisory system can be put in place as soon as possible. We will base this on the Larosière report and see how quickly we can get it into place. We need more coordinated global solutions and effective and functioning international institutions. We need clear principles for bonus systems. I have great faith in the Financial Stability Board and I am confident that it will come up with specific realisable proposals that we can discuss.

We would also like to take up the matter of climate financing. We will call upon all countries to shoulder their responsibilities, but I am not sure that it is realistic to expect to be able to discuss figures at the summit in Pittsburgh. Naturally, we will work towards this, because it would be a good thing.

We also need global solutions. We cannot separate EU solutions from this system, but instead must ensure that we get as many global solutions in place as possible. Unemployment is perhaps the most noticeable aspect of the economic and financial crisis to the people of Europe. Unemployment is here to stay for some time in most of our countries and that is a very, very serious situation. It calls for European and national solutions. We must have a strong labour market policy, we must make it easier for companies and entrepreneurs to take the risk of employing people and to dare to invest and we must ensure that people are employable by investing in education and research. We will be having a special discussion on unemployment at Ecofin in October.

We also have to discuss exit strategies. Otherwise, there is a risk that the measures that we have taken will have negative effects on unemployment and growth in particular, and will result in deficits and inflation. It is always the most vulnerable in our society who suffer first. When it comes to the poorest countries, we are very, very aware that it is they who are the biggest losers in the international crisis. It is hitting the poorest in the world hard. We have discussed and are continuing to discuss how we can ease the situation of these people. It is important that the Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs) have sufficient resources to be able to provide what are known as soft loans. It is also important that we ensure that the international trading system works properly and that there is no protectionism inherent in it. Consequently, the various discussions concerning global taxes and various kinds of Tobin tax are only meaningful if they can actually be realised globally, and at the moment that is not the case. As a result, they would only be counterproductive and would not help our economies.

Many Members have raised the matter of hedge funds and new financial regulation. These are priority issues for the Swedish Presidency. We will decide these matters alongside you and we look forward to working very closely with the European Parliament to get directives on hedge funds and financial regulation in place as soon as possible. I am aware that it is difficult and complex – that there are many aspects to take into consideration – but we are prepared to work with you as closely as possible to get this in place.

In summary, naturally the G20 Summit cannot solve all the problems that we have discussed. Nonetheless, I have good reason to hope that we can make substantial progress on the issues that we have discussed. There is pressure from the citizens of Europe, but there are also people around the world who expect us to demonstrate our leadership and increase the stability of the financial systems, to do our utmost to avoid this type of crisis in the future and ensure that we come out of this crisis stronger than we went into it. The EU is united, the EU is strong, and I can assure you that the Swedish Presidency will do its utmost to defend and assert the views of Europe at the G20 Summit next week. Thank you very much for a highly interesting debate.

Joaquín Almunia, *Member of the Commission*. – (ES) Mr President, I believe we are all agreed that, in the current situation in which we still have to tackle huge and extensive challenges as a result of the crisis, the success of the G20 Pittsburgh Summit and the belief that, as a result of these meetings, we will start to find and apply solutions to the problems and challenges facing us, are extraordinarily important. We are, in fact, starting to see some significant signs of improvement in certain economic indicators, particularly in the growth of international trade and in the confidence of consumers and investors. As a result, all the items on the summit's agenda should be, must be and I hope will be agreed by the Heads of State or Government and implemented following the meeting next week.

One of the most important points, mentioned by many of you, is the need for clarification, for a clear message as to how the world's major economies intend to keep coordinating their actions. The next step in the coordination of economic policy must be to define an exit strategy and commit to a decision as to when and how this strategy will be applied in a coordinated manner. We must learn – and I believe we have learnt – the lesson from the crisis of the twenty-ninth that the stimulus measures cannot be withdrawn too quickly, when the economy – as some of you have said – still needs crutches. However, we must also not use these stimulus measures for longer than necessary because, in that case, we would be repeating the conditions that led to the bubbles and imbalances which were the cause of this crisis. This is a very important issue, which must be clarified by the Pittsburgh Summit.

We must avoid repeating the errors of the past, not only in terms of macroeconomic policies, but also in terms of financial regulation and supervision. I believe that this commitment has been made very clear at previous summits. We must keep developing this commitment and honour those undertakings already made at both global level and, as in our case, at European level.

In this respect, I agree with those who have said in this morning's debate that not everything should be reduced to the issue of pay. However, I also fully agree with those who say that the issue of pay is extremely important in economic, social, political and ethical terms. I believe that Europe is showing its leadership on this issue – as it has done on other issues on the G20 agenda – both through each of the Heads of State or Government and also through the European institutions themselves, the Presidency of the European Union and the Commission.

We should not forget that, in April of this year, the European Commission presented the Member States with recommendations on pay, which are almost exactly the same as those that the whole world is now proposing. We must continue to pay attention to the problems of the financial system – more capital, restructuring and correction of bank balance sheets – at both the European and global levels.

When you have a fully interconnected financial system, there is no point in us solving our problems within our borders if no one else is solving their problems at the same time. You must remember how, one year ago, on the day before the Lehman Brothers crisis, we still thought that we could avoid the worst problems of the financial crisis created in the United States. At the same time, it is absolutely true, as many of you have said, that, in the end, the political objective is not just to sort out the balance sheet of one bank or capitalise its liabilities. The fundamental problems are employment, the situation of our small and medium-sized enterprises, and the sustainability of our public services and social welfare systems.

However, without a functioning financial system, nothing else can be sustained. That is the challenge that must be tackled by the Pittsburgh Summit, or which the G20 must continue tackling at the Pittsburgh Summit.

Finally, I should like to comment on an issue that was raised in many of your speeches. While I agree with other items on the G20 agenda, which many of you have mentioned, I want to refer to just one: the issue of tax havens and non-cooperative jurisdictions.

It is true that the G20 meeting in London failed to find solutions to all the problems posed by tax havens. It would be very difficult to find all the solutions in one day to a problem that has been around for many years. However, it is also absolutely true that, since the London Summit in April, many more problems have been solved over these six months than were or could have been solved over many years before the London Summit. On this particular point, agreement has been reached on the exchange of information needed to prevent tax avoidance and to prevent economic and financial activities being hidden from the public authorities by utilising the protection of tax havens. It is therefore true that not everything has been solved in these six months. However, in these six months, we have achieved a great deal on an issue which is very important in terms of preventing those financial activities, which are hidden from the regulatory and supervisory authorities, from once again creating distortions in the system. This is also extraordinarily important in terms of the message that we are sending to our citizens about the distribution of responsibility and the efforts needed to tackle this crisis.

Lastly, someone said that the EU's voice must be heard above the voices of the European members of the G20. I can assure you that, under the Swedish Presidency and using the voice of the European Commission, the EU's voice is being heard. It is being listened to very attentively and respectfully because Europe, and not just one or two European countries, but the European Union was the organisation that started this process of global coordination. This clearly shows that more effective results can be achieved when there is true coordination.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place during the first October part-session.

Written statements (Rule 149)

András Gyürk (PPE), in writing. – (HU) It is expected that the approaching G20 Summit will place a predominant emphasis on the Copenhagen climate talks. There are still many undecided questions standing in the way of a post-Kyoto agreement. Allow me to express a few thoughts I have on this subject. Number one. Instead of vague long-term promises, we need binding medium-term undertakings. These undertakings must be realistic, fair and accountable. When establishing these undertakings, apart from factors like economic development and natural assets, it is important also to take into consideration the extent to which the Kyoto commitments have been fulfilled so far.

Number two. Support should be given for the notion that the EU should assist the developing countries financially as well in achieving their climate policy objectives. A specific financial pledge is needed to achieve this. However, in order to ensure transparency, the developing countries must also make binding commitments and draw up detailed action plans.

Number three. Flexibility mechanisms must continue to be given an important role. In order to promote investment, agreement must be reached as quickly as possible on the way in which the certificates deriving from the projects carried out so far can be included.

Number four. Market-based instruments must be given more scope in the post-Kyoto system. For example, extending the emissions trading or green certificate schemes may help achieve a reduction in emissions in places incurring the minimum cost. I believe that the economic crisis is not an obstacle to the Copenhagen compromise. A decent medium-term agreement may somehow boost the European economy's competitiveness, while also reducing the burden on the environment.

Edit Herczog (S&D), in writing. – (HU) Five years ago, on their accession to the EU, every new Member State committed to adopting the euro. At present, four of them have already achieved this. The other countries have drifted and are lagging behind in this area due to various economic policy considerations and mistakes, not to mention that the economic and financial crisis has put them in a vulnerable position. The economic downturn has fuelled protectionist ambitions, which threatens to undermine the operation of the single market.

The current economic crisis has highlighted the fact that the euro has assumed a prominent role in the close economic ties established with the euro area members, but the States hoping to adopt the euro have now ended up in an extremely vulnerable position due to the protracted preparations. Many believe, myself included, that in the critical currency situation that has evolved, the key to the solution would be to speed up the introduction of the euro for these Member States. However, economic policy conditions must be stipulated for this, but even with the previously stipulated conditions it would still take years for the euro to be introduced.

In my view, we should not only check that the convergence criteria have remained unchanged, but that the EU is also handling the regulation governing the time which must be spent in the ERM II exchange rate mechanism in a more flexible manner than it does now. I also think that it is very important to examine how the process for joining the euro area could be accelerated, while fulfilling the conditions which can be fulfilled. This could then stabilise the situation in the affected countries, not to mention safeguard the EU's entire internal market. Otherwise, the possible international insolvency of the countries outside the euro area may, in a worst case scenario, bring down the euro area with it as well.

Liisa Jaakonsaari (S&D), in writing. – (FI) Mr President, the market economy is a good slave but a bad master. Recently, though, the roles have become rather confused. It is the custom at international conferences to speak trivia, but now we need action, and fast. The world now has a historic opportunity at the Pittsburgh G20 Summit to agree once again on the rules of the global economy. There has been a lot of talk in the press about bankers' bonuses, but they are only the tip of the iceberg. The global economy is in need of complete renovation and the keyword is transparency. We have to try and do away with the risk economy and move towards the real economy. Only binding international rules can guarantee that there will be no repetition of the casino economy we have witnessed in recent years. In future, the taxpayer should not be made to pay for the damage. There is always the risk with mechanisms like wealth taxes that someone in the global

economy will turn out to be a freeloader. I think, however, that we should at least look into how relevant they might be.

Wojciech Michał Olejniczak (S&D), in writing. – (PL) The G20 Summit in Pittsburgh will be taking place practically on the first anniversary of the collapse of Lehman Brothers bank. This is the background against which world leaders should operate. The repercussions of the crisis have been felt by the inhabitants of almost every part of the globe. The primary aim of the G20 Summit should be to minimise the risk of the crisis caused by the deregulation of the financial markets from repeating itself. The G20 leaders face the task of creating regulation which will prevent further speculative banks from emerging and, to put it bluntly, swindling millions of customers of financial institutions all over the world.

In the last few months, we have been getting increasingly bad news about managers who brought their firms to the brink of collapse consuming public aid. In the last few years, we in Europe have been witnessing an unprecedented income gap not previously seen in the European social model. One of the tasks of the G20 group should be to level out incomes in Europe and on a world scale. The financial sector needs to have rules making bonuses dependent not on short-term profits, but on long-term returns on investments.

The leaders of several European countries as well as of the European Union as a whole will be present at Pittsburgh. That is why Europe should speak with one voice at the summit. I appeal to the representative of the European Union to remember that the interests of the Community include the interests of Member States which will not have national representatives at the summit.

Sirpa Pietikäinen (PPE), in writing. – (FI) On Monday this week, it was a questionable honour to work on what is a sort of anniversary: exactly a year before, the investment bank Lehman Brothers had collapsed. The collapse is regarded as having actually precipitated the current deep global recession and the financial crisis.

At a point in time so close to the anniversary and the approaching Pittsburgh G20 meeting, it is worth stopping to reflect on what has been learned and what can still be learned from the crisis. I see something crucial emerging from the crisis, and that is an opportunity to overhaul thoroughly the international financial architecture. There have already been steps taken in this direction. The G20 meeting last spring served as a good basis for action and guidance for global consensus on the measures required. The United States of America very recently announced a huge financial legislative package. The European Commission is expected to make a proposal for building the European financial architecture and its supervision next week. The key phrase here is 'global approach'.

We have to establish internationally binding rules on the reform of the International Monetary Fund, regulations on solvency, and new rules on the payment of options. The legislation must extend to all financial products, and it needs to be flexible so that it can always react to a changing sector, and one that launches new products.

In the grip of a crisis that is wrecking people's basic security, livelihoods and welfare, it is also constructive to think about new ways of measuring wealth. The final conclusions published by the commission that President Sarkozy recently appointed recommend a switch from measuring prosperity based on GDP to new methods which take account especially of a society's ability in economic terms to safeguard its citizens' well-being and environmental sustainability.

Catherine Stihler (S&D), in writing. – I agree with those who spoke about the need for a global co-ordinated approach. This is essential if we are to change the power structures of the global financial system. However neither the Commission or the Council made comment about the concept of 'living wills' for the banking sector. This week marks the anniversary of the collapse of Lehman brothers. It is estimated that it will take ten years for the investment bank to be wound up. This is in contrast to the Dunfermline Building Society which had a life will enabling its assets to be clearly identified. Transparency is essential if we are to bring consumer confidence back to the banking sector.

5. SWIFT (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council statement on SWIFT.

Beatrice Ask, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SV) Mr President, in the overall fight against terrorism, the key question is how are such activities financed. Preventing the financing of terrorism and tracking clues that such transactions may leave behind can both prevent terrorist crimes and be important in the investigation

of such crimes. In order to do this, we need international cooperation. Here, we should take up the challenge laid down in the UN's 1999 Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and the conventions of the European Council in this area.

Members who participated in the *in camera* meeting of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs on 3 September 2009 heard how the Terrorist Finance Tracking Programme, the TFTP, has helped to improve security for EU citizens as well as others. In recent years, information from the TFTP has contributed to revealing and investigating terrorist crimes and has also succeeded in preventing terrorist attacks on European soil.

The Presidency was given a unanimous negotiation mandate by the Council on 27 July 2009 that is based on a proposal from the Commission. It would have been better if the negotiations with the US could have taken place on the basis of the Treaty of Lisbon. The European Parliament could then have participated fully, but as you are aware, that is not yet possible. Since SWIFT is moving its database from the US to Europe at the end of the year, it is essential that the EU concludes a short-term agreement with the US as soon as possible so that there is no risk of the exchange of information being interrupted. That is in everyone's interest.

I would like to stress that this is an interim agreement for the period until a permanent agreement can be concluded. It must have a term of no more than twelve months and the Commission has advised that it intends to submit a proposal for a permanent agreement as soon as a new Treaty is in place. If the TFTP is to be of use to the EU and the Member States, the US must continue to provide the respective authorised authorities within the EU with information from the TFTP in the same way as previously. This is indeed what will happen.

Moreover, the interim agreement will provide an express opportunity for the EU's crime prevention authorities to request information themselves from TFTP databases in the investigation of terrorist crimes. The Presidency is convinced of the benefit of information from the TFTP. At the same time, we are clear that the interim agreement must contain the necessary mechanisms to guarantee the protection of individuals' privacy, the rule of law and data protection. The draft agreement therefore contains a provision stating that there must be a separate EU authority to receive, process and approve any request from the US to obtain information from SWIFT.

It is equally important that the interim agreement contains detailed provisions on data protection for the information that the US receives from SWIFT via the European authority. Here, the agreement will go further than was previously the case in the unilateral commitments to the EU made by the US in the TFTP representations of 2007, as published in the Official Journal of the European Union.

Allow me to mention certain other provisions that we will demand are included in the agreement. Data must be stored securely, all access to data shall be logged, all searches in the TFTP database shall be restricted and shall only cover persons or information where there are good grounds for suspicion or there is a clear link to a terrorist crime. The storage period for the information reviewed shall be limited and information shall be deleted from the database after five years at most, or earlier if possible.

We can clearly state that the TFTP will be permitted to be used only in investigations of terrorist crimes, including the financing of terrorism. Neither the US nor the EU may use the system to investigate other kinds of crime or for other purposes. Naturally, it is also important that the transfer of information from the EU to the US under the TFTP is proportionate. In addition to the rules concerning the European authority that I mentioned previously, the agreement therefore also contains a provision stating that the system must be appraised by an independent appraisal body. Where the EU is concerned, this body will consist of representatives of the Presidency, the Commission, and two people from the Member States' national data protection authorities. The task of the appraisal body will be to check compliance with the agreement, to check the correct application of the provisions on data protection and to check that the transfer of data is proportionate.

We have a common responsibility to ensure that the crime prevention authorities can counter terrorism effectively. We also have a common responsibility to ensure that this takes place with legal certainty while respecting fundamental rights. The Presidency is convinced that the exchange of information with the US within the framework of the TFTP increases protection from terrorism, and that we can achieve both an interim agreement and eventually a long-term agreement which not only meets our stringent requirements of data protection but which also respects fundamental rights.

Jacques Barrot, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, honourable Members, I would firstly like sincerely to thank Mrs Ask for giving us a summary of all the developments concerning SWIFT and of the negotiations under way with the United States on the continuation of the Terrorist Finance Tracking Programme, the TFTP.

I myself had the opportunity, during the meeting of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs on 22 July, to explain the workings of the TFTP and why we need an interim solution to prevent its interruption. The joint meeting of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs on 3 September took place with the Swedish Presidency, the Director-General of the Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security, Mr Faull, and Mr Bruguière in attendance. I believe that this meeting allowed a number of still open issues to be clarified.

I would like briefly to underline some aspects. The added value of the evaluation, by the US Treasury, of data within the context of the TFTP has been confirmed by Mr Bruguière's report, which the members of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs were able to examine at the joint meeting at the beginning of September. As the Presidency has also reminded us, this analysis of the data has enabled the US authorities to prevent attacks and to facilitate investigations concerning terrorist attacks, both in the United States and in Europe.

Moreover, Judge Bruguière's report confirmed that the US authorities had honoured the commitments they made in 2007 regarding data protection, namely – as Mrs Ask explained very well just now – to limit data preservation and to limit access to the data, so that they are used only where terrorist financing is suspected. In short, Mr Bruguière said that the commitments have been honoured.

It is clear, however, that the judicial framework negotiated in 2007 will no longer be operational since the data will no longer be located in the United States, after the change in the architecture of SWIFT, scheduled for the end of the year. An interim international agreement between the European Union and the United States is needed so that the US authorities can continue to analyse data concerning inter-European transactions taking place in the Netherlands.

The inclusion in this agreement of all the guarantees necessary to safeguard the fundamental rights of our citizens, notably that of the protection of personal data, is absolutely imperative. Of course, we support the Presidency wholeheartedly in its efforts to that end.

Moving on, I would like, above all, to say to the House, Mr President, that, as the Minister has just mentioned, we are talking about an interim agreement, the duration of which cannot exceed a maximum of 12 months. This means that it can be renegotiated immediately once the Treaty of Lisbon has entered into force, with the full involvement of the European Parliament. I can genuinely assure you, here, that the Commission will, of course, continue to keep Parliament constantly informed of the progress of this matter.

I would add that we are pleased to be able to prepare this agreement, which will be a permanent agreement, a long-term agreement, by demanding, of course, full reciprocity from our US partners. The fight against terrorism concerns us, too, and there is no reason why there should not be full and complete reciprocity. That is why I believe the involvement of Parliament in this negotiation of a future long-term agreement will be beneficial.

That is what I believe in all honesty. I would once more like to thank the Swedish Presidency and Mrs Ask for giving us a thorough overview of the situation, which has today given rise to this, once again, interim agreement.

Ernst Strasser, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Mrs Ask, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the US is an important partner in the fight against terrorism. However, on the question of sensitive data in particular, we want European regulations on data security, on civil rights and on the individual rights of our citizens as far as data is concerned, in cooperation with the Americans. That is why we in the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) are calling for a number of basic criteria for concluding this sort of contract.

Firstly, there must be a balance between civil security and civil rights. Secondly, we need legal certainty for the companies concerned and for our citizens. Thirdly, we welcome the co-legislator role of the European Parliament and therefore also welcome the intention of concluding a transitional agreement. We wish you, Mrs Ask, and the Commission, success here in the coming weeks.

Fourthly, we believe that internal European data sets should be handled in accordance with European law, both in the transitional agreement and in the final agreement. Fifthly, we want a similar instrument to the TFTP, to be introduced in addition at EU level, and, sixthly, we are of the opinion that this is the precondition to reciprocity.

These are our thoughts and we trust that they will meet with a broad consensus in plenary. Once the transitional agreement has been concluded, we will need to negotiate and conclude the final agreement quickly.

Claude Moraes, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – Mr President, SWIFT has clearly become a testing ground for getting the balance right between our cooperation with the United States, fighting terrorism and protecting our fundamental rights.

When, in our resolutions of 2006 and 2007, Parliament asked for the mirroring site of SWIFT to be moved from US to EU soil, it was obviously because we thought that the protection offered by the US framework to EU citizens was not in line with EU standards and would have to be improved. So it is a positive development, and our group welcomes the fact that SWIFT's two new servers will now be moved to Europe and that a new legal framework will be set up in order for the US TFTP to continue using and processing data in cooperation with our law enforcement authorities.

My group can also see that the recommendation adopted by the Council tries to address some of Parliament's and the European Data Protection Supervisor's concerns. But there are some key questions left open. If US legal standards continue to apply on EU soil for the processing of EU data, how can we guarantee respect for EU standards regarding procedural rights and the protection of personal data? To which judge can an EU citizen or an EU enterprise go in the case of criminal prosecution?

Of course, one of the most important issues is the timing of the agreement and the interim nature of the agreement, as the Council and Commission have set out. The choice of a third-pillar legal base, coupled with its interim character, leaves Parliament – and, therefore, EU citizens – completely out of the legislative process. The Socialist and Democrat Group is clear that this interim agreement should apply only for 12 months and that a new agreement should be negotiated with Parliament as co-legislator so that we in this House can ensure that delicate balance of protecting the fundamental rights of European citizens in the important and critical fight against terrorism.

Sophia in 't Veld, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (NL) Mr President, after all these warm words, I am going to put a cat among the pigeons! I am not going to say anything about the content, as I think it is self-evident that what has been negotiated is in line with European standards of legal protection and the protection of personal data, but I do now want to get a couple of answers about the process, as this is the umpteenth example of the Council taking decisions affecting citizens behind closed doors. The governments of Europe and the United States want to know everything about our private lives, but we, as citizens, do not get to know what the Council does. For me, that is a little bit back-to-front. The fight against terror has practically become a kind of runaway train, with the Council showing utter contempt for European citizens and parliamentary democracy. Every time, whether the current case relates to Swift, PNR, data retention or whatever else, we are told that 'this is indispensable to the fight against terror'. I dare say, Minister, but when will we actually get some facts for once, when will we do some evaluation? There are also a number of questions that I would really like to see answered in relation to Swift, as they were not answered on 3 September. Why not? It was known back in 2007 that the architecture of Swift needed to be reformed. Why did the Council only come up with this plan at the very last minute in the summer, while Parliament was still to get started? Why have you not consulted the national parliaments on the mandate? Why? Is this not a case of policy laundering, Minister, where it is actually the case that European governments are trying to get access to our data via the US government? Just come out and say it!

Finally, let me deal with transparency. The documents, and specifically the legal advice from the Council's own Legal Service, must be made public, and not just in a small room only accessible to MEPs – since we have already found them next to the photocopier, we already know what they say – but for the citizens of Europe. That is real transparency.

Jan Philipp Albrecht, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, the Presidency and the Commission talk constantly of strengthening civil rights and of a Europe of the citizens. In fact, however, fundamental rights are being eroded and proper public debate on them frustrated. Every effort is being made to exclude parliaments and hold back information. This sort of untransparent approach is unacceptable for a democratic Europe.

It is not enough to just tap at the door; a responsible parliament must stop this undesirable development. The Presidency must interrupt negotiations until it can guarantee the rights of citizens and parliaments. The horse-trading which you are planning for banking data, with no binding protection mechanism, will sell the data protection rights of Europe's citizens down the river and create a preventive general suspicion towards all citizens.

We Greens will have nothing to do with this. Not even temporarily and certainly not if we have servers here in Europe and no longer just in the US, because the data will continue to be sent to the US nonetheless and legal protection will not be guaranteed.

Marie-Christine Vergiat, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is a great honour for me to speak for the first time in this House on behalf of the millions of Europeans who want a different Europe.

The SWIFT affair is symptomatic of the security blunders imposed in the name of terrorism, where utter contempt is shown for the most fundamental rights of our fellow citizens. In this affair, the United States plundered bank data, without legal basis and without even the slightest information from the authorities in Europe. The scandal has made the European authorities sit up and take notice. An agreement has been signed with the US Government. An expert has made an assessment of this agreement. Which expert, though? A French anti-terror judge, Judge Bruguière, whose errors in the area of fundamental rights are well known in France. We are therefore sceptical about the quality of his report.

Apart from the matter of principle, the proposal for a resolution put before us includes numerous warnings that we agree with, but they are insufficient. We propose amendments to reinforce the demands that the European Parliament has a duty to make. We must go further and call for the suspension of the agreement if the principles set out are infringed. We would like to know why it has taken the European authorities so long to inform Parliament and why there has been such a rush to conclude this new agreement.

We are counting on the Swedish Presidency. We will continually monitor respect for human rights. Yes, our fellow citizens have a right to security, but this must be done without us being forced to live in a big brother society where everyone knows everything about us.

Beatrice Ask, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Mr President, thank you for these important points of view. I will try to answer some of the questions in the short time available.

The first question that arises is, of course, how we can guarantee that the US will abide by the agreement. I would like to say that first we have the Bruguière report, which provides a good description of compliance with the terms of what has been agreed to date. Secondly, the draft agreement mentions an appraisal body, which I described to you, and also the Presidency, the Commission and representatives of national data protection authorities, the involvement of which is intended to check that the matter is dealt with correctly. Obviously, it is crucial that the information is reliable. It is also important that everyone realises that when information is transferred in this data programme, it is not the case that people can go in at any time and look at whatever they like. There has to be a suspected terrorist crime or the financing of such in order to gain access to this information. Naturally, this restricts how the information can be used.

As regards the criticism as to why this is being brought up now, during the summer, I would point out that the Presidency has asked more or less the same questions as the Members of the European Parliament are asking. We were tasked with preparing the matter thoroughly and analysing – among other things – this report, which answers some questions, but also with other matters. The reality is that it was not us that decided that SWIFT was to be moved to Europe; this is happening on the basis of other decisions. However, the US is keen to be able to use this tool in its fight against terrorism and we also think the equivalent information would be useful to us. In order for this to happen, we need an agreement. Since the Treaty of Lisbon has not entered into force, we felt it was necessary to provide a temporary solution. That is what we are negotiating and that is what we have been mandated by the Council to do. That is what I have attempted to describe.

Neither is it the case that the Presidency wishes to unnecessarily restrict insight or debate in any respect. Firstly, this is a public debate after all, and secondly, we are, of course, happy to talk about how the discussions are going. However, during negotiations, it is not possible to provide continual access to documents since the very nature of negotiations is that things get changed and then changed again. However, I have tried to describe our starting point and the clear mandate that we have from the Council. In this, we are very determined to combine a high level of effectiveness and practical use with the stringent requirements of legal

certainty and respect for civil liberties and human rights. I am entirely convinced that we will achieve this. If – contrary to expectation – we do not, then there will be no agreement.

IN THE CHAIR: MR WIELAND

Vice-President

Jacques Barrot, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, I would simply like to confirm the remarks made by the Minister, who, incidentally, has drawn a very clear conclusion: if we did not really have the data protection assurances we need, for the lasting agreement that the Presidency will have to negotiate and for which the Commission will lend its support, there would not be an agreement.

That being the case, I believe that we should be able to reconcile matters and so conduct a campaign against terrorism, with respect shown, of course, for the great values and the great principles which mean that we in Europe attach much importance to the protection of privacy, on the one hand, and to the prevention of all commercial espionage, on the other.

I would simply say that, as far as I am concerned, since taking up my duties, I have obviously noted the fact that the Council asked Judge Bruguière to go and carry out this fact-finding mission in the United States. The Bruguière Report, which dates from December 2008, was handed to me in January 2009. This report was presented to the European Parliament and the JHA Council in February 2009. It was at that point that the Commission felt that it had in its hands the essential elements to ensure the continuity of the TFTP in anticipation of a time when, with the Treaty of Lisbon signed and the Parliament a co-legislator, we can really negotiate a long-term agreement with all the guarantees that the Minister mentioned and all the demands for reciprocity that Mr Strasser, in particular, touched on as well.

I believe that in this matter, the Council has just made its will very clear. The Commission shares this opinion, this firm and clear commitment by the Council to make sure that the European Parliament does indeed become a co-legislator, when the time is right for a lasting agreement.

Sophia in 't Veld (ALDE). – Mr President, I have a small point of order. I note that once again we are not getting replies from the Council to the questions that we put. I asked why the Council waited for two years, until the very last moment, to decide on this deal, and I would also like to know – and we can get the answer in writing – why the national parliaments have been completely excluded from the whole procedure. Finally, I read your answer, which was fairly vague and seemed to be saying that you will not publish the legal opinion of the Legal Service of the Council.

President. – The debate is closed.

(Vote: 17 September 2009)

6. EU strategy for the Baltic Sea area (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on the EU strategy for the Baltic Sea area.

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Mr President, I am delighted to have the opportunity to present one of the main priorities of the Swedish Presidency – the development of the strategy for the Baltic Sea area. This proposal was largely inspired by the initiative taken by the European Parliament back in 2005 in a cross-party working group led by Christopher Beazley. Sweden intends to use its Presidency to draw up a coherent, comprehensive strategy for the area based on proposals from the Commission.

One of the main events is an extensive high-level meeting that will take place in Stockholm tomorrow and the following day. Naturally, Sweden and the other countries neighbouring the Baltic have a great interest in the strategy for the area, but we also believe it could serve as a model for other regions and other regional strategies that would be useful to the entire EU. By working across borders and between different sectors in a particular region, we can deal collectively and more effectively with common challenges such as pollution and environmental destruction. We can create new business opportunities and new jobs, and improve transport links.

Consequently, it is important that regional strategies form part of a wider European policy. The proposed strategy for the Baltic Sea area is the result of a request made by the European Council to the Commission

in December 2007 and the initiative was supported by the European Parliament in a resolution of 12 December 2007. It is hoped that the strategy will gain the backing of the European Council meeting at the end of October.

The aim of the strategy is to improve the environment in the Baltic Sea area and to increase integration and competitiveness in the area. The strategy addresses four challenges in particular: ensuring a sustainable environment, increasing wealth, improving accessibility and attractiveness, and guaranteeing security and certainty in the area. Getting to grips with the environmental issues is, of course, one of the main priorities. There are very serious threats to the Baltic Sea environment which, in turn, means that there is a risk that its economic development will be affected. This is a very sensitive marine environment that is exposed to various kinds of environmental impact.

Decisive efforts are needed, and quickly. In particular, overfertilisation and algal blooms caused by excess nutrient run-off are threatening the ecological equilibrium of the Baltic Sea. At the same time, the Baltic Sea is also affected by pollution from land-based sources, hazardous substances and the effects of climate change. As a result of these acute and serious environmental threats, the Baltic Sea area is an obvious priority in the area of the environment and we hope that conclusions will be adopted in December.

However, the serious state of health of the Baltic Sea area is not the only challenge faced by the region. The economic crisis has made the matter of jobs and growth highly topical. Most of the countries in the Baltic Sea area are small and are dependent on exports. This means that we must increase integration in order to strengthen competitiveness throughout the entire Baltic Sea region. Our aims and goals in this respect are clear. We want the internal market to function better in our region than anywhere else, and we want the new Lisbon strategy for jobs and growth to be implemented effectively in this part of Europe.

We must address the crisis by increasing cooperation and commitment in our immediate area. Global competitiveness requires cross-border cooperation between countries and enterprises, in research and through innovations.

The aim of the strategy for the Baltic Sea area is not to create new institutions. Rather, we are endeavouring to use the instruments and policy areas that already exist such that together, they benefit the area in a more strategically coordinated and intelligent way. Neither does the strategy involve new resources being injected into the area. It is based on existing EU programmes and existing structures and on finding better ways to coordinate.

Naturally, our objective cannot be achieved overnight, but our goals are ambitious. We deserve a cleaner Baltic Sea at the centre of an area that offers prospects for sustainable economic development across borders, supported by the entire EU. If we can achieve this, then I am convinced that we will be serving the interests of the Baltic Sea area, and I hope that we will also create a model that can be adapted and applied effectively in other regions. I would like to express my thanks for the positive cooperation of the Commission on this matter, and not least the European Parliament – which is, after all, the institution that originally took the initiative and has been a driving force in connection with cooperation in the Baltic Sea area throughout.

Paweł Samecki, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I would like to start by thanking Parliament for having included the new strategy for the Baltic Sea region on the agenda of its plenary session.

The high visibility this provides for the strategy is extremely welcome. Of course, it is not a complete surprise to me that Parliament is taking such an interest in the strategy. The pioneering work undertaken by Parliament through its Baltic Interparliamentary Group in particular was very much one of the catalysts for the whole macro-regional strategy approach.

The Baltic Sea Strategy has required a completely new approach from the European Commission as it is the first time that we have prepared an integrated strategy for a group of Member States who have to face the same challenges and who may benefit from the same opportunities. I will not hide the fact that the preparatory work has brought challenges of its own, but these have been overcome successfully.

The four pillars of the strategy provide an overarching framework for improving the overall situation of the Baltic Sea region. By addressing the environment, the economy, energy and transport and safety and security issues, the strategy provides an integrated approach covering several policy areas while ensuring close interaction among the fields concerned.

Since the Commission adopted the strategy in June, the Swedish Presidency has led positive and constructive discussions in Council which are to lead to conclusions already in October. This rapid progress is important if we are to maintain momentum as we enter the implementation phase of the strategy.

I would like to underline this point as it must be clear that all our preparatory work on the strategic framework that I have just described will count for nought unless we start to deliver genuine visible concrete results on the ground, hence the importance of the strategy's action plan which has also been drawn up during the preparatory work.

The implementation of an action plan will require real cooperation, commitment and leadership from Member States and regional stakeholders to deliver the 80 or so projects included at this stage. In financial terms, although there is no additional financing from the EU budget, the strategy proposes a more coordinated use of existing funds and a more imaginative approach to other funding sources such as the European Investment Bank or the Nordic Investment Bank.

I would now like to say a few words about the planned governance system which is proposed for the operational implementation of the strategy. This is one area where there has been much discussion among the Member States, but the overall approach is that policy orientations will be taken by the Council. The coordination monitoring and reporting is done by the Commission and the implementation on the ground is led by the Member States or organisations of the Baltic Sea Region.

In addition, the Commission proposes to play the role of a facilitator in the case of difficulties. However, I would stress that the Commission has neither the capacity nor the desire to lead the delivery of the action plan itself.

Responsibility must rest with the relevant Member States and other stakeholders directly involved on the ground. This is the only way to ensure that the ownership of a strategy is in the hands of the Member States and other stakeholders.

So what are the next steps? Once we have conclusions from the Council and the European Council, we will take forward the implementation phase of the strategy. Here we expect to see a wave of coordination meetings to kick-start the various priority areas and individual projects included in the action plan.

The first formal assessment of progress made will be presented under the Polish Presidency in the second half of 2011. However, prior to that, the first annual forum of the Baltic Sea Strategy will take place next year. This will give all stakeholders an opportunity to consider how the first months of the strategy have gone and what lessons might already be drawn at that stage.

I would like to conclude by saying that I look forward to continuing to work closely with Parliament on all aspects of strategy. The Commission very much expects Parliament to be actively involved in events such as the annual forum. Your backing is crucial to maintain widespread visibility for the strategy to maintain high-level political support for the strategy and to maintain pressure on the Member States and the regional actors to deliver results.

Tunne Kelam, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – Mr President, the PPE Group congratulates the Swedish Presidency on its leadership in starting to implement the Baltic Sea Strategy (BSS). This strategy reflects a fundamental change that took place in this region five years ago. Since 2004, the Baltic has become the EU's internal sea. That is why the Union needs a comprehensive approach so as to react in a coordinated way to both the opportunities and challenges this new situation presents.

Furthermore, the BSS is an example of excellent cooperation between the main institutions of the EU. As you might know – and as it has been said – the strategy in question was initiated by Parliament three years ago, more precisely by the Baltic Europe Intergroup under the excellent leadership of Christopher Beazley. I would also like to express my special gratitude to Commission President Barroso. His understanding and support since 2007 were crucial in preparing a practical version of the strategy, which resulted in the Commission communication last June.

I would like to make three points. First, the goal of the initiators was to turn the Baltic Sea area into one of the most competitive and rapidly developing regions of the EU. Provided we make maximum use of the BSS, this region could well become a success story of what is now called the Lisbon Programme.

Second, just now, more than ever, the region needs better access to and security of energy supplies. The EU and Member States have to agree on providing alternative channels for energy deliveries. First and foremost, it comes down to creating a united energy system around the Baltic Sea.

Finally, the issue of the bilateral and primarily political Nord Stream project should be settled through respecting the rightful interests of all states around the Sea and certainly not before the Russian Government joins the Espoo Convention.

Constanze Angela Krehl, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Mrs Malmström, ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted that the Swedish Presidency has put cooperation in the Baltic Sea area at the top of its agenda. There is no need for argument here: we need to protect resources and we, too, need to help protect the climate and nature. On the other hand, we must also focus cooperation in the Baltic Sea area on economic development, of that there can be no question. You have our full support here.

However, some questions do still arise. You just said that there are no additional funds. As we discussed this in committee, all the funds are to be made available under the current cohesion policy. For me, this raises the question of whether this means under existing projects that are already being financed from cohesion resources or under new projects. If so, we need to ask which cohesion policy projects already approved will lose funding.

This is a very important point, because I already know that the towns, local authorities and regions will come and ask me, what should we do in order to become involved in the Baltic Sea Strategy? How do we get the funds to run this sort of project? If we do not give them a good answer and cannot indicate how this cooperation is to be organised, then citizens' enthusiasm for Baltic Sea cooperation will probably quickly turn to frustration. That is not the objective that we are working together to achieve and we therefore need to hold very intensive talks on how to organise this cooperation.

I therefore ask – and I would ask the Commissioner to take this on board – that not only the Council and the Commission participate in the Baltic Sea Strategy, but also that Parliament is properly involved in this cooperation and in the implementation of this strategy, because we would like other regions to profit as well, as with the Black Sea policy or with cooperation between the states bordering the Danube. That would be very important to us.

Anneli Jäätteenmäki, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FI) Mr President, my group is very happy that the Commission has drafted the EU's first Baltic Sea Strategy document. This is also the first strategy document of its kind for this region and we hope that it will serve in particular to speed up the process of cleaning the eutrophic Baltic Sea. The region's problems can best be solved through cooperation between its peoples, countries, organisations and businesses. My group is especially pleased that Sweden has highlighted the importance of countering the trade in humans and crime. I wish, in particular, to thank Mrs Malmström for this, because I think that this is also her handiwork. This is an important issue, and it is rather odd that in 2009, we should be having to speak about the existence of a trade in humans in the Baltic Sea region. We now need a Baltic Sea action plan to end this.

Satu Hassi, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FI) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is excellent that the Commission has drafted a proposal for a Baltic Sea Strategy and that Sweden has added it to its agenda. I hope that Sweden will acquire something more tangible in its efforts to protect its marine environment, mainly in the areas of agriculture and shipping. After all, the Baltic Sea is one of the world's most polluted seas, and its biggest environmental problem is eutrophication. Agriculture is mainly responsible for that: there is nitrogen and phosphorus runoff from EU fields. Nitrogen and phosphorus take oxygen from the seabed and feed poisonous algae at the surface. The question of whether the Baltic Sea is to be cleaned is largely in the hands of the EU. The Commission recognises this in its strategy, but the proposals for measures are vague. Virtually the only precise measure is to prohibit the use of phosphates in detergents. That is a necessary move, but we also badly need new rules for agriculture, so that we can produce food without smothering the Baltic Sea at the same time.

Marek Gróbarczyk, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) Mr President, I would like to draw attention to the fact that in its guidelines, Europe's Baltic Sea Strategy was supposed to promote a comprehensive programme for the development of this part of Europe, *inter alia* by establishing the most natural and shortest transport routes to balance out the development of the countries of the 'old' and 'new' Europe. That is why I am astonished by the Commission and the Council's proposal to change the layout of the central European route.

The most economic link between the Adriatic and Baltic Sea is the central European route along the course of the Odra, whose overland route ends at the port of Szczecin-Świnoujście. I propose a clear memorandum to re-activate the strategy in its original form, which mentions a central European route, one which will not erase from Europe's development plans major ports such as Szczecin-Świnoujście, which is already suffering from the European Commission's decision to liquidate its shipbuilding industry.

Rolandas Paksas, on behalf of the EFD Group. – (LT) In exactly 2564 hours, the reactor at Ignalina nuclear power plant in Lithuania – the last remaining independent energy source in Lithuania – will be shut down. Europe has already invested EUR 200 million in the safety of this power plant. To decommission it today, European States will have to contribute another EUR 800 million. From a legal point of view, Europe is probably correct; every country has to observe the commitments it has made, but is it really right? Is it right with respect to the citizens of Lithuania and other states? I do not think so. Money for the decommissioning of the reactor will have to be taken from people hit by the economic crisis. Is it logical or right, when there is a crisis in Europe, when GDP in Lithuania has fallen by 22%, when unemployment has reached 15%, when winter is coming, to close a working nuclear plant which is safe, I repeat safe. No, this is wrong. Having given its word, Lithuania will implement the conditions of the accession treaty, but this will be a huge sacrifice. Following this sacrifice, Lithuania will find it considerably harder to overcome the economic crisis. Unemployment in the country will grow even more and poverty will increase.

Ladies and gentlemen, tell me, does Europe need such a sacrifice today? Do we not have a better way to spend EUR 800 million today? Appealing to the conscience, economic logic and common sense of each one of you, I call on you to add to the strategy we are debating today a provision that Ignalina nuclear power plant will remain open until 2012, i.e. until the end of its safe lifespan. I hope that by approving President J. Buzek's political programme in the area of energy, that is, diversification of energy supply and the development of nuclear power in Member States, the European Parliament will make the concrete steps required. Ladies and gentlemen, there are only 2563 hours and 58 minutes until the reactor is shut down.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in theory, projects such as these on the regional promotion of cross-border cooperation are to be welcomed and make a great deal of sense. However, strategies often have the disadvantage that, although targets are set and even reached, sustainability is ignored, even during implementation. Sustainability must therefore be included right from the planning phase.

It is therefore important when implementing this integrated strategy for the Baltic Sea area – a very important exemplary EU project – for regions and organisations to cooperate as a network, because these organisations know best what is important for them in the various sectors, such as nature, social structure and infrastructure; they know what to do for the best. This is an area with 100 million inhabitants and an investment budget of EUR 50 billion. We need to proceed very carefully here if we are to make a success of this pilot project. This pilot project is, as already mentioned, very important for other projects along the Danube, too, for the states bordering the Danube in central and south-east Europe.

Andrzej Grzyb (PPE). – (PL) What a macroregion needs is a coordinated policy of sustainable development. This is what the European Parliament, and then the Council, believed in 2007 when it recommended that the European Commission draft a Baltic Sea Strategy and an action plan. Here I would like to underline the role the then Commissioner Mrs Danuta Hübner played in drafting this strategy. This policy is now being continued by Commissioner Samecki, to whom I also extend my heartfelt congratulations.

Amongst other things, the strategy responds to the fundamental challenges named here, such as achieving prosperity in a region with little development of innovation or enterprise, or failing to acknowledge the Baltic as a common asset without building a sustainable environment, or security in the region, including energy security, without building new generation facilities and interconnections. The same is happening with citizens' security and accessibility of the region thanks to the construction of trans-European communications links.

I would like to stress the huge role – and it really is a vast contribution – played by the opinion makers who were consulted on this draft strategy, particularly citizens' organisations, local and regional governments, national governments and Baltic organisations. The active participation of these organisations should be very useful in realising these strategies.

The Baltic Sea Strategy is a good example of how we can use the instruments of Community policy to materialise political will over a large macro-regional area of the European Union.

I would like to make four points, Mr Commissioner. First of all, I believe it is key to focus on managing the Baltic Sea Strategy in such a way as to avoid eroding interest both at local, as well as at government and European Union level. We should also concentrate on properly funding the implementation and operation of the strategy itself – on this matter, an amendment to the budget has been agreed. Secondly, there is the need for full implementation of single market principles in the macroregion, taking into account the experience and engagement at local and regional level. The two final matters are: institutional support for funding undertakings within the scope of the strategy, and maintaining good relations with our partners in the region, including Russia, Norway and Belarus.

Diana Wallis (ALDE). – Mr President, I think it is wonderful that both the Commission and now, especially, the Swedish Presidency, has breathed life into Parliament's ideas and ambitions in this fragile area.

We all know the problems to do with the environment of the Baltic Sea and the specific economic difficulties of the area. But this Parliament remains ambitious, and I think this Parliament does want to be involved. One of the mechanisms you did not mention was the possibility of a regular report back to this Parliament so that we may have a debate like today to watch how things are progressing.

For me, I will have the pleasure, as a Vice-President of this House, of participating in the conference that you are organising on Friday. I think there are concerns still remaining about funding, to make sure that this House sees the results of this strategy that it deserves.

A macro-regional economic strategy could be the way forward in other ways, in other places, in Europe. Let us hope that this one works well.

Isabella Lövin (Verts/ALE). – (SV) Mr President, I am delighted that environmental issues are a main priority in the new strategy for the Baltic Sea area. The Baltic Sea is suffering two major acute environmental problems. The first – overfertilisation – has already been mentioned by Mrs Hassi. The second problem is overfishing. Researchers are entirely unanimous on this. Relatively recent knowledge suggests that the lack of top predators, i.e. cod, has further worsened the algal blooms. The problem is that the Baltic Sea needs a healthy ecosystem. It would therefore be very good if a pilot project – a fast track project – could be established within the new Baltic Sea Strategy involving regional fisheries management in the Baltic Sea area. We would also need to prohibit the dumping of cod and this should take effect immediately. At present large volumes of young cod that have just arrived in the Baltic Sea are being dumped. I call on the Swedish Presidency to take up my challenge and deal with this problem.

Oldřich Vlasák (ECR). – (CS) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it was already agreed during the last parliament that the Baltic Sea region was suitable for a pilot project aimed at implementing an internal EU strategy for the macroregion. I consider it appropriate that this strategy, which is based on the aim of a more consistent application of Community law and the more effective use of EU funds, does not introduce new laws or institutions and does not depend on any special funding.

I can see savings in linking up local and regional bodies. It is essential in the practical implementation of the Baltic Sea Strategy to rearrange the responsibilities of the various administrative bodies within the system of multi-layered government in order that the activities of the various bodies and organisations do not overlap. In future discussions on the impending cohesion policy, it would be useful, at the same time, to clarify how the various macro-regional strategies and mainstream EU regional policies will co-exist alongside one another. It would also be useful to clarify how the Baltic Sea Strategy will affect the planned application of a territorial cohesion policy.

Anna Rosbach (EFD). – (DA) Mr President, we are discussing a 1 200 km gas pipeline beneath the Baltic from Vyborg in Russia to Greifswald in Germany through an ecologically sensitive inland sea where there is a large difference in sea bed levels, through an area where undetonated explosives from two world wars, as well as poisonous chemicals from the paper industry, are constantly being found. Around EUR 100 million have been expended on an environmental analysis performed by the company that is to lay the pipeline, namely Nord Stream – a gas supply agreement between Gerhard Schröder and Vladimir Putin. I will not even mention the security issues surrounding the great increase this will bring to Russia's influence in the Baltic, but instead I will stick to the environmental problems this will bring. Unfortunately, Finland has already approved the project, but on behalf of Timo Soini, as well as for myself, I would now like to establish the whereabouts of the information relating to the project which the citizens of all the countries on the Baltic need before building work takes place.

Inese Vaidere (PPE). – (LV) Mrs Malmström, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the formulation of a strategy for the Baltic Sea region is a very important achievement for Parliament, in which the members of the Baltic intergroup have played a leading role. This strategy is comparable to the Mediterranean strategy which, in its time, stimulated rapid economic growth in the South. It will serve as a good instrument for the development of the Baltic region and, as a result, for the whole of the European Union. Speaking of priorities, I should first wish to mention the development of a common European Union energy policy, including a competitive Baltic energy market. This involves not only the aspects of security of energy supply and energy efficiency, but also, naturally, the development of renewable energy.

Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia must be integrated into the common regional energy network, including NORDEL. Our second priority is further infrastructure development. The roads in some Baltic Sea region countries, given both climatic conditions and also sometimes ineffective policies, are in a quite poor state. The development of transit corridors and communications networks will stimulate business and create new jobs. So that we may speak of effective economic development and protection of the environment, the third priority is an innovative economy, which means growth that is balanced and knowledge-based. In order to carry out the strategy, additional finance is essential, and this must definitely be provided in the next European Union financial framework.

We must now make use both of the EUR 5 billion energy programme and of the globalisation fund and other financial instruments. An effective mechanism for implementing and monitoring the strategy is also important. It has to be simple, transparent and free of superfluous bureaucracy. Regular reviews of the introduction of the strategy and interim reports are essential. The first should already be produced in 2010. I welcome the Swedish Presidency's active role in getting the strategy going. Allow me to express the hope that we shall be effective and flexible in carrying out this specific action plan.

Tomasz Piotr Poręba (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, five years ago, the Baltic Sea effectively became an internal sea of the European Union. Today we are debating a draft strategy which will allow us to unleash the huge dormant potential of the region, a project which was the initiative of the European Parliament. However, not all the recommendations of this House have been accepted by the Commission. The most significant was the lack of, and the retreat from, setting up a separate budget line for the Baltic Sea region. The Commission assures us that funding will come from existing instruments, primarily the structural funds. However, I fear that without special funding earmarked specifically for this purpose, we will not be able to achieve all our aims.

The authors of the strategy mention the need for close cooperation with Russia. In this context, however, we should not forget the greatest threat at the moment to the Baltic Sea, namely the construction of the Nord Stream pipeline. Last year, the European Parliament took a negative stance on this. I hope that the new Commission, by instituting the action plan associated with the strategy, will bear this resolution in mind too.

Danuta Maria Hübner (PPE). – Mr President, it is indeed a unique European regional policy initiative and a pioneering project. Innovation-driven prosperity, the environment, accessibility in terms of transport and energy connections, and security and safety are the four major areas for joint work by all partners who are involved in preparation of the strategy: all three European institutions – Parliament, the Commission, the Council – but also national governments, regional and local authorities, business and academic communities and non-governmental organisations. The process of the preparation of the strategy has led to a genuine partnership between all of them.

Development challenges increasingly do not respect administrative or political borders. The strategy will make it possible to replace the often very fragmented and scattered policy responses with a genuine shared response to shared development problems and opportunities.

The European Parliament's Committee on Regional Development, which is the leading committee on this project in Parliament, will give high importance to it in its work. We will hold the debate on 6 October with the Commission and the Council; the own-initiative report will be prepared in the months to come. We will also keep the implementation of the strategy under review and I trust that this action-oriented strategy enhances the Union's chances to build green, modern and competitive economies.

Liisa Jaakonsaari (S&D). – (FI) Mr President, the European Union became aware of the Baltic Sea issue quite late on. A total of 100 million people live by its shoreline, and then there is Russia, which is important. This strategy will have a strong environmental dimension, and this is only right, because the environmental problems of the Baltic Sea are colossal: eutrophication, fading biodiversity, the waste waters of St Petersburg,

the problems of Kaliningrad, and so on. It has been mentioned here that this will also change the European Union Cohesion Policy, and this, I think, is quite important, and I hope that more will be said about it here. Minister Malmström says how it will change because the change to the Cohesion Policy will result, for example, in the danger that, when we speak of the Danube Strategy and the Black Sea Strategy, part of Europe, including northern regions, will be ignored and, in fact, Arctic areas right now are undergoing the world's most rapid changes, and this is important to see.

Riikka Manner (ALDE). – (FI) Mr President, Minister, Commissioner, the Baltic Sea as a region is special in many ways, and so I am very pleased that Sweden has made this strategy one of its priorities during its Presidency. It is important that we take the strategy forward and thus also implement it. Not only does the Baltic Sea have a very strong environmental dimension to it; I think it also has a major impact on regional policy. During its presidency, Sweden has also integrated these regional policy matters closely with this Baltic Sea Strategy. The strategy is mainly understood as a document that relates to the countries along its shores and their coastal areas, but it definitely has a robust regional dimension. How we go about integrating with this strategy environmental technological expertise, issues concerning inland waters, and its huge impact on transport policy, will also have major repercussions for inland areas. The Baltic Sea Strategy must therefore be made part of the common European agenda. I hope it gets Parliament's strong support so that the strategy is not just empty words and so that we can achieve something tangible.

Tatjana Ždanoka (Verts/ALE). – Mr President, as an MEP elected in Latvia, I welcome the fact that the first example of a strategy for a macroregion concerns the Baltic Sea area. Nevertheless, in my opinion, a number of Community objectives have been forgotten here – for instance, a high level of social protection. Some of the region's Member States, including Latvia, have been severely hit by the economic crisis. Our financial sector is interconnected with the Scandinavian one. This means that our problems will create problems there, so this is not a national issue.

Recently, Latvia received medium-term financial assistance for balance of payments, provided for by the Commission. Unfortunately, there are no social conditions for such assistance. As a result, the government is reducing pensions and benefits, but the Commission tolerates this.

My second concern is about fundamental rights. Mass statelessness and minority protection still constitute a topical issue in two of the region's Member States: Latvia and Estonia. I think that the strategy must be more ambitious and seek to attain all the objectives of the European Union.

Ville Itälä (PPE). – (FI) Mr President, I wish to thank the Commission and the Swedish Government for the very active role they have played, and I believe that the Baltic Sea Strategy is a good and important one. Without proper financing, however, the project will not succeed. In that case, all this will end after the strategy has been adopted. Parliament has been pondering for many years how financing should be organised, and last year it unanimously agreed on the budget having its own Baltic Sea Strategy heading. That is the means, the instrument, for gathering together all the countless projects that the Baltic Sea Strategy now needs if it is to go ahead. I know that the Committee on Budgets has now made proposals for setting aside a little money under the heading, and I hope that the Council and the Commission will also support this, because otherwise the project will simply not succeed. Something else we need to do if we want to rescue the Baltic Sea environment is to obtain Russia's commitment to this project. I find it incomprehensible how some have been prepared to agree to a gas pipeline running through the Baltic Sea without any obligation on the part of Russia even to commit to the conclusions in the Espoo Convention. That is the least we must do.

Victor Boştinaru (S&D). – Mr President, I welcome the idea of a strategy for the Black Sea region as a pilot project for the macro-regional strategies.

Initiatives of this kind allow the coordination of EU policy instruments in order to have a coherent, stable and sustainable development of the regions involved.

On the occasion of the last Council, it was said that a strategy would have been developed for the Black Sea region by the end of 2009. This is an extremely important initiative as it can bring about harmonised development and prosperity for the region that, in comparison with the Black Sea area, is far more complex in terms of actors involved and relevant for security, stability, energy and the environment.

So I would like to ask the Swedish Presidency when such a strategy for the Black Sea region will be delivered, and when Parliament will be informed and involved in this issue.

Werner Kuhn (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, Mrs Malmström, Commissioner Samecki, as a newly elected member from Mecklenburg-Western-Pomerania, I very much support the development of a Baltic Sea Strategy and the associated action plan. The Commissioner referred earlier to the flagship projects, 80 in total.

Our common objectives are, of course, to improve the competitiveness of our economy in the Baltic Sea area, taking particular account of the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises and of a common energy policy which also takes account of renewable energies. That raises the question of how we deal with offshore installations in the Baltic Sea. Maintaining clean water, because that is our foundation and our resource, plays a very, very important role here, when we think of fisheries and when we think of tourism. That is why investments in treatment plants need to be promoted.

I think a common planning programme needs to be agreed for all Member States in the Baltic Sea area, because we need to answer the following questions: where will traffic routes be positioned in future? Where will offshore installations be built? How will safety at sea be addressed? That is why we also need to be clear on where the energy routes will be for Nord Stream, for the supply of electricity, and on many other things.

(The President cut off the speaker)

Cecilia Malmström, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SV) Mr President, I would like to thank all the Members for the great level of support that you have given us for our continued work on the Baltic Sea Strategy. It is only natural that we should be supported by the European Parliament, because in fact you were the founding fathers of the whole idea of a strategy for the Baltic Sea area and I am pleased that you are also going to ensure that this strategy becomes a reality. It can only be a success – it can only become real, and not just fine words and rhetoric – if all the Member States genuinely acknowledge ownership and feel a real responsibility for ensuring that the project is realised.

Success will be guaranteed by working on these projects, setting clear timetables for when they are to be realised and carrying out regular checks. I am sure that, just like the Commission, Parliament will continue to put pressure on us to ensure this actually comes to fruition.

One hundred million people live in this region. At any given moment, there are 2 000 ships in the Baltic Sea. It is clear that we face enormous challenges here. We have had a very broad foundation process and I would like to thank the Commission – first Mrs Hübner and now Commissioner Samecki – for the work they have put in. There is a great deal of support in civil society and among the municipalities around the Baltic Sea for us to achieve this.

Some Members, Mrs Krehl and Mr Itälä, have raised the matter of resources. It is not intended that any new funds will be earmarked for the strategy. However, there are plenty of resources in the region that we can use. EUR 55 million has been earmarked for the region under the existing budgetary framework. We also know that we can hope for contributions from international institutions such as the EIB, which has shown great interest in the Baltic Sea region. The aim is to keep all administrative costs as low as possible and to work with those who have responsibility locally and nationally for the various flagship projects.

One of these concerns trafficking – an area mentioned by Mrs Jäätteenmäki. There is a project that involves strengthening the training of customs and police officers in the region in order to be better able to identify and work on the issue of trafficking. Mrs Hassi and Mrs Lövin mentioned the matter of the marine environment, agriculture and fisheries. There are a number of such projects here and I would very much like to see more of them. I also believe that the strategy could provide the opportunity to gain a better overview of our environmental efforts and our fisheries and agriculture policy and to ensure that they work towards the same ends.

There are also other partnerships in the Baltic region. We have an extensive and growing energy policy partnership in which we aim to link up the energy infrastructure in the region, to reduce dependence and improve efficiency. Naturally, this is something that the Union will continue to work on. The Ignalina plant has nothing to do with the Baltic Sea Strategy. That was an old decision that already existed from the time of Lithuania's accession negotiations. Neither does Nord Stream have anything to do with this. Naturally it is related to the Baltic Sea, but it is not part of the strategy. It is a commercial project that has been examined in accordance with current international environmental conventions and relevant national legislation.

The Baltic Sea Strategy is an internal EU strategy. It will be what we make it. However, it is also important – as a number of Members have pointed out – that third countries are involved. We have ensured that we keep countries such as Russia and Norway involved and that we tell them about our work on the strategy as well

as signalling to them that we would like to work in partnership with them on specific projects in which we have a common interest.

We are looking forward to the conference tomorrow and on Friday and are pleased that Vice-President Wallis is coming to Stockholm. At the conference, we will discuss the strategy for the Baltic Sea area and we hope to gain a strong commitment from the countries concerned to work towards this becoming a reality, as well as discussing macroregions in general. The Danube region and the Black Sea region have been mentioned in this connection. I believe that there is a great deal to do here and a great deal that can inspire us. We hope to be able to move forward in the discussion, although it is a little too early to set actual timetables at present. Once again, I would like to thank Parliament for its strong support for the Baltic Sea Strategy and I look forward to discussing this with Members on future occasions.

Paweł Samecki, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, first of all I would like to thank the Members of Parliament for their comments and remarks on different aspects of the strategy. Your level of commitment demonstrates that the strategy will be a subject of interest in the forthcoming years, which is good.

I will be unable to respond to all comments and issues raised in the debate or in your statements. I would like just to refer to three broad groups of issues. First, the shape. I would like to say that the strategy has been designed in line with the objectives and intentions of Member States. The Commission did not interfere in the selection of priorities. The Commission did not shape the priorities, so the ideas of including certain projects or modifying certain priorities is, of course, possible. However, it is to be agreed in the future work related to the implementation of the strategy.

I want to assure you that the strategy is a kind of living animal and it is, to a great extent, exposed to future modifications should Member States and stakeholders wish so.

Second point: on management and governance. Here I would like to underline that there is a need for a clear division of tasks, for a clear division of labour and responsibilities. I think that we should not delude ourselves. The responsibilities of Member States, of the Commission and of other organisations involved in the management.

At this moment, I would also add that we want to involve local governments in the process of implementing the strategy as well as third countries, as was already mentioned by the Minister.

Of course we foresee reporting concerning progress made in relation to implementation to Parliament.

Finally, the last issue is financing. Several Members mentioned the need for additional funds for new projects etc. I want to explain that the principle of no new additional financing was adopted at the very beginning of the creation of the strategy.

At present, we have more or less three options. We can regulate the use of existing EU funds, for example, by changing criteria for selecting new projects. The second possibility is having recourse to other sources like international financial institutions and finally, although it is difficult at a time of economic recession, we can still try to use national resources. In this respect, I look forward to the work of the conference to be held in Stockholm because this is the conference which may shape the future approach of Member States and the Commission to the macro-regional approach in the future and it should also embrace the financing of potential future strategies. That is why I feel that it will be a good moment to look at the overall macro-regional approach in Stockholm in the forthcoming days.

President. – The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE), *in writing*. – (FI) Mr President, I would like to thank Sweden, the country to hold the presidency, for having had the courage to make its own region, the Baltic Sea, and matters relating to it, such a major topic in its programme during its EU presidential term. It is fitting that the Baltic Sea Strategy that we have been preparing for so long is being dealt with now: there is no time to lose. The central aim of the Baltic Sea Strategy and the Action Programme to improve the region's environment and competitiveness must be taken seriously in terms of the funding allocated to it and the measures implemented. The objectives must be realised in practice: the strategy must not just remain a fancy declaration. We hope in particular that the strategy will expedite the clean up of the Baltic Sea, which is suffering from eutrophication, and help find common solutions to cross border challenges. It is on account of these very objectives that all eyes are now turned to Finland, where soon it will be decided whether or not to allow the construction of the Nord Stream

gas pipeline in its territorial waters. Under the Baltic Sea Strategy, the environmental impact of projects such as these must be investigated using a procedure that is legally binding internationally so that the matter cannot just be shrugged off. We must therefore insist that Russia ratifies the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context that it signed in 1991, and the Finnish Government should make this a condition of processing the gas pipeline's construction permit. Russia, which also benefits from the Baltic Sea Strategy, only acts according to the agreement when it suits it. This cannot go on any longer: the stakes are too high, and we have to know about projects that are harmful to the Baltic Sea before it is too late.

György Schöpflin (PPE), in writing. – The Baltic Sea Strategy promoted by the Swedish Presidency is very welcome. It could readily assume a model function for other European macroregions, like the Danube basin. There is, however, one aspect of the development of the Baltic Sea region that demands urgent reconsideration. This is the Nord Stream sea-bed pipeline between Russia and Germany. Not only is the pipeline the source of serious environmental concern, but – even more urgently – it is a project that has been overtaken by time. The future is not in fixed means of delivering natural gas – via pipelines – but through liquefied natural gas. Nord Stream has every likelihood of being a wholly unnecessary white elephant, and its protagonists should reconsider the project before more money and more resources, effort and energy are tied up in it.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE), in writing. – (PL) The Baltic Sea Strategy announced in June 2009 aims to establish it as a region which is environmentally friendly, prosperous, easily accessible, attractive and secure. This is particularly important in the context of the increasing challenges facing the Baltic since the EU's enlargement in 2004.

It is important to take action aimed at improving the region's environmental situation, as it is one of the most polluted marine areas in the world at the moment. Thousands of tonnes of toxic warfare agents lie on the sea bed encased in mines, bullets, bombs, containers and barrels. Estimates as to the quantities of these chemicals range from 30 000 to 60 000 tonnes, of which Yprite alone is estimated to make up 13 000 tonnes. Chemical weapons were sunk here after World War II in the late 1940s. They had been captured in the German occupation zones, and as burying them underground was difficult, the decision was made simply to sink them into the sea.

Disturbing the chemical weapons lying at the bottom of the Baltic by building any kind of infrastructure could result in environmental disaster, and particularly the disturbance of chemical weapons from World War II during construction of the Baltic gas pipeline is one of the greatest threats to the ecosystem. That is why an assessment of the effect of building the pipeline on the natural environment of the Baltic Sea basin is necessary.

IN THE CHAIR: MR BUZEK

President

7. Voting time

President. – We shall now proceed to the vote.

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

Today we are facing an unusually important, but also symbolic vote. Once every five years, the European Parliament decides who will head another EU institution.

7.1. Election of President of Commission (vote)

Daniel Cohn-Bendit (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President ...

(The speaker was interrupted by heckling from the right)

Are you ill or something? Are you ill?

As there were problems with the vote yesterday, I would ask you to check the machines.

It is not such a bad idea, is it, ladies and gentlemen?

President. – As proposed, we are carrying out a trial vote, i.e. a vote to check that we all have cards, we are all seated properly and that the equipment is working.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me to repeat: once every five years the European Parliament decides who will lead another European Union institution. Today's agenda includes electing the President of the European Commission. This election will strengthen the democratic nature of our institution. It is we, the elected representatives of all European regions, who will do this.

The Council of Europe has nominated José Manuel Barroso as President of the Commission. In accordance with Rule 105(2) of the Rules of Procedure, Parliament may approve or reject the nominated candidate by a majority vote. The ballot is secret. Let us now proceed to elect the President of the Commission in accordance with the Rules of Procedure. The vote will be held using the electronic system. I would like to repeat that you can vote from any position in the plenary hall as long as you place your voting card into the personal voting device. I say this because there are many new MEPs in the House. As usual, in the vote you may vote for or against the candidate, or abstain.

(The vote is held)

Here are the results of the vote: 718 Members voted, 382 in favour, 219 against and 117 abstentions.

(Loud applause)

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President. – According to the results we will see on the board – they are not visible yet – the Council's nominee, José Manuel Barroso, has been elected President of the European Commission.

I would like to extend my heartfelt congratulations to the president-elect on being voted to the position of President of the Commission. I would like to say that we have plenty of work ahead of us. We will have to face challenges, and our citizens expect us to act very energetically and to live up to their expectations.

Mr President, I know that you are aware of the priorities of the European Parliament. Following the discussions, which we also held within our political groups, like yesterday, you know our expectations. For that reason, we greatly look forward to working with you over the coming five years. We expect above all to be able to respond to our citizens' needs. I congratulate you once again, and you may now take the floor, if you would like to say a few words to us. Congratulations, and all the best!

(Loud applause)

José Manuel Barroso, Commission. – *(PT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I would like to express my most heartfelt thanks for the great confidence you have shown in me. I am hugely honoured and very moved by your confidence, and I take it with a great sense of responsibility. I also take this vote of confidence as a sign that this Parliament agrees with the ambitious agenda that I am presenting for Europe over the next five years.

As I said during the discussions before the vote, I would like to work with all the political groups that sign up to this project, which aspires to a Europe of solidarity and freedom. I must, however, give special thanks to the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), which ran the risk of endorsing my programme in Warsaw before the elections, in an attempt right from the outset to give greater expression to European parliamentary democracy.

As I said in this Chamber yesterday and at other times recently, as President of the Commission, my party will be Europe and it will be made up of all those who want to come on this exciting journey to make a united Europe. These are the people with whom I would like to form the consensus that we need to enhance the European project.

Please also allow me on this occasion to say a few words to my own country, Portugal. Without the initiative and support of its Government and Prime Minister José Sócrates, I could not have stood for election. I would like to thank Portugal for its support, which was also passed on to me by the President of the Republic, Professor Cavaco Silva. I would like to acknowledge the support of every single one of those ardent Europeans who believe in this project for Europe.

Finally, I would like to reiterate to you, Mr President, and to all Members of this House, my sincere determination to work closely with you during the next five years so that you can build a stronger European parliamentary democracy. I believe that the European Parliament and the European Commission, as typical Community institutions, have a special duty towards our citizens. That is exactly what I have said I will do and that is exactly what I am going to do – a stronger Europe for freedom and solidarity.

(Applause)

President. – I have an official statement. Under Rule 105(3) of the Rules of Procedure, I shall inform the Council of our results of 10 minutes ago, and would like to ask the Council and the newly-elected President of the Commission to propose jointly the nominees for the posts of Commissioners. In view of the amount of work ahead of us, we should work as quickly as possible.

This was the official statement related to the election of Mr Barroso as President of the European Commission.

7.2. Appointments to interparliamentary delegations (vote)

7.3. Forest fires in the summer of 2009 (vote)

IN THE CHAIR: MR ROUČEK

Vice-President

8. Explanations of vote

Oral explanations of vote

Election of the President of the Commission

Charles Goerens (ALDE). – *(FR)* Mr President, yesterday the President, quite rightly, made much of respect for the Community method. This method guarantees the involvement of all Member States, and Community institutions, in the decision-making processes, and this from the very beginning.

The G4's way of tackling the banking and financial crisis in 2008 was the opposite of respect for the aforementioned method, which Mr Barroso called for yesterday afternoon. In 2008, we waited in vain for President Barroso to call for order.

The European Union is of course France, the United Kingdom, the Federal Republic of Germany, and Italy – all members of the G4 – but it is also Austria, Belgium, Estonia, Latvia, Romania, Poland, Hungary, Luxembourg and so on, which were excluded from an important phase in the decision-making process in 2008.

President Barroso, you should have enforced respect for the Community method in 2008, via the same statement you made yesterday. This is why I am unable to support your candidacy.

Mr President, may I add a personal remark. It is difficult for those who have the floor to speak with this din all around.

Crescenzo Rivellini (PPE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, after my speech I will say a few words in Neapolitan (*Part not transcribed in this document, since Neapolitan is not an official language*). I will do so not for reasons of local colour, but to attract political and media attention to our emergencies: the emergencies of southern Italy. I voted for President Barroso, not least because I hope that he will be the President of the whole of Europe, including southern Italy.

Located as it is in the middle of the Mediterranean, the South is the gateway to Europe and the link between different worlds. Through its history, geographical position and culture of hospitality, it can play an important role for the old continent as a whole. Southern Italy should be treated with the same dignity as other places in Europe and, now that it is experiencing difficulties, Europe must intervene as energetically as when it regularised 150 million citizens from the East, who became EU citizens. That operation came at a price, and if, today, a worker from Gdańsk earns 28 times more than he earned before, he also owes it to the economic effort of Italy and of southern Italy.

(The speaker continued in Neapolitan)

Daniel Hannan (ECR). – Mr President, time has, perhaps, habituated us to the hollowness of the ritual that we have just carried out. Familiar as we are with the EU structures, we have ceased to see how anomalous, how outrageous, it is that we have supreme executive and legislative power in the hands of an unaccountable and unelected bureaucracy. The majority of laws in the Member States come from a European Commission whom nobody votes for and nobody can get rid of. The only bit that pretends to democratic authority is the rite that was just carried out in this Chamber, which I cannot help saying put me in mind of one of those occasional meetings of the People's Assembly in the old Comecon times where we all stand up and congratulate ourselves on having rubber-stamped the decision.

I have no personal problems with José Manuel Barroso. If we are going to have a federalist President of the Commission – and I can see that is the will of the House – it might as well be him as anyone else. He seems a nice chap – and, like all British politicians, I am profoundly Lusophile and aware of our relationship with our oldest ally – but there is something farcical about the pretence that there is any democratic involvement in a system that puts a monopoly on the right to initiate law in the hands of people that we cannot vote for and cannot get rid of.

Syed Kamall (ECR). – Mr President, like my previous colleague who spoke earlier, I would like to say that I also have my reservations about Mr Barroso being re-elected as President of the Commission.

After all, he more than anyone is committed to further European integration, often against the will of the peoples of Europe. But he did come to our group meeting, the ECR Group meeting, and explain that he was in favour of smart regulation.

Now, of course, there is much doubt about what 'smart regulation' means. Many people believe that smart regulation is bad regulation, or that any regulation is not very smart regulation.

But I would ask him, if he really is in favour of smart regulation, to make sure that, on every directive, the Commission carries out a proper economic impact assessment. We have going through this House next year the Alternative Investment Fund Management Directive. The Commission has failed so far to conduct any proper economic impact assessment – in fact they say it cannot be done.

How, under those circumstances, are we going to get smart regulation? I ask Mr Barroso to reconsider.

Joint motion for a resolution: Forest fires in the summer of 2009 (RC-B7-0039/2009)

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – Mr President, I opposed the joint motion for a resolution on forest fires, despite the fact that I agree with European countries cooperating voluntarily to prevent, fight and repair the appalling damage caused by forest fires.

However, I object to the creation of European Union bodies that would exercise power over Member States in areas that are wider than necessary to deal with this problem. I draw attention to paragraphs 3, 7 and 8 of the joint motion for a resolution.

This proposal is exploiting admirable humanitarian responses to the appalling tragedies that we have seen in order to take further steps towards the creation of the European protection force called 'Europe Aid' as outlined in the Barnier report.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Mr President, I abstained in the final vote on this resolution, although I did do so with some reservation and a number of doubts, as this text does, without doubt, include many positive elements, things that no one can really oppose. I am thinking, for example, of the support for reinforcing the Member States' civil protection measures by means of the exchange of experts and working methods. Last summer, we saw once again that some forest fires assume such a scale that cooperation is necessary, but that cooperation between Member States takes place already. Such cooperation can, of course, be deepened further, but it is questionable what value there is, for example, in having a separate EU reaction force. Doing so simply takes resources from the Member States, creates yet another new EU body with its own staff and adds yet more bureaucracy.

Written explanations of vote

Election of the President of the Commission

Maria da Graça Carvalho (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) President Barroso has made Europe the world leader in the fight against climate change. The European Union is the only international bloc that has a clear, consistent negotiating position for the Copenhagen conference. The political guidelines for the next Commission outlined by President Barroso present an ambitious, modern vision for Europe, to which the fight against climate change and the areas of the knowledge triangle are central.

The challenges facing us are complex, and the responses must necessarily be holistic. For the post-2010 period, therefore, President Barroso is proposing a coordinated and convergent approach involving the Lisbon Strategy, energy and climate policy and social policy. New sources of growth and social cohesion are proposed, based on a new industrial strategy for Europe, a modern service sector and a dynamic rural economy.

President Barroso thus prioritises the real economy and its modernisation through scientific research, technological development, innovation and the principles of sustainability. The Commission, under the leadership of President Barroso, in partnership with the European Parliament and the Council, will help to cultivate a prosperous, sustainable and socially advanced European Union.

Françoise Castex (S&D), *in writing*. – (FR) For the sake of political consistency and out of respect for our electorate, I voted against the re-election of Mr Barroso. In the five years of his mandate, Mr Barroso, who harnessed the support of certain EU countries for George W. Bush's war in Iraq, has never been able to revive the European Union or to strengthen it in the face of national self-interest. He did not measure up to the task when the financial, economic and social crisis occurred.

All he has done in these five years is support the wayward paths taken by financial capitalism instead of proposing the new regulations Europe needs in the 21st century. The European Commission's policy needs to be reoriented. Mr Barroso is not the man for the job. His programme is no match for the scale of the current crisis: it lacks a European recovery plan, a pact for employment, regulation and effective supervision of the financial markets, and more robust and prompt instruments to correct the current imbalances. We need a directive on public services and a reoriented policy by the Commission on pay. If we want to save our European social model, we need a much more ambitious social agenda.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I am pleased to say that, as a Portuguese and a Member of the European Parliament, I voted in favour of the re-election of José Manuel Durão Barroso as President of the European Commission. I believe his performance during the previous mandate, which was beset by so many political, financial and social difficulties, and the experience he acquired in this post, justified the support of the governments and the renewed confidence of this House.

I deplore the many attempts – not all of them open or serious – to prevent his candidacy from succeeding, and I note that they were frustrated not only by a lack of any credible alternative but also by the foolishness of the arguments on which they were based. I regret that Members from my own country could not resist taking that path, which is as easy as it is inconsequential.

I hope the second Barroso Commission can combine technical competence with that 'something extra'. I also hope it will effectively respect and make use of the principle of subsidiarity, and will choose the safety and solidity of taking small steps, as recommended by Jean Monnet, rather than adopting the fast-track approach that has promised much but contributed little to the real progress of the European project and dream. However much we aim for the horizon, we only get there by putting one foot in front of the other. Let us go the right way.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I welcome the result of this vote, which brings Dr José Manuel Durão Barroso back to the European Commission Presidency. Portugal is proud to have a Portuguese of such recognised ability and quality as Dr Barroso at the head of the Commission. It is even prouder to see the value of his work during his first mandate, from 2004 to 2009. This value has been acknowledged by the European Parliament in this vote. In fact, he was elected by a very large majority, greater than that required by the Treaty of Lisbon.

Over the last five years, Dr Barroso showed strong, comprehensive leadership. The energy and climate change dossier, the Services Directive and the regulation on chemical substances are just a few examples of success and leadership. He was also at the forefront in the search for solutions and in concrete proposals to resolve the economic crisis that is still affecting us. The European Parliament has just sent out a signal that Europe

is strong and has a strong leader. Therefore, with confidence and hope, we can advance towards a Europe of greater prosperity and solidarity.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The political guidelines for the next mandate of the Commission, which have just been tabled, reveal its President's intention to continue pursuing the main lines of action that were included in the guidelines of the mandate that is now ending. Those guidelines lie at the origin of the deep economic and social crisis that we are now experiencing, the tragic consequences of which – unemployment, inequality, poverty and exclusion – have mercilessly afflicted the workers and peoples of Europe.

In Portugal, the consequences of implementing the policies resulting from these guidelines have been the destruction or utter crippling of essential productive sectors – agriculture, fisheries and industry; the assault on workers' rights, the devaluation of wages and the corresponding increase in unemployment and insecure work; inequality in income distribution, which now clearly diverges from the EU average; and the failure of the policies of deregulation, liberalisation and privatisation of basic sectors, which have dismantled public services and commercialised essential aspects of our collective existence. Keeping these same guidelines means perpetuating the concentration of wealth, maintaining divergence instead of convergence, and causing further damaging eruptions of a latent systemic crisis to occur sooner rather than later.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (S&D), in writing. – (PL) We would all like to see a stronger Europe, and for people to be better off! You do too, judging by the 'Political guidelines for the next Commission' which you presented to Parliament. Yet more is expected from a candidate for the future head of the Commission: he is expected to say how he intends to achieve this, rather than just presenting a list of challenges.

In fact, the goals are so wide-ranging that there is the danger of them ruling each other out, and there will definitely come a time when a choice will have to be made as to which of the priorities are 'more important'. For example, which would you choose if the aim of European economic competitiveness clashes with the aim of high levels of employment? The text you sent us does not make this clear.

I have the impression that your document is simply a wish-list of things that were not achieved in the previous term. The question is, why not?

I would, however, like to speak on the point about the Internet in your programme. You mention the importance of the Internet for economic development and the social cohesion of Europe, and even promise that the new Commission will develop a 'European Digital Agenda'. What I would like to know is how you intend to implement this idea in practice, and what the Agenda will contribute which is new compared to previous initiatives?

Bruno Gollnisch (NI), in writing. – (FR) Like my friends representing the national movements in Europe, I am one of the 219 MEPs who voted against Mr Barroso. He is a likeable and cultured man, but most of all he is the symbol of the failure of the European Union. He has failed to save our economies and our jobs from unfair global competition; to help European countries come out of the crisis; to reform the financial system to curb unbridled speculation; to guarantee democracy; to ensure food self-sufficiency; and to curb the accelerated de-industrialisation of our countries.

In a word, he has failed to demonstrate that the Europe of Brussels is more than a machine for grinding down, impoverishing and enslaving nations and peoples. On closer observation, the election of Mr Barroso is also a symbol: that of the way in which this Europe works. What sort of uproar would there be if, instead of the President of the Commission, who is going to influence the lives of 500 million Europeans through his policies, it was a Head of State who, despite being the sole candidate, was elected by little more than half of the votes?

Sylvie Guillaume (S&D), in writing. – (FR) Today I voted against Mr Barroso's candidacy for three essential reasons. Firstly, his own track record in the last five years: a Presidency which was weak, conservative and liberal, immobile in the face of the crisis, incapable of stimulating a coordinated recovery, and exclusively attentive to the wishes of the Heads of State or Government. José Manuel Barroso has certainly not furthered a strong Europe. Secondly, the inadequacy of his response to the conditions set by the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament: providing neither a genuine recovery plan, nor a pact for employment, no regulation, supervision or effective instruments to correct the imbalances in the financial markets, and making not one commitment concerning a framework directive protecting public services. Finally, the messages sent out by voters during the European elections, which showed us that they

no longer want a weakened, incomprehensible Europe, where compromise is considered a superior virtue to political direction.

Jacky Hénin (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (FR) The election of the President of the European Commission is an extremely important act, and the citizens of the EU should have the right to know their representatives' choice.

Personally speaking, I regret and condemn the secret ballot procedure that leads to a complete lack of accountability.

Moreover, as I can find no common ground with the policy proposed by Mr Barroso, I confirm that I will not be supporting his appointment as President of the Commission.

Cătălin Sorin Ivan (S&D), in writing. – (RO) At the end of the five-year term (2004-2009), the assessment of the European Commission's activities does not cast President Barroso in a favourable light. Based on this fact, it seems necessary to abstain from voting, especially at a time when a negative vote would be an unwise political decision, given the lack of any alternative, while a positive vote would be tantamount to expressing unconditional and unjustified confidence in an unsatisfactory programme.

I believe that the support being given to President Barroso by Member States is unarguable proof of the fact that he has not been a strong president, but rather one for whom national interests have taken priority, meaning that it has been national leaders who have set out the guidelines for his mandate. The European Commission needs a president to support the development of Community policies, constantly strive for integration and promote the concept of a United Europe. He must not be in any way an advocate for national interests. From a social-democratic perspective, President Barroso has not fulfilled a large number of the commitments made at the start of his mandate in 2004. Very little interest has been shown by the Commission in many of these, including the consolidation of a Social Europe. Consequently, I chose not to vote for President Barroso's reappointment.

Astrid Lulling (PPE), in writing. – (FR) I voted in favour of appointing Mr Barroso as President of the European Commission.

I have come to this decision for four reasons.

The European Council unanimously proposed Mr Barroso's candidacy.

In my understanding of democracy, election winners can claim the right to choose one of their own.

There is no other choice but Mr Barroso; no alternative solution has been seriously considered.

The criticisms directed at the outgoing President are mistaken about an essential fact, namely that the Commission is able to make proposals and that it is the Member States that lay them down.

My support also comes with some expectations.

In the course of his second term of office, Mr Barroso should be a little more independent minded, not least with regard to the large Member States, and the sole objective of his actions should be to serve the general interest of the Community.

I regret that the Commission has a tendency to evolve into a conglomerate of commissioners, free to act as they please. I would ask Mr Barroso to use his influence to counteract this evolution.

I would like the institution, as 'guardian of treaties', to regain its original strength, in other words, its capacity to show the way with rallying projects.

Willy Meyer (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (ES) Mr Barroso, the President of the European Commission, is responsible for the current situation of financial, economic, food and environmental crisis in which Europe is immersed. To date, no one has recognised his error, and the blame has instead been placed on the United States. To date, the Commission has tried to build a Europe based on policies of privatisation and dismantling of the social state.

The Commission adopted the Lisbon Strategy, which predicted economic growth of 3% and the creation of 20 million jobs by 2010. The failure of this strategy is clear. Despite that, the Commission is proposing to renew this strategy and continue with these policies, which are the cause of the crisis. This crisis is not a pandemic; it is the result of a gamble on one specific policy: the policy adopted by the European Commission.

Its foreign policy programme makes no reference to the Sahara or Palestine. These issues are not only not its priorities, but the EU is planning to grant advanced status to the Kingdom of Morocco and to upgrade relations with the State of Israel.

Maria do Céu Patrão Neves (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The work carried out by President Barroso over the last five years was characterised by great pragmatism, seriousness and firmness in the way he looked after Europe's top interests.

His world leadership in combating climate change, the timeliness of increasing Europeans' involvement with the oceans through the launch of the new European maritime policy, and his ability to generate consensus on the financial perspective in a Europe of 27 are a few examples that justify keeping him at the head of the European Commission.

Economic growth, investment in innovation and training, and fighting unemployment are fundamental pillars for Europe's integration to continue, and they are also Mr Barroso's priorities for the future.

At a time when the world economic and financial situation is not at its best, Europe needs a strong leader who can breathe life into the European project.

For all the above reasons and many others, I believe Mr Barroso is the ideal president to guide the EU's destiny in the forthcoming term of office.

Frédérique Ries (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) Like 381 of my fellow Members, I supported Mr Barroso's appointment as head of the Commission. I did so for many reasons, not least because some people are levelling particularly unfair accusations against the candidate. I hear some dream of a new Delors, while they forget that we have changed the world... and Europe. The Europe of the 12, of Kohl and Mitterrand, is no more and will doubtless never return.

The first President of a Commission of 25, then of 27, Mr Barroso had the delicate task of handling the enlargement of 2004, a mandate marked by consolidation. The second will be one of ambition. I hope it will be so and I want to give him the credit for this. I want to refuse to play the game of sorcerer's apprentice, to refuse to wait, not for Godot, but for another hypothetical candidate that the Council has no intention of putting forward. I want to refuse to wait and to further weaken our institutions and the reputation that Europe still enjoys among Europeans. So yes, we will expect him to keep his promises, such as combating climate change and discrimination, and the urgent concerted action in the face of the economic and social crisis. To postpone this vote one more time would be to bark up the wrong tree. To wait for a phantom candidate would be a mistake.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) A strong, ambitious Commission Presidency is essential for Europe to regain its position as world leader by seeking a balance between economic and political goals on one hand and social and territorial cohesion on the other. Priorities must be defined pragmatically but without neglecting the values that lie at the origin of the European project.

We have a number of challenges ahead, such as reforming the Community budget, which Europe must address by showing that it is able to set the world agenda on various topics including the fight against climate change and the regulation of financial markets. At a time when unemployment is soaring in several Member States, it is vital to seek a sustainable way out of the current economic and social crisis. This goal should unite the Member States around the principle of solidarity and the strengthening of the European single market.

Since I believe that José Manuel Durão Barroso has the qualities that will allow him to continue to successfully fulfil the expectations that we have placed in him, since I think the fact that he holds the post is an honour for Portugal, and since I see it as an advantage for a small, isolated, distant and outermost region like Madeira to have someone in the Commission who thoroughly understands its reality, I support his new candidacy for the post of President of the European Commission.

Frank Vanhecke (NI), *in writing*. – (NL) I voted against the re-appointment of Mr Barroso as President of the European Commission as, for the past five years, he has been the very symbol of a Commission that chose to disregard the democratic rejection of the Treaty of Lisbon and did so contemptuously and in a particularly arrogant fashion. Mr Barroso also repeatedly argued for a new wave of mass immigration and constantly played down the problems associated with the possible accession of Turkey to the EU. It is also telling that Mr Barroso yesterday refused to answer a justified question from a British Member about his intentions with regard to a European Commissioner for Human Rights – an internal one within the EU, that is. Big Brother Europe marches on, but apparently no one is to know, and that includes MEPs.

Derek Vaughan (S&D), *in writing*. – Although it is not the norm for me to abstain, I felt that, for today's vote on the election of the President of the Commission, abstention was the right choice. I accept that Mr Barroso has made some concessions, for example, on the issue of social impact assessments. However, Mr Barroso has failed to show commitment in putting forward proposals of importance to the S&D Group – for example, a strengthening of the Posted Workers Directive, a directive of vital importance for the protection of Welsh workers. We also need more commitment about the portfolios given to newly appointed commissioners and a clear explanation from Mr Barroso about the organisation of the next college. I do not believe that Mr Barroso's pledge to fight social dumping in Europe is far-reaching enough, and it is for this reason, as well as the abovementioned, that I took the decision to abstain on this vote.

Bernadette Vergnaud (S&D), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted against Mr Barroso's candidacy, above all, because I believe in a genuinely political Europe, which cannot be satisfied with a Commission bound by the desiderata of big business. I also believe that one cannot campaign by calling for another form of European leadership only to then give a blank cheque to a champion of liberalism whose programme is sorely lacking in ambition and values. A man who has taken shelter behind the idea of 'better regulation' in order to 'deregulate' everything that I, as a socialist, defend: public services, social protection of workers, respect for health systems, regulation of the financial economy and protection of consumers and of the environment against the power of industrial groups. Out of respect for my own convictions and those of the electorate, I feel that these values cannot be called into question by ulterior motives and tricks aimed at obtaining derisory concessions from conservatives who control the majority of the Member States, the European Parliament and the Commission, and who will not rest until they have furthered their deregulatory policy.

Dominique Vlasto (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) Although the vote on the President of the European Commission is secret, I would like to express publicly my support for the candidate from our political family, José Manuel Barroso, and sincerely to congratulate him on his re-election. As the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) won the European elections, it is quite natural that the President of the future Commission should come from our ranks. Therefore, despite the futile unrest among the divided left and the Greens, who did not, however, have a candidate to put forward, Mr Barroso was comfortably re-elected. I also welcome his reaffirmed commitment to work in close cooperation with our Assembly, within which he can count on our determination and our support each time the proposals of our European project have to go to the vote. Parliament and the Commission will now be able to set to work without delay, which was the most important thing at this difficult time, where there are many challenges to take up swiftly for the sake of all Europeans. Moreover, while Europe is involved in the G20 and climate negotiations, it must be united and in good working order: today's clear, unambiguous vote also strengthens it in the face of the other world powers.

Joint motion for a resolution: Forest fires in the summer of 2009 (RC-B7-0039/2009)

Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted for the European Parliament resolution of 16 September 2009 on the forest fires of summer 2009. This resolution follows numerous others highlighting the frequency, the seriousness, the complexity and the impact of natural and man-made disasters in Europe, the number of which has increased rapidly in the last few years. The forest fire phenomenon is aggravated by rural depopulation, the progressive abandonment of traditional activities, poor forest management, the existence of vast expanses of forest planted with one single species, the planting of non-adapted tree species, the absence of an effective prevention policy, the levity of penalties imposed in cases of arson, and the flawed implementation of laws forbidding illegal construction and guaranteeing reforestation. It is regrettable that, despite Parliament's demands, the Commission has not taken steps to create a European civil protection force, and I welcome the action of my friend Mr Barnier, who has long been proposing this facility. Finally, at a time when private insurance companies do not offer fire cover for forests, it is becoming imperative, faced with the private sector's failure to act, to consider a public/private collective instrument to insure forests against storms and fire.

Carlos Coelho (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Unfortunately, conditions of extreme drought and forest fires in southern Europe have been growing both more frequent and more intense. Immense damage has been caused in terms of loss of human life (11 people have died just this summer), reduced economic activity and environmental degradation, particularly through an increase in the rate of desertification, in that some 400 000 hectares of European forests have disappeared every year over the last decade.

Climate change is contributing to the increase in natural disasters, but many cases are still unforeseeable or are caused by criminal acts. Scientific research therefore needs to be developed so as to improve risk assessment

procedures, fire prevention systems and fire-fighting facilities, and the requisite financial resources must also be released.

We need a European strategy to combat natural disasters, as well as greater interoperability and coordination among the various Community instruments. The Member States should enhance their cooperation and coordination so as to guarantee solidarity and the availability of additional rapid mobilisation resources to fight these disasters.

I call on the Presidency of the Council to make an urgent decision on the regulation for the new Solidarity Fund, in order to increase transparency and make its mobilisation more flexible in an emergency.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Southern Europe has been the victim of disasters (drought and fires) that have threatened human lives, economies and local ecosystems and are contributing to the gradual abandonment of extensive areas that were once populated, worked and cared for. Rather than being a problem for one country or another, this issue and its serious consequences have now become cross-border in nature and clearly deserve a response at European level.

As I have said previously, the European Union will benefit if it remains united even in adversity and if it is able to mobilise resources such as the Solidarity Fund as well as systems and methods to avert the causes and mitigate the consequences of these scourges and to provide a flexible, prompt and suitable response to them.

In addition to the European Commission, which should adopt a leading role in seeking solutions and implementing best practice, the whole forestry sector should be called on to share knowledge, define solutions and point to ways to help diversify the activities associated with forests.

A Portuguese nursery rhyme says a tree is a friend. The European Union should repay this friendship and thus support the future of rural areas.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) The reason why I voted in favour is linked to the need for effective solidarity and the immediate mobilisation of financial resources, so as to be able, with all due urgency, to tackle the socially and environmentally tragic situation that has befallen the areas and communities affected by this summer's fires.

I believe, however, that the resolution should place greater emphasis on the effects of certain Community policies, particularly the common agricultural policy, which lead people to abandon the land and productive systems, and on activities which contribute to a preventive approach to the problem of fires.

The consequences of the CAP, particularly in countries like Portugal, are among the underlying causes of the fires which today devastate vast areas of land year after year. I believe, however, that this possible and desirable cooperation among Member States in fighting forest fires should not be used to pave the way for removing important aspects of Member States' individual sovereignty, namely in terms of civil protection and measures for controlling and intervening in their own territory.

Sylvie Guillaume (S&D), *in writing*. – (FR) Once again this summer, forest fires have devastated the south of France. Like our other European neighbours, our citizens have found themselves battling flames, these disasters resulting in both material damage and human suffering. This is why I have advocated the setting up of an independent and permanent European reaction force, whose task would be to assist Member States and regions affected by fires and other disasters. Equally, we need – and this is also the appeal we have made to the Commission – a strategy which allows us to conserve the rich ecosystems in our natural parks, be it the Bauges, Ardèche or Lubéron, with the whole undertaking relying on funding designed for preventive measures and actions to re-establish the damaged ecosystem. Recourse to the CAP might be justified to prevent the spread of forest fires, which are too often the result of abundant undergrowth in some areas. Finally, I have also advocated mobilisation of the EU Solidarity Fund, a fund that today is blocked by the Council even though it is needed desperately.

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE), *in writing*. – (FI) Mr President, in Monday's debate on the forest fires during the summer of 2009, I said that natural conditions will alter with climate change. That is a fact that cannot be contradicted. It does not, however, explain environmental disasters, especially if the same phenomena recur every few years. We can and must be better prepared. That is why I had to vote against my group's position today with regard to Amendment 5 and, to be perfectly honest, that position puzzles me greatly. It really is time the Member States of the Union took a look in the mirror. One feels fully justified in saying that the destruction caused by forest fires could have been prevented if certain Member States had developed and

implemented more effective preventive measures and worked harder to stop criminal activity in the acquisition of more land to build on.

Our political environment cannot be one where people close their eyes to the facts. This benefits nobody, especially when it concerns the scale of the human tragedy resulting from forest fires. It has been suggested that climate change is one cause of the increase in the number of forest fires, and it is true that Europe will have to prepare for longer forest fire seasons than just June to September which, until now, has been the norm. Summers are beginning earlier and they are warmer and drier, especially in the south, and the risk of fires is therefore growing. The problem of fires itself, however, lies not in any progressive change to natural conditions, but elsewhere. It is one thing to adapt to the changing environment; it is quite another to accept rigid bad practices and be unprepared.

Willy Meyer (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (ES) In Greece, 130 000 olive trees were destroyed by the fires, as well as many hectares of vines, cattle, beekeeping holdings, storehouses, stables and a large number of greenhouses and houses. In Spain, 95 769 hectares have been burnt by forest fires, causing 11 deaths and estimated losses of EUR 395 million.

The social, economic and environmental damage caused by the fires to local economies, productive activity and tourism is huge, rendering necessary support for affected citizens and the re-establishment of previous environmental conditions through immediate national and Community intervention.

We urge the Commission to mobilise the current EU Solidarity Fund without delay and make available the resources needed for the purpose of supporting rehabilitation plans for the affected areas, the restoration of their productive potential and the full reforestation of the burnt areas.

The deforestation is partly due to the construction of roads and railway lines. The Commission must promote measures so that public works financed by EU funds include an amount of public investment for the improvement, maintenance and increase of public forest.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), in writing. – (DE) Unfortunately, the summer of 2009 was marked by devastating forest fires in southern Europe, which caused huge material and ecological damage. It was clear in this context that arsonists, who profit by destroying forests, are encouraged by shortcomings in or the lack of forest registers, or by poorly defined land use. It was therefore important in this motion for a resolution to call on the Member States to revise or amend these registers.

In addition to reforestation, cooperation between experts, fire brigades and other groups deployed is required both in emergencies and for prevention. This motion for a resolution contains logical proposals, such as how the Member States can be supported in a disaster in accordance with the principle of solidarity. That is why I voted for the joint motion for a resolution on the forest fires in the summer of 2009.

Frédérique Ries (ALDE), in writing. – (FR) We must say straightaway that preventing natural disasters and adapting to climate change is not an easy task. Even if the European Union fares somewhat better than other regions of the world with the creation of a strengthened civil protection mechanism and the financial godsend represented by the Solidarity Fund, more than 600 000 hectares are destroyed each year.

I am not just talking about the forest fires in the Mediterranean Basin, the worst of which were those of summer 2009 in the uplands around Athens. For me, two proposals seem essential to improve the situation. Firstly, Mr Barnier's report of 2006 on a European civil protection force must be implemented in full. We are still waiting for the European green helmets to be set up to give substance to a European policy for civil protection voted for by citizens. Secondly, it is important for the Commission to have a right to oversee what is happening locally. It would be surprising to say the least if European grants were paid when some forest fires were probably started by criminals with the sole aim of preparing the land for development.

Joanna Senyszyn (S&D), in writing. – (PL) I voted in favour of the resolution on forest fires. So far this year, over 200 000 hectares of forest have been destroyed by fire in the European Union. That is more than in the whole of 2008! In Poland, the coefficient of the threat of forest fires is one of the highest in Europe. In April 2009, the number of fires was the highest in five years.

We must take urgent and effective measures to counter climate change, which is one of the causes of the fires. Another important issue in the adopted resolution is that of coordinating EU mechanisms for the prevention of climate change and, in particular, the effective use of the Solidarity Fund to limit the consequences of fires.

We need to set up a European reaction force capable of acting quickly in case of natural disasters. This would be a financial and organisational completion of the actions undertaken in the Member States. I hope that the Parliamentary resolution on fighting the effects of fires will be duly considered by the European Commission and mobilised to intensify its own actions in this field.

Catherine Stihler (S&D), *in writing*. – Today's debate on forest fires is welcomed. The devastation to many sites of natural beauty is a loss to us all. We must show solidarity with our colleagues and help the countries affected.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) As a result of the reforestation promoted by the regional government, along with initiatives by environmental protection organisations, recent studies show that the forests of Madeira have increased by almost 5 000 hectares in the last 36 years, an achievement that is all the more noteworthy because it goes against the national trend. This inestimably valuable heritage must be protected and, while we certainly need to be prepared to respond to forest fires, I feel it is essential to balance the allocation of resources across fire prevention, detection and actual fire fighting. I voted in favour of this resolution since I believe this policy can be promoted at European level through a strategy of solidarity that seeks to coordinate fire response and the effective prevention of hazardous forms of behaviour.

With special emphasis on the outermost regions, this approach should involve both the authorities and the owners of forested land in cleaning up woodlands, planting native species and repopulating rural areas. Criminal behaviour should also be suitably punished at a national level. Flexibility in the implementation of procedures associated with the use of existing structural funds or new ones, such as the EU Solidarity Fund, will allow a swifter response to be given to people affected by the loss of farmland, homes and livestock as a result of fires and other disasters.

Frank Vanhecke (NI), *in writing*. – (NL) I abstained from the final vote on the compromise resolution on the aftermath of the forest fires in 2009. This was because I note that the majority in this Parliament believes that combating forest fires at the European level should not be restricted to support and coordination but that, in reality, a kind of separate European fire-fighting corps would have to be established, yet another European body that would cost vast sums in order to duplicate work already performed by others.

It is, in any case, an illustration of the fact that the Euro-federalists are less concerned about efficiently and competently managing our continent and more concerned about making a statement, namely that everything must be regulated at the European level – in spite of the principle of subsidiarity that we hear acclaimed so frequently.

(The sitting was suspended at 12.50 and resumed at 15.00)

9. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

IN THE CHAIR: MR BUZEK

President

10. Financial services (signature of the acts)

President. – Under the codecision procedure, legislative acts are signed by the President of the European Parliament and the current Presidency representing the Council. Before resuming the sitting, a legislative package will be signed to make it effective. Cecilia Malmström, the Minister for European Affairs, will sign on behalf of the Council. I am very pleased that Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner is also with us today.

I would like to say a few words on the legislation we are about to sign today. Today, the eve of the extraordinary summit of the European Union in preparation for the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh is a good occasion to strengthen the role of the European Parliament as co-legislator. I have been asked to represent the European Parliament at the dinner of Heads of State or Government. We, the European Union, will be preparing for our participation in the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh.

Today we have an important package of four different legislative acts under the codecision procedure approved by us in response to the financial crisis. What is in the package? A capital requirements directive, a regulation on credit rating agencies, a new regulation on cross-border payments, and a decision establishing a new programme to support specific activities in the field of financial services, financial reporting and audit.

The directive and the regulations are aimed at protecting EU investors and the European Union's financial system, and at increasing consumer rights guarantees and ensuring better supervision. These acts are aimed at stabilising the financial markets. We are thereby fulfilling the predictions, but the legislation we are signing was drawn up by Parliament in the previous term. Would Minister Malmström like to take the floor before signing the legislative acts?

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Mr President, we are now going to sign a number of legal acts that are absolutely central to the EU's response to the financial and economic crisis that has hit Europe so hard and that will continue to have an impact. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Czech Presidency, which worked very hard to get these acts in place within a short time. It was thanks to the Czech Presidency that we managed to bring about quickly such successful cooperation between the Council and Parliament, as well as quick, effective agreements.

As I mentioned previously, we are cautiously optimistic about the economic situation, but we also know that unemployment will hit many countries very hard in the coming period. There is therefore still reason for Parliament, the Council and the Commission to work closely with each other. I am looking forward to our cooperation and I am proud to be able to sign these acts along with you, Mr President.

President. – I would like to draw attention to the fact that what we are doing is an expression of the continuity of the functions of the Council, Parliament and the Commission. There have, in the meantime, been elections to the European Parliament which have in no way impeded our activities or our work.

I would like to now ask Minister Malmström to proceed with the joint signing, which will be done at this table. I also invite Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, Mrs Berès and Mrs Bowles – the previous and current Commissioners on Economic and Monetary Affairs – I would ask both of you to come here to the middle, and the rapporteurs, who include Mr Karas and Mr Gauzès. You will all be present at the signing, and the Minister and I will sign.

I would also like to point out that Mrs Starkevičiūtė and Mr Hoppenstedt are former rapporteurs, but are no longer in the European Parliament, as they were Members during the previous term of office.

We shall now proceed to the signing.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ROTH-BEHRENDT

Vice-President

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

12. Composition of interparliamentary delegations: see Minutes

13. Conclusion of a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EC and the Republic of Tajikistan (debate)

President. – The next item is the joint debate on

– the Council and Commission statements on the conclusion of a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the EC and the Republic of Tajikistan and

– the recommendation (A7-0007/2009) by Alojz Peterle, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the proposal for a Council and Commission decision on the conclusion of a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States, of the one part, and the Republic of Tajikistan, of the other part

(12475/2004 – 11803/2004 – C6-0118/2005 – 2004/0176(AVC)).

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Madam President, honourable Members, Commissioner, Mr Peterle, I am pleased to have the opportunity this afternoon to discuss the EU's links with Tajikistan and, in particular, the importance we place on laying a new foundation for our relations with the country by entering into a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

I know that Parliament has a strong interest in this issue. As far back as February 2008, in your resolution on an EU strategy for Central Asia, you called on the Member States to ratify the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement quickly – thereby confirming Parliament's intention to approve the agreement within the near future.

Now the Agreement has been ratified and there is a strong desire to move on with the remaining steps as quickly as possible, so that the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement can enter into force as soon as possible, hopefully before the end of the year. If so, it would send a clear signal that we are opening a new chapter in our relations between the European Union and Tajikistan.

Tajikistan is an important part of our overall strategy for Central Asia. This hardly accessible country is one of the poorest in the world. It has a poorly maintained border with Afghanistan, making it a major route for drug smuggling and a way into the region for radical Islamists. Consequently, we have a great interest in supporting Tajikistan, both for its own sake and in order to solve our common problems. We are already doing this through a number of contacts. The Swedish Presidency sent a high level group to the region in July, and a ministerial conference with Central Asia was held in Brussels yesterday.

However, Tajikistan is one of very few countries on the EU's eastern border with which we have not yet concluded an overall agreement since the Cold War ended. If we seriously want to get to grips with the issues that I mentioned, we need to create a suitable framework for our future relations. The arrangements for political dialogue and practical cooperation with Tajikistan must be improved so as to better reflect the shared challenges faced by the region. A Partnership and Cooperation Agreement would provide us with a more structured way of discussing matters in which we have a shared interest: human rights, the rule of law, the drugs trade and organised crime, as well as terrorism and religious organisation.

At the same time, we need to make progress on issues relating to democracy, good social management and human rights in the region. We are well aware that this is no easy task. I therefore very much welcome the structured dialogue with Tajikistan on human rights that is providing an opportunity to conduct a proper discussion. The second round of this dialogue will take place in Dushanbe on 23 September.

We must continue to encourage Tajikistan to introduce a programme of reforms. Developments are often very worrying. We would like to see a more democratic approach within the country as regards freedom of organisation, religious freedom, freedom of the media and the development of civil society. We must do our utmost to convince Tajikistan that the rule of law must be observed in the fight against illegal activities, the drugs trade and terrorism. We must emphasise that human rights and basic freedoms must be respected as a way of preventing ethnic or cultural conflicts.

We are also very worried about the extensive corruption that is to be found in the country. It is hindering not only development in Tajikistan, but also effective contributions from donors. We should use every channel available to appeal to the Tajik authorities to tackle this problem as quickly as possible. We cannot ignore the fact that all the transit routes for the drugs trade – or a great many at least – pass through Tajikistan. The country is vulnerable to radical movements and international organised crime. We must increase our support for Tajikistan in order to counter this activity while, at the same time, providing alternative sources of income. This strategy accords well with our commitment in Afghanistan and our work on stabilising that country. We welcome Tajikistan's interest in cooperation and support its efforts.

Tajikistan has demonstrated an open, constructive attitude to discussions on our shared challenges. That is positive. This dialogue is an important element of our support for Tajikistan in its work on promoting cooperation with its neighbours and finding solutions to urgent, complex regional problems such as climate change, water and border controls. In view of the fact that we have a strong interest in dealing with many of these problems more effectively and efficiently, I welcome the opportunity to create a new basis for our relations with Tajikistan. The Partnership and Cooperation Agreement provides us with a framework within which we can develop our bilateral relations further and thereby contribute to the overall goals of our strategy for the whole of Central Asia. I therefore call on this Parliament to vote in favour of the Agreement, so that it can enter into force as soon as possible.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, firstly I would like to thank Mr Peterle for his excellent report, and also the resolution, which gives a very good analysis of the situation in Tajikistan and makes recommendations which I can support.

Since the EU Strategy for Central Asia was adopted in June 2007, our relationships with all the countries of Central Asia have been deepening to our mutual benefit. The rhythm of contacts between us has gathered

pace, and there is now a shared understanding of the benefits of greater cooperation on security matters, border management and controls, education, governance and energy diversification. The strategy is succeeding in forging a new kind of partnership with the five Central Asian republics.

Clearly, though, this overarching strategy is underpinned by individual and differentiated bilateral relations that reflect the varying aspirations and orientations of the countries concerned. As you all know, our cooperation with Tajikistan is currently still governed by the trade and cooperation agreement concluded with the USSR in 1989 and endorsed by Tajikistan in 1994. This agreement does not fully reflect our ambitions under the Central Asia Strategy any more, nor does it serve to support the kind of relationship we now seek with Tajikistan.

Your assent to the new EU-Tajikistan Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, which is before you for debate today, would therefore represent a major step forward, allowing us to widen and deepen our cooperation with this country.

Today's Tajikistan is confronted, as has been said already, by major economic and social challenges. It is important – and in Europeans' own interests – that Tajikistan should succeed in tackling its difficulties. This is a country which shares a nearly 1 500 km border with Afghanistan, and which lies close to the Swat Valley in Pakistan. It is a territory vulnerable to spill-over from these conflict areas and to infiltration by Islamic militants.

Tajikistan is also key to efforts to stem the flow of illegal drugs to Europe from Afghanistan. Greater cooperation with the European Union can therefore play a part in helping to prevent the spread of instability.

A key element in Tajikistan's vulnerabilities is its weak economy. The poorest of the Central Asian republics has been badly hit by a substantial decrease in prices for aluminium and cotton due to the global downturn. This, taken together with a 34% drop in remittances in the first half of 2009, gives rise to concern that poverty levels may be rising, and that a precarious socio-economic situation could provoke social unrest.

I believe that we are now on the right track with Tajikistan, supporting and encouraging indispensable reforms. This has also been the focus of EU Special Representative Morel's frequent visits and of my own visit in spring 2008. There is progress, but clearly more needs to be done. The Government has made it clear that, in addition to greater trade and cooperation, it is willing to implement measures to improve social welfare, health, education, tackle corruption and improve human rights.

It is to be welcomed that President Rahmon has created the post of an ombudsman. The ombudsman will be an important interlocutor for us in the next round of the EU-Tajikistan human rights dialogue that you mentioned, on 23 September. Judiciary reform is still making slow progress, but we hope the recommendations of a recent human rights civil society seminar in Dushanbe will be taken into account by the government, particularly in reform of the legal profession and the new criminal procedure code in Tajikistan.

I am, of course, very well aware of your concerns on democracy and human rights in Tajikistan and I can therefore assure you that the Commission will take these concerns fully into account in our dialogues with this country.

As to the economic reforms, we see progress, for example, on the drafting of a cotton debt resolution mechanism, which hopefully will pave the way for wider agricultural reforms and the implementation of 'Freedom to Farm', crucial to tackling poverty in the country.

The European Parliament's assent to the PCA today will help us to continue to work with Tajikistan on a whole range of political and economic reforms, with a special focus on democracy and human rights, and also to ensure their thorough implementation. The reform effort is already underpinned by a relatively large amount of bilateral assistance from the Commission. Indeed, it is EUR 66 million for the period 2007 to 2010 which will even rise to EUR 70 million over the three years 2011 and 2013.

Our aid will focus on sector support for social protection and health, public finance management reform and technical assistance for private sector development. This process will be supported by our delegation in Dushanbe. It is my intention that, before the end of this year, our regionalised office there should become a fully-fledged delegation to encourage the reform process and facilitate full implementation of the PCA. In particular, I hope it will help us to maintain a thorough assessment of progress in the key areas I have mentioned which we will then measure against clear benchmarks.

Alojz Peterle, *rapporteur*. – (SL) The decision to conclude a partnership and cooperation agreement between the European Communities, their Member States and Tajikistan is in line with the European Council Strategy for a New Partnership with Central Asia and Tajikistan's clear will to develop broad cooperation with the European Union, in trade and many other fields.

I am pleased to see that all the Member States have ratified this agreement and hope that we will be able to give our assent to the agreement with Tajikistan, just as we have previously assented to agreements with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. This will mark the end of the Trade and Cooperation Agreement between the European Union and the former Soviet Union.

Acting on the basis of its fundamental values and principles, the European Union expresses with this agreement its strategic interest in cooperation with Tajikistan, which it regards as a very important partner in this part of the world. The EU also wishes to deepen its relations with Tajikistan, thereby contributing to the security, stability and economic progress of this country and the development and consolidation of its democratic institutions, as well as to the protection of human rights and the rule of law.

The more specific objectives of European policy on Tajikistan relate primarily to supporting the struggle against poverty, supporting good governance and reform, as well as to effectively tackling drug trafficking and organised crime. This report takes a critical stance on the state of democracy in this country, expressing concern about corruption and the state of civil society but, at the same time, it calls upon the Tajik Government to tackle the problematic situation in the field of education and training, as soon as possible.

The report also expresses justified concern about violations of human rights, in particular, women's rights, religious freedoms, judicial independence and the conditions governing the work of civil society organisations. That being said, the report also welcomes the commencement of dialogue on human rights, the progress of which is essential for the development of bilateral relations.

This agreement reflects our conviction that Tajikistan has the potential to create a modern, functioning state which is capable of successfully carrying out its regional role, in particular, in fighting the extremism spilling over from Afghanistan and elsewhere in the region. Among other things, the report also reminds us of the importance of energy and water, as these issues concern inter-state relations within Central Asia and require joint tackling.

By way of conclusion, allow me to compliment my colleagues on their constructive collaboration and the Commission on its valuable help. Above all, I would like to thank the Embassy of the Republic of Tajikistan for their cooperation.

I firmly believe that, with this agreement, the European Union will be able to build on and deepen the cooperation which it has had with Tajikistan to date, and I hope that this will be the spirit in which this agreement is implemented in the near future. I warmly recommend that you adopt the agreement with Tajikistan.

Filip Kaczmarek, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (PL) I would like to congratulate the rapporteur, Alojz Peterle, on his highly factual and – I would like to stress – very balanced report on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement between the European Communities and Tajikistan.

Tajikistan has come in for a lot of criticism for its lack of democracy. What we most often disapprove of is the lack of press freedom, religious freedom and corruption. I do not wish to dispute those charges here. However, we do need to take into account the fact that Tajikistan has recently made progress both in combating corruption and improving the human rights situation, as well as various other sensitive areas. In addition, it is a relatively stable country, which is important, considering its strategic location. However this has already been covered today.

As a neighbour of Afghanistan, and the associated problems of the large-scale production and sale of drugs, terrorism and growing extremism, and with another increasingly unstable neighbour, Pakistan, Tajikistan could be a natural ally of the European Union. It is therefore in the EU's interest to continue to support democratic processes in that country and to strengthen its political, economic and social potential.

Let us remember that Tajikistan is the poorest of the former Soviet republics. It was one of just 12 countries that was last year on the UN's list of the countries worst affected by the world food crisis. I am pleased in this respect that the report also mentions the Millennium Development Goals. Let us also remind Tajikistan of these.

The European Union is Tajikistan's primary trading partner. Both sides should make efforts to implement the agreement as fast as possible, thereby supporting the country's development and stabilising its economic situation. Merely criticising what is wrong in Tajikistan will not achieve this. We also need to send out a positive signal that we care about developing contacts with this country and, in my opinion, Mr Peterle's report, along with the entire Parliament, has sent just such a signal.

Niccolò Rinaldi, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, Tajikistan is a word seldom uttered in this House, and so we – I speak on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, and also as a member of the Committee on International Trade and of the Delegation for relations with Central Asia – welcome this agreement. I also welcome this decision to take swift action to promote our representative offices in the region, as the Commissioner mentioned just now.

Moreover, Tajikistan, which is a country that can surprise us but which is often described as an outpost of Europe, is not on the periphery of the world – just as none of the other countries in Central Asia, Afghanistan being the main one, are either. It is in this country that some very important battles are being fought in relation to drugs trafficking, the fight against authoritarianism and fundamentalism, and the establishment of the rule of law and democracy, which are, unfortunately, still very fragile.

With this legislative instrument we will be able to make progress, not only from a trade perspective but, I hope, from a political and cultural perspective too.

Heidi Hautala, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FI) Madam President, conditions are far more favourable for embarking on a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with Tajikistan than, for example, Uzbekistan or Turkmenistan, these latter countries being total dictatorships. Tajikistan, however, is on something of a better path, and this agreement will allow the European Union to have some influence on the situation there. It was agreeable to hear that, in the name of the Council and the Commission, the cooperation pact would focus on human rights and democracy and try to promote the development of the rule of law. It was also excellent to hear that an ombudsman's institution had been established in Tajikistan. In many countries, this is a very important instrument, and the European Union should lend its full support to this new institution.

I would like to raise another point regarding the question of water resources. This region is rich in water resources, and the European Union could help Tajikistan to exploit these resources of theirs rationally and democratically, taking account too of the interests of those countries whose territories lie downstream and which might possibly suffer from the effects of large hydroelectric power stations. Whatever the case, the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance would like to emphasise the importance of regional cooperation, so that the local economy in Central Asia might recover.

Charles Tannock, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Madam President, Tajikistan is not blessed with the energy and mineral resources of other countries in Central Asia. However, that is no excuse for marginalising Tajikistan at the expense of its wealthier and larger neighbours.

Central Asia is a region vital to the EU's political and energy security. In terms of strengthening relations with the EU, some countries in the region will progress faster than others. That is inevitable. But we must retain a sense of collective engagement as we continue to improve ties with what was, until quite recently, a diplomatically isolated and largely overlooked region, particularly by the European Union. Favouring some countries in Central Asia over others risks creating a discord and division in the region. In particular, Islamist terrorists in the region have shown a determination to exploit poverty and inadequate governance to radicalise the people and spread their message of hatred.

The Government of Tajikistan has rejected extremism and, with the help of the international community, is seeking now to consolidate its nation's democracy. Tajikistan still bears the scars of a brutal civil war between secular and Jihadi forces that erupted after the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s. People in Tajikistan have no wish to see the return of bloodshed, which is why they have given courageous support to NATO operations against the Taliban in Afghanistan. The ISAF mission in Afghanistan is vital to Tajikistan's long-term future and its desire to find a security anchor westwards.

It is fair to say that Tajikistan's record in democratisation and human rights is imperfect, but I am convinced that dialogue and engagement on the EU's part will encourage Tajikistan towards positive change. Certainly, that seems to be the European Union's view with regard to Belarus and Uzbekistan, so Tajikistan deserves to be treated in the same way. The ECR Group therefore supports a deeper strategic political and economic

partnership with Tajikistan based on a commitment of progress towards openness, democracy and higher standards of human rights.

Sabine Lösing, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Madam President, thank you for the report. As a member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, I questioned the competent representative of the Commission in a debate on the role of this agreement within the framework of EU immigration management. He clearly stated that, when it entered into force, it would pave the way for cooperation with the border security agency (Frontex) and for numerous immigration regulations, such as within the framework of readmission agreements and border security with Afghanistan. The 1 200 km long border between Tajikistan and Afghanistan has already been addressed here. It will then also become another target of the EU's repressive policy to keep out refugees.

Thus, the European Union wants to seal itself off from refugees far beyond its external borders. Yet again, we see that this is a fundamental component of EU foreign policy. As a result of such partnership agreements, refugees are interned in camps, in which, as we all know, inhumane conditions prevail, as is currently the case in Ukraine. The problem has already been addressed here in general terms. This form of so-called international immigration management involves serious infringement of the Geneva Refugee Convention and of international human rights.

I therefore call on the EU to start fighting the cause of flight rather than the refugees. The European neighbourhood policy is one means of making fortress Europe even more impenetrable, which is why it is looked on very sceptically from our point of view, from the point of view of the GUE/NGL.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (NL) Madam President, quite honestly, this debate gives me mixed feelings. On the one hand, I welcome the fact that Mr Peterle's resolution clearly points out the many problematic areas in the Tajik economy and society. On the other hand, I find it incomprehensible that, at crucial points, Tajikistan is described as a relatively stable country. I have just heard it again in a debate and I absolutely cannot understand where this idea comes from. Well, the European Union gives the impression that this agreement has to come about come what may. This will have undeniable consequences for the credibility of the large amounts of criticism that will still have to be made later on.

What I read in paragraph 2 about the disappointment of the Tajik Government I find entirely astonishing. We must debate the disappointment, ladies and gentlemen, of, for example, the Protestant minority or the Muslims confronted with an Act on Religion that deeply interferes with their religious life. Instead of this completely misplaced disappointment, the Tajik Government should take care of the large amounts of work it needs to do at home. I hope, Commissioner, that this is also followed up on conscientiously.

Pino Arlacchi (ALDE). – Madam President, I am very much in favour of this agreement. I believe it is a big step forward in the cooperation between the European Union and Tajikistan, which is a very important country for several reasons.

I just want to quote one contribution to the stability and security of our continent of the EU. Tajikistan is at the crossroads of drug trafficking from Afghanistan to Europe and Russia. At least 30% of the heroin produced in Afghanistan comes to Europe and Russia through Tajikistan. Ten years ago, the international community started a big operation in Tajikistan, strengthening all the drug control apparatus, and I am very happy to see, ten years later, that it is working and that it is going ahead very well. This agreement is a direct contribution to the stability and security of Europe.

I see there are still many limitations and colleagues underlined the problems in Tajikistan in terms of human rights, poverty and so on, but I believe this agreement is Europe at its best and I am very much in favour of it.

Pier Antonio Panzeri (S&D). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I, too, believe that this cooperation agreement with Tajikistan really is very positive and can help to achieve what I believe are some important and precise objectives.

The first objective concerns the strategic position of that country, which can genuinely be of use in promoting an area of peace, security and stability. The second objective, I believe, is and must be to encourage the growth of that country from an economic and social point of view, because we know that it is one of the poorest countries in the region.

Lastly, we must ensure that freedom, democracy and rights are the fundamental elements that govern the application of this agreement. Leaving aside any limitations that may be found, I believe we should welcome the report on which we are voting in this House.

Jelko Kacin (ALDE). – (SL) I would like to congratulate Mr Peterle on an excellent report. The suffix ‘-stan’ means ‘state’ and Tajikistan is the last of the countries whose names end in ‘-stan’ to be recognised as a state by us. Up until now, we have always overlooked it, which was a great injustice.

However, the stability of Central Asia is in the interests of the region itself, in our interests, and in the strategic interests of the world as a whole. All the countries in the world are interlinked like a connecting vessel, which is why we also need to demonstrate our maturity by ensuring that all the countries in this region are given equal attention, regardless of their size, stage of development or how much energy wealth they possess.

It seems to me that we have now righted this wrong and made up for lost time. For this reason, I would like to congratulate both the rapporteur and the Commission, as well as Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner and the Swedish Presidency, for finally consigning this delay to the past. From now on, things will be better.

Janusz Władysław Zemke (S&D). – (PL) I would like to thank you very much for allowing me to ask a question. I believe concluding this agreement will be a good idea, as it is a step in the right direction.

However, I do ask myself, and I would also like to ask Minister Malmström the question: among the many activities that the European Union has planned, would it not be desirable to put greater emphasis on helping Tajikistan to train those responsible for securing the border with Afghanistan? We are well aware that this is an extremely crucial issue. The border stretches for 1 500 kilometres. Tajikistan has great problems protecting the border, particularly as there is a large Tajik minority on the Afghan side. I therefore think that among the various initiatives undertaken by the European Union, we should also consider helping to train the Tajik forces and the people who are responsible for keeping that border secure.

Bernd Posselt (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, I would also like to say that Mr Peterle has produced an excellent report. We should be clear about one thing: the freedom-loving people of central Asia are among our most important partners. This region has often been dominated by foreign powers. For the first time in a long time – for centuries – it is again free. We should exploit this opportunity to establish a real partnership of the free.

I heard talk earlier of crime. Of course, we must work together to combat crime, but first we should look at the culture in these countries and understand that these are ancient trading nations. They do not just trade in drugs; they trade in goods which were always important for Europe and the world. We should therefore say that this is about partnership, not paternalism.

Athanasios Plevris (EFD). – (EL) Madam President, I, too, should like to touch on the question of crime, which has already been raised, and the question of illegal immigration. It is a fact that Tajikistan is at a nerve point, in a geopolitical position, and Europe should examine how we can manage to reduce both crime, in connection with drugs from Afghanistan, and – first and foremost – migratory movements.

It is a fact that Europe can no longer sustain these migratory movements via Tajikistan and from Afghanistan and other countries, a fact which primarily the Mediterranean countries, such as Malta, Cyprus, Greece and Italy, are paying for now, but which it is certain, with mathematical precision, will be paid for at a later date by all the countries of northern Europe.

Of course, we must respect the rights of all the people who come from these countries but, at some point, Europe too will need to protect itself and realise that we cannot sustain these migratory movements from Asia.

Cecilia Malmström, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SV) Madam President, as Mr Peterle says in his excellent report, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement is part of a greater strategy for increased regional stability in Central Asia. It is only right that we make this significant move, because there are so many problems and they are so extensive and affect so many countries, not least Afghanistan and Pakistan, but each country has its own specific problems. Mr Peterle deals with all this very systematically in his report.

I am pleased that the European Parliament is still holding the banner high as regards human rights. Human rights are a problem in Tajikistan. There is still a lot to do in the country as regards respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law. That is why it is so useful, as the Commissioner has said, that we have this

dialogue on human rights. I am sure that the Commission will be very clear at next week's meeting about European values and the expectations that we have of Tajikistan.

This summer, the EU supported a conference that dealt with precisely the matter of strengthening the rule of law in Tajikistan and which was attended by representatives from the research world, civil society, non-governmental organisations and foreign experts, as well as by many representatives of Tajikistan's own authorities. It is a matter of improving the independence of the legal authorities and strengthening the rule of law.

Mrs Hautala brought up the matter of water. This is very important in the region. The EU is supporting a number of sustainable development projects for hydroelectric power. These projects must be based on scientific studies, have a regional perspective, and take into account the specific needs that exist.

Mr Zemke mentioned the matter of border management. This is a very important issue. The EU is supporting the region to the tune of EUR 66 million up to 2010 and EUR 70 million in the three-year period thereafter. This must surely provide scope for strengthening not only border management and control, but also training of customs and police officers. I am sure that the Commission will return to this later.

To sum up, there are many difficult and complex problems in Tajikistan and throughout the region. There is some light at the end of the tunnel, but we must not underestimate the problems. I am very pleased that the House is unanimous as regards the importance of taking this step of a Partnership and Cooperation Agreement. It will provide us with a better tool to use in our work on improving stability and resolving these problems and with which to conduct an active dialogue with the country on human rights and democracy. It is an important step forward and fills a gap that has existed in our regional strategy up till now.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, we have firmly believed for a long time that an EU-Central Asia Strategy is vitally important and will have a positive effect on security, stability and prosperity in the countries of Central Asia. As Mr Tannock rightly said, we should not marginalise Tajikistan. On the contrary, I think we should engage with this poorest country of Central Asia.

Having said this, yes of course we are also fully aware that there are huge challenges for this country. I think it was Mr Arlacchi who mentioned that Afghanistan remains the first opiate- and heroin-producing country in the world and, of course, the whole transit takes place through Tajikistan and through other Central Asian countries. Afghan opium and heroin are being trafficked out of the country, mainly through Iran and Pakistan on the southern routes and through Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan on the northern routes. So we know that this is an extremely important issue. But we also see that drug production has decreased in Afghanistan and now it is really a matter of working together in order to make this decrease still further.

For that, we have introduced BOMKA, the border management programme. That is excellent because it works against smuggling. It is helping these countries to trade legally but, in particular, it is also working against drug production. I have visited those institutions myself and I can tell you they are working very well. We are also organising training. Training is among the European Union programmes.

Let me say a second word on the human rights question. The new partnership and cooperation agreement will provide us with an instrument to deepen our dialogue with Tajikistan in this field, and there is the human rights clause. This will give us the opportunity and the means for discussing with the Tajik authorities all related issues, such as child labour, women's rights, freedom of assembly and religious freedom – absolutely, Mr Belder, because there are still some problems.

Water has also been mentioned. I have known about these problems for very many years. We have tried to help the Tajiks and now we play the role of facilitator among Central Asian countries. We are convinced that it has to be tackled at regional level, taking countries' interests and needs into account – both upstream, which means Tajikistan and Kurdistan, and downstream, which means Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. I think only in this context can a permanent solution be found. Therefore we are working with all the countries and, in this context, a national policy dialogue on water is scheduled for 2010 – next year – in which all these issues will be addressed, and then, of course, we will try and come to terms.

My final remarks: the time is right to support the final stage of the ratification process for the partnership and cooperation agreement. More intense cooperation with Tajikistan, supported by you, by Parliament, is in the interests of our citizens. A positive vote will send a strong signal to Tajikistan that the European Union honours its commitments under our Central Asia Strategy. It will pave the way for a partnership essential

to our own security and help us encourage greater regional cooperation, so vital for the stability of Central Asia.

Alojz Peterle, *rapporteur*. – (SL) I would like to thank you all for your attentive words, new insights and new emphases. I am pleased to see that Parliament stands united, once again, in this debate and that it has the will to forge a stronger and tighter partnership with Tajikistan. I am also pleased that we are aware of Tajikistan's identity and its special role in the region.

I, for one, would be delighted if we were to devote an equal amount of attention to the monitoring of the implementation of this agreement, and we will soon have the opportunity to do just that. However, allow me to recall the importance of Parliament's role in such cooperation, one vehicle of which will be our delegation to the countries of Central Asia.

I firmly believe that we will be able to finalise this agreement tomorrow with a great majority. When it does take effect, the European Union and Tajikistan will have the opportunity to cooperate, at regional, bilateral and global levels. Thank you very much for your help and cooperation.

President. – I have received a motion to wind up the debate from the Committee on Foreign Affairs pursuant to Rule 110(2) of the Rules of Procedure.⁽¹⁾

The joint debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 17 September 2009.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Jiří Maštálka (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (CS) I welcome all agreements between the European communities and the countries of the former Soviet Union, provided that such agreements are based on equal rights and mutual benefits. If it is established in the report presented to today's plenary session of the European Parliament that the proposed agreement will help to reinforce and consolidate the Union in Tajikistan and Central Asia from a political, economic and commercial perspective, then I would like urgently to draw your attention to the following considerations which I share with many other people. The agreement must not in any way be viewed as a possible stepping stone to an EU military presence in the area in question. It is absolutely essential to develop the European Union as a peace project, free of superpower or military ambitions. The proclaimed war on terrorism cannot be conducted in the area in question without cooperation from Russia and other neighbouring states. Last but not least, I would like to point out that we must approach the extraction and use of raw materials in a spirit of complete equality and mutual interest.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ANGELILLI

Vice-President

14. New regulations on visas for Western Balkan countries (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia) (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on new regulations on visas for Western Balkan countries (Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia).

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Mr President, moving quickly on geographically to discuss another area that I am again very pleased to address: the prospects of visa liberalisation for certain countries in the Balkan region. It is excellent that the European Parliament is addressing this at such an early stage in its period of office. It shows how important we all believe it to be that the people of the Western Balkans are brought closer to the European Union. It is undoubtedly the most important issue for the citizens of the Balkan region as far as their present links with the EU are concerned.

Visa liberalisation will firstly make it possible for people to move more freely throughout Europe and will create more open societies. Many people in the region – particularly young people – have never been to Western Europe, and naturally visa liberalisation would open up a range of opportunities for contacts and exchanges. That is the real benefit of this initiative.

⁽¹⁾ See Minutes.

In 2007, the EU embarked upon a process intended to result in visa requirements being removed for the countries of the Western Balkans. There are two aspects to this process: the countries themselves had to make significant progress as regards the reliability of documentation, better legislation on migration, improved rights for minorities and, not least, the fight against corruption and organised crime. In return, the EU would offer visa-free travel. Visa facilitation was introduced back in January 2008, linked to commitments in the areas to be addressed. However, only genuine visa liberalisation will enable the economic and bureaucratic barriers erected by visa obligations to be removed.

Liberalisation of the visa requirements that apply to citizens of the Western Balkans is an important measure that will strengthen ties between this region and the European Union. We can expect this to stimulate a pro-European attitude among both the governments and the peoples of the region, because it shows that the European integration process has real advantages. Continued isolation, on the other hand, would lead to a feeling of exclusion and prevent exchanges of ideas and, in the worst case, could foster narrow-minded nationalism.

Obviously, our aim is the opposite: to open up the EU, to provide the countries with access to Community programmes, to make it easier for people to be in contact and to promote development and exchanges both between the countries of the Western Balkans and between these countries and the EU. Not least, visa liberalisation will create new opportunities for trade, industry and transfer of know-how. These are important elements in alleviating the consequences of the economic crisis.

Consequently, the Commission's proposal that was submitted on 15 July is very much to be welcomed. It is proposed that in a first step, the visa requirement will be removed for citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia, which have biometric passports. The aim is that on 1 January 2010, we will liberalise the visa requirements for these citizens and later extend this to other countries once they also meet the conditions required. The Commission has assessed that three countries – Serbia, Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia – by and large already meet the conditions for visa liberalisation. The appraisal of Serbia and Montenegro is continuing and we hope that by this autumn, we will have confirmation from the Commission that all the conditions are met, so that we can take the next step.

I must emphasise that many of the conditions that we have set for liberalisation, such as reform of the police system and combating corruption, will also benefit the countries in their preparations for EU membership and thus create a situation in which everyone wins as far as harmonisation of the rules is concerned. It also provides a good example of how the principle of conditionality can work in the Western Balkans.

Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina will not be included in this first decision on visa exemption, but they are not being left in the lurch. I know that that is a matter of concern to many in this House. It is only a matter of time before these countries also meet the necessary conditions in the Commission's roadmap. In order that the process can be concluded as soon as possible, we are continuing to emphatically support and encourage Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina to make further progress on the remaining targets, and I hope that they, too, will be able to benefit from visa liberalisation in the near future.

The EU will do all it can to help and support these two countries in their efforts to achieve their objectives, particularly as regards the rule of law.

Where Kosovo is concerned, the Commission's proposal involves no change. Here, the visa requirement will remain for the time being. In the future, we will have to look at how the measures can best be extended in order to give the citizens of Kosovo the same rights as others in the region. Here we are awaiting a communication from the Commission in October containing ideas for encouraging deeper cooperation and links with Kosovo.

The Council has only just begun its discussions on the Commission's proposal, but the Presidency will work hard to ensure that we can reach agreement as soon as possible. We welcome the great interest that the European Parliament has shown in this proposal and the fact that initial discussions are already taking place in your committees. In view of the incredible significance of this proposal politically, I am sure that we are in agreement on the goal, which is to conclude this process as quickly as possible with satisfactory results, so that visa liberalisation can become a reality as soon as possible.

Jacques Barrot, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (FR) Madam President, I would like to thank the Minister, Mrs Malmström, for everything she has told us, and which I will try to confirm on behalf of the Commission.

On 15 July, the Commission proposed the abolition of short-term visas for citizens of the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. As you have underlined, Minister, this is obviously an historic moment in our relations with the Western Balkans.

This proposal for the abolition of visas is based on the progress made in the last six years in the areas of justice and home affairs, in accordance with the commitments made at Thessaloniki in 2003.

The Commission proposal has been submitted to the Council. The Member States support the approach proposed by the Commission and confirm their intention to work in close cooperation with the European Parliament to guarantee the formal adoption of the text during your Presidency, Minister, the Swedish Presidency.

I thank the European Parliament for appointing the rapporteurs within the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and for setting an indicative timetable scheduling the submission of the report for the end of September, and the votes within the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs and then in plenary, for October and November. The goal is, in fact, to obtain visa exemptions for citizens of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro on 1 January 2010.

The Commission's proposal is based on the results of the dialogue launched in the first half of 2008 with the five countries of the Western Balkans. Road maps have been drawn up stipulating criteria, the realisation of which involves the adoption of structural reforms in the key area of JFS – justice, freedom and security. This method has proved to be a very important incentive for the countries of the region to progress towards reforms, notably in relation to document security, with the introduction of biometric passports and identity cards for border control and global policies on migration, and also in relation to public order and security policies: the fight against organised crime, corruption, human trafficking, and finally, of course, fundamental rights, including matters of citizenship.

Having studied these reports, we can say that the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia meets all of the criteria in its road map.

Montenegro and Serbia have made very considerable progress. However, for Serbia, there are still some conditions to be met, in particular, with relation to the verification of identity documents submitted by Kosovo residents and people of Kosovan origin living abroad when they request a Serbian biometric passport.

The second condition for Serbia is the control of borders with Kosovo and cooperation with EULEX, and thirdly, the drafting of a national strategy on migration.

As for Montenegro, a lasting solution must be found for displaced persons. Measures still have to be taken in terms of the effective introduction of the law on foreigners, as well as measures enhancing administrative capacity and which are designed to fight corruption and organised crime more effectively.

That is the situation in these three countries.

Despite the very significant progress accomplished in the course of the last few months, Bosnia and Albania have not yet been able to complete the requisite reforms demanded in the road map, such as the abolition of visas. On the basis of this analysis, the Commission, in response to the invitation made by the General Affairs Council in June 2009, has therefore proposed the abolition of the visa for the citizens of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia. For Serbia, persons resident in Kosovo, or persons of Kosovan origin who are resident abroad and who hold a Serbian passport issued by a central authority in Belgrade, will be excluded from the liberalisation and will be required to obtain a visa. Indeed, since 1999, Serbia has not been able to provide verification for identity documents held by people from Kosovo. The Commission has considered the security risk that this category of people represents for the Community, as well as the fact that there has, as yet, been no dialogue on the subject of visa liberalisation with Kosovo.

Therefore, the decision to include certain countries in this liberalisation of visa requirements is based on the merits of each individual country.

As far as Serbia and Montenegro are concerned, we will follow closely the measures taken by these two countries to fully implement all of the criteria. In terms of the progress already made by Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Commission is convinced that these two countries will be in a position to meet all of the criteria in the near future. In October, their authorities will submit supplementary information to the Commission on the progress made in recent months. On the basis of this information, evaluation missions will be deployed at the beginning of next year, and then the Commission will draw up new evaluation reports

to be discussed with Member States. Following this, the Commission hopes that it will be in a position to propose the waiver of the visa requirement in 2010.

In accordance with the procedures in force, the proposal will be discussed at the Council and will be the subject of an opinion at the European Parliament. The formal adoption of the text by a majority of the Schengen countries should therefore take place during the Swedish Presidency, which will allow the effective introduction of this abolition of visas for citizens of these three countries from January 2010. As you have said, Minister, all this means the possibility, particularly for the young generation in these Balkan countries, of participating much more in European life, of integrating into it, and we think that all of this can be extremely beneficial, both for these countries and for our Europe.

There you have it. Those are the points I wanted to make following the excellent observations made by the Presidency.

Manfred Weber, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, the Western Balkans need Europe and we Europeans need stability in the Western Balkans. The Western Balkans are a central part of Europe and we must do our utmost to bring this important part back home to Europe. For that reason, these are the right proposals.

The reality of life in this area has been described; the depressingly long queues at visa offices, the young people with no prospect of making an application to leave the country and get a taste of life in Europe. A lot of people experience this area as a prison, where they have no contact with the outside world. We all want to put an end to this and, in my group, Mrs Pack, Mrs Bildt and Mr Posselt are working on this with a great deal of dedication. We all stand for this.

What worries us is that, as a result of the different treatment of the states in this area, there will be separatist movements and different classes of citizens in the area of the Western Balkans will be created, which could certainly lead to problems. However, the citizens in the European Union equally expect security. That means that the standards that Commissioner Barrot described here today, namely security standards for police cooperation, in the fight against illegal immigration and economic migration and for biometric data, are the agreed minimum standards which represent the rules of play. Our citizens expect those rules of play to be adhered to.

That brings me to my second point: there must be no foreign policy concessions on the question of visa waiver. We should not give these states a free rein. The rules of play are clear and anyone who abides by them has every chance of having visas waived. The pressure on the states which have been unable to improve their standards hitherto, despite EU aid, should not let up.

These are the two flanks that we in the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) consider to be right. We trust in the evaluation that the European Commission has carried out and can therefore approve the present step.

Kristian Vigenin, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (BG) Madam President, President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, we support, of course, the Commission's proposals, as they mark a very important step for the three countries in the region just mentioned, which will enjoy a visa-free regime as of 1 January 2010.

I myself am from a country and of a generation which enthusiastically welcomed the lifting of the visa regime prior to our country becoming a member of the European Union. I would also say that this is the first and most important sign that things really are moving in the right direction, and that one day, the final destination of these countries will be the European Union.

At the same time, I cannot help but express, to some extent, my astonishment at the Commission's excessively administrative approach to this matter. Although, on the one hand, technical matters are important, in the sense that compliance is needed and the countries have to fulfil the necessary conditions to become part of the European Union, and therefore be granted this visa-free travel facility, the Commission's decision to exclude Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, to some extent, beggars comprehension. It fails to reflect the delicate nature of this issue in the region. It underestimates the influence it could have on the future development of relations between the countries of the region, and the attitude of ordinary citizens in the region to this decision made by the European Commission.

For this reason, we believe that the European Commission's decision should be reviewed to include Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina, with a clear timetable setting out when these countries could be included in the visa-free regime, subject to fulfilling specific conditions.

In this respect, this issue is particularly delicate with regard to the population of Kosovo. Our question is therefore: when does the European Commission intend to initiate a dialogue on visas with Kosovo, and has it considered what the consequences would be, in terms of Kosovo's stability if this dialogue is not started as soon as possible?

Sarah Ludford, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Madam President, the ALDE Group firmly and consistently supports the goal of EU accession for all the Western Balkan countries. We are aiming to equip their citizens to join an integrated free movement area with a single market and common values.

Freedom of short-term travel is a vital part of preparation for that. The Commission and the Council obviously share that goal, so why on earth has the Commission managed to put forward such an ill-judged and divisive proposal?

The Liberal Group certainly does not want to undermine the pressure for high standards of passport and border security and the rule of law more generally, but this exercise has to be fair, consistent and effective. It is not as if there are no anomalies at present. For instance, Serbia and Montenegro have been included in the July proposal: although they did not meet the benchmarks at the date of the proposal, they are expected to do so in the future. Then there is the requirement for biometric passports, of which Bosnia has now issued 40 000, by the way; but Croatians, who have benefited from visa-free travel for some time, do not need one.

We are saying that Serbia's stabilisation and association agreement cannot be progressed while Mladić stays hidden, since it shows lack of control over the security services. But for visa waiver, they are deemed to meet the requirements of Block 3: Public order and security – some contradiction here.

The way to keep Bosnia and Albania up to the mark would be to include them in the legal scope of this proposed regulation, but to make the actual implementation of visa waiver conditional on a Commission declaration of compliance – in fact, similar to that which the Commission needs to make this autumn about Serbia and Montenegro. The process would be exactly the same, though a bit later.

Any prolonged delay for Bosnia and Albania and the complete exclusion of Kosovo will have very divisive and detrimental consequences, encouraging the search for Croatian, Serbian or, in the case of Kosovars, Macedonian passports, and undermining the integrity and governance of Bosnia and Kosovo in particular. I cannot believe the Commission and the Council intend to pursue this damaging path.

Marjje Cornelissen, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Madam President, I am in favour of visa liberalisation and I am also in favour of attaching certain criteria to visa liberalisation, but what I am more in favour of is peace and stability in the Western Balkans.

What do you think it will do, especially to young people, to Bosnian Muslims, to see their Croat- and Serb-Bosnian peers with double passports hopping in and out of the EU for a weekend? Do we really want to take the chance of fostering nationalist feelings and deepening the divisions in a country where stability is still so fragile? And for what? Bosnia and Herzegovina is really not that far behind Serbia in complying with the criteria. They are already issuing biometric passports and have made about the same amount of progress on the other criteria.

I therefore strongly ask you to include Bosnia and Herzegovina in the present proposal for the sake of those people living there who are working very hard for a better future – with the memories of war still too fresh in their minds.

Ryszard Czarnecki, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) I am very happy that today our colleague, until recently Minister Cecilia Malmström, has spoken on behalf of the Council. This House has been poorer for her absence, but the Swedish Presidency has certainly gained from it. I would like to say in Swedish 'tack' – or 'thank you' – for her speech, which in my language, in Polish, means 'yes' – and it is therefore a fitting word, as I fully agree with what she has told us on behalf of the Council today, even though I have some small but important comments.

In the first place, I really do not want this appropriate initiative of the Council, supported by the Commission, to be – to put it bluntly – some kind of alternative to the rapid accession of Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro to the European Union. It is what the societies of those countries expect, and it is what they deserve. I do not believe that we should substitute the perspective of fast-track accession to the European Union by these countries by waiving visa requirements.

Secondly, I believe that the people of Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo also deserve visa-free travel as soon as possible. In this regard, we need to consistently hold up definite European prospects before them.

Nikolaos Chountis, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (EL) Madam President, on behalf of the Federal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left, we believe that the Commission proposal to waive visas for citizens from Serbia, Montenegro and FYROM who have biometric passports is a step in the right direction and implements the European Union's commitment towards the people in this area, so that they can plan trips and travel to the rest of Europe without the need for a visa.

I must point out that, when it comes to the Western Balkans, we are talking about a traumatised area which recently experienced war and civil conflict for which the European Union and certain of its Member States bear responsibility. The wounds of this area are healing slowly. That is why we believe that the visa waiver procedure for the citizens of all these countries is a very important step and will give them the opportunity to communicate with the peoples of the rest of Europe.

However, I cannot not point out the terms and conditions which, if I have understood correctly, bring a degree of uncertainty to whether the Council will approve the visa waiver for Montenegro and Serbia in October.

Firstly, for Kosovo which, unless I have misunderstood, is subject to Security Council resolution 1244 and, especially, for the Serbian minority living in a state of rural prison, guarded within geographical prisons, we are essentially refusing free communication. A double whammy: we do not allow them to travel within their country, nor do we allow them to travel to the countries of the European Union.

Secondly, I have numerous reservations as to whether certain of these preconditions which we are demanding of Serbia and Montenegro relate to this specific issue and do not serve other political objectives. That is why I consider that you should endeavour in October to waive visas for the inhabitants of Montenegro and Serbia and for the other countries in the Western Balkans.

Athanasios Plevris, *on behalf of the EFD Group.* – (EL) Madam President, firstly, peace and stability in the Western Balkans is certainly in the interest of the whole of Europe and, of course, because I am from Greece, it is logical that it should be in our interest even more, because we border some of these states. As such, we would consider the direction you are taking to be the right direction.

However, I wish to single out FYROM. The Skopje government is cultivating extreme nationalism towards one Member State of the European Union, namely Greece, circulating maps which show a part of Greece, Macedonia, together with Thessaloniki and numerous other towns, under occupation, thereby basically cultivating the spirit that these lands, which are supposedly occupied by Greece, should be liberated.

I do not wish to focus on the question of the name, to which you may be indifferent, even though the Greeks are very sensitive to a name being hijacked. However, you must surely understand that we cannot return to nationalism, the fostering of nationalism, in these countries, to the detriment of other Member States of the European Union.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Madam President, that visa requirements for Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro are to be abolished shows that the reform efforts of these countries are clearly bearing fruit. However, ten years after the end of the conflict, the graves are still deep and ill-feeling is still simmering beneath the surface. Clearly this has to do with the fact that Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia, which have not been included this time, are feeling disadvantaged. Clearly people there prefer to cultivate old antagonisms, rather than ask themselves what their neighbouring states have done better and how progress can be achieved in order to earn visa waiver. In any event, Serbia should soon acquire the status of candidate country, as it is moving towards accession on several counts.

However, the wounds are far from healed and every measure by the EU is being evaluated accordingly. That is why we need, on the one hand, to communicate the reasons for our decisions better and, on the other hand, make it clear to Albania, Kosovo and Bosnia that they still need to make an enormous effort to move equally towards accession. In any event, peace in the Balkans, on the doorstep to the EU, has become far more important than the accession of Turkey, which is being so fiercely advocated on many sides.

Anna Maria Corazza Bildt (PPE). – Madam President, today we in the EPP say to the people of Bosnia, of Albania and of Serbia: you are not forgotten; we have not abandoned you. We understand, especially to the people of Sarajevo, your frustration. But at the same time, we say to the people of the European Union, we

will not bend the benchmarks. The rules have to be the same for everybody. Your security is important for us.

Mainly we say to the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina: take your responsibilities; put your house in order; do your homework. We appreciate the progress that has been achieved recently. We will ask the Commission to continue to support you but if I have learned anything in my six years of the wars and peace in the Balkans, and believe me, this is an issue very close to my heart, victimism, the blame game and scapegoating belong to the past.

This is an issue of European integration. We have to look at this from a European perspective and, as Mrs Cecilia Malmström said, the best way to start the U-turn that is needed to go from dependence and victimism is for them to take the country into their hands, and to start those visa reforms which are badly needed and necessary anyway.

I hope we can agree on a clear message to the authorities in the region that we will support them but we will not compromise on the security of our citizens – that they have to take their responsibilities.

I think we should support the Commission proposal, and, to those who think that this could be destabilising, I would like to say that stability will come with European integration. It is very unfortunate that passports are issued in Zagreb and in Belgrade, and we should definitely try to reduce that as much as possible, but we cannot make different rules for the Bosnian people. It is not in their interests.

What we can do is to do our part in this Parliament to accelerate the process and make a decision, make our policy so that the Council can take a decision within this year.

Tanja Fajon (S&D). – (SL) As you probably know, I am rapporteur for the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs regarding visa liberalisation for the Western Balkan countries.

In July, the European Commission sent us a proposal recommending the lifting of visa requirements for citizens of Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. Macedonia has already fulfilled all its obligations, whereas Montenegro and Serbia are required to meet the remaining conditions as soon as possible.

Although I very much welcome the Commission's proposal and appreciate the demanding nature of this work, I am disappointed by the fact that this document has totally omitted the remaining countries, without even giving them a timetable of any kind.

Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania are using a clear roadmap for the lifting of visa requirements and are aware of all the conditions that need to be met before that can happen. Bosnia and Herzegovina, in particular, achieved great progress on this score during the summer, judging by reports from independent organisations.

The decision to omit Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania from the list is primarily a technical one. We are all well aware that even the best technical decisions can have major political consequences. The fact is that it is the Bosniaks who have been omitted from the visa liberalisation process.

We must all take on a share of political responsibility for the implementation of this process, which will be a prerequisite for peace and stability in the Western Balkans. We also urgently need to think about initiating the visa dialogue with Kosovo, as that will help advance structural reforms.

Ladies and gentlemen, we must not put ourselves in the position of putting the brakes on the lifting of visa requirements for all the countries of the Western Balkans which have a clear European perspective. Visa liberalisation in the Western Balkans is not a jigsaw puzzle with which you might wish to amuse yourselves. We are dealing with people here, with their quality of life and mobility, and facilitating the closest cooperation possible, not least, economic cooperation.

Jelko Kacin (ALDE). – (SL) I congratulate Macedonia and hope that Montenegro and Serbia also get to the same stage. That would be good for all the three countries and for the Western Balkans as a whole.

It is unfortunate, however, that Bosnia has been omitted from this package. The efforts made as regards Bosnia have been inadequate and insufficiently successful, and by this I mean both our efforts and theirs. The main obstacle to progress in Bosnia is the state of mind, the feeling of powerlessness, which is paralysing people and institutions there. The Bosniaks are the only people in Bosnia who have not been allowed to travel freely throughout Europe. They do not have a second state to resort to and, for that reason, they have been ghettoised. They are the only ones who cannot harbour dreams of dual citizenship. That is humiliating. They feel overlooked, belittled and punished by the European Union.

We must provide political assistance to the state of Bosnia and Herzegovina in order to enable it to help itself and its citizens. The European Union shares responsibility for the situation in Bosnia and for the stability of the region. That responsibility lies with the Council, the Commission and Parliament.

Bosnia is close to having its visa requirements lifted. The only problem left is the problem in people's heads – in their heads and in our heads. There is a wall rising between us and them, a wall higher than the Berlin Wall. Let us break down that wall and let us help Bosnia to get its visa requirements lifted, now, as soon as possible, in the same package as the other three countries in this region.

Ulrike Lunacek (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Madam President, Mrs Malmström, Commissioner, we Greens obviously welcome visa liberalisation for Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia. That is something I campaigned for very strongly in recent years when I was still a member of the Austrian National Assembly. It is an important step in the direction of fulfilling the dream of a unified and peaceful Europe.

However, the path on which you have embarked has a number of stumbling blocks. It will result, above all, in the Muslim citizens of Bosnia feeling discriminated against. This was already the case when you merely announced that there would be liberalisation for the other states. You argue on the basis of technical conditions that Bosnia and Herzegovina has not yet met, but you apparently overlook the fact that there are still problems in other states which are now being liberalised. Bosnia has already issued 40 000 biometric passports and has already passed a regulation for displaced persons, which other states do not yet have, and it has introduced an anti-corruption agency, which Serbia, for example, does not yet have.

I get the impression that there is also political discrimination here and I consider that very dangerous for peace in the region and for a multi-ethnic Bosnia and Herzegovina. So to name this danger once again: there is a danger that ethnic dividing lines will be formalised here too. I therefore call on you to conclude a common package with Bosnia and Albania and to start visa talks with Kosovo.

Fiorello Provera (EFD). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, today, certain areas of the Balkans are still unstable and are communication routes for illegal traffic controlled by organised crime networks. Particularly serious is the traffic in human beings, which often involves exploitation in the form of illegal work or prostitution.

The liberalisation of visas must therefore be accompanied by the rigorous application of security rules, one of which is the introduction of biometric passports. As far as we are aware, Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina have still not implemented these technical measures in full. It is therefore crucial that we do not liberalise visas for these two countries until their governments cooperate in full and the technical measures guaranteeing the identity of the parties concerned have been implemented. A failure to meet requirements does not, in my view, represent discrimination.

George Becali (NI). – (RO) I am pleased that today we are discussing the visa waiver for some Balkan countries and I must tell you why: my grandparents were born in Macedonia, my father in Albania, my grandmother in Greece and my mother in Bulgaria, while I was born in Romania. I am here today, thank God, so that I can ask Olli Rehn: is it possible to lift visa requirements for Albania by the middle of 2010, as has been promised? This is a question which I would like an answer to because it touches on my emotions, my relations, my family and my roots which lie across almost the entire Balkans. Please God.

Doris Pack (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, Mrs Malmström, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, we were all delighted about the proposed liberalisation of visas. We have already been fighting for this in this Parliament for a long time and now a start has been made. That is not enough for us. I think that the wrong wording was chosen in June. Today – as we have heard – there are still problems in Serbia and in Montenegro. So why did we not include Albania and Bosnia in this wording and say, here too there are problems that need to be overcome? That would not have caused too much damage.

It is, of course, a fact that the politicians in Bosnia and Herzegovina have little interest in improving what is, from every point of view, the awkward situation of their fellow countrymen. Why should they? They have a job, they can travel, they waste their time with useless nationalistic conflicts, instead, for example, of working for a good school system, for a good infrastructure, for a good health system, nor have they ensured that the benchmarks for visa liberalisation are in place. Visa liberalisation would bring a breath of fresh air at long last to this nationalistic fug in Bosnia and Herzegovina and finally give the young generation hope.

However, since the announcement of the Commission's evaluation, measures have been taken in Bosnia and Herzegovina to combat corruption and a number of important laws have been set in motion, so that the

technical preconditions can be met in autumn. However, it is not just a question of technical preconditions; it is also a question of the political aspect of things. There is the question of the biometric passports; I know that not many have yet been issued and I would sincerely call on the Commission and some of the Member States to help issue these biometric passports. Technical assistance means a great deal.

The Council, the Commission and local politicians must really make every effort to stop the ethnic divide in this country from widening further still. A refusal to liberalise visas for Bosnia and Herzegovina would ghettoise the Muslims, as the Croats and Serbs have a way out of this country. The Bosnian passport – normally a passport is unmistakable proof of a nation – will be worthless in the eyes of its holders if it does not open the door to the EU.

I would ask the Commission and the Council to help these countries. Albania will manage. They have a new government; they will manage, but Kosovo will only manage if you all help. You have our support. You do not need to turn a blind eye, but you should set political standards, not just police standards.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D). – (SK) The liberalisation of visa policies in the Western Balkans is both a politically sensitive issue and a highly sensitive issue in human terms for the inhabitants of these states and this region. At present, we are talking about Montenegro, Macedonia and Serbia, which is very important in a historical context, but we should not introduce a two-speed system in the Western Balkans on a long-term basis and we must bring Bosnia and Herzegovina, in particular, into this process as quickly as possible and also Albania of course.

The Western Balkans have close geographical, cultural and historical ties to the European Union and to our Member States, and despite the extremely turbulent events that have unfolded there in recent times, it must be said that both the reforms and our expectations are gradually being fulfilled and that political leaders in these states really are making great efforts to meet our expectations.

In my speech, I would therefore possibly like to ask not only the Council and the Commission but also everyone here in the European Parliament to support the leaders of the various states in their efforts and to provide them with assistance in respect of those issues that have yet to be resolved. We must also not forget that the countries of the Western Balkans are of great geopolitical importance to us for many reasons.

As Serbia and Montenegro now face important domestic challenges which we all hope they will overcome, I would like to stress once more that it would be very appropriate to fix a date as soon as possible for those countries that have been excluded from the process, by which I mean Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania.

Gerard Batten (EFD). – Madam President, these measures allow visa-free access to the EU Schengen group Member States from Serbia, Montenegro and Macedonia as from January 2010. The Commission envisages giving Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina visa-free access possibly by mid-2010. So within 12 months, we could see another 20.7 million people given free access to the EU.

Strictly speaking, this should not affect the UK, which is not a member of the Schengen group, but in reality it will. Access to the EU for millions more people from some of the poorest and most corrupt countries in Europe will enable them to cross the first barrier in gaining illegal entry to Britain. These countries will eventually be full members of the EU anyway, with full legal access to the EU. These measures are yet another undermining of Britain's ability to control her own borders, and yet another reason why Britain should leave the European Union.

Dimitar Stoyanov (NI). – (BG) Madam President, we are all clearly aware of the advantages and disadvantages of free movement, but let us look at it from another aspect. Are the three countries in question really fulfilling the fundamental criteria required in order to be granted such privileges as part of the visa waiver?

The Bulgarian minority in Serbia has been totally neglected and discriminated against for almost a century now, while Macedonia, ever since its foundation, has pursued in practice a constant and consistent anti-Bulgarian policy.

The latest act committed by Macedonia in this regard was to arrest the Bulgarian citizen Spaska Mitrova and give her an exceptionally harsh sentence. Mitrova is a member of the Bulgarian association 'Ratko'. This association was banned in Macedonia, which resulted in Macedonia being ordered to pay a fine for breach of human rights.

The Bulgarian public find it unacceptable that concessions are made to countries that breach the rights of Bulgarian citizens, in other words, citizens of the European Union.

Kinga Gál (PPE). – (HU) I think it is important that the moment has come when we can finally talk properly about the issue of visa-free travel with regard to the Western Balkan countries. It is gratifying that these countries, which have fulfilled the commitments they have made to date, can also be instrumental in making the process of crossing borders as smooth as possible.

As a Hungarian MEP, I cannot but support these efforts because they will make it possible for Hungarians living in Vojvodina in Serbia, for example, to establish a more direct link with the mother country. Citizens who live on either side of these borders and who speak the same language and foster close family and cultural ties will not be able to find sufficient words to express the importance of being able to cross borders without any barrier or visa. On this point, although not closely linked to visa-free travel, certain forward-looking decisions have also been taken, such as the law recently adopted in Serbia governing the operation of the minorities' national councils. These mark serious progress in terms of the institutional protection of minorities' rights.

Facilitating visa-free travel cannot be regarded simply as a technical issue. It is a very clear political matter. A vital contribution is made to these countries' political stability, knowing what entitlements they are granted with a passport from their own states and to what extent it is recognised by the European Union. It would be unacceptable if the negative differentiation among the states in the region were to continue in the long term.

This is why I appeal to the key responsibility of the Commission and the Council in these matters. The European Union has the political responsibility to offer the Western Balkan countries the prospect of joining the European Union. It should help these countries catch up and encourage the formation and strengthening of their democratic institutions, which includes minority rights as well.

Kinga Göncz (S&D). – (HU) Thank you very much, Madam President. I too would like to welcome Mrs Cecilia Malmström and Commissioner Barrot. I am also delighted with this proposal that has been put forward. As a former Hungarian Foreign Minister, I have worked very hard together with others to bring the Western Balkan countries closer to the European Union and make them take the next step on the path to accession. We also know that, from this perspective, visa-free travel is the thing which people perhaps understand and feel the most. It now paves the way for them to enjoy freedom of movement and to form closer human relationships. Perhaps it will also help with what I think we all consider important, which is sustaining the motivation of these countries during the very difficult process which accession entails.

We know that some very serious steps must be taken. Very often, certain traditions need to be transcended which we know it is not easy to transcend. It is very important that the three countries are now given visa-free travel. I would also like to draw your attention to a view which has been voiced many times today, namely, that the balance in the Western Balkan countries is very delicate. There were already ethnic tensions before the war, but they have still remained following the war. We must therefore assess every kind of measure from the perspective of whether it will decrease or increase these tensions.

In the case of Bosnia, as has been mentioned several times today, this decision is not only beneficial and important because Bosnia has now been left out, but also because a large number of Bosnian citizens who have a Croatian or Serbian passport will enjoy visa-free travel, while the remainder will not. The same situation applies to Kosovan citizens too, so that anyone who can obtain their passport in Serbia will enjoy visa-free travel.

I believe that it is important for us to emphasise once again that a political decision must be made, not only a technical one. For this reason, it is our responsibility to help these countries achieve visa-free travel as soon as possible, within a very specific timeframe.

Bernd Posselt (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, President-in-Office, Commissioner, I too share Mr Weber's security concerns, having spent ten years in the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs. This subject has a profoundly foreign policy dimension.

I am from a generation which grew up with hundreds of thousands of so-called Yugoslavian foreign workers. During the communist dictatorship, the people of southeast Europe living on the borders of Yugoslavia were free to travel, despite the communist dictatorship. Today we talk of Europeanisation, we send in troops and officials, we spend a great deal of money and, at the same time, we are imprisoning young people in these countries. That is why the liberalisation of this visa regime is urgently needed.

However, I too have a number of criticisms to make: firstly I am delighted that Macedonia is on board. Macedonia is exemplary in meeting the criteria, but we should not cite this to Macedonia as compensation for its justified wish to have a date finally set for accession negotiations.

Secondly, Kosovo: it has been said that it must abide by the rules of play, but a player can only abide by the rules of play if they are allowed on to the playing field. Kosovo has not been allowed on to the playing field. We intervened militarily, in order to liberate the Kosovars from oppression. Now the country of the former oppressors are to enjoy visa waiver – and I welcome this, because there is no collective guilt – and Kosovo cannot aspire to it. Even if there are shortcomings there, it is we who must beat our breasts, because we basically administer this country. In other words, we must give Kosovo every opportunity, because if Serbia enjoys visa waiver in the long run and Kosovo is absolutely excluded, that will lead to unacceptable distortions.

Thirdly, Bosnia and Herzegovina: I – like several Members – signed the protest against the exclusion of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This land of three nations – badly designed under the Dayton Agreement, which is in dire need of review – with an international administration, which is equally guilty of inefficiency, must ultimately be given an opportunity to take the path to Europe, without being disintegrated. Disintegration for Kosovo or Bosnia would endanger our security more than any technical details.

Maria Eleni Koppa (S&D). – (EL) Madam President, we must acknowledge that the visa waiver for Serbia, the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Montenegro is an important step towards the European integration of the Western Balkans.

However, it should apply to all the nations in the Western Balkans and avoid creating new dividing lines in the area. Of course, no one can justifiably maintain that the European Commission is biased against the Muslim citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina. On the other hand, we should not forget the peculiar status of Kosovo, whose independence is not recognised by all Member States of the European Union.

We want the inhabitants of Kosovo to benefit from the visa waiver; however, whatever the solution found, it must not prejudice the final arrangements concerning its status. The Commission has acted correctly in not closing the door to Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania. However, it must proceed swiftly, so that no new divisions threaten stability in the area. For their part, of course, the states need to make the necessary reforms which, lest we forget, touch on the question of security and combating organised crime.

This Parliament has stressed for years that easier contact with the outside world and greater facility for travel will reinforce peace, exchanges at all levels and, ultimately, stability. The issue of visas is not simply a technical issue; it is a deeply political issue which affects the European future of the area and all the nations in the area have a right to that future.

Anna Ibrisagic (PPE). – (SV) Madam President, I think that at this stage in the debate there is no longer any doubt of the importance of visa liberalisation to the citizens of the Balkans. The ability to travel freely is, along with education, perhaps the most important tool that we can offer the new generations, of whom we expect so much commitment to the democratisation process throughout the region.

Consequently, I welcome the proposal on visa liberalisation for Serbia, Macedonia and Montenegro. The progress of any individual country on its journey towards the EU represents progress for the whole of the Balkans. Some of these countries have had to wait a long time; some perhaps longer than necessary. We in the European Parliament and the two countries not yet included in visa liberalisation should learn lessons from this.

Although this is a highly sensitive political issue, I would like to point out that the rules on visa liberalisation are clear and universal. The conditions must be met. Let us not make this more of a political issue than is necessary, however. Let us look at what remains to be done and how we can ensure as quickly as possible that Bosnia and Herzegovina and Albania are soon also able to join the family of visa-free countries.

Bosnia and Herzegovina has made great progress recently and will soon have fulfilled most of the remaining requirements in the roadmap. I therefore call on the players in Bosnia and Herzegovina to adopt the anti-corruption act and lay down rules for the exchange of information between the different parts of the police service as quickly as possible. I urge them to try to ensure that this work is completed by the end of September, before a report is sent back to the Commission. In its new analysis, I then expect the Commission in turn to judge what progress has actually been made and, once the EU's requirements have been met, to propose that the Council approve visa liberalisation for Bosnia and Herzegovina. I hope that this can take effect in July 2010.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE). – (RO) Madam President, Commissioner, the visa waiver for some of the countries which belong to the Western Balkans region marks an initial confirmation of the European Union's commitment to continuing the European process of integration. However, I believe that unfortunately, the Commission's proposal is incomplete. Citizens from Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina will not enjoy the same treatment, which is going to create differences between citizens in the Balkans.

I would like to remind you that there is already a division between the previous generation, which benefited from the opening up of the former Republic of Yugoslavia to Europe, and the current generation, which has not enjoyed equal treatment from the European Union. However, this proposal will result in citizens of countries in the former Republic of Yugoslavia who do not benefit from the visa waiver trying to obtain a second passport in a country belonging to the former Yugoslav federation, which the European Union accepts without a visa. We have already come across this type of scenario in the case of Moldovan or Georgian passports versus Russian passports.

I believe that the logical solution is to apply the same treatment to all Balkan countries and, at the same time, I call on the Commission to look into including Moldova as well among the group of countries in south-east Europe.

Victor Boştinaru (S&D). – (RO) As an MEP and socialist, I welcome the communication from the Council and Commission on the visa regime for the three Western Balkan countries. It is a first definite step towards their integration into the European Union, a first achievement for future EU citizens in the Western Balkans. However, I also appreciate that the lack of any clear prospect in the form of a roadmap for Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and Kosovo must be a matter of utmost concern to us. I am not only talking about the disappointment among the general public, but particularly about the risk to political stability in the three countries. Above all, I am expecting the European Parliament and the newly formed European Commission to maintain a predictable schedule for integrating the Western Balkans into the European Union. It is the only way that we can fulfil the mandate which we were elected for: to unite Europe.

Norica Niculai (ALDE). – (RO) Madam President, one minute will be more than enough for me to welcome an historic decision for both the Balkans and Europe. I believe that freedom of movement is the gateway to democracy and knowledge. You have given these three countries an opportunity. However, at the same time, I believe that Europe is also a Europe of regulations which, as European citizens, every one of us must abide by. You have put forward this proposal because you have assessed that the rules and conditions that we set have been met.

I am of the view that you will submit a proposal to extend this to Albania and Bulgaria when these European regulations have been met. In your decision, you will certainly draw up a recommendation for speeding up this process. I am one of those who think that this is not an issue of discrimination. Quite the opposite, in fact. I feel that this process will help encourage the other two countries to perform better and meet these conditions because, since the adoption of this decision, the other three countries have proved that when they wanted their peoples to enjoy a different status, they were willing to do what it takes.

Antonio Cancian (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, Minister, ladies and gentlemen, I must say that I am in favour of liberalisation and of European integration up to and including the completion of this mosaic that is the Western Balkans because, as someone said earlier, we need the Balkans to be stable. This integration is therefore crucial and must happen as soon as possible.

However, on the subject of immigration – which we spoke about yesterday and which represented security and human rights – we must be very careful, because I believe that the checks must be carried out thoroughly, and not made easier. The timescales must correspond to these checks, which should be speeded up if possible. Next, I note that there is a gap in this area, about which very little has been said, and that gap is Kosovo. You will understand me perfectly well when I say that this gap makes it quite simple for people from the other countries to travel between Kosovo and Macedonia. I know that a report is being prepared that will tell us something in the next few days, but please give us some more information about Kosovo this evening.

Emine Bozkurt (S&D). – (NL) Madam President, the Minister said it so well: visa liberalisation is necessary in order to strengthen a bond with the EU, prevent rising nationalism and avoid isolation. How can it be possible, then, that the proposals threaten to isolate the Bosnian Muslims? Great inequality is arising within a single country, as Serbian and Croatian Bosnians do receive a passport. The Muslims, however, sadly have no neighbouring country that will give them a passport. Who will stand up for the Bosnian Muslims? Will the Commission do it? Will the Council? Can you tell me for certain whether the Commission or the Council

have held talks with Croatia and Serbia about exercising restraint in the issuing of passports as it should be clear that their actions will create a great deal of unrest.

Nadezhda Nikolova Mihaylova (PPE). – (BG) I would like to congratulate Mr Barrot for the European Commission's position on liberalising the visa regime for the Western Balkans. As Foreign Minister at the time when visa requirements for Bulgaria were lifted, I know the great emotional effect the visa waiver and ending of humiliation had on our citizens. At the same time, however, as an MEP, I cannot but agree with Mrs Pack and Mrs Bildt that true European solidarity involves the European Union providing logistical help in meeting criteria rather than deviating from them, as this has a demoralising effect on societies and absolves governments of responsibility.

The change must come as a reward for the effort put in, not as a double standard. The societies of the Western Balkans have to get used to demanding their governments to do their job. They must know that the visa regime is being delayed not because of European nit-picking, but because they have not done their bit. Solidarity should be given in return for taking responsibility. When a position of principle is at stake, a person's religion and ethnicity do not matter.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). – (RO) I support the European Commission's decision, which embodies the commitment shown for years on end with regard to the visa waiver for citizens of the Western Balkans region. However, I believe that the citizens of the Republic of Moldova should enjoy the same rights regarding the freedom of movement in the EU as soon as possible. The European Union must continue to develop its open-door policy to these countries, and the visa waiver is an important step on the path to European integration for these peoples.

To supplement this decision, which will lead to the development of cross-border business opportunities and allow people the freedom of movement, European institutions must consider organising cultural and educational programmes which will publicise European values in these countries. Against this background, reinforcing border security and combating international crime must continue to be a priority.

Finally, I wish to reconfirm that Romania has not recognised Kosovo's independence.

Zoran Thaler (S&D). – (SL) I would like to express my satisfaction with the progress of the visa liberalisation process over the past 18 months. This is a major achievement and I would urge you to make rapid steps to continue in the same vein.

In the past few days, we have received reports from Sarajevo that the process of fulfilling the roadmap requirements is gathering pace, despite all the difficulties. This also holds true of areas as sensitive as police coordination between Banja Luka and Sarajevo.

I call on the Commission and the Council to monitor this progress on a continuing basis and to be responsive to it. The European Union must be capable of bringing its influence to bear on any political forces in Bosnia and Herzegovina which are seeking to sabotage this process. The citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina must not be allowed to suffer because of the irresponsibility of their politicians and we have an obligation to help them in that regard. I call on the Commission to include Bosnia and Herzegovina within the visa-free zone as soon as possible.

Alojz Peterle, rapporteur. – (SL) A selective approach to visa lifting will not strengthen the European prospects of any Western Balkan country whose communities are divided, because selectivity brings with it new divisions. I welcome every move that combats selectivity and firmly believe that lifting visa requirements for all those countries would certainly help improve the image of the European Union in the eyes of the people in these countries who need an opening on the world after years of conflict.

I would also like to point out that there are thousands of young people living in these countries who have never been able to travel abroad. Their only source of knowledge about Europe and the world is television. We have an obligation to strengthen their European prospects as well. I am aware of the security considerations, but those leaving their countries with ill intentions will find a way to cross into the EU anyway. However, we are holding back hundreds of thousands of those who have good intentions.

I would, therefore, urge the Council and the Commission to review their positions as soon as possible, to follow up the progress in these countries, and to lift visa requirements for the countries which were not included in the first group. Thank you very much.

Naturally, I call on the governments of these Western Balkan countries to fulfil their obligations as soon as possible, in the interests of their citizens and their EU accession prospects.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE). – Madam President, the liberalisation of the visa regime for the Western Balkan countries is important, as this measure matters most to ordinary citizens in the region and it will clearly show the benefits of the EU rapprochement process. I am confident that the conditional inclusion on the white list of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina will prove to be a strong incentive for meeting the rest of the benchmarks on the road map. In our case, back in 2001, such a strong signal was sent, and in a couple of months, we managed to fulfil all pending conditions.

It is essential that Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina are included on the Schengen white list as soon as possible, and the Commission should provide all the necessary technical assistance to the authorities of these two countries in order to meet the necessary conditions in a short while.

Cecilia Malmström, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SV) Madam President, there is no doubt that visa liberalisation is incredibly important for the people of the Balkans. Just like you, I have met many frustrated people – particularly young people – who are unable to travel around Europe as they would like, unable to visit their friends, unable to enjoy the freedoms that we all have. It goes without saying that achieving visa freedom for these people would be good for them, good for their countries, good for the whole region and good for the EU.

That is why I am delighted that the conditions are already in place to give this opportunity to the three countries mentioned – the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia – at the end of the year. It is regrettable that not all the countries of the Western Balkans can be included in this proposal at present, but let there be no doubt that the Swedish Presidency is extremely keen to strengthen the integration process – and eventually the enlargement process – in the Balkan region. Those of you who know me will be aware of just how committed I am to this matter.

If this commitment is to be credible and become a reality, however, we must insist on the conditions being met. It is essential that we do so for the sake of the people of the Western Balkans as well as for the benefit of our own citizens. We must ensure that the criteria set are met. As Mr Weber said, we cannot make concessions where foreign policy is concerned just to be nice. That applies whether we are talking about visas or accession.

I know that the people of Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina are disappointed. I can understand that. They have not been forgotten, however. We will do everything we can to help them and to make visa liberalisation possible, and that includes in technical terms. We must give a clear political signal that the opportunity is there for them to be included. That is what we are doing today. However, it is up to the authorities and politicians in those countries to finish off the job.

I do not believe that a time lag between the removal of visas for the first three countries and for Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina will cause instability. On the contrary, it shows that the EU keeps its word and that if they do what is necessary, then we will keep our promises. We must support them and we must help them. I believe they will be able to get a positive report from the Commission in 2010. Commissioner Barrot has also said as much.

Where Kosovo is concerned, discussions on the visa regime started back when Kosovo was still part of Serbia, but we are working on finding a solution. I hope that the Commission will point the way forward in its report so that in the longer term, we can also bring about visa liberalisation for the people of Kosovo.

The proposed visa liberalisation for the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro and Serbia is a very important first step. I hope you will help us to take it. I also hope that very soon, we will be able to move on and take the next step for the rest of the region.

Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the Commission. – (FR) Madam President, I would firstly like to mention that this is a groundbreaking step. It is the first time that we have really had a regional approach. I would add that this road map method is one based on very objective, very precise criteria, which also help encourage these future Member States to actually realise that we have a Europe of rules, a Europe of values. I would like to stress that point. You will not be surprised that the Commission is particularly attentive to everything that contributes to the fight against people trafficking and against corruption. It is important, this Europe of values. We must be particularly mindful of this.

I do not know if some of you understood me correctly: I stated clearly that, in the course of 2010, we hope to make proposals for Bosnia and Herzegovina and for Albania. There is, therefore, a process in motion which does not aim to discriminate against anyone. We simply want the road map's objective criteria to be observed increasingly.

It is true that in the case of Albania, the issuing of biometric passports still has to be improved. I myself went to Albania to present the first biometric passport in that country and I can tell you that I gave as much encouragement as possible to see that Albania, its political leaders and those of Bosnia and Herzegovina, are fully aware of the efforts required. We are helping them to establish civil registers, for example, because no matter how hard you try to provide biometric passports, if there is no civil register, it is not possible. Thus, we are helping them technically. It is quite clear that in all this, Albania, in particular, must implement the existing framework for combating organised crime and corruption. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, there also has to be good border control and closer cooperation between police authorities. That is what we want. I think that we have good reason to believe that, in 2010, these two countries will also benefit from the abolition of visas.

I would also like to say to you quite simply that for us there is no question of ethnic or religious discrimination. Incidentally, in the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, there is a significant Muslim minority. There is no question of discriminating against the 25 or 30% of Muslim Albanians in Macedonia. Therefore, I would really like to reassure you and to tell you that this is part of a process that we have planned and that the Council has willingly accepted.

I will also give you an answer on Kosovo. In March 2009, an expert mission funded by the Commission resulted in some positive findings. It is true that the Commission is also encouraging Member States to establish effective consular missions in Pristina. I can confirm that we will have a report, which will be submitted shortly, on the exact situation in Kosovo. It is quite clear that in all this we want to open this European perspective to all of the Balkan countries, and we are thinking in particular about the young generation. Some of you have put particular emphasis on the fact that travel and much easier exchanges with other European Union Member States are, of course, very beneficial. Ladies and gentlemen, this is why, once more, we will build a Europe of regulations and of values that we hold very dear.

I will tell you quite simply, we are on the right road, but evidently we still need to see a final push by two of the states. I hope that in 2010, they will also be able to see the visas waived.

That is what I can tell you, giving you the assurance, in any event, that the Commission's process is one which is objective, which is really very attentive and not at all conducted in a spirit of any sort of discrimination, but in a spirit of cooperation. I am personally very committed to this.

President. – The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The European Commission and European Council are being called on to make an announcement soon about opening up the EU zone to the citizens of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. This is a very important moment for more than 10 million European inhabitants who would like a visa to cross the EU's border. Macedonia was on Europe's side when Europe needed it. Even Serbia has realised that Europe wants it to come onboard, but it needs to be reconciled with its recent past to do this. Serbia has worked closely with the international institutions, such as the International Criminal Tribunal, and has acknowledged the mistakes of the past. The time has come for Europe to reward the efforts of these states for coming into line with the democratic and economic requirements which are typical of the EU-27. Their journey has not been easy, but the efforts which have been made must be fully recognised. Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro have definitely taken the turning for the European Union. This is why I think that the EU must decide in favour of lifting the visa requirements imposed on citizens from these three countries. Their governments have demonstrated that they share the same values as we do. A positive decision would therefore give new impetus to the internal reforms, which are very much needed in Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro.

Cătălin Sorin Ivan (S&D), in writing. – (RO) I welcome the Commission's initiative to remove the visa system for citizens from the Western Balkans region, more specifically the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Serbia and Montenegro. Such measures, intended to bring these states and the EU closer together with a view to integration, will reduce the potential for conflict in the region significantly. As far as Romania is concerned, which shares a border with Serbia, this kind of measure can only serve to provide a further

guarantee of amicable cross-border relations. This measure will contribute to a greater freedom of movement for the Romanian population in Romania and Serbia, as well as support the development of commercial relations between our country and Serbia and Montenegro. I am confident that removing the visa system for these three countries mentioned above is only the start of the process, with the measure being extended later on to Albania and Bosnia and Herzegovina. Although they have not yet met the Commission's requirements, I believe that with coordinated efforts, the results will become evident in a short time. Before I end, I would like to emphasise that the visa waiver and the freedom of movement for people in the Western Balkans must not arouse fears, but establish the belief that Europe's security zone is being extended for the benefit of all of us.

Iuliu Winkler (PPE), in writing. – (HU) The European Union has become stronger after every expansion, not only because it has created a common market for almost 500 million citizens, but also because it has guaranteed stability in Central and Eastern Europe. The Balkan countries are an integral part of Europe. The economic crisis or the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty must not delay the process leading to these countries' accession to the European Union.

I firmly believe that extending the expansion process to the Balkans is a vital process which the European Union must support in order to strengthen its global role. We must not forget that the Balkan countries' catch-up process, along with the healing of the wounds from the bloody war at the end of the 20th century, guarantee the European Union's stability and the region's well-being. Waiving the visa requirement for Serbia, Montenegro and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia is a vitally important event for these countries as part of their process of catching up, while also reflecting the European Union's responsibility to the region.

This process must be resolutely continued. It will then enable Bosnia and Herzegovina, Albania and – at the appropriate time – Kosovo to benefit as soon as possible, after meeting the relevant conditions, from the application of visa-free travel. I support, without reservation, the view of those European politicians who think that suppressing the Balkan countries' ambitions to join the EU would entail unforeseeable, damaging consequences.

15. Situation in Lithuania following the adoption of the law on protection of minors (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on:

- the oral question to the Council by Sophia in 't Veld, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Leonidas Donskis, Gianni Vattimo, Sarah Ludford, Ulrike Lunacek, Raül Romeva i Rueda, Jean Lambert and Judith Sargentini, on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, on the Lithuanian Law for the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information (O-0079/2009 – B7-0201/2009),

- the oral question to the Commission by Sophia in 't Veld, Jeanine Hennis-Plasschaert, Leonidas Donskis, Gianni Vattimo, Sarah Ludford, Ulrike Lunacek, Raül Romeva i Rueda, Jean Lambert and Judith Sargentini, on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, on the Lithuanian Law for the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information (O-0080/2009 – B7-0202/2009),

- the oral question to the Council by Rui Tavares, Cornelia Ernst, Cornelis de Jong, Marie-Christine Vergiat, Willy Meyer and Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, on behalf of the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left, on the Lithuanian Law for the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information (O-0081/2009 – B7-0204/2009),

- the oral question to the Commission by Rui Tavares, Cornelia Ernst, Cornelis de Jong, Marie-Christine Vergiat, Willy Meyer and Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, on behalf of the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left, on the Lithuanian Law for the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information (O-0082/2009 – B7-0205/2009),

- the oral question to the Council by Michael Cashman, Claude Moraes and Emine Bozkurt, on behalf of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, on the Lithuanian Law for the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information (O-0083/2009 – B7-0206/2009), and

- the oral question to the Commission by Michael Cashman, Claude Moraes and Emine Bozkurt, on behalf of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, on the Lithuanian Law for the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information (O-0084/2009 – B7-0207/2009).

Sophia in 't Veld, *author*. – Madam President, I think this is a very important subject that we are discussing here today. It is about European values. We put in the oral question and we have also drafted a joint resolution about the Lithuanian law, which is allegedly about the protection of minors. But it actually does the contrary, because this law may well foster ignorance, taboo and stigma. It will expose young and vulnerable gay, lesbian and transgender people to bullying and exclusion. It will therefore lead to immeasurable distress and suffering by young people, the very people that this law is designed to protect. Instead of protection, it inflicts harm on young people.

Therefore we have addressed this question, and I am very happy that in the summer, we received a letter from Commissioner Barrot expressing the European Commission's concern about this law, saying that the European Commission will keep a very close eye on it and make sure that any national legislation is in line with European legislation and principles. I think that is very important, because the European Commission should not only intervene when market rules are being violated but also, and in particular, when European values are being violated. We cannot tolerate discrimination. Europe is a community of values – values which I know are shared by the majority of our Lithuanian fellow citizens. We are all Europeans.

With reference to the resolution, colleagues, I would ask for your explicit support for the resolution and, in particular, for the amendment that seeks to insert a reference to the existing anti-discrimination directives, because I think that is the very minimum. I also ask for your support for the request in the resolution to ask the Fundamental Rights Agency for a legal opinion on this law.

Finally, I think we can be proud, as a European Parliament – if we adopt the resolution tomorrow – to be the voice of the shared values of Europe.

Ulrike Lunacek, *author*. – (DE) Madam President, as the previous speaker said, this law passed in Lithuania endangers European values, European law and also the freedom of people, namely the freedom of young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual or perhaps transgender, to live their life without fear. According to this law, factual information on this is supposedly damaging to these young people. I can tell you what that means: it means that these young people must live in fear and possibly suffer depression. We know that there is an increased rate of attempted suicide among young people who are lesbian or gay or who are confused in their coming-out phase about how they will live their lives.

This law flies in the face of European values, which is why I was delighted that Commissioner Barrot responded on this back in July. You also told the European region of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) that the Commission would analyse this text and explain what its next steps would be. What I am interested in today is what you intend to do. What have you – and the Council – already promised the Lithuanian Parliament? We know that the former Lithuanian President and the new president, who used to be a commissioner, do not approve of this law, but the parliament is insisting on it. I am delighted that a proposal is on the table today, including a motion for a resolution.

I truly hope that we shall all accept the resolution tomorrow and can petition the European Union Agency on Fundamental Rights to take a position on this law, as that is what it is there for. In the meantime, it should be quite clear in our common Europe that lesbians and gays will not disappear from families and schools merely because a law prohibits information on them. Being different is normal, including in this, our common Europe.

Rui Tavares, *author*. – (PT) Ladies and gentlemen, this law begins by claiming to protect children against the promotion of homosexuality in public information. What does that actually mean? Does it mean that if I have a cinema in Vilnius and want to put up a poster for the film *Brokeback Mountain*, I cannot do so? Does it mean that if I give a lecture on homosexuality in a public place, theatre or university in Lithuania, I cannot do so? Does it mean – as has already been discussed in the Lithuanian Parliament – that I will have to pay a fine of up to EUR 1 500 or do a month's community service under the changes to the criminal code that are currently being debated in Lithuania? Can a television programme, for example, show a homosexual couple that is happy, or must it only show one that is unhappy?

Ladies and gentlemen, there was a date that surprised me when these amendments to the law on the protection of minors in Lithuania were passed: it was 14 July 2009. 14 July is, of course, the day when we gathered here

for the first time in this seventh parliamentary term, and also the day marking the 220th anniversary of our European principles, including the right to seek happiness, the principle of freedom of expression and even the principle of freedom of assembly. Now the freedom of assembly is also at risk, because the Lithuanian Parliament, again, has more recently been discussing the possibility of banning events such as 'gay pride' marches.

Well, when we gathered here for the first time on 14 July 2009, it was because we had a duty – I would say a sacred duty – to defend these values, and these are the values that are at stake. We know how those things begin, and we also know where they always lead. What are we going to do next? Appoint a committee to see what is and what is not promotion of homosexuality? Where – in books, theatres, cinemas, advertising?

Vilnius is one of this year's European capitals of culture, deservedly so, and certainly much to the delight of all Europeans. Being a European capital of culture also entails responsibilities, however: the responsibility of promoting European culture for the best reasons and not to put it under the spotlight this year for the wrong reasons.

I therefore appeal for a vote in favour of our resolution and call on the Agency for Fundamental Rights to issue an opinion on this very serious topic. That is certainly the least that the Members of this House can ask.

Michael Cashman, *author*. – Madam President, can I say, as a gay man, I am proud that this House and others are speaking out against this proposed law. This proposed law will clearly breach EU treaties on human rights, particularly Article 6, as well as the Employment Framework Directive and general policies on non-discrimination. It also, interestingly, breaches the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, in that it encourages discrimination against young lesbians and gay people. So, whom does it protect, and from what?

The British Conservatives introduced in Great Britain a similar law in 1988. It was recognised then, and recognised now, that these laws lead to censorship and the promotion of discrimination and homophobia: discrimination and homophobia which destroys people's lives and blights the souls of those who practise it. The proposed law has been condemned by NGOs, including the International Lesbian and Gay Association, the Council of Europe and Amnesty International, as well as others. It affects young lesbians and gay men – teachers, public officials – and could be used to prevent young people having access to any material – films, books, plays, works of art – created by a gay man or a lesbian. Are they going to try and stop young people studying the works of Plato, Shakespeare, Oscar Wilde, Walt Whitman, Tennessee Williams, Tchaikovsky and others, the music of Elton John, or idolising tennis greats such as Martina Navratilova? It will affect the very way young people and others speak, think and act. And why? Young people need education, not isolation; they need to understand the world in all its diversity and be taught respect for those who are different. The love of one human being for another is never lessened by gender or sexuality: it is love.

Lesbians and gay men are ordinary men and women made extraordinary by extremists' preoccupation with our sex lives and the defamation that lesbians and gay men are a threat to society. That is a vile misrepresentation. Any civilised society is judged not by how it treats its majority but how it treats its minorities. So I say to Lithuanians and people across Europe: reject this dangerous step back to the past.

(Applause)

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Madam President, allow me to start by underlining that freedom of expression and non-discrimination on the grounds of sexual orientation and gender identity are cornerstones of our democratic societies. Our Union is based on various principles and values that all the Member States are expected to support. We cannot insist on and stand up for respect for human rights in other countries if we cannot uphold these fundamental principles ourselves within the EU.

These fundamental rights and, in particular, freedom of expression and the right not to suffer discrimination, are recognised in Article 6 of the Treaty establishing the European Union and are also contained in Articles 10 and 14 of the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights. These principles are further stated in the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights. There is legislation at Community level to safeguard this area. Directive 2000/78/EC prohibits discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of religion or creed, disability, age or sexual orientation. Last year, the Commission tabled a proposal to extend this protection to other areas.

This proposal is currently under discussion in the Council and Parliament has submitted a positive opinion. We welcome this initiative and hope it will be adopted before long.

This is about legislation at European level. At national level, Member States can adopt national legislation in the area of fundamental freedoms and rights provided – and I repeat: provided – that this legislation fully respects the Union's and the Community's primary and secondary legislation, falls within an area in which the Community does not exclusively have competence, and is justified by the fact that there is no legislation at Union or Community level.

The law in question that was adopted by the Lithuanian Parliament in July and the proposed amendment of the Criminal Code and administrative law that is being discussed are a cause of great concern for the Swedish Presidency. However, we must not forget that the law has not yet entered into force.

From our perspective, a law that aims to ban the promotion of a certain sexual orientation violates fundamental values such as freedom of expression and the fact that all people are equal. The Presidency has made this position clear in contacts with the Lithuanian Government on repeated occasions.

As regards the more legal issues raised by Members in their speeches, it is important to point out that the Council does not have a formal role here. Compatibility between national legislation and the treaties is not a matter for the Council, nor is it a matter for the Agency for Fundamental Rights. It is up to the Commission to judge whether a Member State is meeting its obligations under the treaties. That involves not only monitoring whether Union and Community legislation is correctly transposed and implemented nationally, but also ensuring that primary law at European level is fully respected. As I am sure Mr Barrot will say, the Commission can initiate appropriate proceedings if it considers that a Member State is not complying with primary or secondary legislation.

Where Article 13 of the Treaty establishing the European Community is concerned, the Council would be deeply concerned if it were to find cases of discrimination on the grounds of gender, race, ethnic origin, religion, disability, age or sexual orientation. However, a proposal from the Commission is required if the Council is to initiate a discussion of whether discrimination is taking place and the measures to be taken if so. In the same way, under Article 7 of the Treaty, the Council can only take action if a third of the Member States or the Commission put forward such a proposal with due justification. Since the law has not yet entered into force, no such proposal has been tabled.

I can assure Members that the matter of discrimination against LGBT people is on the Swedish Presidency's agenda. We will be discussing it at an equality summit in Stockholm on 16-17 November.

Naturally we take the European Parliament's concern very seriously. It is about respect for fundamental rights and human rights. In formal terms, however, this must be dealt with within the legal and institutional frameworks. As the Council's representative, I have tried to answer the questions as correctly as possible and explain the limitations. I look forward to hearing the viewpoints of the representatives of the Commission on this matter.

Jacques Barrot, *Vice-President of the Commission*. – (FR) Madam President, the Minister has explained very well the legal elements of this problem.

I would like to say here that the Commission has repeatedly expressed its firm condemnation of all forms of homophobia. The phenomenon represents a flagrant violation of human dignity. The Commission notably repeated this position before the European Parliament on 23 April 2007, during the plenary session in which the Resolution on homophobia in Europe was adopted.

In areas that fall under the umbrella of Community competences, the European Union, as well as the Member States when they implement Union law, are required to respect fundamental rights. These are binding principles of Community law.

The Lithuanian law for the protection of minors against the detrimental effects of public information largely falls within the scope of Community competences, as its contents concern implementation of the Directives on audiovisual services and on electronic commerce.

Therefore, the Commission informed the Lithuanian authorities, even before the adoption of the draft law, that some measures of this law would raise serious concerns in relation to their compatibility with fundamental rights and Community law. In spite of this warning, it would seem that the current version of the law adopted on 14 July last does not dispel the concerns expressed by the Commission beforehand.

In this context, the Commission can only express reservations, and serious reservations, on the compatibility of this law with the principles of freedom of expression, the principle of non-discrimination, and with children's rights, including their right to access information necessary for their development.

The Commission will not hesitate to take every measure necessary to ensure respect for Community law, including, of course, fundamental rights.

According to information made available to the Commission, a working group has been established in Lithuania on the initiative of the President, Mrs Grybauskaitė, in order to introduce additional amendments to this law. These amendments should be proposed at the end of October. The Commission will, of course, await the outcome of the work of this committee and the contents of the amendments before giving a definitive opinion on the law such as it will enter into force. Indeed, I can only support Mrs Malmström's very clear point that it is up to the Commission to monitor the situation and ultimately to propose sanctions and to punish breaches of European Union regulations and of fundamental rights, *a fortiori*.

That is the information that I wanted to give you, showing you that our position on this matter is extremely clear.

Vytautas Landsbergis, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – Madam President, the law that is being criticised and debated, despite the fact that it will not enter into force until March, contains only one single line prohibiting the promotion of homosexuality to minors; that is the greatly troublesome part.

The President of the Republic of Lithuania took the initiative by tabling clarifying amendments immediately. Thus, our resolution is practically knocking on an open door. What we should be doing is concentrating on Parliament's intention.

The key words in the troublesome line about the promotion of homosexuality to minors are 'promotion' and 'minors' – not 'homosexuality', as some would have it. The possibility of direct promotion to minors has been dealt with by the adoption of a law. 'Promotion' is a deliberate action going beyond the simple and necessary information currently provided by sexual education, which should include a clause of tolerance to homosexual appeal and love.

The promotion of homosexuality to minors, if we open our eyes, may quite often mean significantly more – from encouraging them to try it, to the seduction of minors, even for homosexual prostitution. The media might benefit from such business, probably by disseminating such promotion to minors.

Dear colleagues, parents and grandparents, please now listen to your hearts. Would you be in favour of opening up this whole area of challenges to your own offspring?

(Interjection from the floor)

OK, that is the case for you.

What if they are exposed to such special 'promotion' regularly and without restriction? It seems as though we are stumbling between two trees: the first, if someone likes tricky doctrine, is the right of children to be mentally abused, while the second is the right of children to be protected from abuse. Let their self-determination come with maturity.

My proposal is to support the positions recalling both the Convention on, and the Declaration of, the Rights of the Child, and to delete paragraph 1, which is irrelevant at the present time and therefore inappropriate for Europe's highest House.

Claude Moraes (S&D). – Madam President, Mr Landsbergis has given a deeply unconvincing justification of this law. I was surprised; I thought he would justify it more. The Council and the Commission have expressed their deep concern, and that is the correct line. Anti-discrimination and freedom of expression are absolutely fundamental principles in European law.

In my own Member State, as Mr Cashman said previously, we had such a law in 1988, but it is now history and this law will become history because, as a Community of values, one of the EU's greatest strengths lies in our common endeavour to raise the bar on human rights and the protection of our fundamental freedoms. It is also difficult when one Member State is under the spotlight for a potential breach of this law but it is because of our Community of values that we can analyse those laws and we can say, as the Commission and Council have said, they cause deep concern for us.

The Fundamental Rights Agency should do its job and give its opinion and, as the Commission and Council have said, there are problems within existing law, anti-discrimination laws in this European Union; let us defend what we have and let us ensure that the Socialist Group, along with our sister party in Lithuania, condemn this law, and let us hope that that is what will happen – that it will be consigned to history.

(Applause)

Leonidas Donskis, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Madam President, the Lithuanian Law on the Protection of Minors from the Detrimental Effects of Public Information struck human rights defenders and media people in Lithuania and beyond as overly homophobic and profoundly undemocratic.

Please let me draw your attention to the fact that this law was vetoed by the former President of Lithuania, Valdas Adamkus, but he was overruled by the Lithuanian Parliament. In addition, this law has been severely criticised by the current President of Lithuania, Dalia Grybauskaitė. The law was assessed in vigorous terms by the Lithuanian media, commentators, and civil liberties and human rights defenders, who stressed its homophobic substance along with its extremely dangerous political implications, such as censorship and self-censorship.

This law has little, if anything, to do with the protection of children. Instead, it is against gay and lesbian citizens of the country. Whatever the case, the equation of homosexuality with physical violence and necrophilia is morally repugnant and deeply disgraceful. Still, it is difficult to believe that the adoption of such a law is possible in an EU country at the beginning of the 21st century. Personally I take this law as an unfortunate move and as a profound misunderstanding, to say the very least.

Changes to Article 310 of the penal code and Article 214 of the administrative code are being debated in Lithuania's Parliament that will criminalise, with the threat of a fine, community work or imprisonment, anyone involved in the promotion of homosexuality in any public space. If this is not our slide to state-sponsored homophobia and criminalisation of public expression of our gay and lesbian citizens, what is it then?

Last but not least, this law is a disgrace, but even more so would be an attempt to obfuscate, trivialise and, in effect, justify it. This is to say that I strongly support the resolution.

Raül Romeva i Rueda, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (ES) Ladies and gentlemen, this is a crucial moment in the process of European integration because, until a short while ago, we would surely not have had this type of debate. This is simply because no parliament would ever have considered adopting a law of this nature.

This means that this is not an internal issue of Lithuanian policy. Put simply, we must conclude that we are facing an issue that directly affects the survival of European credibility. No part of the European Union – and here we have the three institutions – can remain silent while a Member State adopts laws which persecute and criminalise something as universal as the right to choose the person with whom you have emotional or sexual relations, regardless of gender or age.

Mr Landsbergis, talking normally about homosexuality, bisexuality and transsexuality is the best guarantee of a child being able to live with his or her own sexuality, with respect for himself or herself and for the rest of the community.

This is important because what we are specifically calling for at this time is a guarantee of healthy growth, without coercion or negative stereotypes or criminalisation of childhood. We can do this precisely by holding a normal debate on this situation, as we are doing, and not by prohibiting or criminalising it.

Konrad Szymański, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) The law on the protection of minors in Lithuania was drafted out of concern for the emotional and psychological development of the youngest consumers of media which have an increasing presence in children's lives. Another concern of the Lithuanian legislators was that children should be brought up according to their parents' convictions. I do not believe that there is anyone in this House who would not agree that these are important and burning issues. These intentions deserve appreciation, and not criticism, although that is not the main point here.

There is no article of this law that infringes European law, and in most cases the law does not even touch upon European law. The issues raised in the written question are firmly within the remit of the national laws of Member States. Nobody has given the European Union authority to act in these areas. That is the

fundamental reason why we are opposed to the issue being raised at European level, and why we will never agree to any particular ideology justifying European law in exceeding its authority.

That is also the reason why we cannot support any of the resolutions tabled in this matter.

Eva-Britt Svensson, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (SV) Madam President, this is not about ideology. I would say it is about the equal value of all people. I would also like to thank both the Commission and the Council for their unusually clear position. I feel convinced that Parliament, the Commission and the Council are now acting in consort where this violation of fundamental values is concerned.

We are talking about the EU and the EU's respect for fundamental human rights. That must also apply to all the individual Member States. In practice, this proposed legislation risks making any information about LGBT issues illegal. Just imagine if people were suddenly banned from fighting for the equality of all people regardless of sexual orientation.

It is beyond doubt that the proposed legislation is an attack on human rights. I will not even count how many human rights it violates. I will simply say in brief: I fully support this resolution. I hope that Parliament will be as unified as possible in voting in favour of this resolution tomorrow.

Véronique Mathieu (PPE). – (FR) Madam President, above all, I would like to point out how important the fight against all forms of discrimination, particularly discrimination based on sexual orientation, is to the European Union, to Parliament and to all our colleagues.

What are we talking about today? We are talking about a draft law in Lithuania which is causing a problem, which is causing such a problem that Mrs Grybauskaitė has become involved. She has exercised her veto; she has even set up a working group, which will propose amendments to us. I therefore have complete confidence in her, and I am sure that this problem will be resolved and that the Member State concerned will find a solution to this serious problem that is discrimination based on sexual orientation. We have consulted each other, some groups have proposed a resolution and we have fortunately come to a joint resolution. I am therefore convinced, ladies and gentlemen, that this joint resolution will be adopted tomorrow and that this problem will be resolved.

It is, of course, important that the intellectual and mental health of our children is protected, but I would still like to remind you that the fight against all forms of sexual discrimination is important. We have worked for this for many years. We have the Agency for Fundamental Rights. It does have a purpose. We have battled for it to be established and there is no question today of it being abandoned or being thrown out.

I would therefore like to thank you for your willingness to adopt this joint resolution. I thank all of my fellow Members who have put so much into these negotiations. It is a great pleasure to see that we have succeeded in putting together this joint resolution and I hope that it will be adopted in this House tomorrow.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D). – (LT) I welcome the European Parliament's initiative to begin a debate on the question of the Law for the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effects of Public Information, passed due to the efforts of the Lithuanian right wing parties. It is regrettable that the law was passed without its compliance with international and European Union law being sufficiently debated and assessed. The voice of non-governmental organisations also fell on deaf ears. Under the guise of the noble goal to protect children's rights, in actual fact, a legal basis has been created to divide society, limit information and discriminate against individual groups of society. The former President of Lithuania vetoed the draft law, while the new President has set up a working group, which will submit a new draft of the law to Parliament in its session this autumn.

I hope that there will be sufficient political will in Lithuania to improve the law, all the more so because we have experience adopting and implementing progressive laws in this area. Six years ago, the Law on equal opportunities was adopted thanks to the efforts of the Lithuanian social democrats and this prohibited any direct or indirect discrimination on the grounds of age, sexual orientation, disability, race or ethnic origin in all areas of life. At the moment, a similar draft directive is being debated in the Council of Ministers. This European Parliament resolution should encourage the Lithuanian Parliament to adopt such a law, which respects human rights and freedoms, and in which there is no place for any form of discrimination, including discrimination on grounds of sexual orientation.

Emine Bozkurt (S&D). – (NL) Madam President, Commissioner, Minister, ladies and gentlemen, like all of you, I, too, am shocked by the fact that there is a parliament in Europe that is capable not only of proposing regulations of this kind, but also of actually adopting them. This law is not only an unacceptable violation of the rights of gay men and lesbians in Lithuania, it also does serious harm to the position of homosexuals

throughout Europe. The parliament of Lithuania is telling them that their sexual orientation is something that they should be ashamed of and from which children need to be protected.

I expect the Commission and the Swedish Presidency to make it absolutely clear to the Lithuanian parliament that fundamental values such as equality of treatment and non-discrimination are non-negotiable in Europe – not now, not ever, not by anyone! For that reason, I would like the Commissioner to pledge specifically, here and now, that the Commission will not hesitate for a moment to take Lithuania to the European Court of Justice if this law enters into force.

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE). – (SK) Lithuania has passed a law which provides important protection for children and young people against the external effects of information which might seriously harm their further development. It is clear that social and family policy fall under the competence of the individual Member States of the EU and therefore no European initiatives can condemn Lithuania for this.

The law in question does not contravene any international standards in the area of human rights. I have studied the issue and that is the case. I firmly believe that, on the contrary, the law strengthens processes for protecting children from exposure to information or images which – and I stress this – their own parents want to protect them from.

I would like to call for a consistent application of the subsidiarity principle which Ireland has secured in the protocol to the Lisbon Treaty. For all that, such ‘warnings to member countries and states’ are setting a serious precedent in clearly sensitive areas such as the family.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (S&D). – (LT) For the first time in the history of the European Parliament, in this honourable House, the actions of the Lithuanian Parliament are being debated in a negative context. No matter how innocent or good-willed the authors and supporters of the laws under debate are, they definitely did not lead us into the 21st century Europe. I think the fact that the Seimas majority’s overconfidence in its sense of justice had a role to play – above us only sky, we do what we want and we do not care about international commitments. This debate is a very serious reaction by the Council and the Commission; it is a warning sign to Lithuania’s legislators that we must not step backwards, almost to the Middle Ages, but act by looking forwards, taking advantage of the experience and traditions of the countries of the European Union. Therefore, these discussions are needed as is the resolution.

Cecilia Wikström (ALDE). – (SV) Madam President, all people are born equal and have the same inviolable value. Consequently, Parliament must make it very clear today that we are talking about the citizens of Europe, irrespective of the Member State concerned. Since the EU’s fundamental values are tolerance, openness and freedom, I am pleased that the newly elected President of the Commission has made it clear today that he is going to appoint a commissioner whose portfolio will encompass precisely these issues of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

It is particularly regrettable that a country such as Lithuania – which once experienced repression and dictatorship – has now, as a free and independent state, instigated a law so despicable and which represents censorship, lack of freedom and intolerance. All of us who support democratic principles and have any common sense must now emphatically denounce this Lithuanian law, and we must vote tomorrow. Let the Members of this House remind each other that the greatest of all is love.

Anna Záborská (PPE). – (SK) In 2006, Slovakia was condemned for asking for freedom of conscience. Today Lithuania finds itself in front of this community because it wants to protect children from the sexualisation of society. I consider this discussion to be a manipulation of the Charter of Fundamental Human Rights, a document which is legally binding.

This House is ignoring the legitimacy of a national parliament which has twice voted through the law without criticism. This House is requesting an opinion from the Human Rights Agency. The Agency, however, does not have the authority to examine the effect of national laws. I have a question: what must the Irish be thinking ahead of the forthcoming referendum? They must be thinking that the time will soon come when they will be criticised here in this House over their laws protecting the family and protecting life.

I am sorry that here in this esteemed Parliament, we fail to respect European values, we fail to respect diversity and national culture and we fail to respect child protection and the right of parents to educate their children.

Cecilia Malmström, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SV) Madam President, I think the three institutions have made their viewpoint in this debate very clear. Respect for human rights, tolerance, the inviolability of the individual and the prohibition of discrimination on the grounds of – among other things – sexual

orientation are fundamental values of the European project and must remain so. The Member States have a duty to respect both these values and the actual laws that apply in these areas within the EU.

The Presidency is greatly concerned about the law in question, but we know that it is also subject to debate and criticism in Lithuania. As has been mentioned, President Grybauskaitė – who was formerly a Commissioner and is well-informed concerning the values and laws of the EU – has herself initiated a process in which this law will be reviewed and made compatible with EU legislation. I am extremely pleased that the Commission has been so clear about what will happen if, contrary to expectation, the law enters into force in its original form.

Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the Commission. – (FR) Madam President, I fully agree with the Minister's conclusions. I would also just hope that the working group that Mrs Grybauskaitė has put in place will be able to prevent the introduction of a law which, in some respects, would be at odds with European law.

I would like to stress one point: we feared that some of the provisions of the law would go against certain directives, on audiovisual services and on electronic commerce. It is not actually our job to determine family law, which is one of the competences of the Member States. This being so, everything that has been said previously and in the course of the debate shows that matters need to be assessed better at national level, in this case in Lithuania.

President. – At the conclusion of this debate I have received five motions for resolutions⁽²⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 115 of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow, Thursday 17 September 2009.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Carlo Casini (PPE), in writing. – (IT) My judgment on the motion for a resolution on the protection of minors in Lithuania is intended to demonstrate a very serious institutional concern. Often, individual MEPs or political groups claim to address issues that relate to the domestic policy of individual States: that does not seem right. In the case in point, the plan is seemingly to make the European Parliament express an essentially negative opinion on a Lithuanian law – the full content of which is unknown – with the laudable aim of protecting minors, while surreptitiously imposing a position that the individual Member States have been left to establish at their own discretion. This, I might add, is something which the European Court of Human Rights has stipulated on many occasions. The principle of equality is beyond doubt, and no one is trying to call into question the dignity of persons with particular sexual orientations. My reservation is of an institutional nature because it concerns the relations between the European Union and individual Member States.

Joanna Senyszyn (S&D), in writing. – (PL) Discrimination is prohibited under European and international law. There are provisions to this effect in the treaties, the European Convention on Human Rights and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights. No Member State may enact laws that contradict these documents.

The Lithuanian law is inadmissible, as it is absurd and homophobic in nature. Homophobia is a disease. People who are afflicted by hatred for homosexuals deserve no sympathy. They are not so much homophobes, as sexual orientation chauvinists. And like all other chauvinists, they must be challenged and appropriate laws enacted against them.

In 1990, the World Health Organisation removed homosexuality from the International Statistical Classification of Diseases and Health Problems. It also confirmed that no type of sexual orientation is a disorder.

In any societies, including Lithuanian society, there are lesbians, gays and bisexual. They make up about 4 to 7% of the population. They are a minority who are entitled to full rights. The Equality Marches, which cause such concern to some people, are organised, amongst other reasons, to remind people of this basic, fundamental principle of equality.

For this reason, I appeal to the Council and the Presidency to take appropriate steps to prevent Member States from enacting discriminatory legislation. We must show that the European Union says a firm NO to all discrimination and intolerance.

⁽²⁾ See Minutes.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS WALLIS

Vice-President

16. Question Time (Council)

President. – The next item is Question Time (B7-0203/2009).

The following questions are addressed to the Council.

Question No 1 by **Marian Harkin** (H-0259/09)

Subject: Animal welfare

Given that animal welfare is one of the priorities of the Swedish Presidency, and given that countries such as Ireland have already put in place successful animal welfare schemes in relation to the live transportation of animals, including the Suckler Cow Welfare Scheme which helps to ensure that our weanlings for export are stronger and better prepared to cope with the journey, has the Swedish Presidency any plans to take into account schemes such as these for the live export of animals in order to ensure that a balance is reached between the sustainable export of live animals and the safeguarding of animal welfare in any new legislation? Furthermore, given that Ireland is an island nation and relies heavily on the export trade of weanlings, has the Swedish Presidency any proposals that would inhibit this vital trade for Ireland?

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council.* – (SV) Madam President, I have the honour of answering a question from Mrs Harkin. The Council shares the Member of Parliament's concern regarding animal welfare. The Commission's regular tabling of proposals has resulted in the continual establishment of a fair amount of Community legislation in this area. The Swedish Presidency aims to maintain the debate on animal welfare and good animal husbandry. These are priority issues for our Presidency in the area of agriculture and a special conference on animal welfare will be held in the Swedish city of Uppsala on 8-9 October.

The conference will be based on the results of the EU-financed project on Welfare Quality. Since 2004, the project has produced a scientifically based system to assess how well livestock is cared for in farming. The project is also investigating the best ways to provide feedback to farmers, consumers and other stakeholders. More than 40 institutions and universities from the EU and Latin America took part. Another topic that will be discussed at the conference is how animal welfare can be improved globally. There will be speakers from international organisations such as the WTO and FAO, global enterprises and the international meat industry, as well as representatives from the US and Namibia.

The results of the conference may be of relevance for the conclusions planned by the Council in response to the Commission's expected communication on animal welfare labelling. As regards taking the initiative for any legislation, I am sure the Member is aware that it is up to the Commission to make proposals. The Swedish Presidency is currently working on a proposal from the Commission for a new directive on the protection of animals used for scientific purposes. At this stage, the Commission has tabled no further proposals for legislation on animal welfare that will be dealt with during the Swedish Presidency.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – I am very pleased that you are saying that you want to keep the debate going and that you are having a conference in Uppsala on the matter. The truth is that the legislation that we have in place is really only in effect for about two years. I know that we in Ireland have certainly bought into it. We have ensured training for handlers. We have upgraded transport systems and, as a result of all of this, our trade is working very well, but, if we stop it, obviously competition will be gone in the market at home, etc. What I am asking is whether it is important to change legislation that is really only in place and only working effectively for two years. The other question was about what robust scientific data is in place to show the need for this.

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council.* – Well, as you said, it is important to evaluate this properly and see what is being done; what the results have been.

We are gathering scientific evidence. At the conference in Uppsala, we have invited both experts and scientists to be the background for the discussions at that conference. As I said, we hope that these can be the basis for the Council's response to the communication that will come from the Commission. This is what I can say at the moment.

But we also very much welcome the opinions of the European Parliament. We hope that this could be a very good start for the discussions and gather as much information as possible.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE). – One point: I hope that science is prevailing over emotion in relation to the transportation of animals.

I would ask you to address the issue of the transport of horses which, I think, has not been addressed sufficiently, and I think there is huge concern about that at the moment.

I would suggest that animal welfare concerns on farms may increase because of the disastrous prices that farmers in many of our Member States are being paid for their produce. They are doing their very best to keep welfare standards up, against the background of very poor commodity prices and, therefore, no income on farms. So I think we need to be sensitive to this issue.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – This is a very controversial topic in Ireland and is grist to the mill of those advocating a 'no' vote on the Lisbon Treaty. In view of that and in view of the fact that Ireland is an island, and that without live exports there will be a cosy cartel operating, particularly for beef and sheep prices, can you give us any hope that this will be addressed or compromised prior to the vote on the Lisbon Treaty on 2 October?

Cecilia Malmström, President-in-Office of the Council. – I do understand the concerns of Members of this House and of the citizens. Unfortunately, I cannot promise that this will be solved before the referendum.

We are currently awaiting the Commission proposal. It has been delayed for reasons I do not know. As soon as it comes, we will throw ourselves at it and start to discuss it. I cannot tell you more because we are waiting for the proposal from the Commission. I hope we can do this without dramatising it, but rather evaluate it and look at it from a scientific and evidential point of view.

Question No 2 by **Claude Moraes** (H-0262/09)

Subject: Child trafficking in the EU

A report published in July by the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) highlighted the severity of the problem of child trafficking in the EU. Large numbers of children are trafficked within our borders for sexual exploitation, forced labour, adoption and organ extraction.

I welcome the inclusion of human trafficking as a priority issue in the Swedish Presidency's work programme, but would like to know if any proposals will be considered specifically in relation to the trafficking of children, as the FRA recommends?

Cecilia Malmström, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SV) Madam President, the Swedish Presidency shares the Member's concern regarding child trafficking for sexual exploitation or for other purposes. This kind of modern slavery is one of the most lucrative kinds of international organised crime. Of course, it is despicable and it is a serious problem, both within the EU and in the rest of the world. Human trafficking has long been an important item on the EU agenda and clearly we must continue to implement a combination of measures to combat this appalling violation of the most fundamental rights.

Europe must redouble its efforts in respect of preventive measures and the fight against organised crime, as well as the protection of the victims of crime. The EU's commitment to combating human trafficking is clear from the adoption and implementation of both legislation and non-binding instruments on this issue. To start with, a joint action to combat trafficking in human beings was adopted in 1997. The most important piece of legislation is the 2002 Framework Decision on combating trafficking in human beings.

In March 2009, the Commission tabled a proposal for a new Framework Decision on preventing and combating trafficking in human beings, and protecting victims of such activities. It was intended that this would supersede the Framework Decision of 2002. One of the objectives of the proposal is to provide for the special treatment of vulnerable victims – children – in criminal investigations and proceedings, with a view to preventing what is known as secondary victimisation.

This proposal is linked to another proposal that is oriented even more towards the specific needs of children, i.e. the proposal for a Framework Decision on combating the sexual abuse, sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, and repealing Framework Decision 2004/68, which the Commission tabled at the same time. The aim is to create a more consistent legal framework, make it more effective and make the penalties for perpetrators more severe.

These two proposals are currently being discussed in the Council. They are based on a significant international consensus, particularly in the UN Palermo protocol and the measures to combat human trafficking contained in the European Convention on Human Rights as well as the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse.

In conjunction with a ministerial conference that the Presidency is holding in Brussels on 19-20 October, which will focus on overarching EU measures against human trafficking, the report from the Agency for Fundamental Rights will be presented and discussed in detail and the conclusions will be presented to the Council. The Swedish Presidency also intends to bring up human trafficking and the sexual abuse of children as priority issues in the Stockholm Programme, which we intend to adopt at the summit in December.

Anna Hedh, *deputising for the author*. – (SV) Thank you very much, Minister. I know that this issue is hugely important. We in Sweden have been pushing this issue in recent years, just as the EU has. I would simply like to point out that I think it is a great shame that Members of the European Parliament will be unable to attend the conference on 19-20 October because we will be here in Strasbourg, and we cannot be in Brussels at the same time to take part in this important conference. It is a shame, but that is the situation.

I am also aware that the Swedish Presidency has said that it wants to bring up the issue of the exploitation of children in connection with travel and tourism. The intention was to do this at a conference on 20 November when the Permanent Intergovernmental Group *L'Europe de l'Enfance* is to meet, but I have now heard that the Presidency will not be raising this issue. Why is that? Are you going to raise it on another occasion?

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Madam President, thank you, Mrs Hedh. I know that Mrs Hedh is very committed to these issues.

It is very unfortunate that the conference in Brussels clashes with the session. The reason that it is on these dates is to coincide with the EU Anti-Trafficking Day, which is being held at the same time. That is why they coincide. It is indeed unfortunate.

As regards the Member's second question, concerning why this has been dropped: I was not aware of this. I will have to check and get back to you on that and perhaps communicate an answer to Mrs Hedh.

Elizabeth Lynne (ALDE). – Thank you very much for that reply. I am sad as well that the conference is being held when we are in Strasbourg. But can you make sure that on the agenda of that conference we do have the Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking highlighted? Because there are a number of Member States who still have not signed it, and there are some Member States – including Sweden, of course – that have not ratified it. So I think it is very important to make sure that it is high on the agenda at that conference, so we can make anti-trafficking a reality. We have the wherewithal there. We really must act on it.

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Yes, Ms Lynne, I will bring this to the attention of the organisers.

Question No 3 by **Mairead McGuinness** (H-0264/09)

Subject: Message for FAO high-level meeting

What message will the Council be delivering on behalf of the EU at the forthcoming session of the Conference of the Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations (FAO)?

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Madam President, we are covering many different issues.

The UN FAO conference will start on 18 November. One of the most important items on its agenda is reform of the FAO. The reform process is based on the action plan approved by all the members of the FAO in 2008. This action plan involves many different types of reforms. Among other things, the future activities of the FAO will be determined by a results-based management system that will promote greater efficiency as regards the allocation and utilisation of scarce resources. We also expect the reform process to have long-term effects on the FAO's work on matters concerning its staffing and local offices. The conference will also deal with matters relating to changes in the FAO's charter and the reforms to the Committee on World Food Security.

This reform is important because it is linked to the establishment of a global partnership on agriculture, food security and supply. In order to discuss these matters at a political level, the FAO is holding a World Summit

on Food Security in Rome on 16-18 November. The Presidency will be represented there and we will present a declaration that is partly based on the Council's conclusions on food security that will be adopted at the FAO conference.

In its conclusions concerning the FAO on 11 November 2008, the Council acknowledged that the current food crisis demands a common united and coordinated response from the global community, supported by civil society and the private sector. To this end the EU should support a global partnership for agriculture and food in accordance with the EU's action plan for the Millennium Goals. This was welcomed by the European Council in June 2008.

Furthermore, in its conclusions, the Council welcomed the ongoing reform of the FAO that is being implemented in a constructive manner by all the member states of the organisation within the framework of the conference's committee. In the light of this, the Presidency feels that the summit should have a clear political aim and launch a new management system for world food security, with a rejuvenated and stronger CFS taking a leading role.

The Presidency feels that it is essential that this summit establishes a forward-looking, action-based system capable of getting to grips with the current food crisis and increasing efforts to achieve the first Millennium Development Goal – to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger. Reform of the CFS and broad commitment to the global partnership will be of the utmost importance in bringing this about.

The Presidency feels that the summit should have this clear political aim, to launch a new system for managing the world's food supply in which a rejuvenated and stronger CFS plays a leading part. At an operational level, the Presidency feels that this summit needs to establish a forward-looking, powerful system capable of taking on the challenge of the current food crisis and increasing efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE). – I do appreciate the detailed response. Can I just hone in on what the attitude of the Swedish Presidency is in relation to the role of the common agricultural policy in assisting the concept and the desire for global food security. What role do you think our policy can play in that? Do you think it is important that we have a common policy in Europe, given our concerns about global food security?

Cecilia Malmström, President-in-Office of the Council. – We have not discussed that in the Council in the light of this particular conference, but it is clear that the common agricultural policy can play a role and can also, when we discuss it in the future, play an increasing role in facilitating the poorer countries to be part of the common market, as well as in where we can help to mitigate and to eliminate the current acute crisis.

We have done that. Now the world situation looks a little bit better. There are positive reports coming from almost all the different markets. That is excellent, and I would give it a little bit of time to reflect on how we can address those conflicts in the future and how we can use a slightly reformed common agricultural policy to help those poor countries and to avoid a similar situation.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – We are talking here about global food security, but I would like to just briefly mention food security in the EU. In my opinion, food security in the EU depends on food production in the EU. Just today, the ALDE AGRI group had a meeting with Commissioner Fischer Boel and we were discussing that very issue and the future, as has already been alluded to, of the CAP, particularly post 2013, and the fact that the budget may be cut, etc. There are really serious implications for food production in the EU.

I know that is only part of the wider discussion we are having here this evening but, nonetheless, it is hugely important for those who are involved in agriculture. You have already given an answer but, if you have any further thoughts on that as far as the Swedish Presidency is concerned, I would appreciate them.

Cecilia Malmström, President-in-Office of the Council. – This is a complicated and very big discussion. It touches upon the conference itself but it is, of course, something that goes much further. We do not have the intention of really starting those discussions; we have been waiting to receive from the Commission an element, a communication regarding the future budget; it was promised – as was agreed by the Council in 2004 already – that we would have a thorough revision of the income and the outcome of the expenditure of the budget including, of course, the CAP, which is such a big part of the budget. This communication has been delayed – there are now rumours that it will come by the end of the year. If it does, we, the Swedish Presidency, intend to have a first discussion among the Member States on it, but it will be up to the Spanish Presidency to really start working on these issues. So for the moment, I cannot give you any more details.

Question No 4 by **Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou** (H-0267/09)

Subject: Stability and Development Pact

In June, the European Council affirmed its commitment to healthy public finances and to the Stability and Development Pact. Nevertheless, as many as 20 Member States are expected to be subject to the excessive deficit procedure by the end of the year. What initiatives will the Presidency take to achieve its objective of correct and responsible implementation of the Stability Pact and where has it identified the difficulties so far in correctly implementing it? Does it consider that the crisis necessitates a fresh revision of the Pact or is the reform adopted in 2005 sufficient for the Pact to be respected and effective under present conditions? Which exit strategy and strategy for reducing public deficits does it prefer and what is the timetable for implementing such a strategy? Does it consider that 2010 should be a year of fiscal consolidation and discipline or that a degree of flexibility should be retained in public finances, particularly in view of the forecasts of dwindling employment?

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) This issue was also discussed earlier today. During the current crisis, public authorities have taken extraordinary measures in terms of both monetary policy and budgetary support. These efforts were necessary and appropriate, and played an important part in averting an even more serious crisis, in stabilising the economy and in preventing a drastic economic recession. The stabilisation of the economic and financial situation does not mean that the recession is over, however. We need to be extremely cautious and ensure that our policy for the future combines the necessary support for the recovery – which we hope will come – with a responsible attitude to sustainable public financing in the medium and long term.

It is precisely the need to balance these two objectives that makes the flexibility adopted in the 2005 review of the pact so sensible. In difficult economic times, the authorities must take the action required to promote economic activity. Once the recovery has picked up speed and is driven by its own momentum, however, we must ensure that our public finances are sustainable and we must establish credible plans for budget consolidation.

Since circumstances differ significantly in the various Member States, the schedules – the timetables – for ending financial policy incentives and monetary policy measures will also vary. This will be reflected in many of the deficit procedures that will be aimed at individual Member States, but it needs to be coordinated, and it must remain in line with the overall framework of the Stability and Development Pact. Consequently, the Presidency is planning discussions within Ecofin in the autumn concerning appropriate exit strategies and their coordination.

I expect these discussions to result in a clear accord on ambitious consolidation at the right time in each Member State in order to guarantee long-term sustainability.

Marietta Giannakou, *deputising for the author*. – (EL) Thank you Minister for your very clear reply. I trust that you will focus in particular on whether we should insist on 2010 being a year for improving public finances or whether there should be some way of providing extensions or delays, as this is something from which the Union has not benefited to date in its policies.

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) That is a very difficult question to answer. At the G20 Summit next week, we will be starting an initial discussion of exit strategies. However, it is clear that circumstances vary widely in the different Member States, and therefore the timetables will vary slightly. I hope we can start this process quite soon, but it also depends on how the economic situation develops. There is light at the end of the tunnel, we think the worst is over and thus we need to look more into this idea of an exit strategy. If we do not do it gradually, it is the most vulnerable members of our societies who will be hit by rising unemployment, severe public cuts and the risk of inflation. However, at present, it is a little early to say exactly when that time will come in the various Member States.

Question No 5 by **Seán Kelly** (H-0270/09)

Subject: EU measures to combat unemployment

A recent Eurobarometer poll indicated that whilst 72% of EU citizens say the European Union is 'playing a positive role in creating new job opportunities and fighting unemployment,' only a little over a third of respondents had heard of the EU's tools to combat unemployment, such as the European Social Fund and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund. Is enough being done to promote awareness of these key instruments?

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Madam President, the Council shares the Member's concern regarding the results of the latest Eurobarometer as regards awareness of important EU instruments to combat unemployment such as the European Social Fund and the EU Globalisation Adjustment Fund. From the aspects of both democracy and legitimacy, it is important to communicate to our citizens what the EU does.

The Council places great importance on the European Social Fund and the EU Globalisation Adjustment Fund and we want these to be used effectively to combat unemployment. These two instruments are important financial tools for combating the current recession and increasing employment in that they introduce integrated flexicurity strategies and ensure that skills are improved and better matched to the needs that exist. The Council expressed this in December 2008 when it backed the rapid introduction by the European Social Fund of supplementary measures to support employment. The Council also announced improvements to the procedures of the EU Globalisation Adjustment Fund. The original regulation was therefore reviewed to allow the Fund to react more effectively to support workers who had lost their jobs not just as a result of globalisation but also temporarily because of the financial and economic slowdown. However, it should be pointed out that the implementation of these funds, including appropriate information and publicity, is a matter for the Member States and the Commission. As regards the European Social Fund, the Member States must provide information on initiatives and cofinanced programmes with a view to highlighting the role of the Community and the aid provided by the funds. In this context, I would mention the European transparency initiative launched by the Commission in 2005. One of the foremost aims of this initiative is to improve information to the general public concerning the EU funds available by publishing the names of recipients of direct subsidies within the framework of the EU's cohesion policy.

Where the EU Globalisation Fund is concerned, information on the measures financed should be provided by the Member States. At the same time, I would remind you that the Globalisation Adjustment Fund was established relatively recently. Lack of knowledge may be due to the fact that this fund has provided assistance in relatively few cases as yet.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Thank you very much for your very concise response. I have just one other query. I understand that there is strong opposition within the Council to the proposal to frontload the European Social Fund to 100% for the upcoming two years. If that opposition is maintained, can the Council suggest any alternatives that have been put forward to maintain the momentum of the European economic recovery plan?

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Yes, we have indeed discussed this in the Council several times. There is a quite unanimous view that, for the sake of the quality of the project, there should be an element of national financing as well. Therefore, the proposal to eliminate that has no support from the Council.

However, we are aware of the situation and of the problems. We have asked the Commission to present an alternative proposal. I brought that up with Commissioner Samecki, who is responsible for it, just two days ago. They are working on such a proposal and will present it as soon as possible.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) I am sorry that the necessary support in the form of 100% financing is not being provided through the Council at a time when we are talking about the European Social Fund's role in reducing unemployment, especially during the current crisis. I would also like to mention that during the current economic crisis, we are seeing increases in unemployment, particularly affecting steelworks and shipyards, or even technical unemployment, in addition to workers actually being made redundant. I would like to ask you the following question, bearing in mind the need to invest and safeguard the European Union's economic competitiveness in the future as well: what measures do you envisage taking to facilitate the use of European Social Fund and European Globalisation Adjustment Fund resources to support the industrial sectors experiencing economic hardship?

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – As I said, we have asked the Commission to come up with alternative proposals on how this particular Social Fund can be used in this situation where, as you say, lots of people all around Europe are without work, and we hope that the Commission will present such a proposal without undue delay.

However, we do a lot of other things as well to combat unemployment; this is the responsibility, of course, of the Member States, but there is also a collective responsibility for us to try to coordinate, to facilitate the completion of the internal market, to eliminate obstacles, to get the Services Directive working from 1 January,

to get rid of red tape and to stimulate people to be employable, while giving them resources to complete their education or to restart in another direction.

Unemployment will also be discussed at a particular informal Ecofin meeting in October, where unemployment is one of the main issues on the agenda; and in the light of the discussion that I know is taking place within the European Parliament, but also in almost all Council formations concerning the future of the Lisbon Strategy, there are lots of issues being discussed.

So the Social Fund is only one instrument to combat unemployment. It can be improved, and it can be more widely used to show the public how it is used in a better way, probably. But it is just but one element in the whole range of instruments that we have and that we must use in order to combat unemployment.

Question No 6 by **Bernd Posselt** (H-0271/09)

Subject: Information about Chechnya

What steps is the Council going to take, following the murder of the human-rights and peace activist Natalia Estemirova and the subsequent closure of the Memorial human rights group's office in Chechnya, to enable the monitoring of human rights observance there to continue? What does the Council think of the idea of opening an EU office for that purpose, in Grozny or in close proximity to Chechnya, or at least of sending a temporary mission to Chechnya?

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Madam President, as soon as the Presidency heard of the murder of Natalia Estemirova, we immediately issued a statement condemning the murder and expressed our deepest condolences to her family and colleagues within the Memorial human rights organisation. We also urged the Russian authorities to investigate the murder quickly and thoroughly and to bring the perpetrators to trial.

I can assure Mr Posselt that the Council will continue to follow developments in Chechnya very closely and we will give particular attention and respect to human rights and to the situation of the defenders of human rights. The Council has urged the Russian authorities on several occasions to do everything in their power to protect these people in Russia in accordance with the universally acknowledged UN Declaration on human rights defenders. I would stress that the EU already has a presence in Chechnya as a result of the Commission's aid project, diplomats from Moscow's embassies in the EU Member States and in the form of regular visits to Chechnya.

The Council would like to emphasise the importance that it attaches to Mr Posselt's questions and it is concerned about the human rights situation in Chechnya, but we do not consider there currently to be any particular need for the office or mission that he has proposed. The European Union is present in the region and we will continue to monitor the issues of respect for human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles in Chechnya and will address these whenever the need arises.

Bernd Posselt (PPE). – (DE) Thank you, Mrs Malmström. That is the first good answer I have received from the Council on this subject. Thank you.

Nonetheless, I have a brief supplementary question: does the Council intend to address the question of Chechnya again under the Swedish Presidency, because the Russian leadership has issued a series of announcements about changes. However, action needs to follow and we see none, which is why I would ask that you brief us properly once again on this issue in the run-up to negotiations on the agreement. We intend to have an urgency debate on this matter tomorrow.

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Madam President, yes, we continually raise issues of human rights in our dialogue with Russia and human rights will be on the agenda at the summit that we hope will take place between the EU and Russia during the autumn.

Question No 7 by **Nikolaos Chountis** (H-0273/09)

Subject: Authorisation from the Turkish Government for hydrocarbon prospecting within the exclusive economic zones of EU Member States

The Turkish Government has decided to give the go-ahead to the state-owned Turkish petroleum cooperation (TPAO) to explore for hydrocarbon deposits within the exclusive economic zones (EEZ) of Greece and Cyprus. This follows on from the threatening stance adopted by Turkey in a bid to deter Cyprus from proceeding with the exploitation of its EEZ, thereby forcing it to veto the unblocking of the energy chapter.

Given the potentially explosive impact of the above decision by the Turkish on its relations with EU Member States, can the Council provide the following information:

What immediate measures will it take to ensure that the Turkish Government reverses its decision to authorise prospecting for hydrocarbon deposits in the EEZ of the EU Member States? What measures will it take to ensure that, with respect to Cyprus, also Turkey complies with the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement and recognises its right to an EEZ? When is it expected that Turkey will adopt the Convention on the Law of the Sea, which has been incorporated into Community law?

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Madam President, the Council is aware of the events brought up by the Member of Parliament. As regards Turkey's relations with the countries in the region concerned, Turkey – just like every other country – has a duty to act to encourage good neighbourly relations and peaceful dispute resolution. That is the essence of the UN's Charter.

It is also an important requirement for accession to the EU. Within the context of Turkey's negotiations with the EU and the related conclusions drawn by the Council, the EU has called on Turkey to avoid any threat, source of conflict or action that could have a negative effect on good neighbourly relations and the process of peaceful dispute resolution. Moreover, on a number of occasions, the EU has emphasised the importance of progress in the normalisation of bilateral relations between Turkey and all the EU Member States, including the Republic of Cyprus, and stressed the sovereign rights of all Member States of the EU.

As regards the matter of the Additional Protocol, the Union's position is extremely clear. Turkey has a duty to apply it in full and in a non-discriminatory way. All these matters are systematically raised by the EU, most recently at the meeting between ministers from the EU troika and Turkey that took place in Stockholm in July and in the Association Council in May. I can assure the Member that the Council attaches great importance to these matters and that we will continue to monitor developments extremely closely.

Nikolaos Chountis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Madam Minister, I appreciate your willingness and determination to give clear replies to our questions.

May I say that we shall be debating the question of the Nabucco pipeline in Parliament tomorrow and remind you that, in January 2009, the Turkish Prime Minister threatened Brussels that his country would re-examine its support for the construction of the natural gas pipeline if negotiations on the opening of the energy chapter do not continue.

This chapter, as you know, has been blocked by the veto exercised by Cyprus, because it has been threatened by Turkey about the exploitation of its exclusive economic zone.

As, therefore, the question of exclusive economic zones is of crucial importance and may cause a major problem for numerous EU policies, I ask you again what measures the Council will take to ensure that Turkey recognises Cyprus's right to an exclusive economic zone?

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Madam President, both the Council and the Commission have noted this and we will monitor the matter closely. In all our dealings with Turkey, we will continue to raise the matter and the importance of good neighbourly relations. The next opportunity will be at the foreign ministers' troika in November. I hope that incidents of the kind mentioned by the Member can be avoided.

Where the energy chapter is concerned, this is currently being screened in the various Council formations and discussions are ongoing. It is a little too early to announce the results of this analysis and, as the Member will be aware, each step in this process requires unanimity in the Council.

Question No 8 by **Liam Aylward** (H-0278/09)

Subject: EU policy in Burma

Can the European Council make a statement concerning the policy of the European Union towards Burma and outline what measures the European Union is pursuing so as to help release Aung San Sui Kyi, who has been imprisoned there since 1990?

Cecilia Malmström, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (SV) Madam President, the EU has followed the situation of Aung San Suu Kyi closely ever since she was imprisoned twenty years ago. The Council has worked continually and very actively on her behalf. On many occasions, we have called on the authorities in Burma to release her.

Furthermore, during this time, the Council has taken specific action a number of times. To mention some of these actions:

In August, the EU immediately condemned the judgment against Aung San Suu Kyi and the proceedings against her, which had no legal basis. We called on the authorities in Burma to release her immediately and unconditionally. The Council stated that the legal proceedings against Aung San Suu Kyi represented a crime against national and international law.

Moreover, the EU's high representative, Javier Solana, spoke out on behalf of Aung San Suu Kyi at the ASEAN ministerial meeting and the subsequent ASEAN-EU ministerial conference in July, at which a representative of Burma was also present. Strong demands were also made by many others present at this meeting, including representatives of the USA, China, Russia and others, for the immediate release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners.

Through its Special Envoy for Burma, Piero Fassino, the EU has also been very active in supporting the measures taken by the UN and the UN's Special Adviser Ibrahim Gambari, and has also consulted important EU partners in Asia.

The authorities in Burma have chosen to ignore the protests against the imprisonment of Aung San Suu Kyi and the calls to release her that have been made by a large number of countries and organisations, including the Secretary-General of the UN, the Secretary-General of ASEAN and a number of ASEAN Member States, of which Burma is, after all, one.

As there has been no response from Burma, the EU has taken further action directed against those responsible for the judgment. We have placed members of the judiciary and others involved in the action against Aung San Suu Kyi on the list of persons who are to be denied visas and whose assets are to be frozen. We have expanded the list of persons and units that are to be covered by restrictive measures so as to also include the freezing of assets held by companies owned and controlled by members of the regime in Burma or by persons associated with them.

The response agreed on by the Council on 13 August is entirely in line with the resolution passed by the European Parliament in October 2008. I can assure the Member that in addition to these specific measures, the EU will intensify its work within the international community and, in particular, with like-minded partners in Asia in order to bring about the immediate and unconditional release of Aung San Suu Kyi and other political prisoners. This is a fundamental first step in the process of national reconciliation that is required if the 2010 elections are to be able to be regarded as free, fair and credible.

Liam Aylward (ALDE). – I would like to thank you, Madam President-in-Office, for your comprehensive reply. Can I ask you what action the European Union has taken, or is in the process of taking, to assist the thousands of refugees that have fled Burma's northern Shan State into China as a result of August's violent clashes between the junta and ethnic minorities?

Cecilia Malmström, President-in-Office of the Council. – I am very sorry. I do not think I can answer that question. I will have to come back to you on that. I am sorry.

Question No 9 by **Brian Crowley** (H-0280/09)

Subject: Closer EU-US relations

Can the European Council outline the initiatives that it is pursuing so that closer political and economic relations can be built up between the European Union and the United States of America?

Cecilia Malmström, President-in-Office of the Council. – (SV) Madam President, the Council attaches the greatest importance to relations between the EU and the US. Transatlantic relations represent a cornerstone of the EU's foreign policy and are based on our shared values of democracy, human rights and our commitment to open, integrated economies. The new administration in the US has given a new stimulus to these relations.

We are firmly resolved to continue this cooperation. This is a time when definite results are expected in our transatlantic relations, on both sides of the Atlantic. I am pleased to be able to state that there are many areas in which the EU cooperates closely with the United States in order to expand our strategic partnership and achieve results. Naturally we will continue to cooperate very closely on a number of regional issues such as Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran, the peace process in the Middle East, Russia and the Western Balkans. We cooperate regularly on crisis management and I am delighted that the United States is now taking part in a civil ESDP mission, namely EULEX in Kosovo.

We will be cooperating closely on climate issues ahead of the Copenhagen Summit at the end of the year. The new administration has raised the ambitions of the United States substantially in this area. We welcome this and hope that they will be able to present comparable objectives as regards reducing emissions in the medium term as part of the agreement. We have also long cooperated on energy matters. We feel that this must now be taken to a higher level and we hope to establish a special energy council for the EU and the United States. This could become a good forum for increased cooperation between us in the areas of energy security, markets, sustainability policy and research into new energy technologies.

Another issue of high priority is, of course, the financial and economic crisis. Very close cooperation is needed here if we are to restore confidence in the financial markets and get them to work properly. In the area of trade, the Doha Round must be concluded ambitiously in 2010. This is essential if we are to foster economic recovery and fight protectionism. The US has a key role to play here.

Naturally, we will be discussing these issues at the G20 Summit next week. Both sides have shown interest in deepening our cooperation on justice and home affairs and in increasing understanding of each other's regulatory and political frameworks. The statement on the closure of Guantánamo Bay, which mentioned deepening transatlantic cooperation on justice and home affairs, is an important step in this direction.

As regards non-proliferation and disarmament, the cooperation between the EU and the United States has been reenergised and the Obama administration has been very keen on this. Washington and Brussels are working together to ensure that significant progress is made on issues such as the Review Conference of the Parties to the Treaty of Non-Proliferation, the entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and implementation of a solution to the deadlock at the Conference on Disarmament so that we can achieve a treaty banning the production of weapons-grade fissile material.

There is strong interest on both sides in strengthening transatlantic political dialogue and cooperation on development work. The EU and the US are the world's largest donors and we therefore have a common interest in improving efforts in the area of development. We are conducting discussions concerning how this can be done. The forthcoming summit between the EU and the United States is an excellent opportunity to discuss these and other relevant issues at the highest level. I am extremely proud that the Swedish Presidency has been given the opportunity to lead the EU at the summit. We are firmly convinced that the summit will promote transatlantic relations in a positive and constructive manner.

Brian Crowley (ALDE). – Thank you very much Minister. It is great to have you back here, albeit in a different guise.

Specifically on the two issues where I think we can most cooperate: on proliferation, number one; and secondly with regard to the financial crisis.

Does the Swedish Presidency – representing the Council, of course – have specific ideas that they want to bring to the US-EU Summit that will take place very shortly, in particular, about the differences there appear to be between France and Britain on one side and the rest of the European Union with regard to the financial regulations that would apply? The US appears to be closer to the others within the EU, maybe, than they are to the French and British ideas that were announced yesterday by Gordon Brown.

Cecilia Malmström, President-in-Office of the Council. – This morning we had a debate on the preparations for G20. I know that there are different proposals discussed in the media but I must say that the EU is extremely well coordinated. We have had discussions with the finance ministers and tomorrow night there will be a dinner with Heads of State and Prime Ministers to finalise the coordination in the light of the Pittsburgh meeting.

The EU stands united. We know what we want. We have a concrete proposal, and the fine tuning will be done tomorrow. So I am not really worried about that, and I am also very happy that, with the help of the Commission and Commissioner Almunia, we have reached this very rare stage of strong unity within the European Union. These are our priorities and our solutions that are being discussed and we will, of course, try to find cohesion on as many points as possible with the American Administration and the other partners at the G20 meeting.

On non-proliferation, we are very happy that this is again on the agenda. It has been difficult for some time to raise it and we are very happy with President Obama's commitment to that. But it will take time. There are complicated technical issues and it will take time to pursue them. We are very process-oriented. We will try to move them forward but I cannot tell you how long this will take and what deadlines we have. But it is

on the agenda. We are very committed to moving forward and I think this is also a wish that our American counterparts share.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (S&D). – Madam President-in-Office, I would like to ask you about the EU-USA-Russia triangle. As we know, on the initiative of President Obama, the USA and Russia started very important negotiations on nuclear disarmament. How, in your opinion, can the Council and the European Union facilitate, and have its input in, these negotiations which are so important for the future of mankind?

Cecilia Malmström, President-in-Office of the Council. – I am very happy at this news. I think it is an important step that those two countries sit down and discuss, as you say, important issues for mankind, and we can but hope that they move forward in a concrete way.

There is a global nuclear summit in March 2010 where the EU will be present, of course, as well. This is also a good opportunity, in the light of that, to coordinate our views and to see how we can contribute to make these discussions as successful and fruitful as possible.

President. – Questions which have not been answered for lack of time will be answered in writing (see Annex).

That concludes Question Time.

17. Composition of committees and delegations: see Minutes

18. Agenda of the next sitting: see Minutes

19. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting was closed at 19.00)