

WEDNESDAY, 18 FEBRUARY 2009

IN THE CHAIR: MR PÖTTERING

President

(The sitting was opened at 3 p.m.)

1. Resumption of the session

President. – I declare resumed the session of the European Parliament adjourned on Thursday, 5 February 2009.

2. Statements by the President

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, two weeks ago, a Polish engineer, Piotr Stańczak, who has been held as a hostage by terrorists in Pakistan since last September, was murdered by his captors. On behalf of the European Parliament, I would like to express my outrage at this abhorrent murder of an innocent man who was a Polish citizen and a citizen of the European Union. The European Parliament denounces this criminal act in the strongest possible terms. We would like to offer the family of the deceased and all his relatives our heartfelt sympathy and condolences.

Terrorism is a direct attack on freedom, human rights and democracy. Terrorism is an attempt to attain one's ends through blind violence and to destroy our common values. It poses a great danger to the security and stability of the international community. Terrorism is a crime, and one which we cannot go soft on.

Ladies and gentlemen, in the mother tongue of this murdered engineer, I would like to say, *Niech spoczywa w wiecznym pokoju* [May he rest in eternal peace].

In memory of Piotr Stańczak, can I ask you all now to rise to commemorate him.

(The House rose and observed a minute's silence)

Ladies and gentlemen, the forest fires in Australia have led to a tragic loss of life over recent days. These, the worst bushfires in Australia's history, have claimed many lives in horrible circumstances. We were all horrified by the violent power of this natural disaster and its horrendous consequences. I have written to the Australian Prime Minister to convey the sincere sympathy of the European Parliament. On behalf of the European Parliament at today's plenary session, I would like, once again, to express our solidarity with Australia, its people and its authorities in these sad times.

Next week, a delegation from this Parliament will travel to Australia in order to convey our condolences personally. I would like to take this opportunity, however, to express our heartfelt sympathy and condolences to the families of all those who lost their lives. Our thoughts are with you.

Ladies and gentlemen, worrying news is again emerging from the Islamic Republic of Iran. Seven leading figures in the Bahá'í religious community were taken into custody in May 2008. For eight months, they were denied the opportunity of legal counsel. Now, these seven dignitaries of the Bahá'í religious community are to be subjected to a trial this week that meets not even the most basic requirements of the rule of law. The Nobel prize-winner and Iranian lawyer Shirin Ebadi, who was prepared to handle the defence of the imprisoned leaders, has herself been on the receiving end of death threats.

The European Parliament calls on the Iranian authorities once again, and in the most urgent terms, to respect human rights and the rights of religious minorities and to reconsider its indictment against the seven leaders of the Bahá'í – Fariba Kamalabadi, Jamaloddin Khanjani, Afif Naeimi, Saeid Rasaie, Mahvash Sabet, Behrouz Tavakkoli and Vahid Tizfahm. These people were incarcerated solely as a result of their beliefs and should be released immediately.

(Applause)

Ladies and gentlemen, last Friday, 13 February 2009, the Spanish Member of this House, Mr Herrero, was arrested by the Venezuelan Government in the capital, Caracas, and subsequently expelled from the country, as a result of comments he had made to the media about the Venezuelan Government. Mr Herrero was in

the country as part of the official delegation of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, who had been invited by an opposition party in the context of the constitutional referendum. To arrest him, the police forced their way into his hotel room and they then put him on a scheduled flight to Brazil, without an official explanation or any opportunity to collect his personal belongings. We find this unacceptable!

On behalf of the European Parliament, I protest to the strongest possible degree about these methods. I emphatically condemn this incident, which represents an infringement of human rights and a denigration of the democratic institution that is the European Parliament.

(Applause)

Giles Chichester (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I rise as Chair of Parliament's Delegation for relations with Australia and New Zealand to strongly identify myself with the statement you have just made and to thank you for it. I look forward to delivering that message next week in Australia.

President. – Thank you very much, Mr Chichester.

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

4. Follow-up to a request for the defence of immunity: see Minutes

5. Verification of credentials: see Minutes

6. Interpretation of the Rules of Procedure: see Minutes

7. Corrigendum (Rule 204a): see Minutes

8. Lapsed written declarations: see Minutes

9. Documents received: see Minutes

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

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

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

13. Order of business

President. – The final draft of the agenda for this sitting, as agreed by the Conference of Presidents meeting on Thursday, 5 February 2009, in accordance with Rules 130 and 131 of the Rules of Procedure, has been circulated. The following amendments have been proposed:

Wednesday:

The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats has requested that Mr Reul's report on possible solutions to the challenges in relation to oil supply be deferred to the next part-session.

Herbert Reul, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we debated this motion long and hard in the committee, and we reached a decision backed by a large majority, but yesterday and today, there has been an abundance of advice and suggestions that have come about primarily because other committees have added extra subjects for discussion.

It seems to me that it would be a good idea not to make the decision today but, instead, to have the opportunity at a later date to find a solution which Parliament is then in a position to support. I therefore ask that you adopt this deferral today. Thank you.

Hannes Swoboda, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, we have tabled two motions, neither of which, most probably, will achieve a broad majority in this House. I therefore wish to endorse this motion.

Mr President, with your permission, we will also move to defer Mr Berman's report. If this motion is not accepted due to the lateness of its timing, I would like to say, now, that we will move tomorrow to postpone the vote on the report. Thank you.

President. – Thank you very much, Mr Swoboda.

Does anyone wish to oppose the motion?

Claude Turmes, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, my group, the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, has tabled a resolution which has the support of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and large parts of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament. I therefore think that Mr Reul is calling for a deferral out of fear that his position is a minority one.

I find it a little strange that we should have such a long and hard debate and then hear calls for another delay. We are thus against deferral.

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, you have heard the political contexts. You have also heard what Mr Swoboda had to say. The decision will be taken tomorrow.

(Parliament adopts the motion from the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats).

We will vote on Mr Swoboda's motion tomorrow. I would ask you all to remember that in today's vote.

(The order of business was adopted thus amended)⁽¹⁾

14. Role of the European Union in the Middle East (debate)

President. – The next item is the statements from the High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy and from the Commission on the role of the European Union in the Middle East. It is my pleasure to welcome into our midst the High Representative, Mr Solana, and to ask him to address us.

Javier Solana, *High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy*. – Mr President, this is the first time that I have appeared before you this year, 2009. It is a great pleasure to be here and I hope that the good cooperation we have had in the past will continue this year.

The war in Gaza ended a month ago, on 18 January, and I think you would agree with me that it feels like yesterday. The scale of the suffering and destruction was immense and it has left us all with a bitter taste in our mouths. The humanitarian situation today remains heart-breaking. We need to find urgent solutions to get aid in and to reduce the level of suffering of the people.

At the same time, we need to do all we can to end the conflict between Israelis and Palestinians and between Israel and the Arab world. In fact, the parameters of the solution are well known, and have been known for some time. What matters now is the political will to implement it among Israelis and Palestinians, among Arabs and the wider international community.

The European vocation for peace in the Middle East remains as strong as ever. Our commitment to the creation of a viable and independent Palestinian state, living side by side with Israel, is total. It is at the heart of our Middle East policy. All our actions have this strategic objective in mind. We will give our firm backing to all who want a peaceful solution to the many challenges across the Middle East region.

This House – Parliament – knows just how difficult and how intractable the situation may seem. Too often, the region has been plagued by cycles of violence, rising extremism and economic hardship. At the same time, the conditions for Europeans and Americans to work together in the search for peace in the Middle

⁽¹⁾ For additional amendments to the order of business, see Minutes.

East are probably better than ever. I have just returned from Washington where I had good discussions with everybody there in the Obama administration. I think I have the assurance from them that the strong commitment that has been expressed is a reality. We are willing and ready to work with them towards achieving success in this conflict.

I think the appointment of Senator Mitchell as US envoy has given the people in the Middle East and his friends renewed hope. We know him. We have worked with him. I had the privilege of working with him in 2001 on the famous report and just recently, I have had the opportunity to work with him in the region.

I hope very much that these changes will lead to a new approach, one that provides the parties with a greater say in how they manage their affairs. We know that solutions and proposals should be locally inspired. However, at the same time, deeper international engagement remains essential.

This is why the Arab Peace Initiative is so crucial. This initiative is the collective expression of the Arab world on how they could help to end their conflict with Israel. It is their response to the issue that has held back their development and their integration into our global world. It remains, and should remain, on the table.

We have just had important elections in Israel. Of course, it is for the Israeli people, their political leaders, to decide on the composition of their new government. From our side, we hope that the new prime minister and government will be solid interlocutors for peace talks.

Needless to say, the same applies to the Palestinians. They, too, have to get their house in order, including through reconciliation. As everybody knows, we strongly encourage intra-Palestinian reconciliation behind President Abbas and all the efforts by Egypt and the Arab League in that direction. This will be a key to peace, stability and development.

As I said, I know that this Parliament has been deeply preoccupied with the crisis in Gaza, and so have we all. Let me use this occasion to highlight some of the most important international efforts, which focused on trying to end the violence and easing the plight of all civilian populations.

Egypt's role in resolving the situation in Gaza, and indeed with the Palestinians themselves, remains crucial. We hope their efforts will soon lead to a durable and sustainable ceasefire, to the opening of the crossings for all goods and persons, and some sort of intra-Palestinian agreement. Without this, it will be difficult – not to say impossible – to rebuild Gaza.

We are looking forward to welcoming positive announcements on the ceasefire. The day before yesterday, there were good meetings, and let us hope that they will continue today and in the future so that a ceasefire may be called, without delay. As you know, Egypt will also host an important conference on reconstruction on 2 March and we expect all the international community to make a commitment there. The European Union, too, played its role. We immediately expressed our willingness to contribute in concrete ways to a durable ceasefire. We also stated our readiness to re-dispatch our monitors to the Rafah crossing point, in accordance with the agreement that we signed in 2005. We are ready to operate at Rafah, or at any other crossing points where help is needed or requested.

Several European countries also expressed their readiness to help the interdiction of illegal trafficking, in particular, arms smuggling, into Gaza. The activities of the European Parliament in response to the crisis have been significant and are part and parcel of the European Union's overall reaction to the crisis.

As far as the United Nations is concerned, we can warmly commend UNRWA for its work and perseverance and underline that the European Union will continue to support all its efforts.

But it is clear that no single country or organisation can tackle the conflicts in the Middle East alone. The very nature of the difficulties demands multilateral solutions. The Quartet will have a crucial role to play in the months ahead. The new US Administration, in cooperation with us, has confirmed its intention to make full use of the Quartet.

The terrible events in Gaza should also force us to take a more strategic and long-term look at Gaza. The Gaza Strip constitutes an integral part of the Palestinian territory occupied in 1967 and, without any doubt, will be part of a Palestinian state. Gaza needs to become economically and politically viable. Gaza needs to become part of a political solution.

The immediate priority remains to secure a durable and fully respected ceasefire and to allow for the unimpeded delivery of humanitarian aid. We need to see the opening of the crossings for humanitarian assistance, for commercial goods and for people, on a regular and predictable basis.

As you know, the diplomatic fall-out of the Gaza conflict in the wider region has been very significant: indirect talks between Syria and Israel have been suspended; Mauritania and Qatar have suspended ties with Israel; a withdrawal of the Arab Peace Initiative was threatened.

Arab divisions, as you know, have deepened. Without Arab unity it will be very difficult to make progress in Gaza and in the wider Middle East peace process. Peace in the Middle East requires a united Arab world. The upcoming Arab League summit will be crucial to restore Arab unity, in particular, behind the Arab Peace Initiative.

In the coming months, we will also have elections in Iran and in Lebanon. On 12 June, the Iranians will vote for a new President. We have repeatedly stated our deep respect for Iran and our desire to forge a completely different kind of relationship with this country. This is clearly in everyone's interests, but to achieve that, we need trust and that trust must be restored.

Let me conclude by saying that 2009 will be critical for the Middle East. We are possibly at a threshold. We can choose to pursue the same policies in the same manner, knowing that they will lead to the same results – the results that we know today. On the other hand, we can try to work with energy, with determination, to adjust our policies, to adjust the way we set about achieving results.

We have to work on both crisis management and conflict resolution – there is no doubt about that. However, the time has come to focus decisively on conflict resolution. It is the only way to end this endless sequence of death and destruction.

(Applause)

President. – Thank you very much, High Representative. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to bring to your attention the fact that, this coming Sunday, I will be leading a delegation, in my capacity as President of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, to Gaza, Ramallah, Sderot und Jerusalem for two and a half days. Amongst other things, talks are to be held with President Peres and Prime Minister Olmert in Jerusalem and President Mahmoud Abbas of the Palestinian Authority and Prime Minister Fayyad in Ramallah. In Gaza, preparations will be made for the United Nations visit, which will then be carried out.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, we are at a moment of transition in the Middle East. Soon, most probably, there will be a new Israeli Government. There is already a new US administration, currently defining its foreign policy priorities. And we may soon face transition in the occupied Palestinian territory. So changing dynamics can create opportunities for new engagement.

However, there is no denying that the recent conflict resulted in enormous human suffering and destruction. It has left the Middle East peace process – we have to confess – in a particularly fragile state. This House knows that only too well, and I refer to the discussions and debates that we have already had here.

This is clearly not where we wanted to be at the beginning of 2009. But if there is, some day, to be peace between the Israelis and the Palestinians, the only way forward is to do all we can to get the talks back on track. This human tragedy in Gaza has had a huge impact on the region. I returned only last night from a trip to Syria and Lebanon, and I will certainly also say something about that but, in particular, let me say that what we need to do is to make clear to all Israeli leaders that the EU expects sustained commitment to the peace process and to the two-state solution.

We also need to reinforce the message to the Palestinians that a strong Palestinian Authority with effective leadership over the entire occupied Palestinian territory is essential both for the reunification of the West Bank and Gaza and to get the peace process back on track. That is why the European Union is supporting the efforts of Egypt, Turkey and others to achieve this.

With the new US administration, we need to agree a joint way forward. I spoke on the phone to Secretary Clinton to that end only last week. She agreed on the need for a lasting ceasefire and a return to the peace process, which is absolutely crucial. We also agreed that the Quartet should consult closely on these matters before the end of the month. I am glad that the American administration sees the Quartet as a very important institution for going forward on peace.

Finally, we need to step up our own engagement with the Arab League countries. The consensus for peace is weakening, not only in Israel and within the occupied Palestinian territory, but also within the Arab League, where worrying divisions are appearing.

To that end, as I just said, I have just returned from Syria and Lebanon, where I met President Assad in Syria, President Sleiman in Lebanon, and other key partners. The recent conflict has badly damaged negotiations not only on the Palestinian, but also on the Syrian, track. We therefore exchanged views on the peace process at length. I reiterated the very strong support of the European Union for the Arab peace initiative, and I urged partners to maintain their commitment to it, because it offers a serious framework for regional peace talks.

I also stressed the milestone decision taken by Syria and Lebanon to establish diplomatic relations, and pushed for completion of all steps in this process. In both countries, we discussed practical ways in which the European Union could support the process of reform. In Lebanon, I reiterated our readiness in principle to deploy an EU election observation mission, and I have already decided that an exploratory mission should go there immediately.

The European Union as a whole has been extremely active in recent weeks both on the political and practical fronts. On the political front, since I last reported to you in January, we have all pursued our intensive diplomatic activity. We have been at the forefront of calls for a ceasefire and have worked with Egypt and others to make a lasting ceasefire possible.

The Council conclusions in January indicated that the EU is developing a 'work plan' for a lasting ceasefire. This document identifies six areas for action including humanitarian response, the prevention of smuggling to Gaza, the re-opening of the Gaza crossing points, reconstruction, intra-Palestinian reconciliation and the resumption of the peace process.

Much very delicate work is going on. To give but a flavour of the pace of activity we have all been involved in: for instance, I was at a working dinner of the Paris Co-Chairs on 15 January, the Summit meetings in Sharm el-Sheikh and Jerusalem on 18 January, and EU ministerial meetings with Israel on 21 January and with a group composed of Egypt, the Palestinian Authority, Jordan and Turkey on 25 January. In addition, Commissioner Louis Michel, who is responsible for humanitarian aid, visited Gaza on 24 and 25 January.

We are in regular contact with Quartet colleagues. We had important meetings as a troika in Moscow. I had this telephone conversation with Clinton; Javier Solana was there in Washington, and we are agreed on the need to renew the peace process. We continue our road map monitoring work, and we also deploy state-building assistance, including in sensitive areas such as the rule of law and border management.

The EU's action strategy for the Middle East also foresees EU support for specific final status issues, for instance, for Jerusalem, refugees and security arrangements.

In practical terms, the EU has prioritised delivery of humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza. The Commission has already mobilised EUR 10 million practically overnight, and another EUR 32 million has now been committed for the coming period.

In early March, the Egyptian Government is organising an international conference in Sharm el-Sheikh in support of the Palestinian economy for the reconstruction of Gaza. We, as the Commission, will be a co-sponsor of this event. I am delighted that I had the opportunity to discuss the pledge that the Commission intends to make with the Chairs of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Budgets at an early stage here in Parliament on 2 February. Thank you again for your support.

The problem at the moment is not only funding, but access, particularly to Gaza. We have been very vocal, both in public and in private, about the unacceptable closure of the Gaza crossings. This House will wish to join me today in calling, once again, for the crossings to be fully opened.

(Applause)

When access does improve – as I have no doubt it will – we may then have to review our financial forecast. At that point, I may need to come back to discuss this with you. I hope I will again be able to count on your support.

Honourable Members, you can count on the commitment of the Commission – and also on my personal commitment – to do everything in our power to help bring peace as swiftly as possible to one of the most troubled parts of the world. We will certainly continue to work very closely with this House.

(Applause)

Joseph Daul, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Mr Vondra, Mr Solana, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, ladies and gentlemen, the situation in Gaza is getting a little worse each day. The population is suffering enormously. There is a shortage of everything.

The embargo imposed on Gaza means each delivery of humanitarian aid has to get through an obstacle course. Even when it is delivered, the humanitarian aid is insufficient to meet the needs on the ground. The hospitals can no longer operate properly. The population can no longer be looked after. What is happening today in Gaza is a humanitarian catastrophe on a major scale.

The European Union is already playing a major role in the region. The financial support it has given and continues to give to the Palestinians is considerable. It has done a lot upstream to prevent the humanitarian disaster we are witnessing today. Despite the obstacles, it continues to give humanitarian aid and assistance to the population of the Gaza Strip. Just today, the European Union has granted EUR 41 million in aid to the United Nations Agency for Palestine Refugees. This, then, is not the moment for us to start to keep our mouths shut.

For me, the European message must be clear. We cannot tolerate humanitarian aid being taken hostage in this conflict. It is essential that this aid be able to move freely, without restriction, and that the checkpoints be opened.

Moreover, we issue a warning to Hamas. Last month's incidents, when Hamas confiscated, and failed to return, the humanitarian aid distributed by the United Nations Agency in the region are scandalous, intolerable and must not be repeated. All the players involved must anticipate the reconstruction phase and actively prepare it by assessing the damage on the ground and by preparing a plan for the financial, economic and social rehabilitation of the Gaza Strip. This rehabilitation is essential for the region's stability. That is the objective of the donor conference that meets in Sharm el-Sheikh on 2 March.

Let us, however, be clear. No reconstruction – yet another one – can take place before a lasting ceasefire has been called. A ceasefire and the cessation of military operations, on the part of Israel too, are absolute prerequisites for the reestablishment of peace in the region. It also begins, with reference to Hamas – and I say this with the utmost firmness – with putting a definitive end to the firing of rockets into Israel from Gaza.

All measures must also be taken to fight against the entry of arms and munitions through the tunnels linking Gaza with Egypt. Restoring dialogue between all sectors of Palestinian society and restarting the current negotiation process are essential. Egypt, which has a particular responsibility due to its location on the border with Gaza, must take an active part in this negotiation process. All our future diplomatic efforts must take this particular role of Egypt into consideration.

We can only hope to find a solution to the conflict by keeping the diplomatic route open. I call on all the parties involved, including the Quartet, the Arab League and the diplomats of the Member States, to continue to engage in the negotiations with firmness and determination.

Martin Schulz, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Thank you, Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the message from our debate can only be one thing: there is no violent solution in the Middle East. There is no military solution. There is no solution through terrorism.

It may be the case that one party gains a short-term military advantage. It may be the case that a terrorist act causes a great deal of chaos. Yet experience shows that every act of violence generates more violence and pushes the cycle of violence further. What is crucial, therefore, is dialogue, and that is something that is extremely difficult in the Middle East, especially in a time of uncertainty and, to some extent, of asynchronicity.

Yet there is also hope emanating from the United States. President Obama, Hillary Clinton and their team offer a consensus and dialogue-oriented model, something completely different from the previous administration which has now, thankfully, left office. So there is hope in Washington. What about Jerusalem, though? What Benjamin Netanyahu had to say during the election campaign certainly did pose a threat to the peace process, while Avigdor Lieberman is also certainly a threat to the peace process in the Middle East. This asynchronicity poses a risk.

What is going on in Lebanon? What influence will Hezbollah have in future? To what extent is it prepared to engage in constructive dialogue, before and after the election in Lebanon? What about the Western-oriented majority? Would that majority be able to react to an election victory by integrating Hezbollah? Is Hezbollah prepared to allow itself to be integrated? This depends, to a crucial degree, on who governs in Tehran. The issue of the election outcome in Iran is of central importance. This is also true for the attitude of Hamas.

The question of whether we have a radical president who denies Israel's right to exist – as the current incumbent does – or whether there is to be a government that is prepared to talk and this readiness to talk stretches from Tehran to Beirut and on to Rafah is a crucial issue for the stabilisation of the whole region. We are in favour of a unity government for the Palestinians. Without a unity government for the Palestinians, the peace process is unmanageable. It is therefore now up to Hamas to show that it is willing and able to join such a government.

The basic precondition for this, however, is to be talking with Hamas, that those amongst the Palestinian people who want to talk with Hamas be supported and that they not be forced onto the defensive by a government in Jerusalem that knows only the politics of continuing the settlements. As a side point, if it is true that 163 hectares have now been re-released for settlement, this is a destabilising element and this is something that we need to be absolutely forthright in making clear to our friends in Israel.

In the Middle East, everything is interconnected. It is not possible to simply pick out individual elements and believe it possible to solve an individual problem by military means. That is why the basis for everything is the readiness to talk. The Arab League's plan, Saudi Arabia's peace plan, envisages an end to violence with simultaneous recognition of Israel's right to exist. This is a bold and ambitious plan, and it is one that needs to be discussed. It is progress in itself that there are people in the Arab League, in the Arab camp, who are prepared to have that debate. That is something that must be supported. Bombers are not the way to support this, and I might add that the way to support the work of the European Union is likewise not for what we build to be destroyed again for whatever military reasons. For this reason, our message can only be that dialogue is the precondition.

High Representative Solana, you said that this is your first time before us this year. This is perhaps also your last visit before our elections in June. As dialogue is very much a *sine qua non* for success, I would like to say to you, on behalf of my group, that you represent the personification of dialogue. Your work deserves more than respect. It deserves a great degree of admiration, above all, for your continuous advocacy of dialogue. For that, you have our sincere appreciation.

(Applause)

President. – Thank you very much, Mr Schulz. We do, of course, hope – and this is something we can all agree on – that Mr Solana will come before us a few more times before the end of this parliamentary term.

Graham Watson, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – Mr President, it is with heavy hearts that we debate once again what our Union can do to ease the pain in the Middle East.

Looking at the recent conflict in Gaza, all the old familiar phrases apply: blame on both sides; provocation by Hamas; disproportionate response by Israel. But in the face of the recurring violence, we have recycled those tired phrases so often that they have lost whatever impact they once had. We cannot go on like this. Of course, it is our moral duty to assist in the reconstruction of Gaza. Of course, it makes sense to seek safeguards from Israel. It is bad enough to see the airport, schools and sewerage systems blown up; it is worse to rebuild them with European money knowing that they will likely be destroyed once again.

Is it possible, is it credible, to imagine that Israel can assure us that this will not happen? In any event, reconstruction and humanitarian aid from the European Union will not prevent future conflict. We need a new and positive approach, jointly with the United States, if possible, but without them if not.

Last month's violence and the outcome of this month's election have changed the terms of the debate. Hamas is stronger politically, it is intact militarily, it is holding out against recognising Israel, and the expected coalition in Israel will be more hard-line than ever and broadly resistant to seeing a separate Palestinian state. Meanwhile, the gulf between the West Bank and Gaza grows ever wider, with the threat of a permanent division.

The Council and the Commission have not really said what their response will be to this turn of events, and the Czech Presidency appears to want the matter off the agenda, but we can afford to wait no longer. With the situation in flux and neither Hamas nor the Israelis talking to one another, we must set achievable terms on which we can talk to both. Isolation has led only to despair.

The time has come for diplomacy, delicate but determined. In which forum? In the Quartet, Mr Solana? Well, perhaps, but let us first acknowledge that the policy failures, the dashed hopes and the creeping extremism of the past seven years have taken place under the Quartet's watch. Its envoy, Tony Blair, has never even

been to Gaza. If he went there, he could visit the site of the industrial area, which is one of his pet projects, designed to generate jobs, but levelled last month.

(Applause)

The Quartet has to open its mind to a new approach and, if our partners within it cannot take that step, then we should explore ways in which it might.

Lastly, we can only prepare for the future if we acknowledge honestly what has happened in the past. There should be a free and fair international investigation into alleged war crimes in the Gaza conflict. The UNRWA and our own parliamentary committee have both reported alarming evidence of war crimes, and the allegations are serious indeed. If Israel is wrongly accused, its name should be cleared, but if it has committed those crimes, it must face up to its responsibilities. Our aim must be to forge an agreement for a peaceful and prosperous future on both sides of the divide, where enemies can once again become partners. However, the failure of our approach to date is written in spilled blood on the ground. Mr Solana, we must pioneer a new path to peace, and the European Union, if necessary, must take the lead.

(Applause)

Brian Crowley, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (GA) Mr President, High Representative and Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, I warmly welcome today's settlement to provide humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. This is a step in the right direction for the European Parliament.

The current humanitarian situation in Gaza is bad and the European Union has a responsibility to help.

Many words have been spoken with regard to the need for peace, dialogue, understanding, temperance – if one would wish to use that word – with regard to the reactions and the counter-reactions to different events. But three things jump out at us immediately when we speak about the Middle East.

Firstly, it is not a negotiation of equals. There is strength on one side, weakness and division on the other side. Secondly, it is not an equal participation of outside influences and outside media coverage. One side gets more positive protection from international media and countries; the other side suffers under the derogatory terms of 'terrorism' or 'reactionary'.

Thirdly, and most importantly of all, despite all the political disagreements, geographical disagreements and historical disputes, it is the same people who continue to suffer day after day after day: women, children, innocent civilians, people who have no truck with political groups, political organisations or with paramilitary groups or terrorist organisations. These are the poor innocents caught in the middle of the rocket fire, of the bombing and the so-called – and I laugh when I hear these words being used – 'targeted intelligent bombing'. There is no such thing as an 'intelligent' or 'safe' bomb. When it lands, it blows up – it kills people.

We have ample evidence to show that not only the Hamas rockets going into Israel killed innocent people but that, a hundred times more, the bombs and the bullets from the Israeli forces have killed thousands and injured thousands of people within Gaza and within the Occupied Territories. Indeed, we have evidence from an Irishman, John King, who works for UNRWA in Gaza, to show that, when they informed the Israeli authorities that their bombs were landing close to a UN compound in Gaza that was storing fuel and food and was also acting as a refuge to children whose school had been bombed earlier in the day, the bombs came closer; and when they had to phone them a second time, the bombs landed on the fuel dump within the UN compound.

Perhaps it is negligence, misinformation or deliberate targeting, but one way or the other it is an act – maybe not quite a war crime in some people's minds – but it is an act of attack on the institutions of peace, humanity and freedom. At times of war, there are rules of engagement, there are certain things which cannot be done.

Of course, we must get aid and assistance to the Palestinian people for the rebuilding of their areas. Of course we must ensure and insist that talks take place and that peace can be allowed to flourish, but that requires us to take brave moves within Europe as well. Like Martin Schulz, I congratulate Javier Solana on walking that long lonely path of speaking to people that nobody else would speak to, of opening the doors of dialogue, because ultimately only through dialogue between enemies can you make peace, and only through peace can you build the foundations of a solid two-state solution that will guarantee peace, equity, security and justice within the Middle East.

Jill Evans, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Mr President, I was a member of the European Parliament delegation that travelled to Gaza last week to see the devastation, and the focus of Parliament's resolution today is humanitarian action, which is desperately needed.

This is a real humanitarian crisis, and how are we going to address that urgently? Ninety per cent of people in Gaza are dependent on UN aid. This is not linked to any negotiations. We have to ensure that that aid gets through, and the key to that is the lifting of the siege and the opening of the crossing points. How can a densely populated area of 1.5 million people that has been bombed for 22 days and in which over 1 000 people were killed even begin to recover when only 15 categories of humanitarian items are being allowed in: food, some medicines and mattresses? You cannot rebuild homes and offices without cement and glass, which are banned. You cannot teach children in schools that have no paper because it is banned. You cannot feed people when there is not enough food being allowed in. It is not that the aid is not there, but it is not being allowed through. We have to put pressure on the Israeli Government to end the blockade and open the crossings.

Any assessment of the damage caused in Gaza must draw attention to the deliberate targeting to destroy the infrastructure and the economy. We saw schools, factories, homes and a hospital deliberately attacked. Once again, we have witnessed the destruction by Israel of projects funded by the European Union and, rather than take action on this, we are talking about upgrading trade relations when conditions on human rights are currently being breached under the current agreements.

Mr Solana talked about how pursuing the same policies can bring us back to the same place. Well, I agree. In 2006, the European Union refused to recognise the Palestinian Unity Government, which included members of Hamas, and yet we are ready to recognise a new Israeli Government, which may include members who reject a two-state solution, who do not support a Palestinian state.

What is crucial now is that the EU must be prepared to work with and recognise an interim Palestinian national government of consensus that should emerge from the Cairo talks in the next few weeks, and we must give out clear signals of our intentions to the international community. We have to support the reconciliation process in Palestine as part of achieving a long-term solution, and that means ensuring that we do not repeat the mistakes of the past.

(Applause)

Francis Wurtz, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Mr Solano, Commissioner, as I listened nearly a month ago to the children of Gaza speak, amongst the ruins of their house, of how they had trembled as the bombs fell, or to their parents describe the hell of those 22 days and nights that will forever mark their lives and the memory of future generations, I was not proud of Europe.

I thought of some of the leaders of our Member States, of all those who will answer to history for their lack of political courage, the missed opportunities, for their lack of vision. I asked myself this question: to what extremes must the Israeli leaders push their inhumanity towards the Palestinians and their scorn for law and the most fundamental values before the main European political leaders dare to raise a finger and say finally, 'Enough is enough'?

Those who call themselves friends of Israel to justify the impunity and unlimited accommodation shown towards its current ruling class should reflect on these words from the great Israeli writer David Grossman, whom I wish to quote: 'Amidst the wave of nationalist hyperbole now sweeping the nation, it would not hurt to recall that in the final analysis, this last operation in Gaza is just another stop along a trail blazing with fire, violence and hatred. A trail marked at times by victory, at other times by defeat, but which is leading us inevitably to ruin'.

Or let them ask the same question as Shlomo Sand, the famous Israeli historian, whom I also quote: 'We sowed desolation. We have proved that we have no moral reserve. Have we strengthened the peace camp among Palestinians?' He continues: 'Israel has been pushing the Palestinians to despair.'

For 20 years, Yasser Arafat and the Palestinian Authority recognised the State of Israel with nothing to show in return. Israel refused the offer of the Arab League in 2002, ladies and gentlemen. Everyone talks about the Arab League and about the Arab League's peace project. It has been in existence for seven years. What has Europe done to seize this opportunity?

I therefore come back to Shlomo Sand: 'Israel refused the offer of the Arab League in 2002 of full recognition of Israel with the pre-1967 borders.' The Israeli historian concludes thus: 'Israel will make peace only if pressure is brought to bear on its policies'.

This leads to a question, Mr Solano, as you said nothing on the subject of international law. What pressure is the Union prepared to exert on Israel over Gaza and the West Bank, including Jerusalem, to remind its current and future leaders that membership of the international community in general, and the privileged partnership with the European Union in particular, come at a price, that they have no place for military occupation, nor war crimes, nor a policy which pushes each day towards a divorce between Europe and the Arab-Muslim world?

I would wish, as a European, not to have to place the hope for a change in policy towards the Near East solely on the occupant of the White House. I would still like to believe in an about-turn by Europe.

(Applause)

Kathy Sinnott, (IND/DEM). – Mr President, today we are debating a resolution about humanitarian aid. Before making my contribution, I would like to stress that I am not speaking on behalf of the IND/DEM Group as it has no position on this topic. Instead, I am speaking as an MEP on behalf of myself and of my people.

The vast majority of the people of Gaza must rely on humanitarian aid for their very survival – food, water, shelter, clothes and, especially, medicine. This is a population that has been under siege for a very long time. All crossing points have been closed for 18 months and now, with the terrible recent aggression visited on the people of Gaza, they are even more desperate. Because the siege has still not been lifted and crossings are still closed, it is very difficult to get essentials to the people.

I note in recital E of this resolution that we Europeans give ourselves a nice pat on the back for our humanitarian aid efforts. You, Commissioner, talked of the political efforts that you are making, but do we deserve this praise? Israel-EU trade is worth EUR 27 billion annually. If we really wanted action on Gaza, we would use the power that this trade gives us by imposing economic sanctions. Our refusal to do this, even at the height of the bombing in January, indicated that we prefer the status quo of business as usual, with our contribution of humanitarian aid possibly being a salve to our conscience. Not only are we unwilling to risk upsetting a good business market for the sake of bringing injustice in Gaza to an end, but we are also unwilling so far to dissolve or even just suspend the EU-Israel agreement.

I have a great love of the Jewish people. In college, I took the opportunity to study several courses of their history and literature under a rabbi. However, friendship does not mean blindness but the willingness to be honest. Actually, judging by demonstrations that took place in the major cities of Israel, there are many Israeli citizens who publicly oppose their Government's action.

To return to the urgency of the humanitarian aid: rebuilding physical infrastructure is important, but it is understandable that agencies may be hesitant to rebuild when it looks as though an even more threatening regime is taking over in Israel. Rebuilding human infrastructure, however, cannot wait. We must get supplies in. I would especially point out that the particularly vicious weaponry used in January has left many people with missing limbs and terrible burns. I myself know what it is like to have a healthy child become disabled.

We must get intervention – medical and educational – to all those thousands of people, especially children who, since the New Year, have become disabled for life. As we help them, we must record their stories, to begin the process of gathering evidence for targeted attacks and possible war crimes.

Jean-Marie Le Pen (NI). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is certainly not Europe, still less its High Representative for Foreign Policy, Javier Solana, the former Secretary-General of NATO, who can play the role of mediator between Israel and Palestine. At the most, they will be called on to finance the reconstruction of the Gaza Strip, as they are doing today for Kosovo, Lebanon and Afghanistan.

The US and Israel do the bombing while Europe finances reconstruction. That is how tasks are allocated amongst the allies. It should, however, be up to those who do the damage to pay. Egypt is at the centre of the peace talks that are discussing an extended ceasefire with Hamas. However, the challenge is formidable as the new Israeli Government, under pressure from the third man, Mr Liebermann, the far-right leader who is democratically accepted over there, risks seeing its task singularly complicated in this negotiation. In fact, Mr Netanyahu, who is presented as the future prime minister, has always been opposed to a truce with Hamas.

A further difficulty is that the Palestinian Authority of Mahmoud Abbas has become, in the West Bank, a sort of international protectorate whose legitimacy has greatly diminished amongst the population.

The final factor we have to take into account is that the expansion of the Israeli colonies, which has not stopped since 1967, makes the creation of a Palestinian State on the West Bank particularly tricky. Today, the ball is in the Israeli court, but will the hawks in each camp accept this truce of God that the two sides demand without providing themselves with the resources?

Allow me to add a thought on France's return to NATO's integrated military structure, which will be debated within the framework of the Vatanen report. This return will result in France taking on heavy obligations. In fact, we are rejoining NATO even though the Cold War has been over since 1990. Mr Sarkozy seems to have forgotten the fall of the Berlin Wall and Russia's return to the ranks of free nations. Is there a need to reinforce the bloc line of thinking at a time when we see multipolarity and the rising power of emerging countries, including on the military level?

Moreover, France's membership of the integrated structure will oblige it to reinforce its contingent in Afghanistan, even though it already has 3 300 men on the ground. Which funds will it use to finance this operation when its defence budget is about to fall below 2% of GDP and over 30 regiments are to be cut?

Paradoxically, we are going to increase our financial participation to rejoin NATO and, at the same time, reduce our military presence in Africa. European defence, so beloved of President Sarkozy, will therefore be a pillar of the Atlantic Alliance. You only have to read the Treaty of Lisbon and its additional protocols to convince yourselves of this.

Whether it be in terms of foreign policy or common security, the European road is a dead end that can only lead to an alignment with the US and its allies. It is this logic of retraction that we reject in the name of national sovereignty and independence, which rest in particular on our independent nuclear deterrent.

President. – Other members have also overrun slightly, and we must accord the same treatment to everyone.

Javier Solana, *High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy.* – (ES) Mr President, I will not be able to answer all those who have spoken during this debate in the little time available to me. Allow me to express my most heartfelt thanks for what you said about me personally and what I do. I would just like to tell you that you can be sure that I will continue to work just as determinedly – even more so if possible – because the situation is becoming more difficult every day.

I believe that there are five issues on which a consensus could be reached between all those who have spoken before me.

First, humanitarian issues: there can be no doubt that the most pressing and important question is the humanitarian one. The violence of recent days and weeks has thrown into sharp relief some enormous gaps in what is needed to alleviate the population's suffering, in particular, amongst the people of Gaza. Therefore, we will do everything in our power to alleviate the great hardships of daily life in Gaza. The Commission will do so – without the slightest hesitation – as will the Member States of the Council; the entire international community will do so.

Second, the opening of the border crossings between Gaza and Israel and between Gaza and Egypt is absolutely essential to this. Moreover, these must be opened quickly, without delay. From our point of view, all aid will be supplied wherever it is needed and, as far as Rafah is concerned in particular, we will be ready for deployment as soon as possible. There are already European Union observers there, available, so that as soon as the frontier is opened at Rafah, we will be ready to deploy.

Third, the issue – and it is a very important one – of Palestinian unity. Honourable Members, I believe that it is clear that there will be no solution at the moment without the beginnings of reconciliation between Palestinians. Therefore, as stated in the Resolution of the most recent General Affairs Council, the European Union supports, and will continue to support, the efforts that are being made, whether by President Abbas or by President Mubarak, to make progress towards reconciliation between Palestinians.

Many speakers have mentioned the obligations that we may assume, depending on whether there is a new Palestinian consensus government. It seems to me, honourable Members – and this is my personal opinion – that if there is a Palestinian consensus government, a government whose goal is the Two States, a government whose goal is to build these Two States through peaceful means, a government that has a programme of

reconstruction in Gaza, and a government that attempts to build an electoral process in 2009, I believe that such a government is one that the European Union should support.

Fourth, on the question of Israel: there are two important issues following the elections. Firstly, that the government that has emerged from the elections, or that will emerge from the majority produced by the elections, is obliged, as far as we can see, to carry on with a peace process. For this reason, whatever government does emerge from the elections, we will continue working and doing everything we can to ensure that it becomes established, and that it works and contributes towards carrying on a peace process, doing everything in its power to conclude that process as far as possible during 2009.

Fifth, in our view, the settlements issue is absolutely fundamental. I believe that the most recent data concerning the state of the settlements in 2008, published by the Government of Israel, ought to make all of us feel responsible.

I would like to tell you that in 2001, I worked with the then Senator Mitchell on the famous report that bears his name. I was one of the four people who worked on that programme. I would like you, honourable Members, to be so good as to re-read that report, published in 2001, in which things were said that, unfortunately, still have to be said today; for example, on the subject of the settlements. If we in the European Union are incapable of trying to change the way in which the settlements are being established, there is little chance of any peace initiative having credibility. Therefore, this issue must be taken seriously. We must talk seriously with our friends in Israel to ensure that the issue of the settlements is dealt with in a radically different way.

Finally, Mr President, honourable Members: the Arab League. Unity among the Arab states is vital. It is essential that we cooperate with all the countries of the Arab League to ensure that the peace initiative signed by the Arab League remains in force. Crucially, this peace process must end with reconciliation between Palestinians and Israelis, but also between the Arabs and Israel. Therefore, we fully support those who are working to make the peace initiative a reality.

We see deep divisions within the Arab League. We will have to do everything that we can diplomatically to prevent a deepening of these differences and instead encourage the rebuilding of a process of harmony and cooperation within the great Arab family.

Mr President, honourable Members, as I have said, 2009 will be an enormously important year. We will have to continue to manage the crisis, bring humanitarian aid, do everything in our power to ensure that there is a ceasefire, and do everything in our power to ensure that negotiation takes place between Israel and Gaza and between Egypt and Gaza. However, honourable Members, if we do not change our mentality from a position of crisis-management to one deeply rooted in conflict-resolution, we will be in the same situation to which we have unfortunately returned at the start of 2009.

Mr President, I hope that, in the end, if we all work together, 2009 will be a year in which we can actually resolve this enormous conflict which has unfortunately been weighing down on us for too long.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I just wanted to say again that last year we clearly said that failure is not an option. We were all hopeful for the Annapolis process and we were hopeful for a peace process. Unfortunately, the military incursion into Gaza after the rockets launched from Gaza into Israel have changed the equation. Now we all know that there is a series of elements that is absolutely necessary so that we can come back to peace agreements. In any case, however, one thing is sure: a military solution is no solution. On this I agree with all of you. Therefore, whatever the cost, we will all have to work in order to bring about peace.

Many actors are there: in the European Union, in the international community – be it the United States of America, the UN or Russia – but there are also many Arab friends and colleagues. I can only hope that, when a new Israeli Government is in place, all those actors will want to come together for peace. Our rationale is clear, but whether the emotions will then bring us to the right path, we will have to see. Be assured that we will work for that.

(Applause)

President. – A motion for a resolution⁽²⁾ to wind up the debate has been tabled under Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place today.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Bairbre de Brún (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (GA) The humanitarian situation in Gaza is unacceptable. Eighty-eight percent of the population are in need of food aid, there is a lack of essential medical supplies in the hospitals, and thousands of tons of aid cannot be brought into Gaza because not enough trucks are being allowed in.

People all over the world were horrified at the low level of international response when more than 1 000 Palestinians – including more than 300 children – were killed during the recent Israeli attack on Gaza.

A proactive, long-term strategy from Europe and from the new US Government must include the right of Palestinians to a sustainable state – based on the borders that were there before 1967. It must stop settlement activities in the Occupied Territories and it must demolish the apartheid wall.

The security of Israel and a free state of Palestine must be achieved, but the situation where Israel is using security as an excuse to destroy the lives of innocent Palestinians must be ended. A genuine process of negotiation must be begun.

The EU must cancel the Association Agreement between the European Union and Israel while Israel does not comply with international law and humanitarian law.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) What should the 'role of the European Union in the Middle East' be (or not be)? What are the principles by which it should be guided?

It must demand an end to the aggression and to the inhumane blockade of the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and it must ensure that urgent humanitarian aid is provided to them.

It must condemn the brutal aggression, crimes, violations of the most basic human rights and state terrorism perpetrated by Israel against the Palestinian people, which nothing can justify.

It must unequivocally denounce the fact that in Palestine, there are colonisers and colonised, aggressors and victims, oppressors and oppressed, and exploiters and exploited.

It must suspend the Association Agreement and any strengthening of bilateral relations with Israel, such as those advocated by the External Relations Council on 8 and 9 December.

It must demand compliance by Israel with international law and the UN resolutions, and an end to the occupation, settlements, security fence, assassinations, detentions and innumerable humiliations inflicted on the Palestinian people.

It must demand and fight for respect for the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to an independent and sovereign state, with the 1967 borders and a capital in East Jerusalem.

In essence, it must stop being complicit in the impunity of Israeli colonialism.

Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The recent elections in Israel and the new US administration offer the opportunity for a new beginning in the Middle East peace process. I believe that the EU must convey a clear message of support to the new cabinet in Tel Aviv while, at the same time, clearly expressing what is expected of its Israeli partners in terms of pursuing measures which will facilitate a lasting peace, which includes shutting down the settlements on the West Bank and offering strong support for a dual-state solution, and help avoid military excesses and the serious humanitarian repercussions they entail.

The EU's approach to the Middle East must be based on several strong principles. The first principle is close cooperation with the US without which we cannot achieve a long-term solution in the region. The second is that our approach must be aimed at avoiding, as far as possible, violence by both sides, condemning

⁽²⁾ See Minutes.

Palestinian extremism and excessive measures adopted by Israel, as well as supporting moderate governance solutions from both sides which are capable of facilitating the peace process.

I wish to express my support for the European Parliament resolution voted on today, which confirms the EU's commitment to the process of reconstruction in Gaza and provides the basis for the discussions which will be conducted in Cairo in March at the time of the international donors' conference.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (PSE), in writing. – (RO) Democracy, peace and respect for human rights are fundamental values for the European Union which has the role and obligation to defend and promote them, both inside the EU and in its relations with other states too.

The situation affecting Gaza's population is tragic and must be resolved urgently. The flagrant violation of human rights and freedoms in this region is a cause for concern for the European Union, from the perspective of both its relations with Israel and of security and stability in the Middle East.

The European Union must adopt urgent measures to provide humanitarian assistance to the population in the Gaza region, while also thinking in the medium and long term about measures designed to promote peace, security and stability in the area.

With this in mind, the EU must step up its diplomatic efforts to resolve the conflicts and encourage dialogue and reconciliation in the region. At the same time, it must impose without hesitation tough sanctions against any anti-democratic stance or violation of human rights and freedoms.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE) in writing. – (PL) In order to achieve an EU-Middle East agreement, the attempt to restore stability, and assistance in realising the peace programme in the Gaza Strip, should, for the present, continue to be the priority.

The European Union should also do everything in its power to bring about an end to the dispute in which innocent citizens are losing their lives. Furthermore, efforts should concentrate on bringing assistance to people, on ensuring that they have the basic means to live. The population of the Gaza Strip have only 60% of their daily food needs available, which means that they are even more at risk of disease and exposed to difficult conditions. The lack of drinking water constitutes no less a threat than the lack of food. I do not, I think, need to mention the lack of medical care or the destruction of schools and public institutions, which is significantly hindering the establishment of order and a return to normality.

We should remember that only when many basic problems of everyday life have been solved will we be able to concentrate on the economic development of the Middle East and on close commercial cooperation with the region. The European Union has an opportunity to help the Arab world, and all the countries of the Middle East, to become a region where prosperity prevails, which will, in turn, create a framework for closer cooperation between the Middle East and the EU.

15. Voting time

15.1. Role of the European Union in the Middle East (vote)

- Before the vote on paragraph 5:

Pasqualina Napoletano (PSE). – (IT) Mr President, at the beginning of paragraph 5, after the word 'believes', the following phrase would be added:

'inter alia with a view to the International Conference in support of the Palestinian Economy for the Reconstruction of Gaza to be held in Sharm el-Sheikh on 2 March 2009'.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

- Before the vote on recital F:

Pasqualina Napoletano (PSE). – (IT) Mr President, the amendment is the same. It refers to the International Conference in support of the Palestinian Economy, to be held in Sharm el-Sheikh on 2 March, and would be added to the recital.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

16. Welcome

President. – I have been asked to welcome a visiting delegation in the gallery from the region of Piedmont. Normally, we only welcome delegations from nation States but, since we do wish to bolster the regions, I will make an exception and wish a warm welcome to the delegation from Piedmont.

17. Explanations of vote

Written explanations of vote

- Motion for a resolution B6-0100/2009 (Role of the European Union in the Middle East)

Nicodim Bulzesc (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of the European Parliament resolution on the role of the European Union in the Middle East as I agree that we need to support the reconstruction plans for the Gaza Strip.

This resolution seeks to grant immediately rapid and unrestricted humanitarian aid, a measure which is a moral obligation. This aid must be provided without any conditions or restrictions. The Israeli authorities are being requested to allow an adequate, continuous flow of humanitarian aid, including all the necessary materials so that the UN agencies such as UNRWA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency) and international organisations can carry out their activities and tend to the population's needs.

Konstantinos Droutsas (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL) With the European Parliament resolution on humanitarian aid to Gaza, the EU is endeavouring, driven by the principle of treating the slaughtering Israelis on equal terms with the resisting Palestinians, to conceal its huge responsibility for the slaughter of the Palestinian people during the murderous Israeli invasion of the Gaza Strip which resulted in over 1 300 dead, the majority of whom were children, women and the elderly, and over 5 000 injured. The complete destruction of thousands of homes and every social infrastructure, in conjunction with the complete economic isolation imposed by Israel, has resulted in the Palestinian population living under tragic and inhumane conditions.

The avoidance of any form of reference to and condemnation of Israel and the causes of the tragic situation of the Palestinian people confirms, once again, the support of the EU for the criminal action by Israel in its effort to upgrade its role in the escalating infighting between the imperialists in the Middle East.

What the heroic Palestinian people need more than anything is not charity from the imperialists. It is the foundation of an independent and sovereign Palestinian state with its capital in East Jerusalem, in keeping with the UN resolutions on the 1967 borders, and undivided solidarity from other peoples in its struggle.

Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV) The situation in the Gaza Strip is extremely serious, as the ongoing conflict is depriving the civilian population of food, medicines and fuel. The situation is so serious that immediate external help is required. We have therefore voted in favour of the resolution.

However, we feel that it is extremely regrettable – though unfortunately not particularly surprising – that the European Parliament is once again using a disaster to slowly but surely advance its position.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) After more than 18 months of an inhumane blockade, the 22 days of brutal Israeli aggression against the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip have led to the deaths of at least 1 324 people and over 5 000 wounded, most of whom are children. Over 100 000 people have been displaced and more than 15 000 homes have been destroyed. Basic infrastructures and key public services have been destroyed or dismantled, threatening the response to the most basic needs of the Palestinian population.

Faced with this shocking crime, the European Parliament does not have a single word of condemnation for Israel.

There is no doubt that the Palestinian population urgently needs aid. There is no doubt that we must recognise the suffering of the Palestinian population. However, it is also essential to denounce the aggressors and hold them responsible. Instead, the resolution insists on whitewashing the Israeli aggression against the Gaza Strip, hiding it behind the term 'conflict'. This aggression is part of the strategy to overcome the legitimate resistance of the Palestinian people to the occupation and to undermine the conditions required for building a Palestinian state.

The EU, which is always so quick to invoke human rights, is 'forgetting' them with regard to Israel which, for more than 40 years, has been colonising the Palestinian territories of the West Bank, Gaza Strip and East Jerusalem.

Flaviu Călin Rus (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of the European Parliament resolution of 18 February 2009 on humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip (B6-0100/2009), as the civilian population is in great need of aid because of the situation created in this area.

I feel that an assessment must be carried out of the needs of the population in the Gaza Strip and plans for the area's reconstruction must be initiated.

18. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

IN THE CHAIR: MR ONESTA

Vice-President

19. Annual Report (2007) on the main aspects and basic choices of the CFSP - European Security Strategy and ESDP - The role of NATO in the security architecture of the EU (debate)

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

- the report (A6-0019/2009) by Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the annual report on the main aspects and basic choices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in 2007, presented to the European Parliament in application of point G, paragraph 43 of the Interinstitutional Agreement of 17 May 2006 (2008/2241(INI)),

- the report (A6-0032/2009) by Karl von Wogau, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the European Security Strategy and the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) (2008/2202(INI)), and

- the report (A6-0033/2009) by Ari Vatanen, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the role of NATO in the security architecture of the EU (2008/2197(INI)).

Ladies and gentlemen, if you are not interested in following our debates, our rapporteur asks, rightly so, and for the dignity of our work, if you could please leave the Chamber in silence.

Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, rapporteur. – (FR) Thank you, Mr President. Indeed, I believe that the Union's foreign policy is worthy of attention.

Mr President, we have a special debate today on three major reports on foreign policy, on security and defence, and on EU-NATO relations.

Our annual report on the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) has become an important vehicle through which Parliament expresses its strategic view on EU foreign policy. In this year's report, we have decided to focus on policy making and policy shaping. We have focused on the need to establish a true dialogue with the Council on the main objectives of the EU's common foreign and security policy. We have recognised that it is in progress, namely that for the first time, the Council's report systematically refers to the resolutions adopted by the European Parliament. We are grateful: this is a real achievement. However, we have expressed also our regret that the Council does not engage in a full dialogue with the views advanced by Parliament, nor does it refer to those resolutions in operational documents as joint actions or common positions.

We expect that the Council's annual report will provide opportunities to establish a dialogue with Parliament aimed at developing a more strategic approach to the common foreign and security policy. We have reiterated the most important principles in our report which should underscore our foreign policy. In our view, the CFSP must be underpinned and guided by the values which the European Union and its Member States cherish, notably democracy, the rule of law, respect for the dignity of the human person, for human rights and for fundamental freedoms, and the promotion of peace and effective multilateralism.

We believe that the European Union can make an impact, but only if it speaks with one voice and if it is equipped with appropriate instruments like those stemming from the Lisbon Treaty and a more generous

budget. We can undertake effective action only when it is legitimised by both the European and national parliaments acting at their respective levels and in accordance with their own mandates.

In order to be credible and to respond to the expectations of EU citizens – and I say this on the eve of new parliamentary elections coming soon – the CFSP must be allocated resources commensurate with the objectives and specific targets. We regret, therefore, that as in previous years, the CFSP budget is seriously under-funded.

We address horizontal and geographical issues in our report. On horizontal issues, let me just enumerate the most important ones we touched upon: first, upholding human rights and promoting peace and security in Europe's neighbourhood and at global level; second, support for effective multilateralism and respect for international law; third, the fight against terrorism; fourth, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and disarmament; fifth, climate change, energy security and issues like cyber security.

In this report, we are intentionally selective. We concentrate, therefore, on some strategic and geographical priority areas such as the Western Balkans, the Middle East and the broader Middle East, South Caucasus, Africa and Asia, and obviously relations with our strategic partner, the USA, as well as relations with Russia.

This report should be seen in conjunction with, and complementary to, Parliament's more detailed reports. It should not be trying to duplicate them.

I want to thank my colleagues in the House from the different political groups for their understanding and excellent cooperation. We have tried to take most of the concerns on board, and I hope that the report will be endorsed by a handsome majority of our House.

Finally, to our partners from the Council and the Commission, I would like to say that we hope that this occasion can help us to develop a deeper strategic dialogue between Parliament, the Council and the Commission which will bring more democratic legitimacy to the hard work you are doing, Mr Solana and Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, in order to have more cooperation in our triangle.

I hope that you will treat this as a possibility to develop more synergy, to strengthen our common voice – the voice of all three actors – and to give more democratic and parliamentary legitimacy to our common goal which is: foreign policy; one voice; European Union.

Karl von Wogau, *rapporteur*. – (DE) Mr President, High Representative, Commissioner, this report should provide us with an opportunity to consider how far we have come with the European Union's security and defence policy, where we are now, and what part the European Parliament has to play in this.

In so doing, we must observe that there have so far been 22 deployments within the framework of the European security and defence policy, of which 16 were civilian deployments and 6 military ones. This means that a very strong emphasis has been placed on the civilian side of things. This civilian side, of course, comes complete with functional democratic control as the civilian operations under the ESDP are funded from the European budget and are therefore scrutinised by the European Parliament. There are other things that are funded from the European Union's budget that are directly linked to security policy. Examples include security research – EUR 1.3 billion over 7 years; Galileo, which we say there are security aspects to – EUR 3.4 billion; and GMES/Kopernikus, a project for which another EUR 1 billion is available. We also now have, and this is a new development, legislation in the European Parliament in the field of security and defence. We have adopted a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on the intra-Community transfer of defence equipment and on tendering in the field of security and defence. This is an important first step along the road.

Of particular importance, however, is the information for the European Parliament. In this regard, our special committee, which also has access to secret information, is of particular importance, as are the regular discussions that we hold in this committee with the Special Representative on these subjects. I would like to take this opportunity to thank the High Representative and his colleagues for the constructive cooperation that has developed.

I shall turn now to the individual points of this report. This report calls for the European Union to define its own security interests more clearly. We always speak of the security interests of the individual countries, but we do have common security interests. The protection of our citizens within and beyond the Union, peace in our neighbourhood, the protection of our external borders, the protection of our critical infrastructures, energy security, the security of our trade routes, the security of our assets at the global level and many other

things represent, in reality, individual security interests and common security interests of the European Union.

We also need to consider what the security and defence-related ambitions of the European Union actually are. The draft report states very clearly that we have no ambition to become a superpower like the United States. It is also made very clear that we must concentrate on the geographical surroundings of the European Union. Our priorities are the Balkans – the European Union's main assignments – North Africa, the frozen conflicts in the East and our contribution to resolving the conflict in Palestine. We must put our focus quite clearly on these areas.

I feel compelled to observe that, at the end of the French Presidency, the Council set very ambitious objectives, namely acquiring the ability to carry out certain operations in parallel. If that is what we want, we will need the funds to bring it about. This will involve the establishment of an autonomous and permanent headquarters in Brussels. This is a first, very clear demand from this Parliament. There was a very broad majority in favour of this in the committee. Secondly, we need to bear in mind that the 27 Member States have 2 million soldiers at their disposal. Three per cent of these soldiers should be made available to the European Union on a permanent basis. That would be 60 000 soldiers. This is why the report also calls for the Eurocorps to also be permanently assigned to the European Union. This call is aimed at the six Member States that make up the Eurocorps.

We then make clear statements about the capabilities that we need to develop. The 27 Member States of the European Union spend EUR 200 billion per annum on defence, and this EUR 200 billion must be better spent than it has been in the past. We cannot afford to re-invent the wheel 27 times and we are therefore asking you today to ensure that, in future, where the European Union's and the taxpayers' money is spent on defence, it is better spent than it was in the past. Thank you very much.

Ari Vatanen, rapporteur. – Mr President, 70 years ago, Mr Chamberlain came back from Munich waving a piece of paper and saying 'peace for our time'. Well, we know how wrong he was, and we also know that wishful thinking is a deadly substitute for realism. Today, on this issue, we have to be brutally honest. The EU has been incredibly successful in peacemaking. The events of the Second World War gave birth to the EU.

I am very happy that Mr Solana is here today because finally we have this phone number for the EU. Mr Solana has this number, which Mr Kissinger asked for years ago.

But what kinds of means are we – Member States and politicians – giving to Mr Solana? That is the question.

We have a financial crisis now, which did not fall on us from the sky. It was very much self-inflicted. We are talking about the toxic assets of banks and how we have to clear them. Perhaps this is also the time to ask: what are the toxic assets and what are the obstacles to our peacemaking, our *raison d'être*?

We have to move on – the EU has to move on in its peacebuilding. The world is changing so fast around us. The biggest obstacle is that we simply do not have a vision. We are day-to-day politicians who are short-sighted. Immobility is our big problem. The world is changing around us, faster than we can react. What is the result of inefficient and failing security policies? Human suffering, dead bodies, mutilated people and atrocities. Even if those people do not vote for us, we have to care for them because they are our brothers and sisters in the human family.

On 2 April 1917, President Wilson said, 'a steadfast concert of peace can never be maintained except by a partnership of democratic nations'. President Wilson was awarded a Nobel Prize – which he deserved much more than Al Gore.

We in the EU do not realise what kinds of tools we have in our mosaic composition of 27 countries. That gives us a unique tool in peacemaking. Perhaps some people do not like the French, others do not like the Germans, and perhaps some people do not like the Finns, even – but I think everybody likes the Finns! – but, when we are together, 27 countries, nobody can say that they hate the EU. Therefore, the unique ability we have enables us to go to any crisis spot and be a doctor or a referee. But without the military capacity, without military credibility, we are like a dog whose bark is worse than its bite. We have idealism but we do not equip ourselves with the means to reach those targets.

Now is the time to strike while the iron is hot: *Il faut battre le fer tant qu'il est chaud*, as the French say. Now, Mr Obama is the new President of the United States and he values Europe – he says that we are important allies. What do we have to do? We have to get our act together.

Already, 94% of the European population is in NATO, and only 6% are outside. Why do we not use it more efficiently? We owe that to the people, because it is our duty to alleviate human suffering; it is our ethical duty and it is in our long-term interest. Only by following in the footsteps of our forefathers can we be faithful to the EU's inheritance and make the inevitable inconceivable – and that is what peacemaking means.

Javier Solana, *High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy*. – Mr President, thank you for inviting me once again to this important debate on the CFSP. I think that it is becoming a tradition once a year to hold this debate and I am very happy to participate. I would like to thank the three rapporteurs, Mr Saryusz-Wolski, Mr von Wogau and Mr Vatanen, for their reports. I found in them a lot of things that resonate with what we are thinking and doing. I have taken note of many of the things said in the reports and I hope very much that they will play a part in updating our thinking, with your cooperation.

Speaking today, at the beginning of 2009, at the European Parliament, reminds me of where we were 10 years ago, in 1999. That was really when we began working on ESDP. And when I look at where we are today and compare this to where we were on the day that we began to work on ESDP, a lot of progress has really been made. Nobody can fail to see what has been achieved.

As has been mentioned, more than 20 civilian and military operations are, or have been, deployed on just about every continent, from Europe to Asia, from the Middle East to Africa. Thousands of European men and women are engaged in these operations, ranging from military to police, from border guards to monitors, from judges to prosecutors, a good range of people doing good for the stability of the world.

I think this is the European way of doing things. A comprehensive approach to crisis prevention and to crisis management; a large and diversified tool box where we can take whatever is necessary; a rapid response capability; trying to be what we deserve to be, a global actor, as is asked of us by third countries. Obviously, if the Lisbon Treaty were to be ratified, and I hope it will be, we would, without any doubt, be much more effective.

I should like to thank Parliament for the support we have obtained over recent years, for the good cooperation that I have always enjoyed from you, the representatives of the citizens of the European Union. Without the engagement, without the understanding, without the support, not only of the Members of this distinguished House, but also of the citizens of the European Union through other mechanisms – their own parliaments – it would be very difficult to play the role that we try to play with the number of operations that we have and with the number of citizens of the European Union who are engaged in them.

The CFSP is more than an instrument. The CFSP relates to our values, to your values, to the values of our people. I really feel attached to these values that are represented in the core of all the 27 Member States of the European Union: human rights, the rule of law, international law and effective multilateralism; all those words and concepts are probably a constructive representation of what we are. But the CFSP also helps shape our internal cooperation among the Member States of the European Union. By working together, by acting together, we define who we are. And so the CFSP is also a way in which the European Union keeps on, every day, defining itself.

I think that what I have said will resonate with the Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. This really is what we do and what we are about: values and action and, at the same time, construction of the European Union. We act because of who we are, and who we are is shaped by our actions. I think this is an important concept to keep in mind.

The Security Strategy of 2003 was a basic document that allowed us to map the way ahead. The three reports make reference to that document. As you know, we have updated it in cooperation with the Commission and Parliament in 2008. That document does not replace the 2003 document but it certainly reinforces it and brings it up to date, incorporating the threats and challenges that we face in the world in which we are living today, from climate change to terrorism, from energy security to piracy.

Let me say a word about piracy because that relates to our youngest operation, Atalanta. I would like to underline that this is the first time that the ESDP has engaged in a maritime operation. It is quite a step forward, quite a step in the right direction to have this type of operation. This maritime operation against piracy is conducted from a European operational headquarters in the United Kingdom. It involves a significant number of countries and a significant number of third countries want to join it. I had lunch today with the Swiss Foreign Minister and they want to participate in this operation because they share our concerns on piracy. This is very important. You probably think, and I agree with you, that this offshore operation is very important but that the problems onshore need to be solved as well as the problems offshore.

Let me say a word about structures – internal structures relating to ESDP. As you know, during the last month of the French Presidency, we were working on a document to reorganise and set up something very dear to me. I tried to do it from the very beginning and we have the support to do it now, namely to develop a strategic planning capability which is, at the same time, both civilian and military. This is the modern approach to crisis management. I think that we are relatively new to these actions and because of this, we can be even more efficient, more flexible, and more able to adapt to new realities than others. And so I think that what we are doing, in having military and civilian cooperation at the strategic planning level, is very important.

I have to say, and I hope you will agree with me, that military action alone cannot solve the conflicts of today. Civilian action is not possible without a secure environment. This is the equilibrium we have to find and this is what we are seeing everywhere – in the Middle East, in Afghanistan, wherever you look. It is a very important concept of symbiosis between political, civilian and security aspects of our lives.

As has been said very eloquently by the three rapporteurs, we need capabilities. Without capabilities we only have documents, and with documents alone we do not solve conflicts.

That was stressed very much at the December European Council and I would like to thank the three rapporteurs for having made this point clearly. We have problems sometimes with force generation and this is something that is very important for you to know. Without more rapid force generation, be it police, prosecutors, or military, it will be very difficult to act at the rhythm, at the speed, that is required in crisis management.

Let me say a word about NATO-European Union relations because they are covered in the report by Mr Vatanen. As you know, we have a framework for cooperation that we call Berlin Plus. However, not all the operations that we conduct on behalf of the European Union fall within this framework, for cooperation with the North Atlantic Alliance. We still have problems, as you know, because this relationship has not been able to overcome some of the difficulties we have in really cooperating in operations with NATO that fall outside the framework of Berlin Plus. We have problems in Kosovo that have still not been resolved and we have problems in Afghanistan. I hope very much that in the run-up to the NATO summit, we will be able to resolve these problems.

Let me say a word on Afghanistan. Without any doubt, this is going to be one of the most important issues facing us in 2009. You have seen the position of President Obama on this theatre – Afghanistan-Pakistan – and the appointment of a special representative. We have to deliver and to deliver in a sensible manner. More engagement will be needed. This does not necessarily mean military engagement but we have to engage in a more efficient manner and in a more coordinated manner amongst ourselves and with others – the United States, the international community at large, the United Nations. I have had the opportunity to meet Richard Holbrooke already a couple of times, and General Petraeus. We are going to re-examine this concept in the coming weeks and it will be very good if, by that time, we are ready to respond in a constructive manner to a very important problem on which we are engaged, the European Union is engaged, the Member States are engaged, and I think we should maintain this engagement.

We could talk for hours about many other issues – energy, non-proliferation, you name it, but I think the important thing is that we have this fundamental agreement in the three reports that have been presented today on what we have been doing over the last period of time. I would like to finish and say thank you very much for your cooperation. My thanks to those who work with me more intensively on some of the specific dossiers in which we are engaged. As I said, I think how we act in the international arena on behalf of the European Union will also define who we are. At this point, it is very important that we do better because we want to be better.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I appreciate this opportunity to participate once again in this comprehensive debate on foreign and security policy matters.

Let me thank the authors of the three reports, which are the basis of today's debate. I would like to say that Javier Solana's services and my own worked very well together on the report on the European security strategy (ESS), and I believe that this shows in the result. The report reflects well the new security challenges the EU faces and gives a broad definition of security.

Let me first say a few words on the common foreign and security policy (CFSP). The reports before us today, and the European security strategy report, all conclude that the European Union can make a difference if everyone works together to ensure that we have a fully coherent policy, one which embraces the CFSP, the Community dimension and, of course, actions by Member States. Not only do we need to speak with one voice, but we also need to act together in a coherent and coordinated way.

This requires bringing together the best mix of EU policy instruments, from ESDP operations to conflict prevention and crisis response measures through the Instrument for Stability, development assistance, humanitarian aid, or democracy and human rights tools. Let me give you a few examples: Afghanistan, Georgia, Kosovo and Chad could show how we do this in practice.

In Afghanistan, we have given a prominent place to security sector reform and governance within our overall assistance strategy. Since 2007, the Commission has embarked on a new programme reforming the justice sector. On policing, the EUPOL mission of the Council is doing the mentoring and training on the ground, whilst the Commission supports the Afghan national police through the Law and Order Trust Fund (LOTFA). The Commission is also the main paymaster for the running costs of the Afghan police – over EUR 200 million to date since 2002.

In Georgia, additional EU post-conflict financial support is being provided. Up to now, a total of EUR 120 million – out of a EUR 500 million package from 2008 to 2010 – has been provided to the Government. This exceptional EC assistance has contributed to preventing a major humanitarian crisis.

In Kosovo, the Commission has played its role in getting the EULEX Kosovo mission staffed and equipped in time. In addition to ongoing assistance, we will this year prepare a study, which should identify means to advance Kosovo's political and socio-economic development, and its progress towards integration with the European Union.

In Chad, we have committed a total of EUR 311 million under the 10th European Development Fund. There, our goal is to contribute to the reduction of poverty and facilitate economic development. Our priorities are good governance, including the judiciary and police, infrastructure and rural development. Furthermore, we are supporting the training of 850 Chadian police by the UN mission MINURCAT through the Instrument for Stability with EUR 10 million. We are also facilitating the voluntary return of Chadian IDPs and refugees and providing EUR 30 million in humanitarian assistance.

I think this is the right approach, and it needs to be pursued systematically each time the EU is faced with a new crisis.

This flexibility in our policy mix is emphasised in the report on the European security strategy of last December and referred to in all three reports that we have before us. In the ESS report, it is rightly said that the links between internal and external EU policies have become more pronounced, which is clearly essential when we are considering issues such as energy security and climate change, or the focus on the security and development nexus and recognition of the importance of long-term poverty reduction as a means to reducing security threats.

The report recognises the need to communicate better with our citizens on all the aspects of security which are of particular concern to them so that we can maintain support for our global engagement, and emphasises that everything the EU has done in the field of security is based on our values and principles and has been linked to UN objectives. We must continue to bring this message to the people, also on issues such as terrorism, and we have to say that it is firmly founded on respect for human rights and international law.

We also recognise the role of civil society and NGOs and of women in building peace, thereby reflecting a truly European approach.

I was pleased to note that the EP report on the ESS stressed the need to further implement UN Security Council resolutions 1325 and 1820 on women and conflict.

Turning to energy, the gas crisis affecting the EU this year was unprecedented in its effect. With regard to energy security, it is clear that we have lessons to draw. For instance, the need for a functioning EU internal energy market, for interconnection and infrastructure projects, for the development of mechanisms to handle supply crises and for the EU to have a strong external energy policy is now clear, and we support this broad approach.

The report calls for a greater role for the European Union in its neighbourhood, but I shall not talk about that now.

Our relations with Russia, which have been tested lately, play an important role and have a great security impact.

The transatlantic link remains fundamental to our common security, and here we will soon be working with President Obama on issues that are of high priority.

Let me conclude with a few words on a particular element of the Commission's contribution to the EU crisis response, namely the Instrument for Stability. The first two years of the new instrument have been successful, both in terms of budget implementation, operational quality and political coordination with Council and Parliament. So far, EUR 220 million have been committed for 59 actions worldwide in 2007 and 2008, with the main share in Africa, followed by Asia and the Middle East, plus Kosovo and Georgia. Our priorities for 2009 will, as Javier Solana has already said, certainly include Afghanistan, Pakistan and the Middle East.

Let me say that we, through the Instrument for Stability, and in close cooperation with the Council secretariat, are engaged in a number of activities and are playing an increasingly important role in providing training for mission staff on procurement and financial administration and on ESDP-related training for civilian response teams. We have trained 600 police experts on civilian crisis management in line with UN training standards, so that the robustness, the flexibility and the interoperability of the EU police elements have been improved.

I would like to add – and I think it is a very important point, for instance on Afghanistan – that we also need to ensure that the terms and conditions of service for seconded staff from Member States and contracted staff are sufficiently attractive to bring forward qualified candidates in sufficient numbers to staff our missions. I think we will have to work in that direction. That means that our input into crisis management is increasingly in demand, and expectations of what the EU can deliver are high. But we will try to go and do what these expectations require from us.

Valdis Dombrovskis, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Budgets*. – (LV) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in relation to the annual report (2007) on the main aspects and basic choices of the common foreign and security policy, I would like to emphasise some of the important issues from the viewpoint of the Committee on Budgets. Firstly, I would like to talk about the transparency of budget expenditure on the common foreign and security policy. The practice implemented by the European Commission of carrying over to the following year unused appropriations from the common foreign and security policy chapter, which the European Commission considers to be allocated revenue, gives a certain cause for concern. The Committee on Budgets has asked the Commission to provide information on this financial practice and recommends that the issue be examined in one of the regular common foreign and security policy meetings. Secondly, I would like to discuss the transfer of appropriations between different budget chapter headings within the common foreign and security policy. Certainly, here we need to have some flexibility, in order to be able to react quickly to crises in non-EU countries. The Commission could, however, improve transparency and, hence, democratic scrutiny in the field of the common foreign and security policy, by informing Parliament of internal transfers in good time. This is particularly important because the majority of common foreign and security policy missions, such as, in particular, the European Union's monitoring mission in Georgia and EULEX in Kosovo, are politically sensitive. Thirdly, in relation to the regular common foreign and security policy meetings held pursuant to the Interinstitutional Agreement of 17 May 2006 on budgetary discipline and sound financial management, the Committee on Budgets considers that much more effective use could be made of these meetings, by assessing planned measures in the common foreign and security policy sphere and the European Union's medium and long-term strategies in non-EU countries, and also by preparing a budgetary authority position prior to the conciliation meeting. Thank you for your attention.

José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, I wish to thank the European Parliament's three rapporteurs – Mr Saryusz-Wolski, Mr von Wogau and Mr Vatanen – for their reports and to stress, as Mrs Ferrero-Waldner and Mr Solana did, that they are a significant contribution by Parliament to the task of developing a strong, visible and effective foreign security and defence policy. This policy must guarantee the defence of our interests in the world and protect and provide security for our citizens. It must contribute towards creating a European Union that plays its part in an effective multilateral system and, above all, Mr President, it must help to ensure that human rights and democratic values prevail in every part of the world.

I believe we can see from the Treaty of Lisbon and the news that reaches us today from the Republic of Ireland – where the polls show 60% in favour of the Treaty – and the Czech Republic – with the Czech Parliament's ratification of the Treaty – that the European Union is coming of age in terms of its foreign and security policy. Above all, this must also contribute to making our governments think in a more European way when facing crises.

I believe that the European Union has to develop its own strategic considerations – this is obvious, and it is covered in the new security strategy – but without forgetting that the transatlantic link is written into the European Union's genetic code. The United States, through the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, has been the guarantor of Europe's security and, for the time being, there is still no alternative to this link.

Furthermore, I believe that it will only be possible to establish Europe as a 'power' if this is done by asserting itself, not against the United States, but alongside the United States, as two partners who share the same vision of the world and have a mutual respect for each other. Of course, this does not mean that the European Union has to give the United States a *carte blanche*: we must defend our interests and our values whenever we consider it appropriate. The United States must also learn to respect the positions of the European Union because, as the work of Mrs Ferrero-Waldner and Mr Solana assumes, we are an institution that can be respected internationally and that has significant potential as an interlocutor in every region of the world.

Helmut Kuhne, on behalf of the PSE Group. – (DE) Mr President, it is not true of the Council, but we here in Parliament and, as a result, also the Commission, are edging towards the finishing straight for this electoral term. For that reason, I think it makes sense that we should act not merely as the accounts clerk checking the balance sheet of the European security and defence policy's progress, but in a much more fundamental capacity.

I must admit that I am absolutely torn between two ways of looking at this. I tear my hair out when we have to deal with the day-to-day necessities, when a mission is threatening to fail for want of six helicopters, when there is no political will in the various capitals or when there are splits on technology projects.

When I look at things from a historical perspective, however, everything looks different, and Mr Solana, in fact, deserves a great deal of praise in this regard. The European security and defence policy has only been in existence for around ten years, we should remember, and the document on the security strategy was only produced in 2003. On that basis, the progress made is really quite great, from a historical point of view. As a historical optimist, I choose the latter point of view in case of doubt.

The second point that I, as a social democrat, would like to address, relates to something for which neither the European Union nor NATO is responsible, but which affects us all as Europeans. It relates to developments in connection with the missile defence system in Poland and the Czech Republic. We, as social democrats, are very pleased to hear that things that we have put forward are now being implemented in connection with changes in the United States.

We have always said that it does not make sense to rush the decision on the stationing of equipment, as there is not, at this time, any threat from, for example, Iran. Hillary Clinton said last week that further decisions at the US end will be taken in the context of what happens in Iran. Joe Biden has said that it is dependent on technical capabilities and financial considerations. These are things that we welcome. We will, at least, not be the last doomed brigade left fluttering the flag of this missile defence system.

Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – (NL) Today's debate, which is based on the three reports, proves that, contrary to what many euro-pessimists and euro sceptics claim, European defence and security policy and a European foreign policy are indeed taking more and more shape and are showing more and more signs of consistency. This has been abundantly demonstrated by the speakers before me.

I should first and foremost like to thank the three rapporteurs for the way in which they have taken the opinions of the liberal shadow rapporteurs into consideration when writing their reports. We are pleased that many of our opinions are reflected in these reports. It is a little unfortunate, in my view, that for the NATO report by Mr Vatanen, who went out of his way to take as many opinions and approaches into consideration as possible, amendments were tabled by the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats and the Socialist Group of the European Parliament at the very last minute, as if these two groups wanted to place their own stamp on the report.

We will be endorsing it nevertheless, because we believe – and this is with reference to the report – that it does highlight the right aspects and that it also shows sufficient realism. For example, it is recognised, albeit in an elegant manner, that there is definitely competition between the European Union and NATO. Things like this are usually completely ignored, even though that is just the way it is.

Secondly, the amendment put forward by Mr Duff and myself, in which we clearly set out the difficulties that are caused by the respective attitudes of Turkey, Greece and Cyprus in NATO and the European Union, has been accepted. Usually, we do not get much further than elegant allusions.

Finally, there is a plea for complementarity between the strategies of the European Union and NATO in relation to defence and security which, ladies and gentlemen, is absolutely vital.

Konrad Szymański, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Mr President, the liberal end of history foretold in the nineteen nineties has turned out to be a fantasy. We are entitled to feel increasingly isolated. Therefore, there is no alternative to cooperation between the European Union and NATO. There is no alternative to a greater engagement of Europe and the USA in matters of international security. Otherwise the principles of international order will *de facto* be dictated by Korea, Iran or the terrorists of Hamas.

Energy, raw materials, piracy and Internet security require special attention. Recently in Poland, we learned that better coordination of the rescue of hostages is also a huge problem. However, the fact that decisions are taken jointly does not mean they will be good ones. Therefore, I would not overrate the role of the Lisbon Treaty. The limitations of our effectiveness are to be found in European capitals. It is there that we should seek the political will to pursue a joint world policy, and not in procedures.

Angelika Beer, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is the case that, in recent years, there has been rapid development of the European foreign and security policy. We must ensure, however, that there is equally rapid development and change in relation to threats and crises of whatever kind.

My group is opposed to glossing over our own work. For that reason, I am likewise not prepared to talk up the reports before us today. Mr Saryusz-Wolski has produced a sound report, and it is one that we will support. That said, the strategic dilemma is clear. Mr Solana, you are absolutely right. You have just told us that European cooperation must be strengthened at the strategic level. First and foremost, though, what we have to strive for, and what we need to come up with, is a common European strategy in foreign and security policy – something that we still do not have.

I say this because we are at a historic juncture. These reports – in particular that of Mr Vatanen – on NATO, limp along in the shadow of the new US Government. Mr Vatanen declined to deal with the question of nuclear disarmament – which we will be voting on once again tomorrow – in his report. So what is it that we are talking about, then?

I will turn now to Mr von Wogau's report. This report discusses a new concept: SAFE. This is a nice play on words – Synchronised Armed Forces Europe – but this concept simply does not exist. We, furthermore, do not see why we should support this, when this concept is just not on the table. Mr von Wogau has neglected to discuss human security in his report. My group insists that we, as the European Union, must clearly set out this objective in international politics. He has neglected to ensure that we speak about the peacebuilding partnership or the development of a civilian peace corps. For these reasons, I feel entitled to say that this report is completely inadequate if we believe that Europe must act now, in the coming months, from today – and that is something that became clear at the security conference in Munich.

There is a window of opportunity after the election in the United States. I do not know how long that window will stay open. As Europeans, we must now formulate our strategic interests and incorporate them into the alliance – NATO – and we must also now stipulate our definitions of security, as Mrs Ferrero-Waldner pointed out, with regard to Russia. Otherwise, what will happen is that, in a few months time, the US administration will be more forward looking than us in the European Union and will decide, in bilateral talks with Russia, on crucial security strategy positions without European power – political power, conflict-prevention power – being able to have any influence on this re-stabilisation of transatlantic security policy.

For that reason, I call on us, and on others, to truly leave behind the old mindsets of the cold war and choosing one camp over the other and sticking with it and to move on. Europe has the obligation to its citizens to create a security partnership now that brings peace, rather than the opposite.

Tobias Pflüger, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Mr President, the reports by Mr von Wogau and Mr Vatanen are explicit and clear and push forward still further the militarisation of the European Union. The reports require the *de facto* transformation of the EU into a military power. Mr von Wogau's report on the European Security Strategy requires an 'integrated European Armed Force'. We do not share the view that this is the way forward. What is more, the report advocates, *inter alia*, an EU Operational Headquarters and a common market in defence equipment.

The von Wogau report even lends its retrospective support to the dreadfully overpriced Eurofighter programme. The report states that the Treaty of Lisbon, which 'will introduce major innovations in the field of the ESDP,' is of key importance. This is a key reason behind our opposition to the Treaty of Lisbon.

The Vatanen report calls for permanent structures of cooperation between the EU and NATO. We believe this is wrong. Each new EU military mission is problematic. NATO is not an alliance for peace – it is a prosecutor of wars, in Yugoslavia and now in Afghanistan. What wars will be next? NATO stands for the politics of war. The report labels NATO as 'the core of European security'. No! NATO stands for insecurity! A mixing together of NATO and the EU would be highly problematic, especially with regard to the two strategies.

We in the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left stand for a civilian European Union and oppose NATO. What is needed is the disbandment of NATO. NATO wants to hold celebrations of its 60-year existence in Strasbourg, Baden-Baden and Kehl. I issue the call from here at the European Parliament today for protests against this NATO summit! Sixty years of NATO is sixty years too many.

As a group, we have submitted minority reports in response to the reports of Messrs von Wogau and Vatanen, and my colleagues will elaborate on the specific problems in relation to Russia. As before, we reject the missile defence system and we reject wordings in this report that make reference to Cyprus. We will therefore be voting against these two reports.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group.* – (NL) When, less than a year ago, I, along with an EP delegation, learnt about the activities of the EU police mission on the West Bank, I nursed a glimmer of hope of a Palestinian Authority actually enforcing its authority by means of an effective policing and security system. Paragraph 25 of this Saryusz-Wolski report therefore welcomes the extension of the mandate of the EU police mission in the Palestinian regions.

Meanwhile, I have very recently seen a few very unfavourable reports on public safety on the West Bank, including extortion practices by members of the Palestinian security system who operate like mafia leaders at night, or even the names of terrorist group members who are on the Palestinian Authority's payroll.

I would like to ask the Council and Commission whether these reports are true. Is it fiction? In short, what is the latest on the EU police mission in the Palestinian regions? This is essential, after all. If they are pursuing a viable Palestinian state, law and order must first be restored on the West Bank.

Luca Romagnoli (NI). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would argue that the Atlantic Alliance is an obsolete defence instrument and that in certain recent cases it has not in fact helped relations, for example, with Russia. I believe that we should maintain our relations with Russia and use them to pave the way for a privileged partnership.

I agree with Mrs Ferrero-Waldner's statement that common security policies should not overlook the fact that in recent times, NATO has not proved to be the most useful instrument of dissuasion or peacemaking.

I believe that Europe now has the maturity and political need to outline its own independent security strategy. This does not mean adopting an opposite position. We can be alongside – as other Members have argued – without continuing to be subject to what are often non-European interests. For this reason, I cannot support the reports put forward.

Javier Solana, *High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy.* – (ES) Mr President, as quickly as possible and given that the contributions of the various speakers have, in general terms, been along the same lines, allow me to mention to the House three or four issues that come to mind having heard the speeches.

To begin with, resources and means. The rapporteurs of the various reports have said that it is true that we have problems with resources and with means, and that better utilisation of national resources could be a good route for us to take. However, I would say that we also have available to us some means of which we are not making the best possible use, and I would like to highlight this for you.

I believe that it was a good idea to create the European Defence Agency by agreement of the European Council, without the need to apply or adopt the Treaty of Lisbon. I believe that the Agency can carry out great work in coordinating national policies, to give greater added value to all policies that are put in place.

Someone spoke about helicopters. Helicopters are needed for all kinds of missions: civilian missions, military missions, all sorts of missions; for transport. The helicopter has today become an essential crisis management tool.

Better coordination of what we have, both in terms of hardware and in terms of making better use of software for helicopters, would allow us to make better use of them and would, in fact, give us more than we have in day-to-day use.

I would also like to say that in recent weeks, our strategic relationships with the United States and with the Russian Federation have taken great steps forward.

Mrs Beer spoke about the Munich Security Conference; it was, I believe, an important event, at which progress was made in unscheduled talks because it was not a political forum for decision making, but an extremely important forum for reflection. I believe that the issue which will be under discussion in the coming years and months will be our relationships both with the United States, from the point-of-view of strategy in the coming years, and with Russia. That was the case in Munich, as well as later on when Mrs Ferrero-Waldner and I were in Moscow, discussing the fundamental theme of new ideas on European security with the leaders of the Russian Federation.

Europe does not want to be a military power. I believe that Europe – the European Union – is a civilian power with military means, which is very different from a military power, and I believe that this should continue to be the case. This work and all the documents that we produce, and which both Parliament and the Commission – or I myself – produce, are working towards that goal.

A few words about the police in the Palestinian territories, which is a subject we looked at in the previous session. EUPOL is one of the most important assets we have as regards credibility and work in the field of security with the Palestinians and in the occupied territories, and it will continue to be an important asset of the European Union, winning recognition from all: from the Palestinians, the Israelis and the surrounding countries. Therefore, be sure that we will do whatever we can to continue working towards that goal.

Elmar Brok (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, Mr Solana, I should like to thank the three rapporteurs, and wish to comment on just a few part aspects. I should like to say in particular, however, that 60 years of NATO have meant 60 years of peace and freedom for my generation: this should be noted.

If we now succeed in strengthening EU foreign, security and defence policy at a time when multilateralism is increasing again – as the High Representative, Mr Solana, has just said – that is, if we manage to incorporate our vision of preventive measures and soft power into a common transatlantic strategy to a greater extent at this time of multilateralism, we shall have a good future ahead.

At the same time, France's return to military integration strengthens Europe's position. The Munich Security Conference was telling: following explanations by Prime Minister Tusk, Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy – in the presence of Joe Biden, Vice-President of the United States – a European corps within NATO went practically unchallenged. In my eyes, at least, it was a sensational discovery that there were no protests from the Americans. In transatlantic relations, we can step up the development of common positions in the military field, too, so that these can then be portrayed credibly within the framework of NATO. For this reason, we should use our vision of military capabilities with an emphasis on soft power and prevention to tackle a new agenda, one that had already existed, but which became clear in Munich, for President Obama's policies make it possible for us to enter a new era of disarmament negotiations. We Europeans can play a role in this with START, with the NPT, which needs to be renegotiated, and particularly with the CFE Treaty, which is of particular importance in Europe as we also have certain problems with Russia.

If all of this is incorporated, including the missile shield, it will give us new – better – opportunities to conduct common transatlantic policy, with the United States as our ally and Russia as our strategic partner: a policy towards Europe's interest in peace. We can take this opportunity only if we ourselves become stronger and more influential, and therefore this policy goes in the right direction.

Ioan Mircea Pașcu (PSE). – Mr President, the report on NATO's role in the EU's security architecture reflected different approaches in the European Parliament between, on the one hand, opinions which continue to look at NATO as the organisation offering the strongest security guarantee to its members, and opinions which, on the contrary, see less and less need for NATO in a world in which apparently there are no major threats – at least not comparable to the former Soviet one.

However, until now, there was no member in both organisations willing to give up the NATO security guarantee, even if the EU is putting weight behind its defence and security effort and has introduced its equivalent of Article 5 of the Washington Treaty: the solidarity clause in the Lisbon Treaty.

To my mind, the relationship between NATO and the EU – the most important component of the larger transatlantic relationship – should be one that is naturally complementary and mutually advantageous to two partners who are compelled to work together in responding to today's multiplying and increasingly complex challenges. To that effect, existing mechanisms – see the Berlin Plus agreements – could be improved; new ones – see the proposal for an EU operational headquarters – should be contemplated; obstacles – see the negative impact of the Cyprus problem – should be overcome; and, most important, mutual perceptions should be definitely improved. Thus, on the one hand, one should stop considering NATO as an adversary and, on the other, the EU as an appendix to NATO.

As mentioned, the truth is that in practice, the two partners could very well cooperate with each other, mutually complementing one another. For that, the report has been amended and hopefully the end result has become acceptable to many of us.

Andrew Duff (ALDE). – Mr President, several speakers are putting a brave face on things this afternoon. The fact is that not all of the ESDP missions are proving to be a success: several failed to have clarity of purpose, several are poorly funded and it is possible that we could still fail in the Afghan campaign. So it is a good thing that Parliament is putting forward a strong contribution to defining common security, and we need now to establish far clearer criteria for the ESDP missions.

On the question of the integration of our forces, progress is feeble, and I cannot think that colliding French and British submarines is quite what we had expected!

Ryszard Czarnecki (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, when there are too many Presidents, there are, in fact, none at all. When we are talking about the question of security, we should speak very clearly and precisely about something which is a most urgent and significant matter. What happened last year in Caucasia, in the closest proximity to the European Union, shows that we must certainly place importance on eastern policy, and treat it as a specific investment in the security of Europe and the EU. This is also why partnership with countries to the east of the EU is, I think, absolutely fundamental, and while I am pleased that this partnership exists, I am also concerned, because the budget allocated to Eastern Partnership has been reduced almost three-fold. I think this is an absolutely fundamental question and I believe that it will be a specific banner of the European Union, not only for its nearest neighbours, but also for countries that lie a long way beyond Belarus, Ukraine or Georgia.

Satu Hassi (Verts/ALE). – (FI) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, my thanks go to the three rapporteurs. Unfortunately, however, I have to say that I do not share the uncritical view of NATO that Mr Vatanen's report, in particular, represents.

Of course, NATO is not the same as it was during the Cold War, and neither is Europe, and cooperation between NATO and the EU is an excellent thing. I do not, however, share the view that it would be a problem if not all of the Member States of the EU were members of NATO.

We must recognise the fact that some have been able to make a worthwhile contribution to peacebuilding precisely because they have remained outside military alliances, as is the case with my country, Finland. Since Finland does not belong to any military alliances, hardly anywhere is it perceived as hostile or a spokesman for the enemy. This has helped many Finns to act as peacebuilders. Examples are our former Prime Minister Holkeri in Northern Ireland, our former President Ahtisaari in Namibia, Indonesia, Aceh and Kosovo, and our former minister, Mr Haavisto, in Sudan.

Although the majority of EU nationals live in member countries of NATO, we nevertheless also have to recognise that the existence of non-aligned countries is a valuable resource for peacebuilding. It cannot be dismissed in the name of some aim to harmonise military policy within the EU.

Vladimír Remek (GUE/NGL). – (CS) I originally wanted to talk about the dangers of the militarisation of space because I feel, as a former astronaut, that I have a particular understanding of this. However, the documents presented highlight, among other things, the need to utilise security policy for the benefit of EU citizens. At the same time we are completely ignoring, for example, their opinion on the planned construction of new foreign bases on EU territory. Specifically, in Poland and the Czech Republic, preparations are continuing for the installation of components of the American missile defence system. And particularly in

my own country, the Czech Republic, the views and interests of the public are being completely ignored. Not a single official voice has been heard from the EU in support of the interests of citizens, for whom the EU perhaps does not exist in this respect. At the same time, two thirds of people in the Czech Republic consistently reject the foreign base, in spite of an information and promotional campaign that has been going on for more than two years. In my view, there is something wrong with the EU when the interests of the people are not reflected in our documents and when people's views can be ignored in the interests of democracy. It is no wonder then that people turn away from EU politics, regarding it as something that does not belong to them or when they flatly reject it.

Bernard Wojciechowski (IND/DEM). – Mr President, the citizens of Europe need a strong Union with a competitive foreign, security and defence policy. This will not happen if our Union keeps idle in one place. China and India are growing, not only in economic power, but also in military might.

Europe's competitive advantage should be based on knowledge and innovation. This should be nurtured and supported by all of us. In an effective security strategy, our European forces should have access to equipment and resources of the highest quality. While the United States spends trillions of dollars on security, we in Europe are slow or idle in developing our own strategy. In a time of crisis, we are closing firearms factories, like the factory in Radom, Poland. We should instead be investing in advanced technologies, such as the recoilless technologies being developed in Poland as we speak. Innovation creates new business and jobs. We cannot build European capabilities by shutting down our own factories.

Roberto Fiore (NI). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in principle I am certainly in favour of the idea of a European army, but we must define what kind of army it would be and with what limits.

Indeed, it is highly incongruous that we have two forces armed against each other – the Turkish army and the Greek army – that are part of the same alliance. I am sure that the Council has visited Northern Cyprus and has been able to appreciate the damage done by the Turkish soldiers and Turkish occupation to an island that is surely European.

It must also be said that the alliance with the United States is clearly an alliance that very often brings great problems. The US has dragged us into several wars, into several conflicts – I am thinking of Serbia, Iraq and Afghanistan – at the heart of which lay interests that were certainly not European.

Instead, we should ally ourselves with Russia and Belarus which are, in fact, historically, religiously, militarily and geopolitically European. This is the future of the European army: an army, therefore, certainly not at war with the United States, but keeping a respectful distance; an army without Turkey, because until we have evidence to the contrary, Turkey is part of Asia, and in the Mediterranean is unfortunately in conflict with a European country; and an army allied with and closely linked to Russia and Belarus.

Geoffrey Van Orden (PPE-DE). – Mr President, you will not be surprised if I express concern about the thrust of the reports relating to ESDP, in particular Mr von Wogau's report, which is full of false assumptions concerning the nature of the European Union and the ambition to create a European army under EU control. It sees, and I quote this expression, 'Synchronised Armed Forces Europe' as a step on the way to 'an integrated European Armed Force'. Surely, in other words, a European army. As we all know, ESDP produces no military added value. It is a political tool in the advancement of an integrated Europe. It should be seen for what it is.

For a long time, I have argued that the European Union could play a useful role in providing civil instruments for crisis management and post-conflict reconstruction. This would actually be helpful. By the way, no military officers that I know imagine that conflicts such as Afghanistan can be tackled by military means alone. There is nothing new in what is now fashionably called 'the comprehensive approach'. We used to call it 'hearts and minds'. So it is quite wrong – a deceit in fact – for the EU to try and justify its involvement in military matters by claiming the comprehensive approach somehow rather for itself – some sort of EU-unique selling point. For the EU, the honest and sensible approach would be to drop the defence ambition from ESDP and to concentrate on its civil contribution. Then, perhaps, Europe and her allies would be able to focus on their military contributions to NATO, revitalising the transatlantic alliance for the difficult years ahead, without being distracted by the EU's duplicative agenda.

The immediate problem is that the EU's ambitions are now beginning to contaminate NATO, and I am seriously concerned that this will affect the way the 60th anniversary goes. Meanwhile, back in the UK, we have government ministers in a state of denial that any of this is happening.

Martí Grau i Segú (PSE). – (ES) Commissioner, Mr Solana, ladies and gentlemen, I would firstly like to thank the three rapporteurs for their work. As a shadow rapporteur for the report on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), I will refer specifically to that document, beginning by congratulating Mr Saryusz-Wolski on the results of his work and his collaboration with other groups in order to obtain a consensual result.

In the same way as Parliament has demanded many times that the European Union be provided with the tools necessary to give it a single voice in the world, this House itself is also able to present a united front when evaluating and giving impetus to the great priorities of common foreign and security policy.

The efforts of our group – the Socialist Group in the European Parliament – have been towards twin goals. First, introducing or reinforcing the big issues that we believe to be instrumental across all areas of foreign policy, such as the fight against climate change, the promotion of peace across the globe, or a commitment to human development. Second, proposing ways to restore the balance between the geographical priorities of the CFSP as they appeared originally in the text, if they did appear, or introducing them as a new element if they were absent.

That is why we have championed, for example, greater clarification of the actions between the institutional and cooperative frameworks involved in the recently defined Eastern Dimension. We have argued for greater diversification of and greater emphasis to be placed on relationships with Africa, a continent that we often only remember when particularly violent wars break out, and much of the time not even then.

As regards Latin America, we wanted the current negotiation processes for association agreements – the first bi-regional talks that the European Union will conclude in its history – to be given consideration.

Concerning the Mediterranean, we have objected to a reductionist approximation that only talks about security. Instead, we want to include the rich political, economic and socio-cultural heritage contained in the Barcelona Process.

As far as amendments for plenary are concerned, our group has not presented any because we believe that in that way, the balance achieved by the compromises is somehow strengthened. We will therefore oppose the majority of amendments, so as not to damage the compromise reached in the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Janusz Onyszkiewicz (ALDE). – (PL) Mr President, as Tony Blair once said, although the European Union should not be a superstate, it should be a superpower. We might add: not only an economic superpower, for it already is that, but an important player on the world stage, because this is required by the interests, including the economic interests, of all the Member States.

Henry Kissinger is said to have once asked for the telephone number to call to find out what the position of the European Union was in important matters of international policy. Today that is the number of the High Representative. The problem is, however, that when the telephone rings, Mr Solana has to know what to say. It is, therefore, essential to build a common foreign policy, to include a security and energy policy, and therefore also a common policy towards Russia.

I would like to return to the constantly repeated proposal concerning the necessity for all the countries of the European Union to speak with one voice when engaging in dialogue with Russia. For this to happen, a precisely defined policy towards Russia should be developed as quickly as possible, a policy maintained in common and founded on solidarity. This will create a clear framework not only for talks between the EU and Russia, but also for bipartite talks with individual Member States. In developing this policy, a very important role should be granted to the European Parliament, in view of the mandate it has obtained in democratic elections, and of which it may be proud.

Adamos Adamou (GUE/NGL). – (EL) The report on the role of NATO in the European Union has been used as an excuse to slip in the question of Cyprus's joining the Partnership for Peace and NATO. Respect is needed for the position of the Republic of Cyprus. Intervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign Member State to obtain an integration which is not dictated by any treaty is not legitimate.

At a time when the Republic of Cyprus is in the middle of negotiations to resolve the Cyprus question, fronts are being opened which have a very adverse effect on the process. The full demilitarisation of a homeland occupied by Turkey and the safeguarding of the sustainability of a future solution must be everyone's sole objective. Moreover, this is the position taken by the European Parliament in other reports.

We call on you to support Amendments 22, 23 and 24 and to vote against those points which constitute intervention in the internal affairs of a sovereign state. We call on you to confirm that the principle of respect for the sovereign rights of the Member States is inviolate, independent of your overall opinion on the Partnership or on NATO. Our choice is demilitarisation and adherence to the principles of international law.

Georgios Georgiou (IND/DEM). – (EL) Mr President, under international law 'I have a state' means I control certain territories over which I instate a government which exercises a defence and foreign policy. I ask you now about the 'state of Europe' which various people are preaching about and I wonder, where are its borders, what are these certain territories and where is its defence when its defence is in the hands of a large – unfortunately American – army and where is its foreign policy when we have a Middle East in flames, a terrorist greenhouse exporting terrorism, the refugees and victims of which are not on their way to Alabama or Arizona or Kentucky but, unfortunately, are coming to Greece, to Cyprus, to Germany and to Spain?

That is why I have to say that I have started to doubt the possibility of supporting the idea to come out of these proposals by the gentlemen who have tabled their reports before us and am thinking of voting against them tomorrow.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ROURE

Vice-President

Jim Allister (NI). – Madam President, those who pretend that an EU superstate is not being built before our eyes have a lot of explaining to do in terms of the contents of these empire building reports.

Affirmations that a common defence policy – now taken as a given – and what is called the EU's strategic autonomy, require an integrated European armed force, and demands for an autonomous and permanent EU operational headquarters – along with demands for equivalence with NATO – leave no room for doubt but that, under our common foreign and security policy, those pushing the European project demand not just political power but also military power, all of which must come from diminishing the powers, the rights and the independence of the Member States. Such super-statehood and a centralised army for Europe I repudiate, as I do the Lisbon Treaty, which would make it all possible.

Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE). – Madam President, the message of our rapporteurs today could be that a vibrant Euro-Atlantic partnership is the best guarantee for European security and stability.

Indeed, I support adopting a new transatlantic agenda and bringing about a new set of Euro-Atlantic institutions, resulting finally in a comprehensive transatlantic common market.

Ari Vatanen has urged the involvement of all EU and NATO members in closer cooperation, regardless of which organisation they belong to. I think that is a very practical idea, as is his idea of a permanent EU operational headquarters complementing – and, of course, not competing with – NATO's command structures.

Another very important point is that we draw on the same pool of national resources. Jacek Saryusz-Wolski has said that the CFSP is seriously underfinanced, so it is crucial to avoid duplication and to increase efficiency. The question for the Member States is: What are they offering Mr Solana to carry out our common defence policies?

Thirdly, it is time to address new challenges to our security. In fact, future conflicts will be fought and perhaps decided in cyberspace, where every state has to react and defend itself, sometimes in a timeframe that does not exceed a second. The European Parliament, too, needs to take the initiative to contribute to this dramatic challenge of the new century, a challenge that is based on the democratisation of modern technology.

Hannes Swoboda (PSE). – (DE) Madam President, the nationalists, the narrow-minded Members of this House, no doubt really believe that the risks and problems of this world can be dealt with by nations alone on an individual basis.

Mr Allister is a typical example. Does he really believe that terrorism in the world can be combated by counting on his country's national defence alone? Does he really believe that the problems of energy security can be solved if everyone tackles them on their own? That approach is antiquated. Of course, the Treaty of Lisbon, so frequently criticised, would bring the great benefit of enabling us to work together a bit more, for example, in the matter of energy policy and of the Common Foreign and Security Policy, to address effectively the dangers and risks of this world.

The new United States Government under President Obama is pleased that this common European policy exists, as it means that the United States has a partner in tackling a number of these problems. In addition – something made clear by the frequent presence of Russian representatives in this House – Russia, too, has now realised that the old approach of talking only to individual countries and then playing them off against each other simply no longer works. Russia has realised that it must talk to the European Union if common solutions are to be reached, for example, in the matter of energy security.

Indeed, this is also mentioned repeatedly in the report by Mr Saryusz-Wolski. How can we try to solve these problems together: that of energy security, for example? I am delighted that the High Representative and one of his staff are to further intensify their efforts on this in future, as this will enable us to demonstrate to our citizens how the Common Foreign and Security Policy takes into account their specific interests, and how we mean to prevent Europeans having to shiver again in future. That is what this is about, and that is why we favour a common foreign and security policy over nationalist foreign policy.

Philippe Morillon (ALDE). – (FR) Madam President, I congratulate our three rapporteurs for this quite remarkable summary that they have given of the current state of our common foreign and security policy.

Mr Solano, you know better than anyone that Europe is expected to take its place on the world stage, as dictated by its economic and demographic power and its wealth of democratic and humanist values.

It has to be said that despite the will shown regularly by over two-thirds of our fellow European citizens, as you said, some progress has been made over ten years, I will grant you that, but it has to be said also that this Europe still does not exist.

If one were needed, Europe's reticence with regard to resolving the new tragedy in the Middle East would be a recent example of this. There was, and there still is, a need for the presence in Gaza of a Europe that plays an active role, helping the population to survive and rebuild the country, and helping in the fight against arms smuggling, which has allowed this territory to be transformed into a base for the launching of rockets of all sizes.

Despite the verbal outpourings in Sharm el-Sheikh and Jerusalem, nothing has yet been done in this respect. I would like to ask again a question already asked at the time of the Lebanese crisis: when can we expect, Mr Solano, the deployment of a European fleet in the Mediterranean like the one you have introduced to deal with piracy? We have the resources. Will we, one day, have the will?

Mirosław Mariusz Piotrowski (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, the European Union must act in the interests of the security of citizens of all Member States. Above all, it should accept part of the responsibility for the war on terrorism and should react sharply to any manifestations of terrorism.

The murder of a Polish engineer – being held hostage in Pakistan – by the local Taliban has had far-reaching repercussions recently. The so-called European diplomacy did not join the prior talks aimed at securing his release. This shocking incident, which is an element of the broader problem of security, should be the subject of a separate Parliamentary debate and should result in specific steps being taken, and I appeal for this. A priority at the moment is to achieve the return of the body of the murdered Pole and to help his family. These essential but short-term measures cannot, however, take the place of a comprehensive approach to terrorism and of increasing diplomatic pressure on countries such as Pakistan.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL). – (PT) In international relations, Portugal abides by the principles of national independence, respect for human and peoples' rights, equality between states, the peaceful resolution of international conflicts, non-interference in the internal affairs of other states and cooperation with all other peoples to bring about the emancipation and progress of humankind.

Portugal advocates the abolition of imperialism, colonialism and any other forms of aggression, control and exploitation in relations between peoples, and also comprehensive, simultaneous and controlled disarmament, dissolution of political and military blocs and the establishment of a system of collective security aimed at creating an international order capable of ensuring peace and justice in relations between peoples.

I would point to the text of Article 7 of the Constitution of the Portuguese Republic to show how far away the European Union is from these principles. By assuming the role of the European pillar of NATO, in partnership with the US, and by increasingly promoting the militarisation of international relations, the arms race, interference and aggression aimed at ensuring that the major powers control and share the market and natural resources, it is acting in total contradiction to these principles.

Gerard Batten (IND/DEM). – Madam President, these are own-initiative reports and therefore they might be dismissed as so much hot air. But we know that such reports are sometimes used as a means of introducing the policy aspirations of the EU.

Mr von Wogau was once the Chair of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and was instrumental in bringing about the European single currency. He is now Chair of the Subcommittee on Security and Defence, and, when he writes a report saying that the European Union needed its own armed forces, then we can be confident that that is precisely what the European Union intends to bring about in due course.

These reports call for the EU to develop its own armed forces by means of common weapons procurement, a common communication system and an autonomous common command and control structure. Mr von Wogau advocates an EU standing army of 60 000 soldiers permanently available for deployment. The EU wants its own soldiers, guns, tanks, aeroplanes and bombs in order to 'fulfil its responsibilities in the world'.

What are those responsibilities exactly? To find out, you will have to wait to see if the Lisbon Treaty is fully ratified and brings about 'a common foreign and security policy, leading to a common defence'. No one can say that they were not warned of the EU's military aspirations.

Bruno Gollnisch (NI). – (FR) Madam President, however much friendship we feel for the rapporteurs, Mr Vatanen and Mr von Wogau, we are unable to approve their reports.

Firstly, because NATO, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, was created in 1949 in response to the terrible threat posed by communism towards Western Europe. It played a useful, even essential role. Today, however, this dreadful communist system has collapsed and the Warsaw Pact has been dissolved.

NATO, however, is constantly expanding. Its activities extend beyond its geographical framework. Afghanistan, as far as I am aware, does not have a North Atlantic coastline. Neither does Kosovo, where it contributed to the ethnic cleansing of the Serbs in an unjust war that solved nothing. NATO is thus violating the United Nations Charter.

Ladies and gentlemen, you are completely inconsistent. You wish to create a strong, independent Europe and you absorb European defence into a US-dominated command system. How can Russia and other nations fail to see in all that anything but an aggressive attitude?

NATO has subjugated us to the policy of the United States of America. We are their friends, but we do not wish to be their vassals and still less their lackeys. We have to put an end to this and get out of it. NATO has had its time.

Hubert Pirker (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, Mr Solana, as we all know, risk scenarios are constantly changing. The Treaty is also changing, and with it the opportunities for the European Security and Defence Policy. What will always be the same, however, is people's desire for security and stability, for a strong Union and for disarmament, particularly nuclear disarmament.

With the three reports under discussion today, the European Parliament is giving a very strong indication of how it means to achieve these objectives and guarantee security. Firstly, there is the report on the Common Foreign and Security Policy, which focuses on security in the Balkans, stability in Africa and peace in the Palestinian territories. Secondly, there is the report on cooperation with NATO, with its clear emphasis on closer cooperation between the EU and NATO and on better coordination. At the heart of the third report is the further development of the European Security and Defence Policy, with the aim of achieving greater efficiency and better coordination in connection with defence expenditure, and of achieving strategic autonomy for the whole Union and thus, also easing the burden on our Member States.

If we have all these objectives in mind, we must support the calls of these reports: for shared research and development, for the development of common standards and for common procurement systems, for example – all with the objective of interoperability. This will also mean optimum cooperation between the military in the Member States, cooperation between the police and the military, and also the creation of permanent military structures and the establishment of an Operational Headquarters and/or a Council of Ministers for Defence.

I am convinced that this gives us a crucial opportunity to make our Union into a political union and to develop a security union that gives the public what it expects of the Union: lasting security, stability and peace.

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, up to now the speakers have kept to their speaking times. We really are pushed for time. I would therefore ask you to please keep to your speaking times.

Jan Marinus Wiersma (PSE). – Madam President, the CFSP has become almost everything, so you can say almost everything in a debate like this. In the past, we discussed only security issues and now we even discuss climate change, energy, etc. Therefore, I have to be selective and say something about EU-US relations and about the disarmament agenda, which I think we can move forward this year.

The new administration has made a very positive start, also symbolically by the announcement to close down Guantánamo. I think we should work on this issue and try to work together to solve some of the problems with which the Americans are confronted.

The second basic debate this year will be about economic security: are the United States and Europe able together to do things about the crisis or will they try to do it on their own, which will mean a rapid development of protectionist measures?

Afghanistan is also an important issue. Will we be able to match the increased efforts of the Americans or not, and under what conditions? There, the positive sign is that the Americans have said that they are aware that there should be a political solution as this cannot be solved in a military way. This brings the European Union in immediately.

Then on the disarmament agenda: last December, Mr Solana, you gave a very good speech here in Parliament on your ideas and those of the Council and the Union on promoting an agenda that is positive, by starting to support the Americans and the Russians to renegotiate the START Treaty and to work with the Americans on the ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. We will also be in favour of the removal of the remaining technical nuclear weapons in Europe and it would be helpful in supporting ideas to bring the fuel cycle under international control in order to make sure that countries that want to develop nuclear energy have peaceful access but will not be able to abuse that militarily.

We would like the European Union to support this kind of agenda, knowing that President Obama has ambitions. In his inaugural speech, when he talked about foreign affairs, he first mentioned Iraq and Afghanistan, but then he mentioned his ambitions to do something about nuclear disarmament.

Samuli Pohjamo (ALDE). – (FI) Madam President, I will speak about Mr Vatanen's report and I would first of all like to thank him for the open way in which he prepared it.

I think, however, Parliament is sending a dangerous signal if it insists on strengthening its military organisation and highlights the importance of a military power reliant on NATO in the way proposed in the report. Cooperation and partnership, democracy and human rights as a guarantee of peace and stability is a viable European model which should be used in all the world's crisis hotspots. Furthermore, we are facing a deepening economic crisis, environmental problems and the challenges brought by climate change, none of which can be resolved by military force.

In my opinion, it would be more important to stress the importance of the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy and to concentrate on the prevention of conflicts and eliminating the causes of crises: the elimination of poverty, for example, and the promotion of democracy, human rights and civil society.

Finally, I would like to remind everyone that in the Union there are Member States that are not in NATO and which have their own reasons for that. These countries must be allowed to decide themselves on their security policy solutions, without any pressure from outside. For example, Finland has dealt well with its own defence issues and has been involved in peacekeeping operations in various parts of the world for decades. There have been a lot of amendments to the report that improve it, but they do not alter its basic tone.

Mario Borghesio (UEN). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, does Europe have its own geopolitics? It does not appear that way to me! If Karl Haushofer were alive, he would teach this somewhat spineless Europe that it needs a maritime strategy in the Atlantic, Pacific and Indian oceans and with the countries of the north, where the Arctic Ocean holds immense and extremely valuable energy resources. It is the superpowers of the United States and Russia who are active in these areas, not Europe!

The fight against terrorism also means fighting against those who circulate instruments of terrorism; people who can be used by terrorists. As we speak, Lampedusa is in flames because someone has set fire to the detention centres for illegal immigrants. Europe should concern itself with supporting the Italian Government, which is trying to prevent the invasion of illegal immigrants who can be used by the mafia and by terrorists.

However, I can see no evidence of the firm, practical approach needed. Europe must defend itself from this threat, not with words but with action, as Mr Maroni and the Italian Government are doing.

Rihards Pīks (PPE-DE). – (LV) Madam President, Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, Mr Solana, all three of the reports by our fellow Members are very professional, balanced and, most importantly, have been prepared at the right time. Without going into the great number of precise facts, assessments and proposals that are set out in the reports, I would like to stress two points. Firstly, it is important to review Europe's security strategy every five years, since we can see that in recent years, such security issues as energy security, cyber security and climate security have become very topical, and also the possible conflict zones have moved from one region to another. Secondly, the European Union must significantly step up its conflict prevention efforts. I think that this would also have been possible in the South Caucasus but, in my view, the European Union's position prior to the armed conflict was too restrained. The European Union has a right and a duty to carry out preventive activities and intermediary missions, since the European Union is a project to create peace, a task it has been carrying out for the past 50 years. In order to be able to react to challenges and to take preventive measures, we need, first of all, the political will and, secondly, to create and improve a common foreign and security policy together with European security and defence policy institutional instruments. One of these instruments is the Eastern Partnership mentioned in the report by Mr Saryusz-Wolski, including the creation of the EURONEST joint parliamentary assembly. That could enhance understanding and also the development of democracy beyond our eastern borders. Finally, I would like to express my satisfaction with the inclusion of paragraph 33 in the report by Mr von Wogau, since in my country, events in the Caucasus and growing nationalism in our neighbour state are giving rise to grave concerns. As a wise old saying of my people has it: 'always hope for the best, but prepare for the worst, and God helps those who help themselves!' Thank you.

Ana Maria Gomes (PSE). – (PT) I should like to thank the rapporteurs, Ari Vatanen and Karl von Wogau, for their work and efforts to achieve a consensus, particularly on the difficult issue of the nuclear policies, which must be urgently revised by the European Union and NATO at a time when President Obama is reviving the objective of freeing the world from nuclear weapons and when two European nuclear submarines almost caused a disaster.

The Vatanen and von Wogau reports highlight the need for a politically, strategically and operationally independent European Union, through an ambitious European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). We need institutional, financial and operational instruments to achieve these objectives. We therefore need close cooperation between NATO and the EU, based on respect for the political independence of each of these organisations, which are complementary. We therefore call for the setting-up of a permanent EU Operational Headquarters in Brussels, with the capacity to independently plan and conduct ESDP military operations. We therefore call on the Member States of the EU to increase efforts to spend their national defence budgets more wisely, more efficiently, and in a more European manner, which they cannot properly do separately.

The message from this Parliament is unequivocal and serves as a warning. Without a Europe of defence, defence in Europe will be threatened. Our defence industries may be threatened. The capacities that Europe needs in order to fulfil its responsibility of protecting civilian populations and preventing massacres and genocides may be threatened. Europe's role as a global player in crisis management may be threatened. The extension of European political integration to security and defence, as provided for in the Treaty of Lisbon, is urgent and needs to be speeded up. This is not only in the interests of the European Union, but also in the interest of NATO, as both organisations will reap the rewards of a Europe that is better equipped to tackle the increasing challenges to the security of Europeans and to global security.

Andrzej Tomasz Zapłowski (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, NATO has proved useful as an international security organisation during a time of relative peace in Europe. Of course, the sense of security which it gives us is significantly limited by the pace of decision making in the bodies which command the Alliance and also by the decisions themselves. In spite of this, NATO has a stabilising effect on world security. Attempts at 'softening' NATO – weakening its position by enlarging the military structures of the European Union – are a mistake. The European Union today has a problem reaching agreement on difficult political decisions, let alone military ones.

The EU should concentrate on strengthening internal security and increasing the defensive capabilities of its members, especially Member States which share a border with countries where extreme nationalist ideologies are popular, and also Member States which have attracted the interest of terrorist groups. The EU should not become too involved in measures which are aimed at the creation of large expeditionary forces intended for operations outside Europe.

Alojz Peterle (PPE-DE). – (SL) Mr Solana, High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, has rightly reminded us of where we were at in 1990. It would be even more interesting to ask ourselves what kind of a common policy we had at the beginning of the 1990s.

At the time, the European Community was powerless. We subsequently saw wishes being replaced by visions, strategies, political will and capabilities, which also prompted us into action, not just on a European level, but also on a global level. During those years, particularly after the historic enlargement of 2004, the context and the ambitions of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) changed greatly.

Ten years ago, we were still largely immersed in our own concerns. Today, however, we can look back at the successes which we have achieved and it is impossible to envisage a CFSP or a European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) without a global dimension. With this in mind, I am not surprised that all three of the reports and many of our fellow members have called our attention to the new situation, the need for strategy amendments, greater unity and greater interinstitutional cooperation.

All this has been backed up by concrete proposals for the improvement of our operational structures and our political decision-making process, which I heartily endorse. I agree that we have reached a new stage as regards our common policy and would like to point out two issues in this regard.

Firstly, we need to look in detail at how the financial, or economic, crisis might affect the context of our common policy. I firmly believe that we need to be very attentive to the possible political consequences of the crisis, in particular, those which may arise if we face an even deeper monetary crisis.

Secondly, over the course of a number of years, I have witnessed the surprising fact that many of our partners want the European Union to have a uniform foreign policy and defence identity which is better defined and more powerful. In other words, the European Union as a global player is the desired solution. In that spirit, it seems important to me that we should view our bilateral partnerships from a more global perspective than that which we have adopted to date and that we should also develop innovative approaches to multilateral partnerships, which not only take into account bilateral interests, but also serve to stabilise wider regions.

Maria Eleni Koppa (PSE). – (EL) Madam President, the international system is in a transitional phase and there are huge challenges for all of us. We therefore need to reassess and improve relations between the European Union and NATO in order to address common threats, such as terrorism, the spread of weapons of mass destruction, the increase in international piracy and the new problems caused by climate change.

At the same time, however, I consider that this is the right time for us to confirm the role of the UN Security Council as the basic guarantor of international peace and security. There is now an urgent need to reform the organisation and we have undertaken to advance this reform, so that the UN can respond more effectively to its important task.

It is also important for us to stress that all states and international organisations, including NATO, should refrain from the threat and use of any manner of violence, which is out of keeping with the aims and principles of the charter founding the UN. NATO and the European Union have common interests and their relations should not be competitive. We need a more balanced partnership with better coordination of actions and stronger cooperation. However, each side should respect the independence of the other in terms of decision taking and ensure there is mutual understanding when military assessments differ.

Finally, I should like to emphasise the need for respect for the states' right of neutrality and, at this point, to ask for the call for the Republic of Cyprus to join the Partnership for Peace to be deleted. This decision is a sovereign right of every state and Cyprus is an independent and sovereign state able to decide its own future.

Jana Hybášková (PPE-DE). – (CS) Let us celebrate the sixtieth anniversary of NATO. There will soon be some major US-EU-NATO summits. The return of France to the military structures of NATO, together with the energies devoted to European security and defence policies, provide an excellent opportunity for harmonising European security strategies and potential new strategies for NATO. Today's ratification of the Lisbon Treaty in the Czech Parliament marks a step change for European defence and security. Let us construct a joint European leadership. Let us rationalise the European defence market. Let us put resources into science and research, into the European Defence Agency, let us create a law for the European soldier, let us prevent duplicities and let us literally bypass the Turkish syndrome. Let us seize the chance offered by the new American administration for genuine cooperation in Afghanistan and for missile defences in Europe. We have before us an enormous opportunity for European security and defence policy to become the motor of further integration and security in Europe. Let us not waste it.

Libor Rouček (PSE). – (CS) I would like to say a few words on EU-Russia relations. In my opinion, the creation of a joint foreign and security policy cannot be achieved in the absence of dialogue with Russia. The European security agency, which brings together the US, NATO, the OSCE and international disarmament agreements, should include dialogue with Russia as well.

I would therefore like to call on both the Council and the Commission to adopt an open and constructive position towards possible negotiations between the EU, the US and Russia on the renewal of transatlantic dialogue on security matters based on the Helsinki process.

It is my view that these negotiations should also include discussions on the topic of missile defence. The EU should play a much greater role in this issue than it has done to date. In my opinion, the agreement must not be left to the US and Russia alone. The European public expects this from us.

Józef Pinior (PSE). – (PL) Madam President, Parliament is in agreement over common foreign and security policy for the European Union. Consensus exists about this among the main political forces. The problem, the real political problem, is how to achieve the essential aim.

Firstly, ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon is needed as quickly as possible. Those political leaders who are delaying the ratification process of the treaty are weakening the development of the common European Union foreign and security policy. It is difficult to talk seriously about common European Union security policy without the Lisbon Treaty.

Secondly, I would like to emphasise the question of human rights in the development of EU external policy. The policy should support international law – international humanitarian law, liberal democracy and the rule of law.

Thirdly, the policy requires the serious development of a European defence policy, the development of European Union military structures and the development of the European defence industry.

Adrian Severin (PSE). – Madam President, I want to make two points. Firstly, on values. The European Union is a Union of values. These values are criteria for accession. They guide us in our behaviour. They are a means to build interoperability with our external partners. However, we should not make the scope of our external policy from exporting our values. On the contrary, we have to learn to operate in a diversified world and even to respect the other's right to be wrong.

Secondly, on institutions. The international institutions and international law of today were shaped and created in a completely different world. Each day, we realise that they are not adapted to the new challenges, new opportunities and new threats of today's world. I believe, therefore, that the European Union should support the idea of a new conference on security and cooperation in Europe in a larger Europe – from Vancouver to Shanghai, not only to Vladivostok – in order to create a new space of security, of freedom and of cooperation. I think that this should be one of our top priorities, and we should not be afraid that others perhaps have other ideas on that.

Luis Yáñez-Barnuevo García (PSE). – (ES) Madam President, first of all I wish to express my general support for the three reports that we are debating.

Second, I would like to congratulate Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, above all, on what she has said about the close cooperation and collaboration between her team and that of Mr Solana. Third, I wish to congratulate Mr Solana because, without his character and creativity, the Common Foreign and Security Policy probably would not be what it is today: the legal and documentary basis, even with the advance of the 2003 strategy paper, would not have been enough to make so much progress on this Common Foreign and Security Policy in the last few years. Fourth, I would like to say that the Treaty of Lisbon – about which, as has been said today, there is good news that it may be ratified soon – will doubtless be a much greater and much better tool in his hands and in those of the European Union to turn the Union into what it should be: a global actor, in the full sense of the word.

I close with the idea that he himself expressed: Europe must be a civilian actor and power with military means, and not a military power.

Proinsias De Rossa (PSE). – Madam President, having returned at the weekend from a visit to Gaza, I am going to spend my 60 seconds talking about what I believe to be a serious problem there. Our principle of human security is one which obliges us to respond to the humanitarian crisis, but it also obliges us to respond

and tell Israel that enough is enough and that no more can Europe turn a blind eye to the abuse of the Palestinian right to self-determination.

The most significant abuse of that right is the relentless and deliberate colonisation of the West Bank and East Jerusalem by Israel. There are now 500 000 settlers squatting on territory which is supposed to comprise the main territory of the proposed independent Palestinian state. It is increasingly difficult to believe that Israel really favours an independent Palestinian state, while proceeding to annex more and more Palestinian territory – and does so up to the present date.

Declarations that Europe and the USA are committed to a two-state solution, which includes a sovereign and viable Palestinian state, are not really worth the paper they are written on unless we say 'stop' to Israel in relation to settlements. They must be frozen now and eventually dismantled, otherwise there will never be a sustainable peace in the Middle East, Mr Solana.

Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE). – (RO) I wish to express my appreciation to the three rapporteurs. NATO's role in Europe's security architecture has proved to be essential, not only up until now, but also offers real prospects for the rest of the 21st century. I feel that the European Union and NATO must cooperate with each other, avoiding any potential rivalry.

Powerful, productive transatlantic relations can provide the best guarantee for peace, security and stability in Europe, along with respect for the principles of democracy, human rights, the rule of law and good governance. We are at an historic juncture when transatlantic cooperation has become vital with a view to jointly drawing up a new security strategy for the European Union and the new strategic concept for NATO.

At the NATO summit held in Bucharest in April 2008, the allies welcomed the political role which the European Union can have if it develops an action capability in the area of security and defence. The Partnership for Peace promoted by NATO and the Eastern Partnership project promoted by the European Union are of vital importance to the development of democracy and the rule of law, as well as for the transition to an efficient market economy in certain countries in the Black Sea region.

Rosa Miguélez Ramos (PSE). – (ES) Mr Solana, I have been here since 3 p.m. just to speak to you about maritime piracy and to be able to congratulate you on launching the European naval operation against maritime piracy in the waters of the Indian Ocean. You know that the government of my country is fully involved in this mission. I wish to remind you that in April, the fishing season begins and that our fishers are concerned about how the forces in the Indian Ocean are currently distributed geographically. They would like some protection closer to the area where they will be fishing; that is, further south. I would like to hear something from you on this subject.

I would also like to tell you that I am interested in this operation enduring beyond the established timeframe. I believe it would be a shame if so much joint effort involving all three pillars at once were to finish abruptly at the end of one year, especially considering that the situation in Somalia and in the region does not seem likely to change or improve in the short or medium-term.

Marios Matsakis (ALDE). – Madam President, NATO is the backbone of European defence, and we rely on NATO forces for the security of our Union. But NATO forces in Cyprus – Turkish NATO forces – are not a force of freedom, but one of occupation: occupation of EU territory. Not only did these Turkish forces cause death and destruction on the island when Turkey invaded in 1974, but they today continue to keep an EU Member State divided, causing fear and oppression among both Greek and Turkish Cypriots and obstructing the current negotiations between the two Community leaders on the island.

So, in discussing NATO's important role in European defence, it is fair to remember that the EU has not yet put the necessary pressure on Turkey to get its NATO invasion army out of Cyprus unconditionally and immediately. Do you not agree with me, Mr Solana? Perhaps he is not listening. Do you not agree that the Turkish army should leave Cyprus immediately, Mr Solana?

Marie Anne Isler Béguin (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Madam President, I would like to quote the example of Georgia to show you how far we are from our stated ambition for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, despite the efforts of our High Representative and Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner.

Now, of course, Mr Solana, you are asking for more capabilities and more aid. For my part, I would ask you the following question: is the European Union currently able to meet its commitments, particularly in relation to the ceasefire agreement that we have proposed with Russia?

Obviously I understand Commissioner. We know to what extent the European Union has been present and how it intervened quickly, but today we must also be aware that the Georgians are confronted by the Russian army, based on the territory of Abkhazia and South Ossetia. I am certainly not questioning the remarkable work of the civilian observer mission on the ground. However, what can our observers do to defend civilians against the daily violence? Not much, apart from act as witnesses.

Moreover, the ambition of the CFSP, in this case in Georgia, will be judged against our courage finally to send peacekeeping forces to stabilise a region that we have included in our neighbourhood policy.

Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE). – (RO) In the three reports which we have debated today, I have come across some relevant, useful points for defining the European Union's future policies as a global player.

I would like to make three observations. Firstly, I would like to stress the importance of the transatlantic aspect to the EU's foreign policy. We must capitalise on the current climate in relations with the US to open up a new chapter in this area to boost our power at a global level.

Secondly, the European Union's security dimension must be harmonised with NATO's to prevent any duplication of effort and shortage of resources.

Thirdly, I believe that the EU must use the European security and cooperation policy to strengthen stability in the Western Balkans, following the clarification of Kosovo's status. Kosovo is now in a phase of 'supervised independence', according to the EU's special representative, Peter Faith. Even though Mr Faith rejected during a recent hearing of the European Parliament the use of the term 'EU protectorate' for Kosovo, he acknowledged that the path to 'total independence' is long and difficult. 'It would be a miracle if we completed our mission in two years,' says Mr Faith.

However, I believe that we need to evaluate a clear timeframe for the EU's involvement in Kosovo. This is why I welcome the Commission's initiative to carry out a study on Kosovo, as long as it contributes to the success of the EULEX mission.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, let me just make a few remarks, and one in particular: I think this debate has shown that there is a growing acceptance of the approach Europe follows in crisis management and conflict prevention. The Munich Conference on Security confirmed the comprehensive approach, because security and development go together – you cannot have one without the other. I believe this European approach is a core element of our strategy to promote peace and security in our neighbourhood, but also beyond.

It works, but it must be adequately resourced, so we have to work on building our capacities and capabilities in both the civilian and military fields, and we will try at least to play our part as much as we can.

But I would also like to answer your questions, in particular that of Mr Saryusz-Wolski, Chair of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the under funding of the CFSP budget. It is true that the budget has been reduced this year, but this should, we hope, not be an impediment to our political ambitions in civilian ESDP, provided that there are no new significant missions this year. It is important to remember that only certain costs are covered by the CFSP budget – equipment costs, contracted staff, special allowances, for instance, the EU special representatives – but Member States also pay for the cost of their seconded staff. The budget will increase – as you know, not this year but in 2013 – to EUR 400 million.

Concerning transfers between budget articles, which Mr Dombrovskis mentioned, the Commission includes information on transfers within the CFSP budget with its quarterly reports to the budgetary authority, and in recent years, all appropriations under the CFSP budget have been committed.

Let me comment on two specific issues: firstly, on human security. Human security is something which I am personally very fond of, because it must be promoted: freedom from want and freedom from fear as a good of foreign and security policy. This is also recognised in our 2008 report on European security strategy (ESS), that we both mentioned before. Furthermore, the ESS report recognises that without development and poverty eradication, there will be no sustainable peace. Therefore, this is very important, and the promotion of human rights is also a part of this equation.

Finally, let me say a word on early warning and conflict prevention, which Mr Piki spoke about. I agree in general that as a European Union, we must work more on the early parts of the conflict cycle, which means early warning, conflict prevention and preventive diplomacy. From the Commission side, one initiative we are taking in this field is to strengthen links with NGOs as part of a peacebuilding partnership, and also

improving our uses of open sources of information. However, we will try to reinforce the early prevention side in the future. We know this is a very important part.

Javier Solana, *High Representative for CFSP*. – Madam President, I shall be very brief. I would like to thank those Members of Parliament who have intervened, and I have taken note of their remarks and their questions. I will certainly be in touch with you to respond to those who have to be responded to properly.

I would like to say that this is the second time that we have had a debate of this nature in the European Parliament, an almost three-hour discussion on European security. I think this is very important, and I hope very much that this idea will be maintained in the future. To the three rapporteurs, thank you very much for your work, and you can be sure that we will continue cooperating with you in the future.

Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, *rapporteur*. – Madam President, this is a very broad and, for me, satisfactory, debate about successes, gaps and actions in progress. Roughly speaking, I would say that it is the syndrome of the half-empty/half-full glass, depending on who is looking at it.

Some questions were answered at least by the mainstream of those who spoke. Is there progress in this area? Yes. Is it enough? No. Is there more convergence between institutions like Parliament, Council, the Commission and Member States? Yes, there is more progress, although this broadband of foreign policy of the Union is not sufficiently big enough, and here I refer to your words, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, on money. If we had more money, or at least as much as the Commission proposed for broadband in rural areas – EUR 1.5 billion – perhaps Member States, without having to pay, would more willingly participate in CFSP actions. You know well that this House is appealing for the Union budget to pay for that.

Do the citizens value this foreign policy? The answer is, again, 'yes'. Do we make sufficient use of foreign policy to legitimise the Union? The answer is 'no'. Capabilities: in the broader sense of the term, everything that is crisis prevention management and rapid response, we have what we could get and – I could expect that Mr Solana will nod – more. I have already touched upon finance. In terms of legal and institutional instruments – Lisbon – everyone agrees that we need more and better equipped instruments under the Treaty rules.

This convergence is being worked out in a discreet manner, and I would like to pay tribute to the discreet action and diplomacy of the High Representative, not only outside, but also within. How does this like-mindedness come about? When you are able, Mr Solana, to speak on behalf of the whole Union, there has to be, beforehand, action to persuade everybody and to get everybody on board.

The question of values was raised. Do we agree on values? Yes, we do, but we have different practices and this axis of values vis-à-vis interest is also present, and the best example is how to deliver it in Central Asia: it was present in the debate on the Central Asia strategy.

To close, I would say that I was touched by what Mr Solana said – that, through foreign policy, the EU identifies itself. It gets more identity. What we are adding in our approach in Parliament is that it gives more legitimacy, which means it gives more power. For that reason it can be an integral part of European integration. The dominant debate has shown that there is hunger for more Europe in foreign policy and that more pooling of European political and material capital is needed.

President. – We are allowing the rapporteurs a little more time, but now we are short of time and we cannot continue to do so.

Karl von Wogau, *rapporteur*. – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to comment on a few points.

Firstly, I wish to explain why I did not include the principles of 'human security' and 'responsibility to protect' in my report. This has been very controversial. In my personal opinion, these concepts that we have developed, whilst very important, are not suitable for a security policy, as they can be misused to justify military intervention all around the world. This is a very real risk I can envisage. Therefore, I do support these two concepts, but not for the security policy.

It has also been said that I am in the process of creating a European army and am calling for this in my report. I would ask you to read the whole report through once again – you will most certainly not find the words 'European army' in it. What the report says is that taxpayers' money should be spent better in this field than has been the case up to now.

Then there is the European Security Strategy, which now has everyone's support. The work that needed to be done on this took several years and was very successful. In my opinion, the next step must be to produce a work on the implementation of the security policy, a white paper on the security policy. This is a job for the next parliamentary term.

Last but not least, I believe that the next talks we hold on this subject must deal with the issue of EUBAM Rafah: how to revive this mission and how it can possibly be extended.

Ari Vatanen, rapporteur. – Madam President, I shall just repeat what President Wilson said in 1917 and what, for example, our honourable colleague Mr Swoboda said half an hour ago: the nation alone cannot solve problems. This House, and the EU, are testimony to that. We have to learn from our mistakes. In whatever walk of life, we must work together: there is no cherry-picking, there is no free riding in the real world. We cannot let the burden be borne by just some shoulders: we have to share it, because we are democratic nations. That is a noble cause.

Sometimes I have difficulty in understanding why, immediately the word 'NATO' is mentioned, people – perhaps because of their anti-American feelings, or because they have anti-military leanings – are against it. Yes, we are pacifists. Who is not a pacifist? Anybody of sound mind is a pacifist. Who wants suffering; who wants war? But we must have the means to prevent it. We must be proactive. Wars come and go if there is this kind of attitude, but we must build peace actively.

I really give credit to the majority of Members in this House who again proved tonight that constructive, responsible common sense will prevail; that this House is what it is meant to be: a House that looks forward, because, unless we work together, peace will become a casualty.

Let me make one last comment. Mr Platini – a maestro of football – is speaking in another hall at this very moment. I was in France when the massacre in Rwanda took place – and this is not directed against France, but is a comment on how the media report information – and the fact that Mr Zidane, the football star, had a wart on his knee literally drew more attention than the massacre in Rwanda. No, we cannot be silent: we must be proactive; otherwise we condone these kinds of events in the world.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 19 February 2009.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Alexandra Dobolyi (PSE), in writing. – (HU) How should Europe react to the fact that on its eastern borders, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, a regional organisation comprised of several emerging superpowers and states rich in energy resources, is getting stronger? Through Russia, the SCO borders the EU, and therefore the organisation inevitably deserves the EU's substantive attention. By assaying the members and observers of the SCO, we can safely conclude that these countries own a significant proportion of the world's oil and gas reserves.

In light of this, addressing the question of a new strategy on Russia and Central Asia is unavoidable, and it must also include a political risk assessment specific to each country.

Let me also point out that, as illustrated by the Russia-Ukraine gas dispute, the EU's current vulnerability and considerable energy dependency undermines the development of an authentic, efficient and consistent joint foreign and security policy.

In addition, countries react differently based on their historical experience and financial interest. More so than at any other time in the past, it is especially important today to take uniform political action and to harmonise discordant national interests and positions.

It is indispensable for the EU to improve the efficiency and consistency of its actions on the global scene. The ratification of the Lisbon Treaty and the foreign policy tools outlined therein may contribute greatly to this goal.

The increasing need for the EU to operate more efficiently and promptly, and events demanding intellectual answers with increasing urgency, call for a review of the organisational and decision-making mechanisms for governing our foreign policy, and for the provision of suitable structural answers.

Glyn Ford (PSE), *in writing*. – I congratulate Mr Vatanen on his report which I endorse. In particular, I support the idea of an EU Operational Military Headquarters being established. Of course, NATO should be, and is, our first port of call when security is threatened. Yet during the Bush-Gore debates just over a decade ago, George Bush said that had he been President he would not have intervened in Kosovo.

Now despite my antipathy to the Bush Administration's foreign policy, it seems to me that it is a perfectly reasonable position for Bush to take on the basis of US self-interest. Yet it is not a position that Europe could or should have followed. Apart from the strong moral argument that we had a responsibility to protect those facing the genocide of the Serbs, we also had the consequences of tens/hundreds of thousands of refugees. We, in our own and their interests, must have the capacity to engage without the Americans. To do this, it is a small price we pay to have a permanent EU Operational Military HQ ready for such a future eventuality.

Anneli Jäätteenmäki (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FI) Madam President, Finland does not need to be ashamed of its security policy solutions. Finland outside NATO is in good company with Sweden, Austria and Switzerland. It is easy to identify with them. Non-alignment with respect to NATO is the modern alternative for a mature state.

We have started to speak about a softer NATO, as the 'bellicose' President was exchanged for a 'peaceful' one in the United States of America. It is to be supposed that the ecstatic speeches about a soft NATO under Obama and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton will become a more common phenomenon. Let us allow some time to pass, however, and just see how NATO develops.

My own view is that NATO's fundamental nature has not changed at all, ever since the bipolar security system failed. On the other hand, the propaganda about a soft NATO has been a success.

Simply gazing in the direction of Russia (Russia, Russia, Russia) or waiting around for a new Winter War will lead nowhere. Neither is NATO the proper answer to the bigger problems facing Finland in the near future, which are mainly economic in nature.

Adrian Manole (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (RO) The evaluation of the role of the NATO-EU alliance must start with the acknowledgement that the political landscape in both Europe and the US has fundamentally changed recently, with the European Union now having a legitimate role to play in global security.

This situation requires the alliance to become 'repoliticised' so that it becomes a forum for open dialogue discussing the major issues in which it is bound to get involved. An honest transatlantic dialogue about, for example, the necessary approach to tackling terrorism is an absolute must, precisely because the allies have different perspectives about the way in which they must respond when faced with this common challenge.

In the current situation where Member States are facing an ever-increasing variety of challenges to global security, ranging from interethnic conflicts in the immediate vicinity of allied territory to global terrorist networks and proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, they must attach particular importance to the process of reflection and dialogue on this issue and support the alliance reform processes. I am referring, in particular, to the security problems affecting the areas in the immediate vicinity where the alliance can play a key role in the creation of democratic defence and security institutions in the Balkans and extended region of the Black Sea.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (RO) We need a common, coherent and up-to-date European security policy which will help strengthen our European identity and allow the EU to speak with a single, credible voice in the international arena.

The current reality we are facing, fraught with major challenges such as the economic crisis, energy security, climate change and migration management, requires cooperation and responsibility from the Member States in order to protect their common interests and promote peace, security and respect for territorial integration.

The EU can only have an impact if it speaks with a single voice and has available and uses effectively the necessary instruments, helping to strengthen cooperation with neighbouring states.

We need to think strategically, become actively involved and act consistently at a global level. We also need regional security and close ties with the relevant regional players.

Strategic partnerships with neighbouring countries to the east of the EU are a necessity, and we must invest in relations with Russia, deploying a coherent strategy with common, mutually beneficial commitments.

We need to invest in neighbouring countries, especially those to the east of the EU, and offer them the necessary incentives to continue with their reforms and be able to strengthen the EU's presence in the area. We have new instruments available, such as the Eastern Partnership, which will help us establish a new consolidated approach at a higher level with our partners in the region.

Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański (UEN), in writing. – (PL) International security is one of the greatest values for all the subjects of international relations. Nowadays, we are witnessing a redefinition of that concept and a shifting of the centre of gravity to non-military factors which threaten stability and international security. Examples of such threats are organised crime, Internet terrorism, piracy (we can see this off the coast of Somalia), climate changes and the dangers arising from the world economic crisis. The European Union, while directing its attention to building common military instruments, such as Eurocorps, the European Air Transport Fleet and the permanent EU Operations Headquarters, must not, however, forget about other threats which are no less important. More attention should be paid to building bodies and institutions which would allow us to overcome the financial situation caused by the world economic crisis, and to protect the natural environment and biological diversity. Internal threats, such as drugs, poverty in society, and Internet crime, must not be forgotten either.

All these elements are important factors which influence international security, the security of the European Union, and of every nation. Without a solution to these fundamental questions, creation of a stable European security strategy is not possible.

Flaviu Călin Rus (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The common security policy is a topic which has been debated many times and about which a great deal has been written. The European Union is an increasingly important facilitator at regional and global level. It is precisely for this reason that I feel that the European Union must be visibly active within its borders and proactive in any area of the world.

After examining the three reports today: the 2007 Annual report on the main aspects and basic choices of the CFSP, the European Security Strategy and ESDP and the role of NATO in the security architecture of the EU, I believe that we can come to three conclusions:

1. The European Union must have a common security policy capable of supporting the democracies within its borders and the partnerships with the countries neighbouring it.
2. The European Union must project the image of being a unitary whole and needs a rapid-reaction force capable of intervening at any time to support peace, democracy and human rights.
3. The European Union must consolidate its position globally and continue to act as a facilitator for stability and balance between the major powers in the world.

Katrin Saks (PSE), in writing. – (ET) Mr President, I would like to thank my colleague, Mr Vatanen, for his good report on synergy between the EU and NATO. The all-round intensification of cooperation and partnership, the reasonable use of resources and the avoidance of duplication, an appeal to members of both to be more flexible, goal-oriented and pragmatic – this report contains everything that we in Europe, and also in the European Parliament, have always emphasised in our positions.

Among other important features of the report, I found the recommendation that the candidate countries of the European Union that are also member states of NATO should be granted some temporary status in the European Defence Agency (EDA). This would definitely be a solution for the Turkey issue from NATO's point of view.

The report on the ESDP and ESS by our colleague, Mr von Wogau, generally hits the mark. The ESS report, which was approved by the Council in December, answered most of the questions that had been raised. The new aspects presented in the report and the positions guiding EU security-related activities will help the EU to stand up for its security interests more effectively, as the von Wogau report recommends. The orientation of the report towards the EU seeking cooperation with other partners is to be commended.

Thank you!

Theodor Dumitru Stolojan (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I wish to express my support for Mr Saryusz-Wolski's report which rightly emphasises that the task of guaranteeing energy security for Europe's citizens must become a major priority in the EU's common foreign and security policy.

I would like to say loud and clear: the security of our energy supplies and, in particular, diversification of the gas supply sources, will remain just a beautiful dream unless we build the Nabucco pipeline.

The Nabucco project must be adopted as a strategic goal by the whole EU. It requires both a serious amount of financial investment and, in particular, an effective European foreign and security policy. An effective policy provides guarantees of regional stability in the area through which this gas pipeline is going to run. With this goal in mind, we must make every effort to provide our Common Foreign and Security Policy with the coherent and effective structure that it so desperately requires in order to achieve tangible results.

For instance, I think that the EU needs a Senior Official for foreign energy policy who will enjoy strong political support and have at his disposal the necessary instruments to take action.

I appreciate that the EU needs to allocate sufficient financial and human resources to its Common Foreign and Security Policy in order to achieve the concrete results which European citizens are expecting from us.

Daniel Strož (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (CS) I fundamentally reject the report on European security strategy and a European security and defence policy in its current form (A6-0032/2009). This report is a typical example of the militarisation of the EU and proof of the fact that in the security sphere of the EU, military resources and measures have to replace and even supplant necessary measures of a political nature. Many of the findings and recommendations contained in the report are in direct conflict with the fact that the EU is supposed to be developed as a project for peace. It is no wonder that EU citizens, whenever they get a chance to express their opinion, take a stand against the Lisbon Treaty for reasons that include the way it establishes the militaristic nature of the EU. There is a highly aberrant and dangerous position included in the report which, on the one hand, talks about the security interests of the EU while, on the other, criticising Russia for defending its own perfectly legitimate security interests in the Caucasus.

Dushana Zdravkova (PPE-DE), in writing. – (BG) Ladies and gentlemen, the fact that we are discussing three reports relating to security and defence in this House is an expression of our great political responsibility to the citizens of Europe on the eve of the NATO summit. The established practice of adopting resolutions on the main aspects and decisions of the Council report on common foreign policy and security is an excellent opportunity to appeal to Member States to apply this practice at national level.

It is especially important to develop independent academic capacity for analysing and assessing European security and defence policy in tandem with national security policies. This will form the basis for a public debate on ESDP through a network of analysis centres based in the Member States.

It is not possible to work on an EU security and defence white paper if the Member States do not transpose the document into their national strategies. This includes strengthening national analytical capacity and the ability for computer-based learning and training to test and grasp new concepts in the area of civil-military cooperation.

We must encourage Member States to conduct a joint strategic review in the field of security to establish a sound basis for interaction between the EU and NATO in the process of developing a new strategic concept for NATO in the context of ESDP.

20. The Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean (debate)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0502/2008) by Mrs Napolitano, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean (2008/2231 (INI)).

Pasqualina Napolitano, rapporteur. – (IT) Madam President, Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, Mr Vondra, ladies and gentlemen, with this report, Parliament is proposing to make a constructive contribution to the prospect of strengthening the Euro-Mediterranean partnership.

The proposals resulting from the Paris summit on 14 July last year put forward two objectives that are worthy of our support. The first of these is to give practical shape to economic, regional and environmental integration projects and to make them more effective, by creating a secretariat entrusted with this task, receiving public and private funding; the second is to strengthen political dialogue within the whole process, through new institutions such as the co-presidency, the summit of Heads of State or Government and the regular Foreign Ministers meetings. In this context, I would like to emphasise the role of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, which was recognised in the Paris text and then in the Marseille document.

Parliament wants to help find a way out of the serious stalemate that has followed the tragic events in Gaza. Much depends, however, on the policies that the new Israeli Government formed after the elections will adopt. Nonetheless, I would like to point out that the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly will meet in the near future and demonstrate the role that parliaments have to play, even in this difficult situation.

We wish to highlight the value of institutions that involve both the European Union and the countries in the south and east of the Mediterranean while, at the same time, signalling that it is essential not to reduce the entire process to a solely intergovernmental approach. We hope for widespread involvement of civil society and social partners, not least because the economic crisis can worsen the already endemic and terrible problems such as unemployment and increasing migratory pressure, making this phenomenon even more difficult to manage. We are calling for greater attention to be paid to the issues of human rights that affect the behaviour of all the partner countries to a greater or lesser degree.

As regards the institutions, let us remember that with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Union may be assured of coherent and structured representation through the new figures of the President of the Council and the European Foreign Minister. In the meantime, it would be beneficial to ensure continuity in the European presence, at least in the co-presidency. We know that the Czech Presidency has been sensitive to this, and hope that the Swedish Presidency, too, will be willing to accept this message.

Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank all my fellow Members and the officials of the various political groups and committees that have given their opinion. They have all contributed to the drafting of this report, which I believe enjoys widespread support.

Alexandr Vondra, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Madam President, I am grateful for this opportunity to contribute to today's discussion on the issue of the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean. I know that Parliament follows this with particular interest. Pasqualina Napolitano is to be commended in particular. As a result, the motion for a resolution on which you will be voting later constitutes a valuable contribution to our work together.

The Paris Summit last July created the Union for the Mediterranean and established a partnership built on the existing Barcelona Process. The current rotating presidency gives priority to strengthening this partnership. Even though the Lisbon Treaty has not yet come into force, I can assure you that, in the spirit of co-ownership, we are placing a particular focus on the development of this initiative and, in particular, the regional projects. These are important. They offer concrete signs to the citizens of the region that the partnership works in their interest.

The Union for the Mediterranean is not the only mechanism for cooperation. The bilateral dimension continues under the European neighbourhood policy, and is complemented in some cases by the pre-accession framework – as well as, in the case of Mauritania, the ACP framework.

These approaches together encourage reform within individual countries, and reinforce regional cooperation. The neighbourhood policy, of course, also has an important eastern dimension, and we very much welcome the parallel development of this policy.

The Paris Summit agreed to take work forward in four key areas: de-pollution of the Mediterranean; maritime and land highways; civil protection; and the development of alternative energies through, for example, the Mediterranean Solar Plan.

There is also particular focus on higher education and research, as well as on support for business through the Mediterranean Business Development Initiative. The technical aspects of project proposals put forward in this area will be handled by the secretariat to be established in Barcelona, as was agreed in Marseilles last year.

In addition to these specific project areas, the ministerial conferences of the Union for the Mediterranean will address a number of global challenges that affect us all. These include the search for peace and security in the region, the social and geopolitical impact of the economic crisis, environmental concerns, the management of migratory flows, and the role of women in our respective societies.

There are two particular areas of cooperation which I know are important to this Parliament and which we also fully support. The first is interparliamentary cooperation through the creation of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and its committees. This initiative is key to developing a strong parliamentary dimension to the Union for the Mediterranean. It will, as is pointed out in your resolution, serve to reinforce its democratic legitimacy. It will also help promote the basic values which lie at the heart of the European

Union. We very much welcome the way in which you and your President have embraced this particular initiative, and offer you our full support.

The second area which I believe should be a particular priority for us is the development of intercultural relations. This is absolutely crucial if we are to encourage greater understanding between cultures in the Mediterranean region. Civil society, local social and regional partners all need to be involved. The Anna Lindh Foundation has a particularly important role to play in this area.

The Union for the Mediterranean offers us the potential for developing better relations among its members. Recent events have shown that this is not an easy enterprise, but they have also underlined the importance of our continuing to work to this end. We are only too aware of the difficulties faced by the populations in the region as a result of the crisis in Gaza. As you know, this has led to the postponement of meetings of the Union for the Mediterranean, but the Presidency believes that regional cooperation and dialogue is the way to achieve peace, build confidence and create prosperity and we certainly expect to resume work within the Union for the Mediterranean as soon as possible.

Therefore, a démarche of the Czech EU Presidency and the French Union for the Mediterranean Co-Presidency, on behalf of the EU members of the Union for the Mediterranean, possibly together with the Egyptian Co-Presidency, addressed to our Arab partners, is just being prepared. Its purpose is to appeal for a resumption of all Union for the Mediterranean activities automatically and without any conditionality immediately after the League of Arab States Doha Summit at the end of March. We intend to use the opportunity of the Donor Conference on Gaza, which will be held on 2 March in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt, for further consideration by the three Ministers of Foreign Affairs: Karel Schwarzenberg, the Czech Foreign Minister; Bernard Kouchner, the French Foreign Minister; and the Foreign Minister of Egypt.

IN THE CHAIR: MR SIWIEC

Vice-President

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Mrs Napoletano, first allow me to congratulate you on the work done, since it has allowed a report to be produced that is genuinely important on several levels.

Firstly, because it is a truly positive and constructive contribution from the European Parliament to the definition of a coherent Euro-Mediterranean policy, a challenge to which we are deeply committed.

Then, as you rightly point out, the Union for the Mediterranean must be supplemented. It must not be purely intergovernmental, but must be rightly supplemented by opening it up to the participation of other players, such as local and regional authorities. It is important to intensify the parliamentary dimension by reinforcing the role of the Parliamentary Assembly, and to establish a lasting involvement for civil society.

It is true the Union for the Mediterranean's role is to develop the joint nature, at an institutional and political level, of a regional partnership in need of a relaunch. However, it is all also true that this can only be done on the basis of the Barcelona *acquis*, which needs to be extended and consolidated.

Regional cooperation financed by the Commission is part of this *acquis*. There is, therefore, no reason to call it into question today. On the contrary, it supports and guarantees the coherence of the European Union's action in the region, especially as its objectives are perfectly compatible with the ambitions of the European neighbourhood policy, the main framework for our bilateral relations with the countries of the region.

The same is true for compliance with Community methods applied to the mechanisms for making decisions and setting priorities within the European Union, as the Union for the Mediterranean is an initiative that forms an integral part of the European framework.

Mr President, the constituent summit of the Union for the Mediterranean had, as you know, the triple objective of reinjecting political vigour into Euro-Mediterranean relations, of changing the institutional governance of these relations in favour of a joint leadership of the initiative and, finally, of crystallising multilateral cooperation between the European Union and its Mediterranean partners around structural projects, which will bring sub-regional integration and are likely to reduce the discrepancies in development between the two sides of the Mediterranean.

Indeed, we must reduce these discrepancies via social economic development, more trade and increased investments. We must counter ideological radicalism, for which the lack of development and a sense of

injustice provide fertile ground, with dialogue and political solutions to conflicts. We must pursue responsible and concerted migration policies, as you said, to benefit from demographic stabilisation in Europe and the demographic growth of the Mediterranean countries. There you have several examples of the challenges we must face together with our partners in the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean.

Indeed, we know that we cannot achieve these objectives without parliamentary support, both from the European Parliament and the Euromed Parliamentary Assembly. This is the spirit in which we are working, with the firm conviction that, on all these issues, the European Commission will be able to rely on your collaboration, and I would like to thank you for this in advance.

However we also know, of course, that, faced with the most worrying situation in the Middle East following the war in Gaza – we discussed this today – we do indeed have a problem: we cannot leave the Union for the Mediterranean in a political vacuum. It is what we have always said. Indeed, it is a fact.

This has given rise to the current suspension of the work that, personally, I regret greatly, but, of course, we hope to get to work again at some stage. The meeting to be held in Sharm el-Sheikh, where the Commission will, of course, have an important role to play as cosponsor, will be very important. I hope that various other meetings will be held afterwards. A lot of work has been done already, in fact, and when the Commission is working, it takes it very seriously.

Moreover, much has been done on the rules governing the secretariat which are in place and which should allow Barcelona to start its work.

Vural Öger, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on International Trade*. – (DE) Mr President, Mrs Napoletano, ladies and gentlemen, the Union for the Mediterranean should revive the Barcelona Process, which was launched in 1995. Unfortunately, we must face the fact today that the recent Middle East crisis has meant the project has not come to fruition. The opening of the secretariat in Barcelona has been postponed indefinitely, and the money promised cannot come in.

Thus, there have been no tangible results so far, which I greatly regret. I ask myself whether we have been concentrating too much on institutions, and whether this is the reason for the current impasse. Have we underestimated the influence of political crises on the Union for the Mediterranean?

How can we ensure the continuation of the projects? In the history of European integration, we have been very successful in the economic and commercial fields. It is for this very reason that we in the Committee on International Trade have considered how our successful mechanisms could be applied to our neighbours in southern Europe. One objective is the creation of a free trade area by 2010, but this, too, has ground to a halt. It is precisely because political conflicts are blocking this process that we should strengthen the economic field.

International trade could have a beneficial effect not only on the economic but also – and particularly – on the political and social situation in the region. Regional economic integration is crucial in this regard. Our southern neighbours must also cooperate more closely with one other.

At the same time, the countries that have already developed a network of bilateral trade relations should be convinced of the added value of a multilateral dimension. Communicating the benefits of economic integration to local citizens will play an important role in this. This would be one step towards stabilising the situation in the southern Mediterranean. I wish to see this for the sake of us all, particularly the citizens in the region.

Íñigo Méndez de Vigo, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs*. – (ES) A poem is never finished, only abandoned, said a Mediterranean poet born in Sète. I believe that something similar happened to the Barcelona Process: it was not finished, but it was abandoned – in part at least.

That is why Parliament believes that the efforts made under the French Presidency to breathe new life into the Barcelona Process are important. That is also why, in the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, we have actively collaborated on the report by Mrs Napoletano, whom I wish to thank for her patience and understanding.

Why was the Committee on Constitutional Affairs concerned with this subject, Mr President? For several reasons. First, to guarantee the continuity of the Barcelona Process with the Union for the Mediterranean. Second, to avoid duplicating structures and embed this process into the institutional framework of the Union. Third, as Mrs Ferrero-Waldner has already said, to say that it is not simply an intergovernmental process but to emphasise the parliamentary dimension.

That is why, in the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, we have been insistent on issues already raised by President Pöttering on 13 July 2008. These refer to how the Parliamentary Assembly must meet once a year, be organised into groups on the basis of political families and produce consultative reports.

We also tried to help the Council with the important decisions that it had to make. Mr Vondra, this House wishes to cooperate with the Council and we laid down the criteria that the headquarters of this new Union for the Mediterranean needed to meet. Coincidentally, these criteria coincided with a city in a country that I know very well; in fact, the Committee on Constitutional Affairs decided that Barcelona could be a good headquarters. Moreover, the ministers recognised it shortly afterwards, which, Mr President, reflects once again this desire to cooperate with the Council.

I began by quoting Paul Valéry; permit me to finish by citing a verse by Paul Valéry as well: *'Tu n'as que moi pour contenir tes craintes!'*

I believe that to soothe the fears that there could be on both shores of the Mediterranean, there could be nothing better than the success of this Union for the Mediterranean. Let us hope so, Mr President, and thanks, once again, to Mrs Napolitano for your understanding and help.

Vito Bonsignore, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I congratulate Mrs Napolitano for her efforts and the balance she has brought to this issue, and thank Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, who is always attentive to our work, for the important job she is doing around the world.

We must all demonstrate great unity because the problems and challenges we have to face in the Mediterranean are particularly difficult. We must strive for a stronger, more influential role for Europe, given that strategically we are side by side with the United States.

The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats has gone to great lengths, over the years, to build an ever-stronger, ever-more active role for Europe. Funding is not enough; funding alone is no longer sufficient; what is required is substantial renewed political action. One of the many shared challenges is that of tackling immigration into Europe. This problem cannot be addressed through cooperation with political opponents, nor can it be addressed through populism; rather it requires rigorous controls to ensure compliance with the law and the Convention on Human Rights.

The Union for the Mediterranean, the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly and the common foreign policy in relation to the south are all excellent and legitimate tools that can be used to carve out a stronger, more significant and credible role for Europe.

For this reason, my political group will vote against the amendments tabled by the far left; we believe that they are excessively controversial and not very constructive. My political wing seeks to give renewed impetus to this valuable activity, which will become essential in the near future, and therefore we support the re-launch of the EMPA, no longer as a mere discussion forum, but as a place where important joint decisions can be made for our future and the future of all those living on the shores of the Mediterranean.

Carlos Carnero González, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (ES) On behalf of the Socialist Group, I would first of all like to congratulate Mrs Napolitano on the excellent report that she is presenting to us this afternoon, but above all, and most importantly, because she has been a Euro-Mediterranean *da prima ora*. Without her work and her impetus, we would not have been able to imagine firstly a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Forum, or subsequently a Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, and we would not now be in a position to demand the role that the representatives of citizens should have in what we are trying to set up.

I would like to follow on from my colleague Mr Méndez de Vigo, who always quotes great literary figures, by recalling a phrase from Shakespeare's *King Lear*, in which it is said that 'The worst is not, so long as we can say, "This is the worst"'. We have strived to do the opposite, because at a time when the situation in the Middle East is worse than ever, we have established an instrument whose aim is for the region as a whole to contribute to political, economic and social development, as a basic framework for resolving conflicts. This is what the Union for the Mediterranean is, after all. This is a Union for the Mediterranean that is not *ex novo*, but has come from the deep roots of the Barcelona Process, creating new institutions such as the Permanent Secretariat, which will be in Barcelona. It is something that we welcome as Europeans, as Mediterraneans, as Spaniards and as the parliamentary representatives who asked for it at the time. It is also an acceptance of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly as what it should be: a way for parliamentarians and citizens to express themselves within this Union.

The EMPA does need to be given what it deserves: the tasks of consultation, monitoring and proposal. The Union for the Mediterranean needs to be based on joint management, it needs to have sufficient funding and be focused on regional integration and provide for the needs of citizens. In this way, we will be able to build a Mediterranean of peace, solidarity and also an alliance of civilisations.

Marios Matsakis, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, I also wish to congratulate Ms Napoletano, not only on the excellent report she has produced, but also for the valuable cooperation she has offered to the shadow rapporteurs. The subject matter of the report is extremely important as it deals with the prospect of having a Euro-Mediterranean Union of states bound together through friendship and cooperation and aiming at the common goal of achieving peace, stability and prosperity for their citizens.

This is not an easy task, not least because regional conflicts, such as the Israeli-Palestinian problem, are not easy to resolve – or even to cope with, sometimes. Nevertheless, hope must never be given up and the Union for the Mediterranean can only be of help in keeping such hope alive. And who knows? Perhaps it would help to turn hope into reality in the form of long-term stability and lasting solutions to regional problems.

It is important to note in this debate the valuable contribution made to the initiation of the proposed project by the French Government, and it is also important to reiterate that the formation of the Union for the Mediterranean is not offered as an alternative to Turkey's planned accession to the EU. We should make sure that the Turkish people know and understand that there is no such hidden aim or trickery.

Finally, with regard to the amendments before us, the ALDE Group, with the PSE Group, have agreed on five compromise amendments aiming to improve further the report. The additional five amendments submitted by the GUE/NGL Group are not thought to be very helpful and will not be supported by my group.

My congratulations once again to the rapporteur.

Salvatore Tatarella, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I wholeheartedly support any initiative aimed at developing the Union for the Mediterranean.

From this perspective, I hope to see the parliamentary role of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly strengthened, including by stepping up the Assembly's relations with the Mediterranean partners and enabling it to make recommendations to meetings of Foreign Ministers and to participate as an observer at meetings of Heads of State or Government, ministerial meetings and preparatory meetings held by senior officials.

I would like to emphasise the need to strengthen the role and initiatives of the Facility for Euro-Mediterranean Investment and Partnership and to create a EuroMediterranean Investment Bank, which was announced some time ago but which has not yet been carried out.

I support the proposal to create a Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly along the lines of similar, European, institutions, in order to involve regions and cities further, and a Euro-Mediterranean Economic and Social Committee to involve the social partners and civil society.

I also welcome the proposal to establish a Euro-Mediterranean Energy Community within the framework of a policy aimed at implementing large-scale projects in the fields of renewable energy and energy infrastructure.

Furthermore, I hope that the Union will play an ever-more effective role in the search for peace, in conflict resolution, in the strengthening of democracy, in the defence of religious freedom and in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking, organised crime and people trafficking.

Lastly, the Union cannot evade the task of taking concerted action with the states involved to manage migratory policies and flows in the Mediterranean area. It can no longer focus solely on security, the rule of law and repressing illegal immigration, but must also, and above all, direct its attention to active policies, sources of shared rules and targeted and sustainable employment.

David Hammerstein, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (ES) Thank you, Mrs Napoletano, for this excellent report. A couple of days before the war broke out in Gaza, I was representing Parliament and the EMPA in Jordan, at the last ministerial conference that took place before activities were once again suspended due to the violence in the Middle East. It was a conference on water. It was a ministerial conference on one of the key issues on which there needs to be cooperation across the Mediterranean, which is going to create conflicts, is a question of survival and is also the target of some possible large projects in the Mediterranean, involving solar energy, transferring water and many other things.

This is how crucial it is. These activities have been suspended and I hope that soon the Union's activities for the Mediterranean will resume and that there will be progress in the Middle East.

We have had some very ambitious objectives in the Mediterranean. The results have been much more modest, especially in the fields of human rights, democracy and the environment.

We also need to promote the South-South market and cooperation between the countries of the South, and not just be obsessed with a big free market in the Mediterranean, which is not preceded by cooperation between countries that have deeply entrenched conflicts, one after the other.

At the same time, we need to deal with the energy crisis. The energy crisis and the current economic crisis could represent an opportunity to move forward with very important projects, both for Europe and for our neighbours to the South, such as plans for thermosolar plants (high-temperature solar energy) and the creation of intelligent, clean networks to connect North Africa, the Middle East and Europe in a vast, clean plan to fight climate change and the economic crisis.

Willy Meyer Pleite, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (ES) Mr President, I would like to begin by thanking Mrs Napoletano for her work. Secondly, I would like to say that as shadow rapporteur, I have asked my group not to vote in favour of this report, for two fundamental reasons.

Firstly, because the most recent conflict, the most recent Israeli attack on Gaza, is of such magnitude that it cannot go unpunished. Everything has a limit, it is not the first time, but this attack on Palestinian sovereignty is of such magnitude that it genuinely prevents the Annapolis agreement from becoming a reality and blocks the prospect of the creation of a Palestinian State, which is the only possibility of having a Union for the Mediterranean in peace and solidarity.

The second reason why I have recommended that we do not vote in favour is because with regard to the free trade area, regional differences are not taken into account. We feel that it is essential that trade issues be taken into account in terms of treating everyone equally, taking into account regional differences and the particular characteristics of each country.

Luca Romagnoli (NI). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I think that I, on the other hand, will vote in favour of Mrs Napoletano's motion for a resolution, because in my opinion, it is undoubtedly strategic to identify major projects to be carried out and equally useful to highlight the need to adopt a 'programme agreements' approach in order to do so. These agreements should, however, be based – and I believe it is very important to emphasise this – on the principle of subsidiarity.

Frankly, I am somewhat puzzled by the call to give fresh impetus to the management of common migration policies, although I recognise the importance of collaboration between the Member States, and not only this; collaboration with the countries on the southern shores of the Mediterranean is certainly important and should be implemented.

In all honesty, I also have some doubts about the economic and commercial initiatives intended to pave the way for the creation of a Euro-Mediterranean free trade area. This is not because I am prejudiced, but because I would appreciate some clarification on how it could be mutually beneficial.

Ioannis Kasoulides (PPE-DE). – Mr President, first of all, I would like to congratulate Ms Napoletano on her report. Certainly, the Union for the Mediterranean is a significant step forward in the efforts for the Euro-Mediterranean partnership. One of the impediments to this partnership so far has been visibility: the capability of the populations of the partners to acknowledge the impact of the Barcelona Process and our Union for the Mediterranean.

Let me give you an example. When I was asked to prepare a report on de-pollution of the Mediterranean, the programmes involved are the following: the Mediterranean Hotspot Investment Programme, the Strategy for Water in the Mediterranean, the EU Marine Strategy, the UNEP/MAP, the Mediterranean Strategy for Sustainable Development, the Mediterranean Environmental Technical Assistance Programme, the Mediterranean EU water initiative and the MYIS, which have been running under the umbrella of the Horizon 2020 programme. This fragmentation makes visibility suffer.

The other impediment is the Middle East problem. I salute the position of Mr Solana that the Quartet will this time operate in a different way to the past. This is not due to the lack of will on the part of the European Union, but due to the previous policy of the American Administration. I hope that, this time, with the dispatch of Mr Mitchell to the area, political progress will be made. We have done a lot on this issue. I visited Lebanon

very recently, and I saw there that UNIFIL, with the presence of the European contingents, makes a repeat of hostilities in southern Lebanon and Israel impossible.

Jamila Madeira (PSE). – (PT) My thanks go to my colleague, Pasqualina Napoletano, for her excellent report. Fourteen years after Barcelona and five years after the first Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly, we have the Union for the Mediterranean with economic and parliamentary power, with civil society, and with the heads of government deciding together. Everyone wants to do more and better in this territory where 720 million citizens represent real potential for development and peace in the world. Restricting ourselves solely to the economic and business dimensions is clearly a mistake. Responding to the growth crises naturally requires a political response, but responding to the humanitarian crises, to emergency situations and to military crises, such as the one witnessed at the end of 2008 and beginning of 2009, is crucial.

Politicians and citizens must respond to the world's problems. The world asked them for answers and yet, months later, we, the citizens and politicians, particularly in a platform such as the Union for the Mediterranean, are still taking time to react. I hope that, at the very least, this time of crisis will make us learn and progress. Although we can only learn through our mistakes, making progress by speeding up the reaction is absolutely crucial.

Miguel Portas (GUE/NGL). – (PT) In her speech, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner summarised the objectives of the new Union. In truth, this Union was born during the French Presidency under the star sign of mistakes. The first mistake was to remove from its agenda the conflicts in the region, particularly the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the Western Sahara conflict. The second mistake is for the Union to try and assert itself by sharing economic and environmental projects, without questioning the free trade context in which it sits. The third mistake is to insinuate that there is a possibility of transferring to this Union Turkey's application for accession to the European Union.

Mrs Napoletano's report does not tackle the first mistake, and that limits its scope. No economic and regional integration will come to fruition if the Union does not have the courage to tackle existing conflicts and to do this based on international law. On the other hand, the report does contain clear recommendations on the second and third mistakes, and these are all heading in the right direction.

The Union for the Mediterranean cannot act as the waiting room or back door for Turkey, provided that it meets the accession criteria, and the Union for the Mediterranean cannot be an add-on to the European free trade strategy, without any social integration policies.

The report's recommendations are important: a Union with a citizen and representative dimension involving the League of Arab States; regional projects with a social dimension; and the extension of projects to areas essential to people's lives, namely water, agriculture and education. There are also clear rules on the programme agreements and a Euro-Mediterranean Investment Bank.

The Union was born with mistakes, but at least it exists. I support this report because I believe that this Union will end up being what we manage to make of it. I therefore give it the benefit of my support.

Luís Queiró (PPE-DE). – (PT) Many of the issues of greater political importance to Europe involve the Mediterranean Basin. The 'Union for the Mediterranean' initiative therefore deserves our support as it can give new impetus to a process that is necessary and useful, but which has not had the requisite success or visibility. The question raised concerns how we can pursue this strategy. The model followed in Barcelona has not had the expected results. Can this new partnership bear fruit?

Mrs Napoletano's report goes against this perception. However, we do not want the Union to suffer the same problem as the Barcelona Process. It apparently encompasses many projects and many areas of action, but the priorities are not correctly ranked. Relegating intercultural and inter-societal understanding among the peoples on both shores to paragraph 26 and leaving the issue of democratising and promoting human rights to paragraph 27 and migratory flows to paragraph 28, after having talked so much about other sectors and other issues, leaves a mistaken impression of what the priorities of this partnership are, or must be.

There must be a clear strategy. In our opinion, this strategy must involve offering more benefits and more cooperation to our neighbours, but also asking them for more results at the economic, social and democratic levels, and concentrating on well-defined and perhaps a smaller number of sectors to prevent all areas having equal priority, which runs the risk of nothing ultimately being a priority. Clearly, this can only be achieved with appropriate support and funding. Recognising the need for an investment bank for the Mediterranean

must ultimately be favourably received. It is essential to be ambitious, which means properly doing everything within our power.

Finally, Mr President, I must mention the Middle East conflict. This process, although not an alternative to peace negotiations, can, and must, make a contribution to better understanding, interdependence and mutual respect between the opposing sides. These are essential factors – as we are all well aware – for bringing peace to the region.

President. – The list of speakers has been exhausted. There are four requests from the Chamber for leave to speak under the ‘catch the eye’ procedure.

Christopher Beazley (PPE-DE). – Mr President, would the Commissioner, in her reply to Parliament, explain exactly how the newly phrased ‘Union for the Mediterranean’ – as opposed to ‘Mediterranean Union’ – remains an EU policy? I think it is very important that she also considers two other EU seas: the Black Sea, and its synergy, and the Baltic Sea, and its strategy.

My country has an interest in the Mediterranean. I think we have observer status too. Member States are Commonwealth members, and – though I do not wish to irritate my Spanish colleagues – Gibraltar, as far as I know, still is technically part of Her Majesty’s Dominions.

It is very important that this is not just some sort of regional hive-off in which the rest of the EU is not fully involved – as I hope they will be fully involved in the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE). – (RO) The economic and social development and prosperity of the citizens from the states in the Union for the Mediterranean must be sustainable. I feel that the newly created Union for the Mediterranean must also tackle the issue of climate change.

Approximately one billion citizens live in the Euro-Mediterranean region, which produces a third of the world’s GDP. Regional cooperation is most needed in the area of tackling threats to the environment.

Population growth and the reduction in the amount of precipitation in this region, due to climate change, make drinking water one of the main elements at risk in this area. Water shortages, water pollution, shortage of water treatment plants, oil spills caused by maritime accidents, forest clearances and soil erosion must feature among the concerns of the partnership for the Mediterranean.

I believe that one of the fundamental values promoted by the Union for the Mediterranean must be environmental protection and the fight against climate change, both in terms of adapting to it and of reducing the causes contributing to it.

Marie Anne Isler Béguin (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, Minister, Commissioner, I would also like to thank Mrs Napolitano since, during the first discussion on the Union for the Mediterranean, I was rather sceptical and whilst this may still be the case, I now believe that there is hope.

The challenges are absolutely enormous. Do we have the resources to confront them? We know that we do not. The objectives are certainly noble: environment, energy, the fight against desertification, immigration, etc. We must not, however, just descend into a disconnected list that would only lead to disappointments on the other side of the Mediterranean.

However, if you would allow me, Commissioner, I would like to mention a particular country that is not a Mediterranean coastal state but has been included; it is an ACP country and also a member of the Union for the Mediterranean. This country, Mauritania, is today going through a very serious political crisis. I think that, as a partner in the Union for the Mediterranean, as an ACP country and in the name of the neighbourhood policy, this country deserves our support to help it get out of this crisis.

I believe that this is what the two parties to the conflict are asking us to do and we have a responsibility to commit ourselves to help it out of this major political crisis.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – Mr President, water is a key issue of cooperation across the Mediterranean. So too, I hope, is a pan-European super-grid, or HVDC interconnection, including a connector between Spain and the north-western coast of Africa.

It is of critical importance to mainstream the use of renewable energy including wind, hydro, various solar technologies and others. Being able to rely on it at peak demand depends entirely on spreading the input into our grids from as many sources as possible so that the output can always respond to demand. If the

wind is not blowing off the north-west coast of Ireland – and Ireland has been described as the Saudi Arabia of Europe in terms of wind energy! – it will be off the north-west coast of Africa, or the solar thermal operations in the Mediterranean, especially Spain, will be feeding the grid, or the range of PV installations across the region will be inputting.

This scenario is a win-win for the Mediterranean region, for energy security, for energy politics and, above all, for a serious regional decrease in our carbon dioxide emissions from our current dependence on fossil fuels for industries, transport and heating and cooling.

President. – Mrs Figueiredo has joined us and will present the opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality under the 'catch-the-eye' procedure.

Ilda Figueiredo, draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality. – (PT) The opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality highlights the need for all Member States to pay closer attention to ratifying the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, and all other United Nations and International Labour Organisation human rights instruments. It also draws attention to the situation of women, regretting that no special consideration has been given to this issue in the Commission communication, particularly in the 'projects' dimension, which should include the promotion of geographical, economic and social cohesion and which should always take into account the issue of equal opportunities for men and women and the gender perspective.

Finally, I simply want to stress the concern about poverty and social exclusion, which seriously affect women. I will end with a final word on the serious cases of Palestine and the Western Sahara, where women and children are the main victims of war and exploitation, in short the whole process of discrimination that affects these people and which seriously affects women and children.

Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council. – Mr President, first of all, thank you very much for this useful debate, which brought forward a number of ideas. You have prepared a really interesting document.

Where are we now? We know why we are doing this: the Mediterranean region is the cradle of our civilisation and therefore it is logical that we in the European Union want to give it special attention. Last year, there was a French initiative, and we need to keep this process in motion and to develop its full potential.

So we know why we are doing this and what we want to achieve. Many of you have stressed how important it is that the Mediterranean becomes an area of peace, stability and security, where democratic principles, human rights and fundamental freedoms – including gender equality and the role of women in society – are upheld and fully respected.

We also know how we want to achieve that, so we have the Union for the Mediterranean and a broad spectrum of activities. You are very well aware of the most important areas, the emphasis on renewables, the solar programme and the water management programme. I was in Portugal just a week ago and that country could serve as an example of how to develop a sustainable, dynamic programme for a renewable source of energy, which is very important for the Mediterranean region.

We just need to move. When we met last year, both in Paris and in Marseilles, we could not have anticipated the situation that would arise in Gaza, but the Presidency, together with the Commission, is doing enough to be able to start with the implementation of all the agreements which we reached last year. So I think we can reasonably expect to move on after the end of March, as I informed you, with the latest activity of the Presidency.

The programme of our activities for 2009 is very substantial: about nine sectoral ministerial conferences are scheduled. There are the resources which, as far as I know, come to over EUR 1 billion. So I think we are ready. There are certain realities related to the situation in Gaza which have caused some delays, but I believe we will be able to overcome that.

Thank you very much for a useful debate. We are certainly ready to assist you further.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, much remains to be said, of course, but I will start with the following question: what is the Community dimension in all this?

Firstly, I can tell you that the Community dimension is important in this issue, because the Union for the Mediterranean project is based on the Barcelona process and has also inherited the *acquis* of the Barcelona process. All the *acquis* is there then. We have worked a great deal on that.

Secondly, the Union for the Mediterranean is part of the framework of the neighbourhood policy. The neighbourhood policy represents the bilateral policy and the Barcelona process, while the Union for the Mediterranean constitutes the multilateral part. Of course, I can also tell you that the Black Sea and the Baltic Sea are part of the same framework, although they are in the North. Do not worry then. Fortunately, everything is there. This, in fact, is what the French Presidency wanted, in other words, to share the copresidency with the Mediterranean countries – as I said before – and to work together.

Now, we – the Commission – are also managing all the future Community projects, because it is necessary and because we are also under Parliament's control. Only those projects that may be financed by private funding are managed differently.

The secretariat, which will be located in Barcelona, will promote the projects. That is how we imagine the promotion, then we will try promotion using private funding because, for the rest, that will remain under the Commission's control. The decision will be taken initially by the 27, as always, and afterwards, once again, the copresidency will be able to work in cooperation with the 143, the South and the North.

As for Mauritania, Mrs Isler Béguin, it participates only in multilateral relations, namely the Union for the Mediterranean, but is not involved in the neighbourhood policy. That is the only difference.

That said, I might add that, despite this temporary suspension, we are working at the Commission in a constructive spirit, of course, to implement the four to six projects that have been put forward as priorities. These are civil protection, de-pollution of the Mediterranean sea, maritime highways and also a solar plan, within the framework of which we are doing a lot of work on renewable energy, particularly solar energy, as the latter, along with wind energy and other energy sources, is very important.

In total, the Union for the Mediterranean can now benefit from financial support worth EUR 60 million in the 2008-2009 budget, particularly via regional programmes. Moreover, EUR 50 million has already been committed to the Neighbourhood Investment Fund to support investment projects in the region.

We also wanted to support the promotion of university exchanges and that is why, for example, I decided to extend the Erasmus Mundus programme to the countries of the southern Mediterranean to offer them extra university grants.

As regards the issue of women, Mrs Isler Béguin, we are naturally also involved as it appears in the Barcelona *acquis*. I remember that I was at the first women's conference for the Mediterranean, held in 2007 in Istanbul. We continue, of course, to deal with this issue.

However there is still, as you know, on the one hand, the bilateral aspect, concerning the relations with each country and, on the other, the multilateral aspect, which is now one of the core concerns of the Union for the Mediterranean.

I would just like to say a quick word about the secretariat: we envisage the creation of a drafting committee that will soon be handed the responsibility, in particular, of preparing the secretariat's legal statutes. The Commission has already made much progress in the preparatory work. These statutes will confer a legal personality on the secretariat; then they will need to be formally approved by the senior officials of the Union for the Mediterranean.

To conclude, I would like to tell you again that the participation of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly as an observer at all the meetings of the Union for the Mediterranean is very important and we support the reinforcement of this role within the Union for the Mediterranean. Moreover, when Mrs Kratsa went to Marseille, we gave her a lot of support on this issue.

I believe that I have raised the most important points. Of course, there is still a lot to be said on the subject.

Pasqualina Napolitano, *rapporteur*. – (IT) Mr President, Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, Mr Vondra, ladies and gentlemen, I think this debate has been very useful and has clarified certain aspects of our fairly complicated system of instruments for bilateral and multilateral partnership with the countries of the south.

I subscribe to the explanation Mrs Ferrero-Waldner gave, pointing out that the Barcelona *acquis* remains in place, and that for precisely this reason, we in Parliament would perhaps have preferred the first definition,

which was: 'The Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean'. Perhaps it would then have been clearer that we were reinforcing a system for which there was already an established basis.

Similarly, I hope – I say so quite openly, I will no longer be rapporteur – but I hope that Europe's institutional framework can itself evolve. Why? Because once we have a European Foreign Minister who will, in part, represent the Commission and the Council, I hope that this minister will not be a 28th foreign minister to add to all the others but, at least on the European side, the Member States will feel that they are represented by this person. There will then perhaps be no need to add more states to the Union, but if we have a senior representative in the Foreign Minister, we may be able to consolidate the role of the European Union. This is something we have all worked towards, and so we give our wholehearted support not only to the fact that the regional programmes should continue but also, as the Commissioner knows, that Parliament attaches great importance to these programmes, which have arguably produced better results.

Thank you all for this debate.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 19 February 2009.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (PSE), in writing. – (PL) Close partnership between the European Union and the countries of the Mediterranean Basin should be based, first and foremost, on respect for human rights and the rule of law. The proposal entitled 'Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean', adopted in Paris on 13 July 2008, contributes towards peace and prosperity and may be an important step towards economic and territorial integration, as well as ecological and climatic cooperation.

It is a pity that since the launching of the Barcelona Process, no substantial progress has been made in some of the partner countries as regards adherence to, and respect for, some of the common values and principles highlighted in the 1995 Barcelona Declaration, to which they subscribed (especially as regards democracy, human rights and the rule of law).

In the countries of the Mediterranean Basin, the incidence of poverty and social exclusion, which seriously affect women and children, is disturbing. It is essential that Member States and partners engaged in the Barcelona Process emphasise inclusion of the gender perspective in all policies and specific measures which promote equal opportunities for men and women. All States taking part in the Barcelona Process: Union for the Mediterranean should ratify both the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and all other United Nations and International Labour Organisation human rights instruments as soon as possible.

Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE), in writing. – I welcome the efforts made to further develop the EU's relations in the Euromed region, but I would like also to underline that the EU should not neglect its two other seas – the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. The Baltic Sea strategy will be one of the priorities under the Swedish Presidency. Also, the Black Sea Synergy carries strategic importance. The EU has to take care and find a common spirit in developing all these regions in a balanced manner. The EU is an integrated community and the long-term strategic development of all its regions has equal importance.

There is clearly a need to have a close partnership with non-EU countries in the Mediterranean based on respect for human rights and the rule of law. Regrettably, there are still several countries that have serious problems in this domain. I urge the EU Member States to address these issues with the utmost seriousness.

Involving the Arab League is a significant opportunity to bring all states together to jointly find solutions for conflicts in the region. I call on the EU Member States to take a balanced stand and play the role of negotiator rather than taking sides in different conflict situations. Only by being balanced can we contribute to achieving long-term peace in Middle-East.

21. One-minute speeches on matters of political importance

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

Csaba Sógor (PPE-DE). – (HU) In Romania, the history of Székely Land's autonomy goes back several hundred years. The founding documents of the modern Romanian state guaranteed the regional autonomy of Székely Land, which existed even during communist times.

Taking into consideration the different forms of autonomy guaranteed in EU states, on 8 February 2009, in Sepsiszentgyörgy (Sfântu Gheorghe), a crowd several thousand strong demanded that the President withdraw his offensive statements toward Hungarians in Transylvania, guarantee representation in state institutions commensurate to ethnic populations, cease targeted relocations into the area, stop deliberately crippling the economy of Székely Land, expedite the return of ecclesiastical and public property, halt the expansion of military units, establish state-funded independent Hungarian universities, recognise Hungarian as an official language of the region and recognise collective rights and the regional autonomy of Székely Land.

Iliana Malinova Iotova (PSE). – (BG) We must congratulate the Lower House of the Czech Parliament for ratifying the Lisbon Treaty. This is yet another victory for the European idea and further proof that ever more people believe in European values. And for that reason, I appeal to us to set ourselves apart from those who would encroach upon these values and destroy our belief in them.

How can we write up our fundamental rights in gold in the Charter on the one hand, while tolerate them being scorned and denounced at the same time? We speak of religious and ethnic tolerance, and the rights of the elderly to a dignified life and to participate actively in it while, at the same time, the leader of a Bulgarian political party, a full member of the European People's Party, demarcates various ethnic and age groups, and imposes the idea of different classes of people. How should we treat such leaders? My question is addressed to the right side of this House, because the president of the EPP, Mr Martens, has recommended that same person for the next prime minister of my country. Let us reject double standards and respect our own actions and words, and remember that what brought us together more than 50 years ago were human rights.

Filiz Hakaeva Hyusmenova (ALDE). – (BG) The European Economic Recovery Plan is now in place. The crisis is a general problem, but protectionism and the promotion of national industries and employment is creeping in. The fundamental freedoms of free movement of labour and free trade are being put to the test. The crisis is following different paths in different countries. In the recently emerging economic tigers of the European Union, which include Bulgaria, the banking system is relatively stable, unemployment levels are not high, there are highly-skilled workforces and stable currencies. In view of the dynamics of the crisis, I appeal for the recovery plan to be updated to be more in tune with the real economy. At times of crisis, capital looks for low-risk areas, and there is the chance to invest in new greenfield technologies rather than in unviable industries. The potential of the last economies to fall into recession should be used to revive them first and, with the help of this funding and know-how, they can become centres of stability around which the economic and financial system of the European Union can more quickly recover.

Andrzej Tomasz Zapałowski (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, at a time of spreading crisis, I would like to congratulate the European Commission on the destruction of Polish shipyards. The egoistic approach of the European elite, their joy at the loss of the jobs of over 100 000 people in the shipyards and the firms which work with them will surely result in a large part of these workers appearing on the job market in western Europe in the near future. This decision has only deepened the European crisis.

I am curious to know how the European elite will behave; will they show solidarity with Member States where the crisis has grown to a huge scale, or will they only look after their own interests? It is precisely at a time of crisis that European society will see if the declarations and principles which lie at the foundation of the European Union are true, or if it is only a game being played by some States against others within an institution which was founded on noble principles. In this context, I am surprised by the lack of reaction from the Commission to measures currently being taken by many members of the EU which break prevailing principles, while Poland has been punished for taking similar measures.

Rebecca Harms (Verts/ALE). – Mr President, I received some strange news from Northern Ireland last week. It was that Mr Sammy Wilson, the Environment Minister in the regional government, banned a UK information campaign organised by the UK Government on energy efficiency. I cannot believe that the good reasons behind our common climate and energy targets – 20% less CO₂, 20% renewables and 20% more energy efficiency – are not accepted in the regional government of a Member State.

I am therefore asking the Commission to find out what the reasons are behind this strange and quite bizarre ban in Northern Ireland. I think even a climate sceptic like Mr Wilson should take care of citizens and support energy efficiency and efforts to decrease the energy bill.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Today, I should like to highlight a scandalous situation involving Corticeira Amorim in Portugal. This company's profits, in the last two years combined, were in excess of EUR 30 million, with more than EUR 6 million being recorded in 2008. However, this month Corticeira Amorim has announced that nearly 200 workers will be laid off. It has blamed the effects of the crisis. However, the company is forgetting that it was these workers who helped to build the group, which is worth millions and which has received public aid, including Community funds, in order to generate the millions in profits that it is still making. I therefore want to protest in this House and express my indignation at this announcement, which is a scandal, and I hope that everyone will join together to condemn companies that are taking advantage of this crisis in order to lay off workers, even though they are still making large profits.

IN THE CHAIR: MR McMILLAN-SCOTT

Vice-President

President. – Just before I call the next speaker, let me announce with pleasure that Dr Ayman Nour, the Egyptian parliamentarian who was imprisoned some years ago for reasons which the EU Council said were not serious, has been released today. He has been the subject of many resolutions in the European Parliament, so I am very pleased to announce that he has now been released.

Bernard Wojciechowski (IND/DEM). – (PL) Mr President, Poland returns Members to the European Parliament, but their ability to act in their own country is limited. Polish legislation does not give MEPs any legal instruments which ensure the effective fulfilment of their mandate. This concerns significant issues, such as exerting an effective influence on the administrative authorities of central and local government.

Senators and Members of the national Parliament have a series of rights: the right to be given information by state bodies, the right to request information from the administrative authorities of central and local government and a statutory 40-day period within which an answer must be given. In Poland, hardly anyone sets any store by an MEP, except the media when they are looking for a cheap sensation. On my website, I have informed electors of the lack of statutory forms of action open to MEPs. The legislative slovenliness of successive groups of legislators in Poland is, in this case, well known. I believe that the European Parliament should demand greater possibilities for its representatives to act in their own countries.

Jim Allister (NI). – Mr President, EU funds distributed by the lottery of 'first come, first served' is wrong. Yet that is what we have seen in Northern Ireland this week. The minister who decided on cavalier distribution of EU rural development funds on this basis, leading to the demeaning and bizarre spectacle of farmers queuing for two days to get some of their own modulated money back, is a minister not fit to hold office. In that, at a stroke, she both humiliated hard-working farmers and displayed crass ignorance of basic requirements for the distribution of EU funds.

The source of this embarrassment is the wanton refusal of the minister to allocate sufficient funds to rural development. The pitiful GBP 50 million she put into Axis 1 – and only GBP 15 million of that into the modernisation fund – is what caused the spectacle of Tuesday.

Let me say on another matter, in defence of Mr Wilson, the Minister of the Environment in Northern Ireland, that I am glad he does not fit the stereotype that unthinking climate-change hysteries expect in this House.

Colm Burke (PPE-DE). – Mr President, the recent poll in the *Irish Times* on Monday showed growing support for the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland, with 51% of voters now saying they would vote 'yes', particularly at this moment of Irish economic fragility. This is an increase of eight points since the last poll was taken by the *Irish Times* in November of last year. The 'no' vote has also dropped six points to 33%.

Concerning our current strained relationship with the European Union, in the absence of leadership from the present government, an attempt must be made to address the root causes of the Irish electorate's periodic disenchantment with the EU. There must be a meaningful engagement with the Irish people to rebuild an understanding of, and support for, the European process. This communication shortfall can be breached by allowing more positive information to flow freely about the advantages of being part of the EU.

I believe it is important that the positive role of Europe must be highlighted through our education systems. This should not apply to Ireland alone, but also to all Member States. I would urge that the communication deficit be tackled at the earliest possible date.

Marusya Ivanova Lyubcheva (PSE). – (BG) I should like to draw your attention to the problem of the renewed schism in the Bulgarian Orthodox Church. This schism arose at a time when the country was highly

politicised, at a time when the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, like many other structures, had to uphold its position in the democratic face of Bulgaria. Unfortunately, this led to the so-called 'Second Synod' of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, despite the Bulgarian Religious Denominations Act. This legislation is very liberal, which allows any religion to be registered in Bulgaria provided it does not serve inhumane purposes. However the so-called 'Second Synod' wants to register as 'the Holy Synod of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church'. The Act states that the Bulgarian Orthodox Church is traditional to Bulgaria and exempt from registration. The election of the patriarch and members of the Holy Synod is not subject to legislative action. I appeal to all those who value the freedom to worship in accordance with one's personal spiritual needs not to succumb to the manipulative definitions of the so-called 'Second Synod'. This Synod cannot be registered and has no legal basis.

Toomas Savi (ALDE). – Mr President, last week's elections in Israel showed that the majority of citizens support the parties that see the reinforcement of the military as the best way to protect the country. Even though the centrist party, Kadima, received the largest number of votes, the fact that the right-wing parties now hold 65 seats in the Knesset, compared to 50 in the previous elections, reflects the changing views of the Israeli citizens about the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Those parties are in favour of taking a hard line rather than relying on seemingly endless and ineffective peace talks.

The Middle East must be one of the top priorities in the European Union's common foreign and security policy and the stability of the whole region depends largely on Israel-Palestinian relations. It is absolutely crucial, therefore, for the European Union to continue pursuing the peace talks and to restore hope to Israelis and Palestinians that a peaceful coexistence is possible.

Mirosław Mariusz Piotrowski (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, tomorrow Vaclav Klaus, President of the Czech Republic, will visit the European Parliament. Mindful of the scandal which has developed in Prague, we hope that the President of the State which is the holder of the European Union Presidency will be received properly and accorded due respect. The justified opinions expressed by President Klaus about the Treaty of Lisbon have become the subject of attempts to cover them up with an uproar in order to conceal the fact that the main source of opposition to introducing the treaty may turn out to be Germany. The decision of the Constitutional Court in Karlsruhe will be pivotal. According to media reports, half its bench have serious doubts and think that the treaty may breach the national constitution. This shows that no one should be in a hurry where such an important decision is concerned, and this is understood not only by the visiting Czech President.

László Tőkés (Verts/ALE). – (RO) After the autumn elections in Romania and the formation of the new government, we have seen the return with a vengeance to political life in Romania, just like in Slovakia, of anti-Hungarian incitement.

The demonstration that took place on 9 February in Sfântu Gheorghe, organised by the Hungarian churches, was precisely in protest against this incitement. In the petition raised at the demonstration, thousands of local residents of the Székely Land region protested against the change in the ethnic proportions in the area through directly populating the region with groups of Romanians from other areas.

President Traian Băsescu has absurdly accused the Hungarians in this region of ethnic cleansing. At the same time as this, during the municipal elections in Cluj, the democrats' flyers were inciting hatred against the Hungarian candidates, using the same slander. After decades of discrimination and denial of rights, who is accusing who?

I would like to draw Parliament's attention to the fact that in Romania, even now, there is an ongoing process, using subtle methods, of homogenising and making Transylvania Romanian by artificially altering the ethnic proportions.

Gerard Batten (IND/DEM). – Mr President, on 12 February 2009, the Dutch MP, Geert Wilders, was refused entry to the United Kingdom by order of the Home Secretary. Never before has a democratically elected politician, representing a democratic party from a democratic European country, been denied entry.

It seems odd that the British Government can find the legal means to ban Mr Wilders, but is powerless to prevent the entry of assorted terrorists, political and religious extremists, gangsters, criminals, rapists and paedophiles from the European Union and, indeed, the wider world.

Perhaps Mr Wilders' banning had something to do with the alleged threat by a British peer, Lord Ahmed, that, were Mr Wilders to appear in the House of Lords, 10 000 Islamist demonstrators would appear outside.

This was an act of appeasement to a Dark Age ideology and it seems that we do not quite have the free movement of ideas across European Union borders.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Mr President, on the theme of the Lisbon Treaty, my colleague has spoken about the increase in support among the Irish electorate for the Treaty, but I would warn that one swallow does not make a summer. I think that must be taken against a background of a recent Eurobarometer poll, which shows that support for Irish membership of the EU has dropped by 10 percentage points from 77% in the spring of 2006 to 67% in the autumn of 2008. Yes, there is a job to be done to persuade the Irish electorate about the positive benefits of the European Union.

That is why I would be concerned about those who want an earlier date for a second referendum in Ireland. I believe that we need to be cautious, we need to give time for the clarifications to be given on the issues of concern to the Irish voters and we need time for those issues to be debated in full and in public – and in due time allow the electorate to give their view.

Vasîlica Viorica Dăncilă (PSE). – (RO) The current economic and financial crisis is an important test for Europe which, now more than ever, must show unity in taking measures which will facilitate the economy's recovery in the shortest time possible.

Member States' budgets are under great pressure in facing up to these challenges, which is why the best instruments and actions need to be found to prevent them from greatly exceeding the limits envisaged by the Commission for the budgetary deficit and to prevent protectionist measures from being adopted by some Member States or in favour of private manufacturers.

Such decisions must pass quickly through the adoption procedures to avoid prolonging the crisis and, above all, to make it possible to restore confidence in the financial markets and avoid prolonging the crisis from a political perspective too, bearing in mind as well the approaching European Parliament elections.

One possible solution for financing public expenditure could be to issue euro bonds. However, we need to factor in the risk that, based on the measures taken, we are indebting ourselves to the hilt and it is difficult for us to avoid reaching the situation where we are leaving future generations to shoulder the payment of these debts.

Ignasi Guardans Cambó (ALDE). – (ES) Mr President, a year and a half ago, we adopted the Audiovisual Media Directive. That text had at its heart the principle of respect for the country of origin, which we established as essential for ensuring free movement of audiovisual information within the European Union.

However, the Directive cannot be applied within my country, Spain, because it is within a Member State. The Community of Valencia imposes exactly the opposite principle, and for political reasons it is forcing the closure of the relays which, hitherto, enabled its citizens to receive public television signals from Catalonia.

In other words, there is complete freedom of circulation of audiovisual information between the Member States of the European Union but, at the same time, it must be reported that in Spain, there are authorities that are fearful of this same cultural freedom, which is so essential. It is so essential that it has been imposed across Europe and nevertheless, within Spain, some are prevented from receiving the television programmes broadcast by others. This was the paradox that I wanted to share with you.

Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański (UEN). – (PL) *(initially the microphone was turned off)* tragic periods in the history of humanity. During its course, tens of millions of people met their deaths. Many of those victims had their lives taken in one of over twelve thousand German extermination camps and concentration camps which operated on the territory of the Third Reich and in occupied countries. Today, attempts are being made to distort the truth about those tragic years, and information is being disseminated that these camps were Polish or Latvian camps, and not German. A leading force in this is the German press. Recently, *Die Welt* wrote that Majdanek was a Polish concentration camp.

In connection with this, I have prepared a draft resolution which intends to standardise the nomenclature of concentration camps by adding to their names the words 'German' or 'Nazi' concentration camp. My initiative has been taken up by the Union for Europe of the Nations Group, but unfortunately, I have received information that it has been blocked by the Conference of Presidents.

Ladies and gentlemen, the European Union can endure and develop only when it is guided by historical truth and respect for human rights. I therefore address a request to my fellow Members for support of the UEN

initiative, so that no one will ever again distort history or make executioners of the victims and victims of the executioners.

Nicolae Vlad Popa (PPE-DE). – (RO) As some of my Hungarian fellow Members have been complaining recently that their rights are not respected in Romania, I would like to state a couple of facts.

The approaching electoral campaign should not give rise to attacks and insults targeted at a legitimate state which, through its legislation, has offered a model in the area of interethnic relations. Respect for minorities' rights is guaranteed by the Romanian constitution.

Citizens of Hungarian origin are represented proportionally in the local administrative structures. For instance, the Hungarian minority's parties have 195 mayors and four chairmen of county councils, 2 684 local councillors and 108 county councillors. As they hold the majority in the local and county councils mentioned above, they manage local budgets according to their discretion. This is what local autonomy means.

At parliamentary level, the Hungarian minority have three MEPs in the European Parliament, 22 MPs and nine senators in the national parliament and have participated in governing Romania during the last 12 years. The complaints that have been heard are outright political electioneering.

Luis Yañez-Barnuevo García (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, the referendum in Venezuela has ended in a victory for the 'yes' campaign, which has been graciously acknowledged by the democratic opposition.

It is also true that there has not been equality of opportunities during the campaign, and that the ruling party has had the overwhelming support of the entire State apparatus, while the opposition has suffered constant harassment and coercion.

Even under these conditions, the country has been practically split down the middle, and it will be very difficult to build a future with just one of these groups. The European Union must promote dialogue, inclusion and consensus between the Venezuelan political and social leaders for the good of the country.

Visceral attitudes, condemnation and insults will not be the way to help Venezuela to find the way onto a democratic, pluralist and free pathway.

We therefore criticise the decision of the Venezuelan Government to expel a Spanish Member, and especially the way in which this was done. However, we urge this House to prevent our representatives, when visiting third countries, from making statements that violate current local legislation and especially that insult a head of state, however worthy of criticism he might be. Such attitudes are compromising future European Parliament missions to other countries.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – Mr President, I want to refer to the issue of transparent and accurate food labelling and, in particular, I refer to poultry and pigmeat.

Right now, meat can be transported from outside the EU into the EU, substantially transformed – and by that I mean encased in breadcrumbs or batter – and then labelled and sold as EU produce. This is an absolute nonsense, and the labelling is designed to fool the consumers. We need country-of-origin labelling so consumers are able to make informed choices.

We also have the situation where pigmeat and poultry meat has been frozen, then defrosted, labelled and sold as fresh. Not only is this an example of inaccurate labelling, it is potentially dangerous for human health.

I note that Hilary Benn, the UK Environment Secretary, and the Shadow Secretary, have called for clearer labelling. I am sure that many across the EU would support this, as nobody would want to fool consumers. I would ask the Commission to deal with this matter as a matter of urgency.

Hanna Foltyn-Kubicka (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, at a meeting today, the Union for Europe of the Nations Group unanimously adopted a draft resolution calling for 25 May to be established as Heroes of the Fight against Totalitarianism Day. Its text will soon be sent to representatives of the highest authorities of the EU, including Mr Pöttering. The choice of 25 May is not incidental — it was on that day, in 1948, that the Soviet authorities murdered cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki, the Polish soldier who voluntarily became a prisoner in the Auschwitz extermination camp in order to build the resistance movement there. He later escaped and up to the end of the war, fought against the Nazis, and then, after the Soviet armies entered Poland, he began an underground fight against the successive occupants. Pilecki was only one of many Europeans who lost their lives in the fight against brutal totalitarian systems. Many remain unknown, but the bravery and devotion

of all of them deserve to be remembered. Therefore I ask you, Mr President, to support the initiative of our group.

Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE). – (RO) The recent history of the European Union offers a record of the success stories in terms of protecting minorities' rights. This also applies to the Hungarian minority in Romania. This minority enjoys a variety of rights, including administrative posts, and these rights have been continually supported by Romania's President Traian Băsescu.

However, in other areas we still have a great deal to do, and I would like to speak now about the problem of the Roma community. This offers a test of the European Union's ability to integrate groups at a high risk of exclusion.

The case of the Romanian handball player Marian Cozma, brutally murdered by two members of Hungary's Roma community, shows us once again that crime knows no borders and that ignoring the problems of this community is counterproductive.

The situation of this minority, which is inherently transnational and at great risk of exclusion, can only be improved through adopting a concerted policy at European level. With this in mind, I have tabled, along with my colleague Rareș Niculescu, a resolution on creating a European agency for Roma. The EU has a strategy for the Roma minority but does not have any agency to implement it coherently and effectively.

In order to remain a relevant force on the international stage, while preserving internal cohesion, the EU needs to be able to create a pan-European environment of tolerance.

Vicente Miguel Garcés Ramón (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, I have just come back from Venezuela, where I was invited by its electoral authority as a member of an international electoral support group for the referendum on 15 February.

The European members of the group have submitted a report to the National Electoral Council with a positive overall evaluation of the process in terms of its organisation, transparency, participation, freedom and secrecy of voting and security in all its phases.

Regarding the statements that Mr Herrero made on Venezuelan television, I can tell you that they served to delegitimise the electoral process, made serious accusations against democratic institutions in that country, and bordered on interference in the internal politics of a sovereign country.

Parliament should not encourage any type of confrontation with the democratic institutions in Venezuela. However, it is up to Mr Herrero himself to give explanations to the House for an action that affects us all.

Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE). – (RO) I refute the accusations levelled by my fellow Members, Csaba Sógor and László Tőkés, against Romania.

Romania is a Member State of the European Union, NATO, the Council of Europe, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe and respects, in accordance with European standards, human rights and the rights of persons belonging to national minorities. Romania applies the letter and spirit of all the relevant international treaties in this area.

The Hungarian language is used by law for administrative matters in any location and county where those belonging to the Hungarian minority account for more than 20% of the population. This is a *de facto* and *de jure* situation. Romania offers extensive educational opportunities for Hungarians in their mother tongue in nurseries, primary schools, secondary schools, vocational colleges, university faculties, right up to master and doctorate level. In the areas where ethnic Hungarians live alongside Romanians, it is a well-observed rule that schools operate sections where the language of instruction is Hungarian for all children of Hungarian origin. Just in case they have also somehow forgotten, the Babeș-Bolyai University in Cluj-Napoca has three sections offering instruction in Romanian, Hungarian and German respectively, plus the flourishing development of Jewish studies at the institution, as well as special places for Roma.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE). – (HU) Mr President, I would like to congratulate the makers of the official homepage of the European Parliament, the EP press service, for respecting multilingualism, and for indicating place names in the national language of each webpage. This allows EU citizens to acquire information in their mother tongue about the other 26 countries. The Czech page about Germany displays Köln as Kolín, while the French page displays Cologne. The Slovak pages about Hungary indicate town names in Slovak,

as they should. It should be just as natural for Hungarians living in Slovakia to refer to the village or town where they were born in their mother tongue, Hungarian.

Therefore, I welcome the fact that the Slovak Parliament has passed legislation on public education providing for geographical names to be presented in minority language textbooks in the minority's language. Thus, if the law is implemented, the former status quo may be restored, and Hungarians will be able to use Hungarian place names once again.

James Nicholson (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I would like to draw to your attention the situation that occurred in my constituency yesterday morning when farmers were forced to queue outside government offices, in some cases for two nights, in order to apply for a European Union farm modernisation grant scheme.

Our local Agriculture Minister decided to allocate these grants on a 'first come, first served' basis. This can only be described as an inadequate way to deal with the allocation of EU rural development money. I was glad to hear, therefore, that a Commission official yesterday questioned the validity of this allocation procedure.

We are aware that not every farmer can benefit from this particular funding package. However, I feel the situation clearly demonstrates the dire straits of the agriculture industry, certainly in my region, if farmers have to queue for days outside, during winter months, in an attempt to secure modest sums of EU funding.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE). – (RO) The implementation of the energy and climate change package assumes significant investments in measures aimed at cutting greenhouse gas emissions.

Buildings are responsible for 40% of the consumption of primary energy. Increasing buildings' energy efficiency helps reduce the consumption of primary energy and the level of carbon dioxide emissions.

Next year, the Commission along with Member States, will evaluate, in the middle of the 2007-2013 period, the operational programmes and the degree of absorption of structural funds. I call on Member States to review the method for using structural funds, giving priority to energy efficiency in buildings and urban mobility for the 2010-2013 period.

I urge the European Commission and Member States to increase from 3% to 15% the amount allocated to each Member State from the ERDF for costs linked to boosting energy efficiency in buildings and using renewable energy. This increase will offer Member States greater flexibility in using the structural funds, thereby speeding up their absorption, especially during the current economic crisis.

Ryszard Czarnecki (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, it is with great sadness and anger that I would like to say that one of our countrymen, a Polish engineer, died recently in Pakistan, but he was yet another citizen of an EU country to die in that region. It is yet another death which shows the existence of a world of anti-values, a world of people who do not acknowledge something which, in other civilisations, is considered sacred – human life.

I think that this dramatic fact and, indeed, this successive fact, should be for us another significant signal and inducement to unite in the fight against the world of anti-values, and also to unite in the political fight and in context – and this should be said directly – in a common front against terrorism. I think that those politicians in the European Union who feel that terror can be fought without violence are mistaken.

Oldřich Vlasák (PPE-DE). – (CS) The mounting economic crisis is affecting all countries of the European Union. However, rising unemployment is not a reason for us to start violating the basic principles of the common market. I would like to register a protest here in this house against the statements made by the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, in which he called for the French brand Peugeot to shift a plant in the Czech town of Kolín back to France. Such statements by politicians who want to protect and constrain firms during times of crisis are completely unjustifiable. Attempts at protectionism and closing a country in on itself are undesirable and undermine the meaning of the European Union.

The president of the Dallas branch of the Federal Reserve Bank, Richard Fisher, has said:

'Protectionism is like a dose of cocaine for an economy. It can pick you up but it is addictive and leads to economic death.' Let us bear that in mind, let us resist populist pressures and let us not lose our cool in the face of the crisis. Let us focus on sticking to the priorities of the Czech Presidency and let us promote the idea of an open Europe without barriers.

Iuliu Winkler (PPE-DE). – Mr President, a large coalition government was set up in Romania after the elections in November of last year, with a parliamentary share of 73% in the two houses of the Romanian Parliament.

One of the first measures taken by this coalition was to work out a scheme to divide among themselves the leading positions of state-controlled public institutions and the public administration of Romania.

This is an unacceptable situation for two reasons. Firstly, it leads to renewed partisanship in state administration, which contravenes the law on the public servants' statute. Secondly, in the regions where the Hungarian population forms a large majority, the measure has an anti-minority facet as well: ethnic Hungarian public servants are being replaced by ethnic Romanian persons. On 8 February, a public gathering in Sfântu Gheorghe/Sepsiszentgyörgy, Romania, was attended by more than 3 000 people protesting against the political games of the Romanian parties and requesting that the Hungarian communities' rights be respected.

Nicodim Bulzesc (PPE-DE). – Mr President, regarding the report on patients' rights in cross-border health care, I would like to emphasise the issue of the right of patients to be informed about the available medication and treatment options. European patients should have access to quality health information regarding the latest medication available, the treatment options home and abroad, the legal and financial implications of being treated abroad, the reimbursement of the treatment costs and many other areas. For the moment, we do not have this type of quality information. We may have some national initiatives, but nothing that could be effective at European level.

The problems we face are European. I therefore support the idea of setting up a European health literacy network. Such a network should consist of patients' organisations from all the Member States and should work closely with the health sector and the policy makers. In the hope of making the Commission aware of the need to better inform the 150 million European patients, I have initiated a written declaration on health literacy. We have all been patients at some point, and we never know when it will happen again.

Maria Petre (PPE-DE). – (RO) Today and tomorrow, you will come across in our building some young students from the Republic of Moldova. They have come to the European Parliament because in their own country, they cannot speak out, or if they do, they can expect reprisals.

All the European Commission's reports, our hearings in the Commission on human rights and the reports from civil society in Moldova indicate to us that the freedom of expression is frequently violated and that the mass media cannot be independent. Dozens of young people who were using Internet forums to express their opinions were investigated and threatened with criminal records in 2008.

Please show an interest in them, invite them into your offices, listen to them and sign written declaration No 13/2009 which was created for them in order to give them the freedom to express themselves, this generation from the eastern border of our united Europe.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – Mr President, under Directive 2000/84/EC, summer time begins on the final Sunday in March and ends on the last Sunday in October. I would like to propose that this period be expanded in order to maximise many economic, safety and environmental benefits which are associated with the summer time period.

In 2005, the United States implemented a programme of extending daylight saving time by four weeks – an additional three weeks in the spring and an additional week in the autumn. There is already clear evidence that this has helped reduce both energy consumption and carbon dioxide emissions. In fact, a report by the United States Department of Energy found that extending daylight saving time by four weeks saved enough electricity to power some 100 000 homes per annum. Similarly, a recent study by the University of Cambridge also suggests that increasing summer time would lead to a decrease in both energy consumption and carbon-dioxide emissions as, during the peak demand period from 4 p.m. to 9 p.m. each day, many of the more expensive and carbon-emitting ancillary power stations are switched on.

As the rapporteur of the review of the EU ETS, which formed the cornerstone of the EU's climate and energy package adopted last December by this House, I urge you to consider this proposal as a contribution to meeting the 2 °C target. So I would like a review, please, of the Daylight Saving Time Directive.

Hans-Peter Martin (NI). – (DE) Mr President, I should like to put forward two suggestions. The Treaty of Lisbon has been mentioned repeatedly today. The least we should expect of this House is that it be able to distinguish between an opponent of the Treaty of Lisbon and an opponent of the EU. In addition, if the Irish

should have to vote once again, it is desirable that they be given a fair chance rather than there being manoeuvring to undermine the rules that have applied up to now, according to which 'yes' and 'no' have an equal chance to appear in public, and this then being hailed as a triumph of democracy – or of what?

My second point is that, of course, this House is being noticeably boastful with regard to the forthcoming elections. I would suggest an investigation into the specific approach this House has taken to the problems of the global financial crisis over the years, and into who voted which way, for then we shall discover that most of those who are now acting as fire-fighters actually helped start the fire.

Danutė Budreikaitė (ALDE). – (LT) This January, the European Commission provided a package of additional proposals on the funding of energy and broadband network projects laid out in the European plan for economic revival. It is proposed that EUR 5 billion be allocated to these projects, using EUR 3.5 billion from the 2008 agricultural budget. However, last week 6 states blocked the Commission's proposal. Apparently, these are the very countries which are forming the current financial perspective and have demanded a reduction in payments to the EU budget to 1% of GDP. We are returning to nationalism and protectionism, which have been consistently rejected for 50 years, ever since the Community was first founded. Fellow Members, only solidarity among states can help us face the challenges of the financial and economic crisis and ensure the future of the EU.

President. – That concludes the item.

22. The review of the European Neighbourhood Policy Instrument (debate)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0037/2009) by Konrad Szymański, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the review of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (2008/2236(INI)).

Konrad Szymański, rapporteur. – (PL) Mr President, I would very much like to address myself to a representative of the Council as well, but the Council did not decide to send anyone to this debate. I think that this is a pity, and that it is a bad habit. And I think that the President should react to this situation.

Returning to the subject of neighbourhood, we must admit, we must be aware, that the countries which surround the European Union are changing very dynamically. Therefore, we need changes in neighbourhood policy. The Union for the Mediterranean is our answer to the needs of the south, and the Black Sea Synergy answers the challenge which intensified with the last enlargement of the European Union. The Eastern Partnership is a timely answer to the expectations of our European neighbours to the east.

In order to achieve the objectives which we have set in recent years for neighbourhood policy, citizens of neighbouring countries must feel a real political and economic rapprochement with the EU. This is why such importance is attached to establishing a deep free trade area and to rapid action to reduce visa fees, with the proposal of visa liberalisation for a significant part of these countries as the ultimate goal. Inclusion of energy in the most important objectives of neighbourhood policy should be our common goal, our mutual interest, and this includes engagement of our money in the modernisation of independent energy transfer networks, especially in the east and the south. Only in this way will we achieve political rapprochement with Ukraine, Georgia, Moldova, Armenia and, ultimately, with Azerbaijan, and in the future – also maintaining appropriate balance – with the five republics of Central Asia.

When we talk about the eastern aspect of neighbourhood, we inevitably come to the problem of Russia and our partnership with this country. Today, as we stand at the threshold of negotiations over a new agreement, we can, however, say only one thing – Russia is a challenge for security in our common neighbourhood. It is very difficult to see Russia as a partner in this area. Here, we come to the fundamental political problem of expansion of the EU to the east. The neighbourhood process does not, of course, replace accession, but it cannot be separated from the perspective of membership in the case of European countries. Without that perspective, our efforts will be significantly impaired.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to give many thanks to all the coordinators of foreign affairs of the political groups, the co-rapporteurs, and also the Secretariat of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, without whose help it would not have been possible to prepare a report which today enjoys broad support, as can be seen by the very small number of amendments submitted in the plenary session. This will significantly facilitate voting tomorrow.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, two and a half years ago, Parliament and the Council adopted the Commission proposal for a simplification of the external financial instruments. We streamlined many different instruments, one of which was the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI). This is a highly important instrument because it makes our external cooperation stronger, more ‘policy driven’, and better targets our funding in support of key sectors.

I was very pleased to read Mr Szymański’s comments and to see that he considers that the ENPI regulation is adequate and valid for the purpose of cooperation with our neighbouring countries. The preliminary findings of our review point exactly in the same direction.

The ENPI country programmes underpin the implementation of ENPI action plans and reflect the ambition of the EU and the partner countries. In a way, they have been transmission belts for the political and economic reforms that we seek to encourage through the ENPI. Moreover, instruments such as twinning and TAIEX provide support for institution building, legislative approximation and regulatory alignment. Sector and budget support operations are used to promote the agreed reform agenda. The different ENPI regional approaches and dimensions are supported through specific regional programmes. A multi-country programme was created, particularly to implement highly visible initiatives common to all neighbouring countries such as TEMPUS, Erasmus Mundus or CIUDAD. The innovative cross-border cooperation component has been successfully launched.

All of this clearly shows that the 2006 agreement on the ENPI regulation gave us a tool which allows us to deliver and produce tangible results. There is always room for improvement and I am always grateful for suggestions.

Let me also say that the report, firstly, underlines the need to further develop consultations with civil society and local authorities, which is what we are already doing.

Secondly, I have noted your call for even more ambitious actions in the fields of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. As you know, these topics are already at the forefront of our cooperation with partner countries, and political reforms and good governance are at the very heart of the ENP. We have also targeted projects to strengthen the judiciary.

However, let us be honest. First, because our partners face important structural challenges, we cannot expect things to change overnight and, as Lord Patten once said: ‘democracy is not instant coffee’. I think that is really true.

Thirdly, I see that the report calls for more resources. Clearly, more resources improve our leverage – that is true. In the first two years, we had to come back to the budgetary authority several times, asking for sufficient supplementary funds, for instance, for Palestine and Georgia. Therefore, we have proposed to draw on fresh funds for an ambitious Eastern Partnership, which we will soon be discussing in Parliament.

Finally, let me say that I am very pleased to see that the report welcomes the recent Commission proposal on the Eastern Partnership, which we consider has a very important multilateral dimension, together with the Union for the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. I hope that I will continue to have your support and understanding in the future.

Danutė Budreikaitė, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Development*. – (LT) The ENPI established after EU enlargement in 2004 applies to 17 countries, of which 15 are classed as developing countries. The instrument includes the EU’s new Eastern neighbours Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, Moldova and Belarus.

The security of our Eastern neighbours, in particular, energy security in Ukraine and Belarus, also constitutes EU security. This was demonstrated by the Ukraine/Russia gas crisis in the New Year which has already become a tradition. Last summer’s military conflict in Georgia forced us all to consider the security of EU States and the threat to independence.

Faced with such a situation, I propose, as I did before, that an Eastern Neighbourhood assembly, Euroeast, with the participation of the European Parliament and based on the principles of the Euromed and EuroLat assemblies, be created with a view to implementing the ENPI in the countries of Eastern Europe.

I am delighted that this has also been approved in the report.

Euroeast would give the European Parliament the opportunity to devote equal attention to all neighbours and developing countries.

Tunne Kelam, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Regional Development*. – Mr President, I would like to congratulate my colleague, Mr Szymański, on his very good report. On behalf of the Committee on Regional Development, I welcome the inclusion of cross-border cooperation within the scope of the ENPI Regulation as an instrument to develop common projects and to strengthen relations between ENP countries and EU Member States.

At the same time, I would like to highlight the necessity of regularly monitoring the management and implementation of joint operational programmes on both sides of EU borders. Cross-border cooperation should contribute to integrated sustainable development between neighbouring regions. We ask the Commission to prepare a detailed overview of all joint operational programmes approved for the current financial period, with an assessment of how the principles of transparency, efficiency and partnership have been respected. Such an assessment, together with an inventory of the most frequent problems faced by the managing authorities, should contribute to finding more appropriate solutions for the next programming period.

I would also encourage the Commission to facilitate the exchange of experiences and best practices in cross-border cooperation between ENP programmes and projects, on the one hand, and actions taken under the European Territorial Cooperation objective and under the already completed Interreg IIIA Community Initiative, on the other.

Finally, the Regional Development Committee considers that ENPI should focus on a balanced strategy between the east and the south, with specific approaches for both areas.

Ioannis Kasoulides, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Mr President, I would also like to congratulate Mr Szymański on his comprehensive report, which will have the support of our group in the vote tomorrow.

I would also like to congratulate Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, both on the success of the ENPI and of the projects that lie ahead, with the need for an Eastern partnership concerning, in particular, our Eastern neighbours and partners, as well as the Black Sea Synergy. Once these are constituted and take on their own identity – for example, with a parliamentary assembly, etc., as we are doing for the Mediterranean – perhaps they will all assume a distinct identity, even in the way they are financed.

I discern some kind of rivalry – or, let us say, anxiety – among Members. We have just heard about not creating one thing to the financial detriment of another. That should not happen. We know that the Union for the Mediterranean, the Eastern Partnership and the Black Sea Synergy, etc. are in the interests of the European Union. Those arrangements should not be a reason for countries aspiring to join the European Union to have to be told time and time again that this is not the alternative to membership that some are worrying about.

IN THE CHAIR: MR DOS SANTOS

Vice-President

Maria Eleni Koppa, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (EL) Mr President, the neighbourhood and partnership instrument needs to be revised so as to secure simpler procedures and, at the same time, improve transparency. The basis for the European neighbourhood policy is the creation of a climate of trust in the immediate vicinity of the European Union.

It is in everyone's interest for there to be stronger economic growth and stability in all neighbouring countries, both to the east and in the Mediterranean area. However, criteria and approaches specific to each country need to be defined, depending on its political priorities in terms of human rights, democracy, the rule of law, minority rights and so forth. It is also important for Community aid to reach all the interested groups of citizens. That is why the capabilities of the neighbourhood instrument need to be promoted in the right way.

In order for these ambitious targets to be achieved, the distribution of funds between the countries of Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean countries needs to be equally weighted, as provided for under the financial framework for 2007-2013. The Barcelona process should be supplemented by the European neighbourhood policy and the objectives must be clearly defined.

At this time in particular, with the economic crisis now affecting all the countries which benefit from the neighbourhood instrument, it must be made clear that the European Union is helping to address the crisis through this financial aid. That is why the European Commission should publish evaluations on this question.

Finally, I should like to mention the Black Sea Synergy: this region needs to be included in the European neighbourhood policy. The support being given by the European Union to this regional cooperation must target the production of tangible results in certain priority sectors such as energy, transport, immigration and the fight against organised crime.

Metin Kazak, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, I fully support Mr Szymański's report, particularly the proposal to increase the financial envelope in the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument. We need to engage more with our neighbouring countries, particularly after the three conflicts that have occurred in the last six months, in Gaza, Ukraine and Georgia.

A considerable number of amendments proposed by our group, including the 11 amendments I suggested as shadow rapporteur, have been adopted by the Committee on Foreign Affairs. However, now I wish to submit two additional amendments on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

Whilst I agree with the idea of further cooperation with Turkey and Russia to resolve certain ongoing conflicts and to strengthen the links between the Black Sea countries, the wording of Paragraph 39 could lead to confusion. Cooperation on the Black Sea is carried out on four different levels: the member countries, candidates for accession, the countries covered by the European neighbourhood policy and Russia, as a strategic partner.

As Turkey is a candidate for accession, it is not a part of the European neighbourhood policy and benefits from the pre-accession aid instrument rather than the European Neighbourhood Instrument. Therefore, the European neighbourhood policy will certainly not provide an appropriate basis for cooperation with Turkey.

Platforms for cooperation with the Black Sea countries already exist. We should perhaps try to create links with these regional initiatives to reinforce this synergy instead of looking for new forms of cooperation.

The second amendment deals with the energy issue. Paragraph 44 of the report only refers to Ukraine and Moldova, although most of our neighbours are important countries for the energy sector, as source countries or as transit countries. I am thinking, in particular, of Georgia and Azerbaijan, whose importance will grow with the launch of the Nabucco project, which was the subject of an international conference in January. It therefore appears to me that the measures in the energy field should include all the countries in our neighbourhood.

Hanna Foltyn-Kubicka, *on behalf of the UEN Group.* – (PL) Mr President, the European Neighbourhood Policy was developed with the objective of integrating the countries included in the programme with the structures of the European Union. This assumes strong cooperation in the areas of economy, culture and politics, without favouring some countries at the cost of others. With this in mind, it is difficult to understand the differences which occur in the division of financial means between Mediterranean and eastern states, to the disadvantage of this second group.

The idea of separating European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) according to these regions is justified in view of the different problems which these regions face. It cannot, however, be a justification for inequality in the distribution of financial means. This seems especially unfounded in view of the tragedy which recently hit one of the countries included in the ENP – Georgia. It is now, especially, that the citizens of Georgia require our help and the feeling that they are being treated in the same way as other countries which are working with the European Union.

Another important objective which the ENP was supposed to achieve is energy security. The present crisis in Europe is, however, an evident manifestation of the incoherence of the principles of cooperation within the framework of neighbourhood policy. Without doubt, the crisis has shown the need to identify measures within the framework of this policy and the need to strengthen the energy sector as part of the Eastern Partnership. I am glad that the European Commission has noticed this problem and wants to introduce just such a policy.

Cem Özdemir, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I too wish to start by thanking the rapporteur, Mr Szymański, for a very good report. The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument (ENPI) can be an effective instrument only if it provides incentives for democratic reform and promotes sustainable – ecological and fair – development.

To make it possible to verify the effectiveness of this instrument, clear, specific, measurable objectives must be defined for all the action plans under the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). We in the Group of the

Greens/European Free Alliance make a particular call for coherence in all the human rights instruments in the context of the ENP action plans, and also a thorough investigation of the 'Justice' projects promoted by means of the ENPI.

A further important point also rightly emphasised in the report is the increased involvement of civil society in the design and monitoring process with regard to the ENPI. The war in Georgia in the summer of 2008 made it clear that, up to then, the European Union had not developed and implemented a sustainable conflict resolution policy for the Caucasus region.

Frozen conflicts, such as the one in Nagorno-Karabakh, still hinder the further development of the ENP in the South Caucasus region. Therefore, we call on the Council to work more actively in the field of conflict resolution. This instrument gives the European Union the opportunity to play an active role in its neighbouring region, in order to take forward democratic reform and sustainable development.

Particularly with a view to preserving its – our – credibility, the European Union must finally start taking the democracy and human rights clauses in its agreements with third countries seriously and taking the appropriate action – ideally positive but, if necessary, negative.

Zbigniew Zaleski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, in thanking our fellow Member Mr Szymański for a good report, I should like to share a reflection on the subject of why neighbourhood policy is so important for us. We must answer this question. Firstly, because neither the European Union nor Europe is a kind of isolated island. The EU is located in Europe and this is important for us, all the more so because we are ambitious and we want to 'export' our values, our ideas and our experiences to other countries.

I think that alongside the larger decisions – concerning transport, energy, free trade and mutual exchange – there are also smaller matters which are very significant, such as education, and scientific and cultural exchange, and, above all, interpersonal contacts. I see the European Union as a family of people who communicate with each other. Europe – at least this is how I see things – will be strong when every part of it has a role to play and is able to fulfil that role, and so this must include not only the countries of the EU, but also its neighbours.

Commissioner, I think that, for today, we have in large measure finished building Euromed, which is an interesting structure. We are giving a great deal of money, perhaps too much, as our fellow Member from the Union for Europe of the Nations Group said, and now we should strengthen the idea of Euroeast. This is very important, and I think that after the recent energy crisis, no one has any doubts that this is a dimension which is very, very significant for us. The issue here is one of the Community and regional programmes, which should be supported, but which, unfortunately, require financial support. Appropriate amounts should be set aside for this. We are making good decisions here, which countries and neighbours will put into effect in cooperation and while working on joint projects.

Aloyzas Sakalas (PSE). – Mr President, in 2008, several new regional initiatives were launched under the umbrella of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Although the financial instrument was designed in 2006, it proved a sufficiently effective tool as it was oriented towards the future.

The EU has decided to strengthen multilateral and regional cooperation with and between its neighbouring countries. The instrument already allows the EU to receive co-funding from other international organisations and to cooperate with other multilateral organisations in its neighbourhood. Let us actively use these opportunities.

My second point concerns the distribution of financial allocations between our neighbours on the south and eastern shores of the Mediterranean and our neighbours to the east. Ultimately, it amounts to a question of credibility of EU policy. Therefore, the EU needs to stick to its commitments and maintain the geographical distribution of financial allocations, as laid down in the financial perspective for the years 2007-2013.

However, there is another important allocation gap between the neighbours. I am speaking about the gap in allocations spent on programmes in the future democracies relating to the rule of law and human rights. Between 2007 and 2010, 21% of the total funding for the Eastern neighbours is spent on allocations to support democratic development, but for the Southern neighbours, this amounts to only 5%. I ask the Commission to take this concern into consideration.

Grażyna Staniszevska (ALDE). – (PL) Mr President, financing initiatives for the Mediterranean Basin and the future Eastern Partnership under the European neighbourhood instrument should not take place, as it

does today, to the detriment of either of these regions. What is important is to take into consideration the specific nature of both the eastern and the southern partner countries.

Recent geopolitical events involving our eastern neighbours have clearly demonstrated that there is also a need to better adapt the European Neighbourhood Policy to the needs of the region. Ukraine may serve as an example. The largest eastern neighbour of the European Union should be offered specific incentives and advantages under the Eastern Partnership which will have a motivating influence on a country with European ambitions. In addition to this, it would also be important to accelerate the establishment of a free-trade zone and to conclude talks with Ukraine on the subject of visa freedom.

The ENP does not merely involve the activities of governments and national politicians. I am, therefore, glad that the need for greater social engagement on the part of the citizens and local authorities, in terms of planning and implementing the ENP, has been stressed in the report. We should also remember that in order to ensure good, effective and mutually beneficial cooperation with our neighbours, it is extremely important and valuable to have an exchange of experiences and best practices, as well as training initiatives, including programmes for learning the languages of neighbouring countries.

Pierre Pribetich (PSE). – (FR) Mr President, I should like to begin by congratulating my fellow Member, Mr Szymański, for his balanced report on the review of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument.

Let us remember that the main objective of this report is to avoid the emergence of new dividing lines, or worse, splits, between the enlarged European Union and its immediate geographical neighbours, but also to enhance the stability and security of the area under consideration as a whole.

Spreading peace is an oft-repeated desire but one that, very often, is hindered along the way by the reality of hatred and intolerance. Consequently, the proper functioning of this policy determines, in part, Europe's international geopolitical standing.

How can we effectively review this neighbourhood and partnership instrument? The main point can be summed up by just one word: ambition.

More ambition, indeed, in dialogues with civil society and local authorities, to enhance their involvement in the conception and control of the implementation of this instrument.

More ambition in aid support, with the aim of enhancing administrative, local and regional capabilities in neighbouring countries and, also, of promoting exchange programmes for civil society.

More ambition in the areas of democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

This budget support, however, must be subject to a selection process so as to make it accessible only to those who can make use of it, with a country-specific approach, under political conditionality, without forgetting to improve evaluation of policies. It is also imperative to clarify the relationship between European neighbourhood policy, a framework policy *par excellence*, and regional initiatives, such as the Black Sea Synergy, the Union for the Mediterranean, and the future Eastern Partnership.

Indeed, by reducing policies to increasingly limited geographical areas, we run the risk of losing the overall direction, visibility and transparency of the neighbourhood policy that the European Union wants to pursue.

That is the price at which we will enhance the Union's cohesion and synchronisation, our dedicated budget will be deployed, comprehensively, in the desired directions, and the European Union will, at last, fully assume its role as a centre of stability.

Nicolae Vlad Popa (PPE-DE). – (RO) The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument has made a significant contribution to the development of relations with states neighbouring the European Union.

One financing option is the Neighbourhood Investment Facility which, on top of the sum allocated from the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument, EU Member States have the opportunity to participate in by making donations. We are aware that in this study, the funding which the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument benefits from is not sufficient to meet the ambitious objectives for this area.

We urge the European Commission to conduct an analysis regarding the allocation in the future of more consistent sums to this instrument, especially in the situation where other initiatives, like the Black Sea

Synergy need to be supported too with adequate funding. Romania has supported and will continue to support the relevance of the Black Sea region for the European Union, based on the obvious opportunities the region offers for stability, economic development, energy security, security of its citizens and environmental protection.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE). – (RO) The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument can and must be used more in the Black Sea region. In my view, the synergy in the Black Sea region is positive, but I feel that this region is of special geostrategic importance and merits a more structured cooperation framework, based on a model of the same scope as the Nordic one or of the Union for the Mediterranean.

The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument should contribute more to developing transport links between the European Union and the Black Sea, as well as between the European Union and the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Romania would like to develop more cooperation programmes between towns in Romania and the Republic of Moldova. I welcome the launch of the CIUDAD programme which encourages the development of dialogue between towns.

The development of Community ports located on the Black Sea, the construction of liquefied gas terminals, as well as the development of rail and road links between states in the Black Sea region and Member States, must feature among the priorities which this instrument will be used for. In addition, I feel that this instrument must also be used for cooperation in the energy sector, as well as for expanding and integrating the infrastructure for transporting electricity to the Western Balkans region.

President. – I must apologise to Mr Alexandru Nazare as, due to an error by the Bureau, we did not give him the floor during the normal period, although he was on the list. I will give him the floor after the ‘catch-the-eye’ period.

Zbigniew Krzysztof Kuźmiuk (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, I should like to draw attention to three issues in this debate. Firstly, it is essential to maintain a geographical division with respect to financial aid from the EU budget for Mediterranean countries and the countries of Eastern Europe, in accordance with the provisions of the Financial Perspective for 2007-2013, and also to continue providing support to these countries in the form of European Investment Bank loans. The sub-ceilings for loans to these countries anticipated by the EIB for the years 2007-2013 – EUR 8.7 billion for Mediterranean countries and only EUR 3.7 billion for Eastern countries and Russia – appear to be unfavourable from the point of view of Eastern European countries in the sense of being disproportionate to their needs.

Secondly, it is essential to foster cooperation in the field of energy with these countries, under the auspices of the Eastern Partnership, and to create conditions which will ensure the supply of energy resources from these countries to Europe, thereby providing Europe with alternatives in terms of its energy supply. Thirdly and finally, it is essential to deepen the EU's economic integration with the Eastern Partnership countries by extending the free-trade area to include these countries, as well as through social integration, the ultimate objective of which should be the abolition of visa requirements for residents of ENPI countries.

Daniel Petru Funeriu (PPE-DE). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, when we draw up a policy for the neighbouring states of the European Union, we must not ignore the democratic deficit in these countries. It is a democratic deficit that stems from their history. Well, in order to establish a democratic society, we need all the citizens of these countries to have an awareness of democracy.

The report discusses – and, moreover, rightly so – people-to-people contacts, and I would ask you what better way of establishing these people-to-people contacts is there than by allowing the citizens of these countries to travel freely to the European Union?

I therefore call on the Council to allow the citizens of the Republic of Moldova which, by the way, is the only country to share an official language of the European Union, to travel within the European Union without a visa. Of course, pending such a measure, I would ask the Commission to do everything necessary to get the ‘common visa centre’ in Chișinău, up and running. We must set a real example.

Corina Crețu (PSE). – (RO) During the last six months, the European Union has faced a series of challenges which have raised question marks about its role, cohesion and capacity to act and react.

The crisis in Georgia and the gas crisis highlighted to us that we cannot continually face threats from the east which target international stability and our energy security.

I welcome an eastern partnership as ambitious as the one proposed in this report, all the more so as it is aimed at more effective cooperation and supporting the reconstruction of Georgia, while also suggesting for the future setting up a free trade area and lifting visa requirements for the European Union.

However, I think that we must attach more importance to the situation in the Republic of Moldova from where we are getting worrying signals about the freedom of expression and the integrity of the elections which are due to take place this spring.

Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE). – (RO) The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument is of fundamental importance to the success of the European Neighbourhood Policy, especially the Eastern Partnership and cooperation in the Black Sea region.

The Eastern Partnership project can only be successful if it has the funding required to achieve clear objectives. At the same time, we must streamline the mechanisms for evaluating the impact of the actions and finances involved in the Eastern Partnership so that European assistance is not misappropriated and misused by some governments against the political opposition.

Our actions must always be well conceived so that citizens can see specific benefits from them. I feel that the European funding offered by the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument should give priority to the measures aimed at cross-border cooperation in the area targeted by the Eastern Partnership.

Cross-border cooperation has the specified mission of making a decisive contribution to regional development, building trust between neighbouring states and interethnic harmony, while facilitating the cross-border movement of people and trade flows can have particularly beneficial multiplier effects.

Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE). – (RO) The European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument is vital for ensuring stability, democracy and prosperity in the area. In addition, this instrument transforms the concept of a border, an area of confinement and exclusion into an area of cooperation and political ties.

Recent events in the area to the east of the EU, which have been mentioned previously in the house, namely the gas crisis and the crisis in Georgia, have demonstrated once again the need for a strategy capable of ensuring that the European Union plays an active role in this geopolitical area. We need to adopt a more coherent approach in dealing with the area to the east of our borders. We need clear objectives which meet the interests of the EU and the specific needs of our partners.

I fully applaud initiatives such as the Black Sea Synergy and Eastern Partnership which consolidate cooperation with the countries in the region, especially the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, as well as states from the Caucasus and the Caspian Region. We also need more active involvement in the Black Sea area, to provide a basis for consolidating relations with Turkey and Russia as this area is in the vicinity of the European Union, Turkey and Russia.

The partnership is also a welcome incentive for the participating countries which will want to apply for Member State status of the European Union, such as the Republic of Moldova. This partnership significantly raises the level of commitment by both sides.

Furthermore, I would like to say a few words about the EURONEST initiative as well, which is only one example of a specific solution for improving the application of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument in states such as Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine or Belarus.

The application of this policy cannot be improved without raising the level of financial assistance. Apart from the need to increase this financial package, we must also pay as much attention to the way in which these funds are spent.

I feel it is imperative to guarantee transparency with regard to the financial mechanisms for allocating funds. I also think that resources must be allocated with a view to involving civil society in the partner countries in common projects and to supporting the mobility of citizens in these countries, which includes easing visa requirements.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I think this discussion on the ENPI has in fact already pre-empted the next Commission communication on the Eastern Partnership. Many of the ideas that you have put forward are in the Eastern Partnership communication and I am sure that when you get this, you will, hopefully, be quite satisfied.

Let me just say a few things. I am, of course, very thankful for many of the suggestions. In this Eastern Partnership, the idea is that we want to work with our Eastern partners – Ukraine, Moldova, Belarus – if necessary on democracy and human rights, but also with the three Caucasian countries, on trade, to try to make more profound association agreements, secondly, on energy, and thirdly, on more mobility. With regard to your suggestions on being visa-free, we will start with visa facilitation, although even that is not easy, as many Member States here are still very reluctant. Then, of course, there are all kinds of different platforms which I have already mentioned – for instance a platform for civil society, on energy and on transport – or indeed where best practices can be exchanged.

With regard to financing, I can only tell you that, unfortunately, I do not have more funds available. Of course – as I always say as a mother of the neighbourhood policy – I would love to have more. You are a very important budget authority so please give us a chance in the future and really support us on that. This goes for both the Union for the Mediterranean in the south and for the Eastern Partnership and the ENPI in the east.

The funding figures are currently EUR 3.6 per capita per annum to the east and EUR 3.4 per capita per annum to the south. So, as you can see, we are nearly at the same level. At the same time, however, it is never enough, because there are huge necessities and challenges. Therefore, we have also established the idea of a so-called NIF – the Neighbourhood Investment Facility – that can be used for bigger projects.

This is all I can tell you at this stage, but perhaps at a later stage, when we start to discuss the Eastern Partnership, we can go into all the details. In any case, thank you for this debate and for your suggestions. They are very much in line with the direction in which we are going.

Konrad Szymański, rapporteur. – (PL) Mr President, I would like to make a few comments in reference to this debate. The simplification of procedures, the monitoring of how the neighbourhood policy is implemented and the supervisory role of the European Parliament are issues with which we have been grappling since 2005, and it seems there is not much more we can do in this regard. Today, however, it is certainly important to add political content to our neighbourhood policy. That political content includes issues such as visas, a common market and energy. If we do not overcome these challenges, we may lose the opportunity to create our neighbourhood on our own terms. Time is against us. Countries which today are part of our neighbourhood may lose their stability and slide towards other principles for establishing regional order. We will not be happy with this kind of outcome and history may never give us such an opportunity again. Such events will also affect our own security and we should, therefore, also think of the problem in entirely selfish terms, namely the interests of the European Union, so that our neighbourhood will be an area of stability and affluence.

As far as the budget is concerned, I know very well that, with regard to reforming the neighbourhood policy, many sections of this Chamber agree on matters concerning the financing of specific areas of the policy, as well as particular regions, but we should remember that the neighbourhood policy is only one section of the budget and that nothing will change during the next financial perspective. If we manage to finance the Mediterranean, Eastern and Black Sea neighbourhoods well, we will all be winners. We cannot achieve success in any part of the neighbourhood at the cost of another part, because the EU budget has been structured to prevent this. We should, rather, concentrate on reforming the EU budget so that all the parts (Mediterranean, Eastern and Black Sea) will benefit from the future financial perspective.

Marcin Libicki (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, I regret that Mr Szymański's summary of his excellent report could not, unfortunately, be heard by Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, because she continues to be occupied with other matters.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Alin Lucian Antochi (PSE), in writing. – (RO) I wholeheartedly support the provisions in the report aimed at raising the level of the European Union's political commitment to the states targeted by the ENPI, along with the prospect of signing association agreements which are tailored to each country.

In order to implement this policy effectively, the states concerned must fully commit to the process of democratic reform in society. Effective implementation of the reforms, especially those relating to the areas of democracy, rule of law and freedom of expression, remains a serious problem for these states and is

dependent both on the political will of their authorities and on the degree of commitment from civil society and their citizens.

It is important that the populations of these countries understand that European integration offers not only the opportunity to legally cross borders, but also a real chance to get the country out of its impasse. In this context, European projects must provide for more specific provisos and special funds for informing the population.

Familiarising the population with both the benefits of integration and with the commitments which they assume once a country has joined the EU will have the effect of involving them actively in the democratisation process in society and considerably reduce the ability of the elite who are in power to use coercive measures against opposition political parties and civil society.

Adam Bielan (UEN), *in writing*. – (PL) Mr President, the initiative which Poland and Sweden were advocating only last year is today no longer a matter of debate. Closer cooperation with our neighbours from across the eastern border is not only beneficial for both sides, but it is also essential and strategic in terms of Europe's security.

The political and economic situation beyond our eastern border has a direct influence on the situation in the entire EU, and on our economic equilibrium and security. Last year was a test of Russia's credibility in terms of relations with its neighbours, a test which the Kremlin quite simply failed.

This is why the development of the European Neighbourhood Policy requires our active involvement in the situation in the Southern Caucasus region, and in events concerning our closest neighbours. That involvement is the prerequisite for our cooperation in specific areas. I am thinking here of support for civil society and for democratic and institutional reforms, and guaranteeing Europe's energy security. Let us show that we can be the main player in the East and not allow Russia to implement its own neo-imperialistic game plan.

Janusz Lewandowski (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (PL) Use of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument to finance both the southern and eastern European Neighbourhood Policies should not be implemented to the detriment of either of these regions. With regards to the use of this funding, it is particularly important to ensure the transparency of other sources, including private finance.

During negotiations on a new EU-Russia agreement, we should focus on greater cooperation on the part of Russia, in terms of identifying clear financial cooperation priorities which would lead to better planning and multi-annual programming for aid, on guarantees that any financial assistance granted to the Russian authorities contributes to strengthening democratic standards in Russia and on ensuring that there are more jointly-owned projects earmarked for funding.

I should also like to emphasise the need for effective political conditions and guarantees to be established, in order to ensure that assistance for Belarus will have an immediate and direct impact on citizens and will not be misused by the authorities to attack their political opponents. The European Union should give more effective support to civil society and to political parties which are defending democracy.

Recent geopolitical events in the European Union's Eastern neighbourhood underscore the importance of developing the European Neighbourhood Policy further by adapting it more effectively to the needs of the partners, which includes enhanced EU involvement in the Black Sea region.

Marianne Mikko (PSE), *in writing*. – (ET) As the head of the European Parliament's Moldova delegation, I am naturally interested in the development of the ENPI's Eastern dimension.

I fully understand and support the interests of the southern Member States of the European Union in promoting the development of the ENPI's southern dimension. At the same time, I am convinced that we cannot neglect our neighbours in the east. From the point of view of the security and welfare of our common home, both eastern and southern neighbours are equally important to us.

On the basis of the present system, which is in effect until 2010, the ENPI's funds are divided unequally – 70% goes to the southern dimension and just 30% to the eastern dimension countries. New financing discussions will begin this year. I sincerely hope that the present system will be amended during these discussions, and that in future funds will justifiably be divided equally.

Due to the events of the past summer – here I refer to the Russo-Georgian conflict – our eastern neighbours in my opinion justifiably expect a greater contribution from the EU to the safeguarding of stability. The EU's

involvement must not be limited just to declarative political support, but must also contain very real cooperation and assistance with the implementation of reforms.

I am incredibly happy that Estonia is one of the 15 founding members of the recently founded Neighbourhood Investment Facility. During the present economic recession, the allocation of EUR 1 million is quite a big act – and a concrete one.

Toomas Savi (ALDE), in writing. – Mr President, I welcome the notion that ‘the Eastern Partnership should not hinder the European Union membership for neighbouring countries wishing to apply’, as it was stated in the report. The possible future membership incentive is an integral part of the Eastern Partnership as it forms the basis for a successful conditional approach.

Although the progress towards a completed democratic transition varies from country to country – in Belarus there have been only minor advances, while in Ukraine and Georgia, some significant steps have been taken – the European Union should always sustain the possibility for the Eastern Neighbourhood countries to accede to the EU, since the efforts to establish functional democracy, rule of law and respect of human rights can sometimes be exhausting to the point of relapse.

The primary objective of the European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument as well as the accession incentive vis-à-vis Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus is to ensure continuous progress towards consolidated democracies in those countries.

23. Financing of actions other than Official Development Assistance in countries falling under Regulation (EC) 1905/2006 (debate)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0036/2009) by Mr Berman, on behalf of the Committee on Development, on financing of actions other than Official Development Assistance in countries falling under Regulation (EC) No 1905/2006 (2008/2117(INI)).

Thijs Berman, rapporteur. – (NL) I, too, am pleased that Mr Deva has taken a seat, for now Mrs Ferrero-Waldner will be able to hear me, which is a great relief.

This unprecedented economic crisis, which is biting hard, spells renewed disaster for developing countries. The crisis leads to a drop in prices for raw materials, fewer investments, less trade credit and less money being sent home by immigrants. Meanwhile, the gross domestic products of all the rich countries are dwindling fast, which means that the budget for development cooperation is also being decimated as this is 0.7% of GDP, or at least that is what it is supposed to be, and even then, most countries fail to live up to their promises.

This is the context of the discussion about the new policy instrument that is being held here. If Spanish students receive a grant to study in Latin America for a few months, or vice versa, then such an exchange is useful, necessary and desirable, but a project such as this cannot be exclusively financed with funds that are intended to fight poverty. Whilst EU funding in this area is to be welcomed, it is not fighting poverty. It is frustrating to have to withdraw projects like this simply because there is no legal basis on which to back them.

That is why we have been looking for a modest instrument with which the EU can implement policy in developing countries that does not, strictly speaking, fall within the scope of fighting poverty. A financial source and a legal basis that do not come under development policy will need to be found. The legal basis cannot, therefore, lie in Article 179 of the Treaty of Nice, because that is precisely the statutory basis for development policy that should be avoided here.

The EU's own interests – European students making study trips – may not be financed under Article 179. Moreover, the EU, when spending development funds, has to meet the criteria legally prescribed in respect of development cooperation, namely those of fighting poverty.

With a little bit of creativity, there are other sources. Extending the Industrialised Countries Instrument is an option which the Committee on Foreign Affairs has put forward and which is also backed by my own committee. What is also an option, though, is a combination of Articles 150, 151 and 170, education, culture and research. With this combined legal basis, the European Parliament would maintain complete codecision with regard to this instrument, and the money, about EUR 13 million at the moment, is not taken out of the development policy kitty. Neither is it taken out of the foreign policy kitty.

As rapporteur – and the Committee on Development will back me up on this – I cannot agree to Article 179 as the legal basis. If it was, this new instrument would become ineffective, seeing as its exact aim is to prevent development funds from being used for other purposes. There should not, therefore, be a legal basis for this instrument that could make this compulsory.

For this reason, I plead with the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats to withdraw its amendment as a matter of extreme urgency. It flies in the face of our shared desire to protect the budget for development cooperation, even in times of economic crisis.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, first of all, I would like to confirm the undertaking I gave, on behalf of the Commission, to carry out the mid-term review of the financial instruments in 2009. This was in response to Parliament's request during the final negotiations on the instruments.

That review will take the form of a communication, accompanied by legislative proposals where appropriate. The adoption of the communication is foreseen for April 2009 and is included in the Commission's legislative work programme.

The review is about the implementation of the instruments. It should be distinguished from the other mid-term review currently underway – and also foreseen in the regulations – which relates to the programming documents and the strategy papers for 2011-2013. This new programming will give rise to a round of democratic scrutiny, as for the first programming exercise covering 2007-2010.

The two exercises are different, but they are complementary. It is important to fix issues related to instruments before the new programming period. The strategy and programming review will take place during 2009 in order to be ready in 2010 for democratic scrutiny by Parliament.

As regards the Development Cooperation Instrument (DCI), our preliminary reflections confirm an issue that will be at the core of the review: the legislative gap as regards non-ODA activities for countries covered by the DCI.

What are these non-ODA activities? They are of various natures, but the current four preparatory actions initiated by this Parliament give a good outlook on what we are talking about: cooperation with middle-income countries in Asia and Latin America, which is not covered by the DCI, and business and scientific exchanges with China and India.

On these kinds of activities, we agree with you on the need to have legislation to cover measures which promote EU concerns in DCI countries. This could be done either through a new legal instrument or through amending the existing Industrialised Countries Instrument (ICI) Regulation.

When we prepared the new external relations instruments in 2006, we agreed that they should also cover the external dimension of our internal policies. We agreed that this could be done under the legal basis for external actions. This represented a considerable simplification compared to the previous situation.

It will be difficult for the Commission to follow this approach. We consider that the legal basis must reflect the objectives and content of the instrument. We recognise that there is a problem with non-ODA activities. By their nature, such activities do not qualify as development assistance. Therefore, a proposal that deals only with such activities cannot fall under development cooperation – under Article 179, as you mentioned.

Given that we want to cover known ODA activities, it seems likely that Article 181a of the Treaty will be the most appropriate legal basis, since it covers economic, financial and technical cooperation. However, before making any proposal, the Commission will consider the question carefully in the light of the position expressed by Parliament. It would be helpful to have Parliament's position so that we can finalise our proposals before the elections, as we promised.

Finally, I see that the report calls for more resources. We will have to look into it. You know the very tight situation of Heading 4 of the financial framework. One could argue that emerging countries are in transition and that the current assistance envelope should accompany that transition – that is, with a gradual shift from the development focus to non-ODA activity. We will examine this as part of the review.

These are the Commission's initial considerations on the report that we are discussing today. We consider it to be a good basis for our common work, and I look forward to hearing what the Members have to say.

Vicente Miguel Garcés Ramón, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Budgets*. – (ES) Mr President, the Committee on Budgets believes that it is of the utmost importance that each of the budgetary instruments

be clearly demarcated. Therefore, the most realistic option seems to be the creation of a new instrument for actions other than public development aid for countries falling under the Regulation.

From a budgetary point of view, the financing proposal from the Committee on Development does not appear to be adequate, as this money does not exist and these lines do not have funds allocated on a multiannual basis. There is funding for 2009, but not beyond that.

In any case, given that the financing of this new cooperation instrument must be compatible with the 2007-2013 financial framework, it is worth pointing out the importance of the mid-term review of the financial framework. This should allow an adjustment of the different headings' ceilings.

Nirj Deva, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Mr President, I welcome very warmly the statement made by Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner just now, and I ask my political group to withdraw its amendment so that this report can go through. If not, I am in a rather difficult position, but I will have to support the Socialist rapporteur on this issue.

I have to say that I believe the development instrument is for development purposes. But if one looks at what the development instrument – particularly Article 179 – gives, even with all the constraints, the ODA instrument allows the promotion of museums, libraries, the arts, music in schools, sports training facilities and venues – all these count as ODA. But, of course, sponsoring concert tours or athletes' travel costs does not. Cultural programmes in developing countries, whose main purpose is to promote the cultural values of the donor, are not reportable as ODA. It excludes military aid but it does not exclude peacekeeping. It covers a wide variety of activities – even civil police work to supply and increase the capacity of training of policemen, the demobilisation of soldiers, monitoring of elections, removal of mines and landmines – all this is ODA.

So here we are asking ourselves, in this Parliament, how many angels are dancing on the head of a pin when, in fact, the main area of the work is covered by the ODA instrument. So, I welcome Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner's statement that Article 181a is there to make it possible to look for the funds to do what some of my colleagues are hoping to do.

Ana Maria Gomes, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – Mr President, it is crucial to solve the current legislative gap concerning the financing of non-ODA actions in countries covered by the DCI. This proposal for an instrument to address this gap must preserve the DCI unequivocally as an instrument for ODA and it must allow for a clear separation between financial sources allocated to pure ODA development cooperation and those allocated to other types of non-ODA development cooperation with developing countries. This separation is a very relevant political message in itself and it would give proper visibility to the EU's development cooperation policy.

The new or revised instrument should also be sufficiently broad to cover a wide range of actions that do not comply with the OECD DAC guidelines, but which are crucial for the EU's cooperation with developing countries, for instance, the development of the Akkas gas fields in Iraq or cooperation on aviation security with India. This is why I am not in full agreement with the restrictive legal basis proposed. I fully back Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner in finding Article 181a, possibly, a more adequate legal basis, which would provide for these kinds of concerns that I am highlighting. However, I am not convinced either by the alternative presented by the PPE-DE Group amendment that we are supposed to vote on tomorrow.

Therefore, I hope that, under the guidance of our rapporteur, Thijs Berman, we may find more time to have a thorough discussion on this matter and consider what is the best legal basis, namely, the proposal made by Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner.

Toomas Savi, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, I would like to thank Thijs Berman for his report. It points out an important aspect in development aid that the Commission should, in my opinion, seriously consider. Activities such as cultural, scientific and economic exchange programmes, citizen-to-citizen contacts or political dialogue are regrettably not covered by existing European legislation, those being just a few examples.

The European Union has set up numerous programmes and financial instruments under the auspices of different agencies, each covering only certain limited aspects of the problems that the developing countries are currently facing. I find that, without a central European Union agency and a comprehensive and coherent policy, the efforts that we are making to improve the situation in developing countries are not of notable extent.

We all agree that the purpose of the European Union development cooperation policy is to reach as many people in need as possible, but yet we have chosen a rather inconvenient path to that goal. At the moment, the European Union is both institutionally fragmented and legally hindered as far as development aid is concerned. This much appreciated report deals with the results of those deficiencies.

The European Union and its Member States have contributed immensely to the official development assistance and it should never be underestimated, but much remains to be done to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of the institutional framework as well as congruence of the legislation covering development aid.

Michael Gahler (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, to be quite honest, I was somewhat surprised to find that the Berman report had already been drawn up and a proposal was being presented before the completion of the Mitchell report, the actual report that is to assess the experience gained with the DCI.

My fellow Member is right in terms of the substance of his proposal. Given the design of the DCI, the legislative gap was inevitable. I support the conclusion that a different instrument is needed to close this gap for non-ODA (Official Development Assistance) activities. I can conceive of both the alternatives he proposes in paragraph 3 of his report.

I should like to make it clear, however, that non-ODA actions are also relevant to a country's development: it is only the choice of legal basis that is in dispute. In my opinion, it is the rapporteur and his committee against the rest of the world in this regard. The Committee on Development opts for a narrow interpretation of Article 179 and must therefore resort to articles intended for domestic policies as a legal basis. The Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Committee on Legal Affairs, Parliament's Legal Service, the ECJ, the Council and the Commission all read Article 179 differently.

Therefore we, the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, decided today not to withdraw this motion tomorrow, but to table an amendment to change the legal basis envisaged, nor shall we be supporting the postponement, as we agree that only the legal basis is at issue in this matter. I am therefore sure that we will achieve clarity in the matter tomorrow.

Corina Crețu (PSE). – (RO) The report from our fellow Member, Mr Berman, offers a clear solution for plugging the gap in the legislative structure for financing external actions which are not an emergency and which do not come under the category of development actions as defined by the Development Cooperation Instrument.

Financing actions of this kind is important from a political perspective as it can ensure continuity of the European Union's presence in the countries and regions which have already gone beyond the initial development stage. However, it is vitally important that the funds used to finance these actions do not come from sources earmarked for development, but from different budget lines.

The purpose of the legislative proposal requested by this report is to encourage development and not to restrict it by reducing the funds available for development policies in favour of other measures. This is why it is vital for the distinction between actions provided for under the Development Cooperation Instrument's scope and those provided for by the new legislative provision to be reflected when determining the funds earmarked for financing them.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Mr President, firstly I would like to thank the rapporteur for this report. I endorse his first comment about the economic crisis, its particular impact on the developing world and, indeed, the fact that we are not reaching our target of 0.7% in aid. This is very regrettable because, when the developed world shrinks, the developing world really takes the brunt of it.

I came to this debate because I was anxious to hear the arguments about legal bases. It seems to me that, underneath all of this, there is a fear that the budget will be spread too thinly. Let us just call a spade a spade. Let me quote the comments made by an aid agency which contacted me today: 'While we support Parliament's request for a financing instrument for non-ODA activities in developing countries, we strongly believe that it must be established on a legal basis which is appropriate to the activities which it intends to finance. The use of Article 179 as the legal basis for non-development activities is clearly not appropriate and, as such, would contravene both the EC Treaty and the *acquis communautaire*. It also opens the possibility that, in future, non-ODA activities may be financed from budget lines which are intended for genuine development activities. We very much hope that the amendment will be withdrawn.'

So, as a member of the PPE-DE Group, I am here tonight to listen to both sides of this argument, but also to put forward some of the lobbying that I am receiving from very genuine people in the development area, whose concerns I need to address.

I repeat the point that, if we were awash with funds, our legal basis might not cause us so much grief. The difficulty is that we are not. There is concern among those involved with the development agenda – the focus of concern – who are fearful that the money available will be spread over too many activities. However, I remain to be convinced.

Paul Rübzig (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, ladies and gentlemen, I wish to discuss not the legal basis but the basis for survival. Small and medium-sized enterprises have a very special role to play in this. Creditworthiness is particularly important during financial crises, so that these enterprises can still obtain microcredit.

I wish to point out in particular that the instrument of microcredit has actually very much proved its worth worldwide and that, particularly within the framework of the WTO round, which is hopefully approaching the final stages, we should consider how to bring about the relevant trade facilitation for the affected families in these areas.

After all, prosperity is created where something is produced, where people can live off the proceeds themselves and feed their families. If, in addition, they manage to sell something, prosperity is assured. It is with this in mind that I hope development policy takes the right course.

Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, after hearing all the different contributions, it is clear that the Members' main concern is the choice of the legal basis.

I stated in my introduction the direction in which the Commission seeks to go, but I will certainly be very happy to take up your suggestions also.

You know that we want the best development assistance for all countries, and this is the main thrust of our thinking. So let us work together in order to find the right solution.

Thijs Berman, rapporteur. – Mr President, I am not a lawyer, and I am not well versed in law, but I know that one should avoid stretching the interpretation of legal texts. That is my fear if we use Article 181a, because it talks about economic and technical cooperation, whereas we are talking about students who go abroad on exchanges between universities. It is a bit hazardous. I am not against this if the Commission sees it as a way out for the non-ODA activities we all deem necessary and important, and I will go along with it. Perhaps I am concerned because I am a journalist. I like texts and I take words seriously, which is the essence of Europe – its humanism, taking texts seriously and taking language seriously. You have to be very careful when using words, so Article 181a is a maybe, but I am not very happy about it.

I was happy, however, with the comment made by Mairead McGuinness, to the effect that she needed to be convinced. She is Irish, she has her convictions and she is firm in her principles, as indeed we all are. If it is impossible tomorrow to reach agreement on the right legal basis, then I would prefer to refer this back to my committee and to take time to decide on a proper legal basis, because we all know that non-ODA actions are necessary.

I thank the Commission for its comment that non-ODA actions will, over time, become more and more important in developing countries and in middle-income countries, etc. We all agree on their necessity, and we all agree on the need to find a legal basis. Some of us agree that Article 179 is not the basis we are looking for.

If I cannot reach agreement with the PPE-DE Group before we vote tomorrow at noon – which will be a pity – I shall ask for a referral back to my committee. I am ready to do that and I will do so when the amendment is voted on tomorrow. I would be very sorry if this is the position of the PPE-DE Group, because we all agree on the need to maintain development aid at the level it is today, and we all know that it is shrinking with the economic crisis.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Angelika Beer (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – (DE) The review of the new foreign policy financing instruments has revealed defects in cooperation with third countries, and so we propose reforming the industrial instrument.

The Committee on Foreign Affairs does not consider it desirable to limit the new legal basis for the instrument to a few areas of cooperation. In addition, the policy fields currently envisaged (culture, youth, research) are borrowed from European domestic policy and have not, up to now, been intended to define cooperation with third countries. This is just one of the uncertainties that worries the Committee on Foreign Affairs. What happens, for example, if, in the near future, it becomes desirable to cooperate with other countries in matters of climate policy? Do we have to create a new legal basis for the instrument each time? Do we mean to do that every time there is a change in the area of cooperation?

The reform of the foreign policy instruments is very important to us all, and so it should be made clear that we are not fighting against one another.

This is the only reason why the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, together with the second rapporteur from the Committee on Foreign Affairs, withdrew the amendment on Monday.

In terms of content, we believe our proposal is more far-sighted and that it is the one that enables a coherent foreign policy. However, this report is just a recommendation to the Commission. We shall see what it does with it.

Sirpa Pietikäinen (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (FI) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the European Union is the world's largest donor of development aid, accounting for 60% of all funding. The Union's central role as a key actor in development cooperation should be strengthened even further in the future.

In order to stabilise the economies of the developing countries and bring peace to them, it is vitally important that the Union keeps to its target to increase its share of development aid by 0.7% of GDP by the year 2015. This alone, however, will not be enough.

It is essential to achieve general coherence in development cooperation among the different institutions. Financial investment and projects intended to build infrastructure and for more satisfactory adherence to the notion of human rights need to be undertaken in such a way that they support one another. The EU needs to establish the necessary instruments for implementing coherent development policy measures.

The Union's current legal basis for development cooperation, however, is flawed in terms of legislation, and that is why I would like to thank the rapporteur for raising what is an important issue. Projects aimed at improving the transport, technology and energy sectors and the dialogue between the scientific community and NGOs are essential for the social viability of developing countries. The main goal of such projects is not, however, to foster economic development and prosperity in the developing countries, and they do not therefore meet the criteria for official development aid as set by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development. In future, official development aid should focus specifically on the elimination of poverty and improving people's living conditions.

24. Community legal framework for a European Research Infrastructure (ERI) (debate)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0007/2009) by Mrs Riera Madurell, on behalf of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, on the proposal for a Council regulation on the Community legal framework for a European Research Infrastructure (ERI) (COM(2008)0467 - C6-0306/2008 - 2008/0148(CNS)).

Teresa Riera Madurell, rapporteur. – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, I would first of all like to point out that unanimity was achieved in the ITRE Committee regarding this report. Unanimity was possible thanks to the good work and cooperation of the shadow rapporteurs, whose contributions also largely helped to achieve a useful report on a subject as important as the European research infrastructure.

I must say that Parliament agrees with the Commission that, in view of the globalisation of research and the emergence of new scientific and technological powers such as China and India, we urgently need to speed up, and, to that end, incentivise, the construction of a new European research area.

It is very important that we ensure as soon as possible that the European Union is an area in which researchers, technologies and knowledge can move freely, where there is effective coordination of research activities and

where the best possible use is made of resources. This requires, amongst other things, that we have large research infrastructures at the European level.

These infrastructures can also provide an excellent opportunity for cooperation between the different Member States, with significant effects on the scientific education of our young people and a strong economic impact on European industry. They are therefore essential to the progress of science in Europe and consequently, we must facilitate their development. Parliament therefore applauds the Commission's initiative in proposing a legal framework and the conditions for it.

In fact, from the beginning, we considered the development of European research infrastructures to be one of the pillars of the European Research Area. However, we were always aware of the difficulties that needed to be overcome, not only because they required significant financial resources – it should be remembered that the ESFRI roadmap identifies 44 projects that should be implemented in the next ten years – but also due to the technical and organisational complexity of the issue.

On this point I would like to say once again that in an initiative of this calibre, Parliament should have played a much more decisive role. However, the urgency of these measures and the absence of a better legal basis in the current Treaty sufficiently justify the use of Article 171, which does not take away from the fact that this is one more reason to proclaim the need to have a new Treaty as soon as possible.

I will briefly point out some of the contributions that the report makes. Firstly, it clarifies the definition of 'European research infrastructure' in order to avoid confusions between the legal entity and the actual research infrastructure. It also clarifies and completes the requirements for a piece of research infrastructure to be considered European, adding important issues such as an impact assessment for the proposal at the European level, justifying its financing capacity and ensuring that there is a good policy of access to the whole European scientific community.

We also propose extending this initiative to existing infrastructure, and we give our full support to the Commission's proposal for exemption from VAT, which we think is the key element of this initiative.

We therefore want to send a clear message to the Council to resolve its problems on this issue as soon as possible and to say once again that if we want to promote research in Europe, we must release it from tax burdens. This is something that we have recommended on several occasions in order to encourage SMEs to participate in R&D tasks, and which we now need to support in relation with the creation of large research infrastructures at European level, because they are essential for the progress of science.

To conclude, I would once again like to thank all the shadow rapporteurs, the Commission for their excellent contribution, and also the services of the ITRE Committee for the help that they have given me in drawing up this report.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, first and foremost, I wish to express my gratitude to the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) and particularly to the rapporteur, Ms Riera Madurell, for supporting our proposal for the Community legal framework for a European Research Infrastructure. Listening to you was music to my ears!

Let me also thank the ITRE shadow rapporteurs for their constructive support.

Together, we are coming an important step closer to a legal framework which will allow Member States to collaborate on the construction of new large research infrastructures, which are becoming increasingly complex and expensive, and which can only be built if several European countries work together.

You have discussed the new legal instrument in depth, and you have made many amendments which will help to clarify the text and give it a better structure, notably regarding definition, scope and status, and by introducing references to the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures (ESFRI).

The Commission will make all possible efforts to support the implementation of these amendments by the Council.

We are especially glad to see that we agree on the most vital aspect of the discussions taking place right now in Council, and which risks blocking adoption – I mean the VAT issue.

As you know, all Member States agree that it is necessary to exempt research infrastructures set up by several countries from taxes in the host country.

Many times, for working purposes, it is addressed as a tax exemption issue, which creates some confusion. In reality, it concerns only the implementation of the existing VAT Directive, which has already been agreed and adopted by the Council. The real question is whether European research infrastructure should be given the status of international organisations, as defined in the VAT Directive and, as such, be exempt from the VAT payment. Therefore, we are not talking about fiscal harmonisation but about setting up the legal entities related to research infrastructures.

Both the legal services of the Commission and of the Council have clearly stated that this is the right place. This is consequently purely a political decision on how important Member States consider the setting up of new world-class research facilities in Europe to be.

Your unwavering support in this issue could be of great importance!

IN THE CHAIR: MR ONESTA

Vice-President

Paul Rübig, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, Mr van Nistelrooij once said that this was about defining the ‘fifth freedom’. The fifth freedom is simply the freedom of researchers, who cannot be tied to regional, national or international level.

We simply need to create the grouping and legal framework for researchers to do the job society expects of them. We are talking here not only about research carried out at universities – academic research – or in industry but also, in particular, about research carried out in small and medium-sized enterprises. After all, it is also important that these research results continue to be presented and made available.

Last year, we introduced the Energy Club in this House – which Vice-President Onesta attended – where the scientific community and those responsible radiated enthusiasm for inventions with the potential to bring us all very great benefits. Creating such research instruments is the right answer, particularly in the present economic and energy crisis, so as to enable the development of new products and services that can then be marketed worldwide. The Commission’s initiative on this is particularly to be welcomed, therefore, as the organisation of such initiatives of course reinforces the international possibilities. International cooperation, in particular, is increasingly important for us in Europe, as it is for our partners. After all, we in Europe have made ourselves the part of the world with the greatest purchasing power, and our 500 million citizens have the right to have the research results drawn up as quickly and efficiently as possible. Thank you.

Adam Gierek, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (PL) Mr President, the aim of the European Research Infrastructure (ERI) is to create unique research centres managed by the most distinguished specialists working in specific fields. They should, in my opinion, possess a great deal of expensive, cutting-edge equipment, and be staffed by a team of scientists. The ERI will be used for the experimental study, mainly using inductive methods, of phenomena in the world around us, with the aim of producing practical solutions. The ERI should also serve to train young scientists.

I think that the European Strategy Forum on Research Infrastructures is not intended to copy present centres of excellence but, by using structural and national funds, to create different research units which will complement the centres of excellence and create an infrastructure of specialist research units, a uniform network spanning the entire EU. Young, ambitious European researchers will not be forced to travel across the ocean to implement their ideas. Thus, I think that the preconditions for the effective functioning of the ERI include a high degree of specialisation and mobility in terms of the research environment. Research will become more effective if time constraints are introduced and if it is spread across several locations, *i.e.* if basic research tasks are carried out simultaneously in various international specialist ERI units which, as they are not economic entities, would be exempt from tax.

In thanking you for your attention, I congratulate Mrs Madurell, and I wish the Commission a speedy realisation of this concept for a regulation which, while interesting, requires further specification.

Vladko Todorov Panayotov, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (BG) I would like to congratulate Teresa Riera Madurell on this report, which brings us closer to successfully establishing a European Research Area. I am convinced that by setting up a network of scientific research partnerships among Member States, we will be able to achieve a competitive and profitable economy based on knowledge and innovation. It would not be possible to exchange knowledge without the relevant infrastructure, because it plays a key role in establishing an effective environment for carrying out up-to-date and extremely necessary research.

Currently, all activity is limited to cooperation between individual research establishments. We also have not had the relevant legal instruments which would make it possible to set up a suitable partnership with participants from various states which is, in fact, the key to success in this area. The lack of such legal instruments has greatly held back the processes of research integration of the new Member States, and these Member States have a huge research potential which needs to be incorporated into the European Union.

This report is not merely a step towards establishing the legal groundwork for setting up a research infrastructure. It would be instrumental in achieving the movement of knowledge in the European Union, increasing the prestige and authority of European research centres at a world level and increasing employment, and will contribute in the search for adequate solutions to new environmental challenges. I would once again like to congratulate the rapporteur, Mrs Riera Madurell.

Nils Lundgren, on behalf of the IND/DEM Group. – (SV) Do we need a European economic legal entity in the research sector or is this yet another example of the EU's persistent fight against European pluralism? The truth is, of course, that institutional competition is necessary for successful institutional reforms. Imagine if an international legal research framework had been established 50 years ago. Development in this area would have ceased. Changing international treaties is difficult and proceeds far too slowly. Progress is made if countries can easily reform their national institutions. Successful reforms then spread to other countries.

The Commission's proposal is certainly not a straightjacket. It offers an alternative to existing national proposals and, to that extent, represents an improvement. However, the proposal is ruined completely by the fact that the Commission also wishes to regulate the taxation of this legal entity at EU level. This proposal must therefore be rejected.

Erna Hennicot-Schoepges (PPE-DE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, I feel that this is a very significant step forward in European research policy. It is a result of the evaluation report of the Sixth Framework Programme, but it is also a consideration that has been retained throughout the drafting of the seventh.

You said, Commissioner, that some Member States are now allowed to join forces. It is absurd, to say the least, to note that special permission is required from the European Union for that but still, it is progress. What concerns me is your statement that VAT will be applied at its minimum rate and that the situation regarding international status is not yet absolutely clear, at least that is how I understood it.

Article 171 was cited for the vote on the SESAR Joint Undertaking. We have voted twice on this draft since, in the initial version, the international status had not been confirmed and, therefore, it was not possible to establish the joint undertaking. Another joint undertaking, Galileo, has not been established at all.

My questions are as follows. What will be the share of Community funding? Will funding be provided for those who work together to prevent the squandering of resources intended for research infrastructures and to encourage them? Will it finally be possible to tap into the cohesion fund for research so as to combine excellence and cohesion?

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE). – (RO) 2009 is the European Year of Creativity and Innovation.

Setting up a European research infrastructure to operate on a non-economic basis will help to streamline the Community's research programmes, as well as distribute and optimise the results in the field of research, technological development and demonstration activities at Community level.

I welcome the fact that these infrastructures can receive cofinancing through Cohesion Policy financial instruments, in accordance with the regulations on the European Regional Development Fund, the Social Fund and Cohesion Fund.

I want to emphasise that it is vitally important that these infrastructures establish the link between research institutes and structures, universities, academia and the private sector, with industrial sectors benefiting from the use of research results.

However, I would like to mention that, above all during the current crisis, we need to make sure that at least 1% of a Member State's GDP is allocated to research.

Dragoș Florin David (PPE-DE). – (RO) The notion of a common European Research Area and of a Community legal framework that is applicable to European research infrastructures has been the basic principle for achieving the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy relating to economic growth, the creation of jobs and establishing a dynamic, knowledge-based economy.

Research infrastructures are playing an ever greater role in the advancement of knowledge and technology, thanks to their ability to mobilise human resources and investments so that a critical mass is achieved, thereby successfully making a crucial contribution to European economic development. We have proposed to provide research with competitive financing, adequate infrastructures and intellectual property regulations, as well as efficient mobility for researchers in our desire for the European Union to be a top international research partner.

Today, through this proposal for a regulation on the Community legal framework for a European Research Infrastructure, we are consolidating the creation of the fifth freedom in Europe: the free movement of knowledge. The current regulation will be a pillar of European research development as the European Research Infrastructure will guarantee scientific excellence in Community research and competitiveness of the Community's economy, based on medium and long-term forecasts and through effective support for European research activities.

In the current economic crisis, the quickest possible implementation of this regulation, combined with encouraging investment in research and development, establishing common standards in the knowledge sector, and modernising national education systems, will provide real solutions aimed at overcoming this crisis.

I feel that at this time, we need to promptly focus our attention on the existing differences in the area of developing an infrastructure for innovation and research between developed Member States and those with a developing economy so that we do not trigger a major migration of researchers from the economies of the states which have recently joined to the Member States whose economies are at the forefront of the global economy. Homogenous distribution of these infrastructures and of research opportunities within the European Union would be beneficial to the whole European Union and would help to combat the migration of scientists from East to West.

I would like to conclude by congratulating the rapporteur, Mrs Riera Madurell, and her colleagues from the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy for their contribution in compiling this report.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – Mr President, could you share the five minutes between the two applications that have been made? I would be interested in taking two minutes, if that was in order?

President. – Well, you present me with a quandary. The Rules of Procedure state one minute. One minute.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). – Mr President, with the greatest respect, we have already wasted two minutes talking about it. There are five minutes from the floor under 'catch the eye'. I have participated in other debates where there were perhaps one, two or three speakers and we share the time. I want just two minutes – I do not know about the other colleagues.

Thank you for allowing me to trespass on your patience, Mr President.

I fully support the establishment of legal status for new European research infrastructures for pan-European research projects and pan-European funding.

I have two quick points. I have in front of me – and I would like to compliment the Commissioner and his staff – a publication entitled 'A more research-intensive and integrated European Research Area: Science, Technology and Competitiveness key figures report 2008/2009'. I think the figures may be well out of date, given the collapse in GDP across the EU and elsewhere. I particularly pick up the point that public funding of R&D can be counter-cyclical, as happened in Japan and the US in the early 1990s and early noughties respectively. When there were collapses in their GDP, the public sector investment in R&D went up.

Could you extrapolate from what we are experiencing at the moment in the EU, with what we have available in FP7 and from Member States, in view of the collapse of economic growth throughout the EU at the moment – we are not alone globally – whether we will be able to compensate with increased public sector funding in R&D?

My second point concerns the frightening prospect as regards the EU's world share in patent applications, which has declined by an alarming figure. The high costs of patents in Europe, you say, might possibly explain this. In Europe, the costs and corresponding costs for patent applications are over 20% higher than in the US, 13 times higher than in the Japan Patent Office, while the costs of maintaining a patent protection in the 27 Member States is over 60 times higher in the EU than the US – frightening implications. Perhaps you could tell us, Commissioner, how we could resolve this as soon as possible?

I should like to congratulate you once again, Commissioner, on a fascinating publication.

Mieczysław Edmund Janowski (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, I would like to thank the rapporteur for her work. I will refer here to a statement made by Mrs Doyle. At a time when we are experiencing economic collapse, we should not allow ourselves to make the mistake of neglecting research and development or the people who work in these areas. Therefore, I endorse the measures concerning the establishment of a legal framework for the European Research Infrastructure.

We must be aware that for the ERI, it is necessary to have legal frameworks and also adequate funding, but that this money cannot come from contributions made by individual regions, or even countries. The question of appropriate taxation is also important in this case. I also think that better cooperation is needed between research centres and the economy, including small and medium-sized enterprises. I am convinced that the ERI will also contribute, if it is properly correlated with the framework programmes, to improving the situation of the people who work in research, and especially young people, as Mr Gierek has said. This may also prevent a brain drain in Europe. We should remember that the Lisbon Strategy provides for a share of three per cent of GDP for expenditure on research and development. In the European Union today – my figures are for the year 2007 – that indicator stands at 1.84%. I trust, therefore, that the ERI will improve this situation.

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, firstly I would like to thank you for your support. I think we all understand how important it is that we talk. I may not follow the order of the questions but will try to respond briefly to what you asked.

Ms Doyle, as regards public funding, the experience of the past has shown that, in times of crisis, private financing most likely goes down. That is why public financing should not make the terrible mistake of following that pattern because that would be the way which, after the crisis, would lead us to a completely improper situation. That is why public financing has to act counter-cyclically and that is why, even in Europe, we have had that kind of example. Finland was the case at the beginning of the 1990s. I think we should do something like that and we should follow that path.

On the cost of patent application, it is very striking. I think there is no simple answer. 'Better' would certainly be an answer which would be more horizontal than anything which we could do. Last year, we tried to do our best by proposing to clarify this patent picture in relations between private and public institutions, but certainly that is not the answer to the depth of the problem which we are facing in patent application.

Now I turn to the proposal about the questions about the financing from the Seventh Framework Programme. What we have financed until now is the preparatory phase of the projects which are released. It is not intended that we finance institutionally the infrastructure. This will be done by the Member States and also Member States will decide, for example, where this will be located. When this is finished, however, we will certainly, as for any other infrastructure, finance the grants.

That is really the only way ahead. I can remind you that, when we discussed the issue of the budget of the research infrastructure, this was the budget which, in percentage points, was really mostly cut for the Seventh Framework Programme. I am, however, quite optimistic. We are well ahead, and I think that legislation is bringing good solutions.

Concerning VAT, I would like to be precise. We do not propose VAT exemption in the legislation. We believe that if more countries are joining in efforts to build a common infrastructure, say between Germany and Slovenia or the United Kingdom or anywhere, then at the end of the day, none of the countries will agree to pay VAT in that country. That is the case also today – but what exactly is the case today? Today, the countries are individually negotiating with the host country on that kind of exemption. What we are trying to do, via that legislation, is to guarantee the status of an international organisation which would, as a consequence, due to the VAT legislation which exists today, guarantee VAT exemption.

That would, in essence, be the end of the story anyway, but time was mentioned. Time is the crucial question here, so we are talking about whether we can speed up and simplify how we are building the research infrastructure together. Unfortunately, today's situation in research infrastructure is so complex that we are losing time and thus money also. In essence, that is the story.

I have forgotten cohesion. The answer is yes.

To finish, that is exactly the point which we have to underline. We need infrastructure. We need it as soon as possible. This is the step to speed up the whole process. I thank you for understanding that and I thank you for your support in that context.

President. – Before giving the floor to our rapporteur, I would like to clarify something for Mrs Doyle. We have looked into the technicalities.

A little over a year ago, on 8 January 2008, you received a communication from the Deputy Secretary-General, on a decision of the Conference of Presidents of 27 October 2007. Point 3(B) very clearly states that ‘catch the eye’ time is a maximum of five minutes, and is limited to a maximum of one minute per speaker.

That is the rule, but it was such a pleasure to listen to you that we took great delight in hearing what you had to say. We now come to our rapporteur, Mrs Riera-Madurell.

Teresa Riera Madurell, rapporteur. – (ES) Mr President, I would like to thank everyone who has taken part in this debate for their contributions, and also I would like to thank the Commissioner for his words and say that I entirely agree with his very clear explanation regarding the VAT issue. To conclude, I would simply like to say that the majority of us are in agreement with the basics. The message is clear: excellence in research requires high quality research infrastructure and, basically due to high construction and operational costs, it is important to share a large proportion of this research infrastructure. In other words, it is more than reasonable to think about creating European infrastructure that can serve the whole European scientific community.

The roadmap drawn up by ESFRI was certainly a step forward towards better planning of research infrastructure at European level. What we need to do now is implement this roadmap. One of the main problems is certainly funding, as some of my colleagues have pointed out, because despite the increase in the funding allocated to the Seventh Framework Programme and the possibilities of support for the infrastructures in the cohesion policy programmes, which some of my colleagues have also mentioned, the European Union budget is not sufficient to fund all of the necessary infrastructure. It is therefore essential that we mobilise sources of funding, both national and private, as far as possible, especially from industry, although as the Commissioner rightly said, this is not a very good time.

Another difficulty, which is no less important, was the lack of a legal structure. This was the Commission’s objective when putting forward this proposal: to establish a legal framework and the necessary conditions for developing European research infrastructures. This is a good proposal, which we are convinced has been strengthened by Parliament, as the Commissioner has already said.

I would like to ask the Council once again to listen to our message.

Paul Rübig (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, may I ask that the heating be kept on until the end of the sitting, as it is too cold in the House.

President. – We take note of this comment. Perhaps our evening debates should be more animated and more heated so as to warm up the atmosphere. It is true, though, that the Chamber is large.

On this fundamental issue, which will do a great deal to advance European research, the debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 19 February 2009.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Constantin Dumitriu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) At times when the economy is in a downward spiral, the authorities are tempted to cut funds for research. However, I am pleased that by discussing this report on the proposal for a Council regulation on the Community legal framework for a European Research Infrastructure, we are sending out an important signal that research remains a priority activity for the European Union.

I firmly believe that by establishing this institutional framework for supporting research activity, we will see results which will bolster the European economy. The reason for this is that research is not a fad, but a necessity which guarantees the European economy’s competitiveness at a global level.

I would like to stress one extremely important area where research can play an important role. In the next 25 years, as a result of urbanisation, it is expected that almost 25% of land will be withdrawn from agricultural use. To compensate for this reduction in area, we need greater productivity from smaller areas, with a lower

use of water or pesticides. The solutions may emerge through research, particularly biotechnology, bearing in mind, of course, the principle of food security.

This is yet another reason for supporting greater research activity and ensuring a uniform European framework.

Daniel Petru Funeriu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I welcome the report on establishing a legal framework for the European Research Infrastructure (ERI), as well as the Commission's proposal for a regulation in this area.

ERI is a response to a real need on the part of European researchers and will undoubtedly help boost competitiveness in European science.

One of the important elements in this regulation is the opportunity for the European Union to hold a stake in an ERI type entity. This gives the Community the ability to participate in and guide Trans-European research policies.

Based on this element, I am calling on the European Commission to bear in mind three points when it comes to providing financial support for the ERI:

- 1) The Community's involvement exclusively in projects with an extremely high scientific potential.
- 2) Encouraging the formation of ERIs in regions which have traditionally been victims of the brain drain, both within and outside the Community.
- 3) Facilitating the access of companies in the private sector to the ERI.

Community policies in this area must combine scientific excellence with triggering an influx of researchers and effective infrastructures into countries, such as the new members of the European Union from the accession rounds in 2004 and 2007.

Nicolae Vlad Popa (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The report compiled by Teresa Riera Madurell is particularly important as it creates the legal framework required to develop research infrastructures.

Establishing European research infrastructures guarantees that research will reach a high level.

In addition, it will create new opportunities for closer collaboration between teams of European researchers which may also be joined by numerous students and technical staff, thereby helping attract young people into hi-tech research.

This legal framework must also ensure better cooperation between industry and academic research, thereby facilitating the implementation of innovations.

I support the rapporteur's proposal which asks the Commission to regularly report to the European Parliament on the status regarding the development of the European research infrastructures.

The cost of establishing large-scale research infrastructures requires several countries to join forces.

Establishing a common legal framework is absolutely necessary in order to facilitate and accelerate the development of these infrastructures.

25. A special place for children in EU external action (short presentation)

President. – The next item is a short presentation of the report (A6-0039/2009) by Mrs Kinnock, on behalf of the Committee on Development, on a special place for children in EU external action (2008/2203(INI)).

Glenys Kinnock, rapporteur. – Mr President, I have to say at the outset that I very much welcome the communication which has been prepared by the Commission. I think it is both comprehensive and ambitious.

In my report, Commissioner, I recommend which practical actions, investments and processes are needed if we are to identify that very special place for children in external action. The Commission and the Council communication and conclusions on external action will build upon the external dimension of the EU strategy on the rights of the child. I believe that this is essential work for the European Union.

Commissioner, I now look forward very much to seeing actions intended to match the ambition which I see. We need to see substance backing up the rhetoric. That means that resources must be available and, of

course – as I am sure you will agree – there must be no backtracking by the European Union Member States on the commitments they have made to fund the Millennium Development Goals (MDG). What we know is that, for most of the world's two billion children, it is a daily struggle against poverty and vulnerability. As we know, 98% of the children in our world living in extreme poverty are living in developing countries.

Furthermore, it is now clear that the impact of the financial crisis will be severely felt by children and young people, for instance when the budgets are cut back on health and education. That is why I think it is right that we make a political commitment, at the highest level, on behalf of and with children. The EU must see in its partnership with the developing countries the opportunity to influence public policy to save children's lives. Priority actions for children must be promoted when the European Commission negotiates the country strategy papers' regional and thematic strategies, when they are drawn up, and subsequently when they are reviewed.

When there is budget support, including MDG budget contracts, specific objectives and indicators on children must and should be included. I welcome the Commission's intention to draw up partner national action plans for children. We need assurances that even the most marginalised children – including children with disabilities and orphans – have access to equitable health, welfare and judicial services.

I believe there needs to be more and better training of Commission staff – both in Brussels and in delegations – particularly in how they manage the participation of children. We need to see a radical rethink in the European Union about how we ensure that we listen to children and invite children to participate, because we understand that it is children themselves who give lives to the values that are enshrined in international law through the Convention on the Rights of the Child agreed in 1989. It is my experience that the children themselves – the young people – have a wealth of understanding and experience – which we must tap into – on how to tackle poverty and environmental degradation.

I welcome the fact that the Commission recognises the importance of consultation during the preparation of the EU strategy on the rights of the child. I also understand that this has been planned for the first half of 2009. Commissioner, would the Commission be able to confirm when this process will begin? I trust there will not be any decision that the public consultation – including with children – will be put on hold until a new Commission and Parliament is in place.

Finally, to quote Kofi Annan, 'There is no trust more sacred than the one the world holds with children. There is no duty more important than ensuring that their rights are respected, that their welfare is protected, that their lives are free from fear and want and that they grow up in peace.' I think all of us would agree that those are fine objectives.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, it is a pleasure to be here today to talk about children and also about the report you will adopt shortly.

Let me talk for a few minutes about how we got to where we are today, and what will come in the future, and about child participation, which is most likely our biggest challenge regarding children.

Today is an important step in a long process that started several years ago internally in the Commission. We recognise that the EU needs a strategy on children. We need a strategy on how we, the European Union, will implement the commitments. We and the rest of the world have signed up to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

The first step was the Commission communication 'Towards an EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child' in 2006. This was followed in 2008 by the communication package on children in external actions, which outlined a comprehensive approach to children by the EU using all available instruments in external cooperation.

Let me digress for a moment, since I am convinced that some of you will be asking the question: what about the EU strategy on the rights of the child, which was announced in the above-mentioned communication? I can confirm that the Commission is working on such a strategy, which will be presented under the next Commission.

During the Slovenian Presidency in May 2008, the Council adopted conclusions on the promotion and protection of the rights of the child in the European Union's external action – the development of humanitarian dimensions.

The Committee on Development then started drafting a report. We are now at the end of this process and tomorrow, you will be voting on this excellent report.

In addition, the EU's policy on children is based on the two EU guidelines – the Guidelines on Children in Armed Conflicts and the Guidelines on the Rights of the Child – both being implemented in a number of selected priority and pilot countries. The Commission welcomes the report – which is an excellent complement to our communication – the Council conclusions and the guidelines. We will surely use it in our work on children.

Let me focus my final comments on what is probably our biggest challenge today: child participation. How do we ensure that we involve children in decisions that concern them? How do we ensure that children have access to pertinent information? How do we ensure equal access for children to express their views? We have to recognise that, amongst everything that we all agreed to in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, this might be the major challenge.

We have to admit that we are still far from achieving anything significant in the area of child participation. In the Commission, we are starting to reflect on how to design and implement proper child participation that is not just tokenism. It should be relevant, meaningful and informed child participation. We have also ensured relevant funding for child participation under the thematic programme 'Investing in People'.

Why is this difficult for us adults? Essentially, because it questions what is fundamental to us: the way we behave.

What will the Commission do in its external action to promote this participation? The Commission will make the tools available for our delegations to consult children, but these tools will be used not only by our delegations but also by partner countries. We are also developing a tool kit, together with UNICEF, that should not only address child participation but also overall child protection, legal reform, child budgeting.

In addition to the tool kit, we are also recasting and strengthening our collaboration with UNICEF in general in order to be able to improve our support to partner countries in their efforts to ensure that children have a voice at country level.

We also cooperate closely with various NGOs to learn from them about possible formats, often involving children and having meaningful child participation. Let me be honest: it is not going to happen tomorrow. This is just the start of a long process.

Let me just make one comment on the report. The report underlines how the Commission should pay attention to child participation, but, colleagues, you will also have to do so, and I can assure you that the Commission will be happy to work with you on advancing this. We should build on the collective force of the two institutions to advance this important issue.

Let me once again express the Commission's appreciation of the report and underline that we will do our utmost to carry out these recommendations. We are counting on the continued support of Parliament in this area.

In answer to Ms Kinnock's question, I am happy to confirm that the position of the Commission has not changed. The idea of using 2009 for consultations was launched in the Commission itself and we are working to put in place the conditions for a process of consultation with children that avails itself of all existing tools.

Let me also underline that the Commission is keen to ensure a process of consultation that fully respects the rights of the child.

Finally, let me thank you, Ms Kinnock, for a very fruitful collaboration on children and child-related issues, not only as regards this report, but also over the years. I know that I was too long, but you can never be too long when you are talking about children's rights.

President. – Many thanks, Commissioner. Indeed, your speech was very interesting and on an issue that is also very important.

The item is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 19 February 2009.

Written statements (Rule 142)

John Attard-Montalto (PSE), in writing. – It is a sad day when we have to acknowledge that every day, more than 26 000 children under the age of five die around the world, mostly from preventable causes.

It is tragic that many lives can be saved with the appropriate measures, be they medical or financial, and still the situation is aggravating. Special attention has to be given to the most vulnerable and socially excluded girls and boys, including disabled children, migrant children and children from minorities.

The report is commendable. I only disagree with those aspects which refer to abortion.

The Committee on Development adopted this own-initiative report (drafted by Glenys Kinnock (PES, UK) on a special place of children in EU external action in response to the Commission communication on the subject. The committee welcomed the communication and the four guiding principles of the Commission's Action Plan on Children's Rights in External Action, which include a holistic and coherent child-rights-based approach.

Without losing any more time we must:

- (a) undertake a thorough analysis of children's rights;
- (b) build up existing youth and children's networks as sustainable platforms for consulting children;
- (c) ensure that international agreements between the EU and third countries should contain a legally binding clause on the protection of children's rights.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (PSE), in writing. – (RO) It is our duty to ensure that we are the ones who build a better future, not only for Europeans, but also for the developing countries.

It is children who represent the future and we must ensure that their rights are enforced and respected in third countries which receive European funding.

It is a matter of priority that in relations with third countries, the European Union ensures that children's rights to education and access to medical services are guaranteed.

It is true that we are going through a period of financial crisis, but we cannot overlook the fact that somewhere in the world, a child dies every three seconds and every minute a woman dies in childbirth.

Given that children make up half of the world's population, we must consider that the rights of children are a priority in the European Union's development policy.

Every Member State, according to its possibilities, should get involved in the policies for cooperating with developing countries. In fact, the European Commission should exert pressure on developing countries to transpose into national legislation the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Anna Záborská (PPE-DE), in writing. – (SK) I am pleased that I was able to write an opinion on this report in the Committee on Women's Rights. I have taken a particular interest in the issue of children's rights in the context of foreign relations.

My opinion was unanimously approved. It states above all that the EU foreign strategy as regards children's rights should be based on the values and principles set out in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in particular Articles 3, 16, 18, 23, 25, 26 and 29. These are particularly important for the wellbeing of individuals and society as a whole. My opinion stresses that all measures in the interests of children's rights should give priority status to parents and immediate relatives of children.

The fact that the European Parliament has adopted my opinion underlines the importance of protecting human life right from the outset, and of giving each child its own identity. I succeeded in introducing statements condemning gender-based eugenic discrimination, which is increasingly common in some countries. The opinion asks the Commission to emphasise the importance of the need to register every child at birth in all third countries as part of the Commission's development policy, and to make its aid programmes dependent on this requirement.

I support any attempt to promote development aid. I do, however, insist that humanitarian organisations and international bodies responsible for allocating aid guarantee that the aid and funding allocated actually reaches the children it is destined for, and is not squandered.

26. Implementation of Directive 2002/14/EC establishing a general framework for informing and consulting employees in the European Community (short presentation)

President. – The next item is a short presentation of the report (A6-0023/2009) by Mr Cottigny, on behalf of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, on the implementation of Directive 2002/14/EC establishing a general framework for informing and consulting employees in the European Community (2008/2246(INI)).

Jean Louis Cottigny, rapporteur. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would first like to thank the various shadow rapporteurs for their open-minded work during our collaboration on this text in the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs.

The Member States must improve the implementation of the directive on informing and consulting employees, particularly in the current context of the financial crisis and of its consequences for companies as they restructure, merge or move abroad. This is the message the Committee on Employment was seeking to send out in this initiative report.

The European Union has 23 million companies with fewer than 250 employees. They represent 99% of companies and employ over 100 million people. Workers' rights to information and consultation are essential components of the social market economy.

The transposition of Directive 2002/14/EC has been considerably delayed in some Member States. In this own-initiative report, we point out that the impact of this directive is evident in the countries where no general system of worker information and consultation existed.

I am calling for an improved transposition of the directive in the Member States. We ask that the Commission takes measures, as soon as possible, to ensure the proper transposition of this directive by the Member States, and to bring infringement proceedings against those that have either not transposed it at all or have done so incorrectly.

The report also emphasises that, in their transposition measures, some Member States have not included some young workers, women working part-time or workers employed for a short period on temporary contracts.

We ask that the Member States define precisely the term 'information' by allowing workers' representatives to examine the data supplied and not to content themselves with awaiting the end of the information procedure if the companies' decisions have direct consequences for the workers. Member States without effective, proportionate and deterrent sanctions are asked to introduce them. Finally, in an improved coordination of the different legislative instruments, we also invite the Commission to examine what is required to coordinate the six directives and the regulation on informing employees, so that any amendments to get rid of overlaps and contradictions can be made.

As this type of advance in workers' rights is more than beneficial, the Union owes it to itself to guarantee that the Member States transpose the obligations of the directive correctly and in full. It is essential that all European workers know that Europe supports them in their involvement in the life of their company, in their daily lives as workers, and especially at the present time.

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I take due note of Mr Cottigny's report on what is an important directive which consolidates at European level a fundamental social right of employees. The Commission attaches great importance to informing and consulting employees at both national and transnational level, particularly in the current difficult context of the financial crisis.

We proposed the recasting of the directive on European work councils. This has been successfully completed. We are continuing our work on the anticipation and socially responsible management of restructuring and the questions arising at European level from the negotiation of transnational agreements.

As explained in its communication of 17 March 2008, the Commission's prime concern for the implementation of Directive 2002/14/EC is that it should be comprehensive and effective in collaboration with the Member States and the two sides of industry, which have an extremely important role to play, as you know. It should be borne in mind that the directive only establishes a general framework that can be implemented and expanded by the two sides of industry, particularly at company level.

The Commission conducts and supports activities for raising awareness, promoting the exchange of best practices and boosting the capacities of all the parties involved by means of seminars, training courses, studies and financial aid for projects particularly under a specific budget line.

The Commission also monitors the correct application of the directive in its capacity as Guardian of the Treaties: for example, if complaints are made by trade union organisations. So far, however, the Commission has received very few complaints concerning the implementation of this directive.

President. – The item is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 19 February 2009.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The transposition of Directive 2002/14/EC establishing a general framework for informing and consulting employees in the European Community has been subject to considerable delay in certain Member States.

I feel that there is a need to increase the democratic involvement of workers in making decisions which have an impact on the company, bearing in mind the global nature of the current financial crisis, which is affecting Member States indiscriminately in their economic network and is generating fears about restructuring, mergers or relocation.

In the case of restructuring enterprises, I would call on European funds to be made available and for assistance to be provided to workers, not only enterprises. I also feel that it must become an obligatory practice in the situation where a multinational company is being restructured for trade-union representatives from all branches of the company to be invited to negotiations and consulted, not only those from the Member State in which the company has its head office.

I feel that it is important to regularly update the legislation concerning the rights of workers to be informed and consulted and include this item on the agenda for European social dialogue, both at an interprofessional and industrial level.

27. Social economy (short presentation)

President. – The next item is a short presentation of the report (A6-0015/2009) by Mrs Toia, on behalf of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, on Social Economy (2008/2250(INI)).

Patrizia Toia, rapporteur. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am pleased and proud that the European Parliament is looking at the social market economy and laying down practical proposals to provide real support for this sector.

My report has three objectives. The first is to draw attention to and shed light on a sector that has a great impact on many areas, including the economy; 10% of European businesses belong to this sector, as well as 9% to 10% of jobs. It is a sector comprised of different operators – cooperatives, mutual societies, foundations, social enterprises and associations – which share specific values and make a significant contribution to GDP. We thus hope to give it greater institutional visibility.

The second objective is to confirm that this is not a marginal sector or an exception; rather it is firmly established in the market economy, with its own rules that the internal market must recognise and respect. It represents an alternative way of doing business, of producing, consuming and providing employment, that has nonetheless earned the right to be part of the market. It is a method characterised by a number of distinctive traits that must not be smoothed over and that consist primarily of the desire to combine and reconcile production and employment with values of solidarity, responsibility and human dignity in all areas including the world of work.

As someone once said, in my opinion quite rightly, these enterprises operate with capital but not for capital. These are concepts that form part of the ideological heritage of the European Union – one need only think of Delors – since we have often acknowledged the social economy as the keystone of the European social model, but then done very little about it.

Now is the ideal time to rediscover the relevance of these businesses, as the current crisis in manufacturing has shown many traditional economic actors to be very fragile, very weak and sometimes very unscrupulous.

The world of the social economy is, by contrast, more locally rooted, closer to the real economy and to people and therefore protected from speculation, as has proved the case. It is also a sector with a wide range of actors who do a lot of welfare work, and constitutes a recognised hub of social utility. It can, I believe, help to sustain our social systems when times are hard.

The third objective is to decide what we can do in practice to support this sector. I will very briefly describe one or two proposals. First of all, we need a clear definition to accurately understand the profiles and definitions of these highly diverse entities. It is also crucial to record the contribution made by this sector accurately in national statistics in different countries. It does not belong to either the capitalist economy or the public economy, and therefore requires its own definition. The Commission has gone some way towards this with its handbook, but it needs to be applied. I believe that the world of academia, research and universities can also help with this.

Finally, some legislative initiatives are called for. A number of things have been done, such as the cooperative statute and the foundation statute, and I see that the Commission has reopened its consultation. So, we need to understand what is useful and whether it is worthwhile continuing along this route. We do not want to bog down a sector that thrives on ideas, motivation and freedom with paperwork, but where Community laws are needed, or will be needed in future, it would be wise to create them.

One final request is to involve this sector in social dialogue. Where and at what level should consultation and dialogue with the European Commission take place? And lastly, what direct support should be provided by European programmes – should we have ad hoc programmes for the social economy, or create space within existing programmes for these operators? It is up to the Commission to assess this.

Before I finish, I would like to thank the national associations and European networks that have lent me much support in this work, Parliament's intergroup on the social economy, which is working well, the shadow rapporteurs, and also Mr Verheugen and Mr Špidla, with whom we have had a frank and thorough exchange of views.

We pass on this report, to which social actors and associations have contributed a great deal, to the Commission, in the hope that despite the short time remaining before the end of this electoral term, it will find the time, Commissioner – you represent the whole Commission here today – to put together some initiatives, and give a clear signal, so that the next Parliament and the next Commission do not have to start again from scratch but have something solid to build on.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, the Commission welcomes Parliament's initiative to formulate an own-initiative opinion on the social economy. Especially in the context of the present financial and economic crisis, this important sector deserves to be promoted more.

Social economy enterprises have a unique way of doing business since they combine economic performance mutually between members, and often also the achievement of social and societal objectives, as a business purpose. Thus, they are well placed to contribute to Community policies and objectives, particularly in the field of employment, social cohesion, regional and rural development, environmental protection, consumer protection and social security. Social economy enterprises are an integral part of the Commission's enterprise policy. Since, in the majority, they are micro, small or medium-sized enterprises, they already benefit from the Small Business Act and all actions targeting small enterprises.

With regard to the social economy, our objective is to create a legal and administrative environment, at European level and in every Member State, in which social economy enterprises of whatever form and size can thrive and meet the challenges posed by globalisation and the economic downturn. More specifically, the Commission's policy aims to guarantee that social economy enterprises can grow and prosper alongside other forms of company. To this end, the Commission pays particular attention to ensuring that all other Community policies in areas such as competition, accounting, company law, public procurement, health, social affairs, agriculture, fisheries, banking, insurance, public and private partnerships and regional development, do take into account the specific needs, particular goals, efforts and working style of this kind of enterprise.

To conclude, the Commission services are currently working on a document which will take stock of the progress made since 2004 on the promotion of cooperatives. It will also assess the situation of other social economy enterprises and propose new actions if necessary.

President. – The item is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 19 February 2009.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Iles Braghetto (PPE-DE), in writing. – (IT) Non-lucrative activities and not-for-profit organisations are experiencing continual growth in Europe.

At this time of economic and financial crisis, which has serious repercussions at social level, strengthening an economy founded on social benefits rather than profit is a strategic choice that allows us to alleviate the impact of the crisis and to pursue the development of the Lisbon strategy by realising one of its primary objectives, namely the call to social responsibility.

Secondly, the social economy is able to initiate action at local level, becoming a reliable partner for public administrations which need to plan measures to support the vulnerable in society.

We should therefore welcome the move by the European Parliament to recognise, in legislation and statistics, those organisations that operate and are deeply rooted in the European fabric due to their ability to achieve social objectives.

This is a grass-roots vision that represents a fundamental contribution to the European social model.

Gabriela Crețu (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The social economy can play a vital role in the European economy, by establishing a new type of economy based on democratic values, an economy which puts people first and supports sustainable development.

However, the social economy is facing a huge obstacle: the lack of institutional visibility due to the fact that it is not recognised as an economic sector which is distinct from the main two: public and private.

We call on the Commission and Member States to develop a legal framework which will recognise the social economy as a third sector and apply regulations that clearly stipulate which entities can operate in this sector so that no other type of organisation can benefit from the funding or public policies intended to encourage enterprises in the social economy.

We also call on the Commission and Member States to offer financial support, training and consultancy and also to simplify the procedures for setting up enterprises in the social sector.

In this way, the social economy will fulfil its effective role against the general backdrop of the European economy, by not only helping combat poverty, but also by facilitating access to resources, rights and services which citizens need to be able to participate in society.

Gábor Harangozó (PSE), in writing. – First of all, I would like to congratulate our rapporteur, Mrs Patrizia Toia, for the quality of the report she presents today. As a matter of fact, it is important to provide some clarity in defining the concept of social economy and ensuring its legal status through the wide range of national experiences. Social economy indeed requires visibility – through better knowledge of EU-wide data – for better achieving the objectives of solidarity, employment, entrepreneurship, growth, competitiveness social cohesion and social dialogue in the Union as a whole. Social economy is increasingly becoming an important actor at local and regional levels and has now, more than ever – due to the serious impacts of the financial crisis – a major role to play in European social and economic development. The Union needs to concentrate its efforts in supporting the social and economic dynamics to overcome the mere separation of public and private sectors if we really want to find new and innovative solutions to provide our citizens with sustainable jobs and a better living environment with quality services of general interest in an inclusive society.

Magda Kósáné Kovács (PSE), in writing. – (HU) We have been trying to mobilise all the EU institutions and resources for several months in order to alleviate the effects of the growing crisis. The silver lining of this dark cloud is that Mrs Patrizia Toia's report is now on the agenda of the plenary session, since initiatives focusing on solidarity, as well as on social and regional cohesion, are especially important these days. This is the focus of the social economy, as the latter is a conglomeration of organisational forms whose goal is solidarity and common financial interest, instead of profit. Such institutions cannot be replaced by any market-oriented organisation. They provide an opportunity to reduce the effects of economic stratification on the marginalised members of society, provide honourable work, and with their various forms ranging from self-employment to social cooperatives, they are able to reapply the fruits of their labours to the benefit of the community.

We have talked and written a lot about the social economy, but without a European statistical base it will not become visible in our everyday lives. If this concept is unknown to society, its solidarity is unable to help. Participating organisations, on the other hand, are too small to become known on a macro-economic level.

Mrs Patrizia Toia's report can help eliminate the suspicion legislators and market stakeholders have that the money and products generated by the social economy are simply organisations seeking to evade competition rules.

Here and now, the report may provide an opportunity for the social economy to manage the crisis efficiently, and with relatively little effort, to prevent job losses and guard against the loss of means of subsistence.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The social economy ensures job stability as it is not subject to delocalisation. I feel that the European Union and Member States should encourage and support forms of implementation of the social economy, e.g. cooperatives, mutual societies, associations and foundations, in their legislation and policies.

It is important to devise a series of measures aimed at developing microcredits and tailored EU funding as the values of the social economy correspond to the European objectives of social integration and contribute to establishing a work-life balance, as well as improving gender equality and the quality of life for the elderly or disabled. I feel that the role of women in the social economy must be reinforced, given their involvement in associations and voluntary organisations.

I urge the Commission to integrate the social economy in the other policies and strategies for social and economic development, especially in light of the Small Business Act, as the structures of the social economy are primarily targeted at small and medium-sized enterprises and services of general interest. These efforts could also be supported by creating a statistical register of enterprises in the social economy in each European Union Member State and by inputting the data into the EUROSTAT European statistics system.

28. Mental health (short presentation)

President. – The next item is a short presentation of the report (A6-0034/2009) by Mrs Tzampazi, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, on Mental Health (2008/2209(INI)).

Evangelia Tzampazi, rapporteur. – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, there is now an ever-increasing awareness that there is no health without mental health. We realise that mental health problems frequently have an impact, from a humanitarian and financial point of view, both on the personal, family, professional and social lives of the individuals and their families and on society as a whole.

The figures speak for themselves: one in four people will experience some form of mental disorder. Depression is one of the most common disorders and, by 2020, will be the most common illness in the developed world. Some 59 000 suicides are committed in the European Union every year, 90% of which are attributable to mental disorder. Vulnerable and marginalised groups, such as disabled people, are more likely to suffer mental health problems.

Also, in an ageing Europe, neurodegenerative disorders are becoming ever more common. We will therefore all agree that there is a need to take a concerted approach to the challenges posed by mental health and that it concerns us all. We all have an obligation to defend mental health and safeguarding the rights of mental patients and their families is an ideological and political position whereby the state provides social support and protection to those who need it. The first step was the Commission's Green Paper; the next step was the European Conference 'Together for Mental Health and Wellbeing', which also established the European Pact for Mental Health and Wellbeing.

In keeping with this, the report on mental health, which was approved unanimously by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, includes a series of recommendations to promote the mental health and wellbeing of the populace, to combat the stigma of discrimination and social exclusion, to strengthen preventive action and self-help, and to provide support and adequate treatment to people with mental health problems and to their families and carers.

In the report, we stress the need to provide high-quality, accessible, effective and universal mental health services and up-to-date legislation. We call for emphasis to be placed on the training of everyone in key positions. We call for access to appropriate education, training and employment and for the creation of a supportive environment, with particular emphasis on vulnerable groups. We call for emphasis to be placed

on the prevention of mental ill-health through social intervention. We call for the Member States to empower organisations which represent people with mental health problems. We propose the adoption of a platform to monitor the implementation of the Pact. We call on the Commission to present the conclusions of the thematic conferences. We stress the need to produce appropriate indicators with a view to improving the assessment of needs at national and European level.

At the same time, we are formulating proposals within the framework of the five priority areas of the Pact. Within this framework, we stress that, in order to prevent depression and suicide, we need to implement multi-sectoral programmes and set up networks, to develop a healthy climate in schools, to improve working conditions, to adopt measures to improve the quality of life and, finally, as regards combating stigma and social exclusion, we stress that public information and awareness campaigns are needed. For this, I should like to thank the members who contributed with their proposals and I hope that we shall send out a message that mental health is a valuable social commodity and that we all need to work to promote it.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I congratulate the European Parliament and its rapporteur, Ms Tzampazi, on this own-initiative report on mental health. The report quite rightly underlines the great impact mental health has on general wellbeing, on education, on learning, and on social cohesion in the European Union.

The fact that Parliament is adopting this report only two years after a resolution responding to the Commission's Green Paper on mental health signals the urgent need for more action in this field.

In my view, there is some reason for optimism. There is more awareness of the importance of mental health and wellbeing across all sectors, compared to a few years ago. This was evident from the great support for the Commission's high-level conference 'Together for mental health and wellbeing' and the European Pact for Mental Health and Wellbeing, both of which were mentioned by the rapporteur.

Further positive developments include the fact that many Member States have revised their mental health strategies or are setting up action plans, for example, in Finland and Hungary. Socio-economic learning has been included in school curricula. In the United Kingdom, life issues are now a subject in their own right in many schools.

Employers are increasingly aware of the links between wellbeing and productivity. CSR Europe has even created a toolkit for wellbeing in the workplace. However, let us be clear. There can certainly be no reason for complacency, and much more remains to be done. There could be new risks for mental health as a result of the current financial and economic crisis. Member States could be tempted to reduce budgets for mental health or to reduce their efforts to build up modern mental health systems with community-based services instead of outdated asylums.

The economic downturn worsens the future prospects of young people, especially school leavers. Job insecurity in the workplace, and its ensuing concerns over the stability of incomes and rising levels of unemployment, create new major threats for mental health.

Over the next two years, the Commission will organise a series of thematic conferences on the five priorities of the mental health pact. These will be joint events with Council Presidencies and Member States. A first international conference on stigma and psychiatric care will be organised by the Czech Presidency on 29 May this year. The first thematic conference on mental health in youth and education will take place in Stockholm on 29-30 September, in cooperation with the Swedish Presidency. The second thematic conference on the prevention of depression and suicide will be organised with Hungary in December. In the first semester of 2010, the Spanish Presidency will host a thematic conference on the mental health of older people. Furthermore, we are in contact with Member States regarding two further conferences on mental health in workplace settings and on combating stigma and social exclusion.

Parliament's report includes many concrete suggestions which constitute a valuable contribution to future debates in these conferences. The report not only highlights the relevance of mental health in the European Union, but also demonstrates that there are many opportunities to act in the area of mental health at European Union level.

One of the suggestions in the report is to set up a structure to oversee the implementation of the European Pact for Mental Health and Wellbeing. I agree that there would be significant added value in periodically reviewing progress against the objectives of the pact.

We will seriously consider how we can best put such an idea into practice. Once again, I would like to thank Parliament and its rapporteur for this very supportive report and its very important recommendations.

President. – The item is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 19 February 2009.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Louis Grech (PSE), in writing. – Mental health is a key factor in people's lives and there is increasing evidence of its impact on our social, economic and legal systems. I support this report since it entails a comprehensive approach to the challenges we face in the mental health sector, such as combating stigma, discrimination and social exclusion, but also recognising the need for preventive programs, public support and adequate treatment of people.

As a relatively new science, mental health is not widely recognised as a priority, but recent technological developments have allowed us to explore more of the human brain, showing the way to new, life-changing treatments for individuals. I believe we should strongly support further research in this area, with special attention to the growing elderly population in Europe, which is hoping for a healthy, dignified and active ageing.

We need accessible structures for care and treatment of mental illnesses, but it is also very important to have a supportive environment such as labour market integration programmes. Mental health is also very relevant in workplace settings where it can severely hamper performance, so we need to promote good practices among employers that reduce unnecessary stress and preserve the mental wellbeing of their employees.

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FI) I would like to thank Mrs Tzampazi for her report on mental health, which I voted in favour of.

One in four people suffer from mental health problems at least once in their life. It is estimated that by the year 2020, depression will have become the most common illness in the developed world and the second main reason for incapacity for work. External factors, such as the consequences of the present financial crisis, will tend to make people vulnerable to these problems. Not only does mental ill-health entail an expense that is a burden on the healthcare sector and the entire social and economic system; it also detracts from the quality of life of sufferers and their families to an unnecessary degree.

Although there have been dramatic leaps forward as regards standards of care and general attitude, people who suffer from mental health problems and their families are being marginalised more and more often. The differences in standards that apply to prevention and the guarantee of first-rate care are too great, both among the EU countries and regionally within countries.

I am pleased that special mention was made of the matter of mental health in young people in Mrs Tzampazi's report, which proposes that there should be cross-sectoral programmes to address it. We should not forget, however, that the most important preventive mental health work is always the responsibility of educators and agencies outside the family and home. This entails promoting healthy lifestyles, and listening to children and young people and paying attention to them.

I consider the high quality, easy accessibility and effectiveness of universal mental health services called for in Mrs Tzampazi's report to be especially important, as I do greater investment in top quality research. There should be more funding in particular for medical research into the links between prevention and mental and physical health problems.

Siiri Oviir (ALDE), in writing. – (ET) Mental health disorders are national health problems in many countries, as they have a significant influence on the people involved, their families and society in general. Mental health disorders also often lead to disability and can thus cause a significant economic burden on society.

In accordance with the World Bank's 1993 development report, four of the ten most common causes of disability were mental health and/or neurological disorders. Whereas in 1993, depression was in fourth place among illnesses causing disability, if present tendencies continue, by 2020, depression may become the second most significant cause among the total population, and even the most significant cause of disability for women.

Despite the extent and seriousness of the consequences of mental health disorders, there are still countries in the world and in Europe today where insufficient attention is devoted to the problem. Such a situation is

often caused by the prevalent partly negative public and political attitude in society and the stigmatisation of the mentally ill. This, in turn, leads to insufficient attention being devoted to mental health, limited availability of services, the shortage of alternative treatment methods and insufficient information about treatment possibilities.

Regardless of the fact that the solution of mental health problems falls within the competence of the Member States, it is important that the volume of financial assistance and knowledge-based assistance provided to Member States by the EU be further increased, in order to help them develop and improve the necessary health, social, care and educational services and preventive measures.

I believe that the promotion of individuals' mental health and welfare must become a high-priority objective in all Member States of the European Union, because individuals' mental health has the most direct effect on Member States' economic productivity and employment.

Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański (UEN), in writing. – (PL) As we know, mental health is a fundamental value for every person, and we, the representatives of the nations of Europe, must not forget this fact. I think it is a good thing that, today, we have turned to this issue in the forum of the European Parliament. Mental illnesses, a flood of suicides and depression have become a threat to contemporary society. These problems do not only affect people who live under constant stress, but also children, young people and the elderly. I think that we should take far-reaching steps to defeat these diseases of civilisation. This is also why I support research and free access to the results of this research, as well as specialists.

In expressing my thanks for the Report on Mental Health, I would, at the same time, like to express my concern regarding whether it is possible, in addition to providing assistance to the elderly, and action to combat stigmatisation and social exclusion, to also include projects aimed at reaching people who are socially marginalised. Such people very often display antipathy towards others, feel alienated, and have a fear of the censure of society. In my opinion, the first problem we should focus on is an extensive education programme so that everyone who is in need will know where to turn, what kind of help can be obtained and, most importantly, that it is possible to return to a normal life.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (PSE), in writing. – (RO) Mental health and wellbeing are a major challenge during this century we are living in. The World Health Organisation estimates that mental disorders will account for 15% of all illness by 2020.

I am particularly concerned about the future of adolescents and children, which is why I have proposed action to make citizens aware of the deterioration in the state of mental health in children whose parents have emigrated, along with the introduction of programmes in schools designed to help these young people face the psychological problems linked to their parents' absence.

I have insisted on this matter due to the large number of children abandoned by parents who have gone off to work abroad, a situation encountered increasingly often in Central and Eastern Europe. Still with the support of these young people in mind, I have proposed action to promote setting up counselling functions in every secondary school and offer alternative options which are confidential and which will not stigmatise these children, in order to meet their social and emotional needs.

Bearing in mind that mental health determines the quality of life of the European Union's citizens, this issue must be dealt with just as seriously as physical health matters. In fact, a European action plan for this is required in order to respond to the challenges posed by mental disorders.

Richard Seeber (PPE-DE), in writing. – (DE) When we talk about health, we are usually referring to physical wellbeing. Yet mental illness can be as much of a handicap to the daily lives of sufferers, and has extensive adverse social effects. Parliament's initiative to improve information on mental health is a very positive step, therefore. There should be more public discussion of approaches to mental disorders and, in addition, methods for preventing mental illness should be made accessible to the general public.

The workplace setting should be particularly emphasised in this connection. Since working people spend a very great deal of time at their workplace and are exposed to stress in connection with their work, it is necessary to promote mental health in that particular setting. Only motivated, balanced workers are in a position to meet the demands made of them.

Awareness of this issue should therefore be raised among businesses and public bodies. On the whole, by recognising mental disorders, Parliament is indicating a modern understanding of health and offering many sufferers a positive perspective in the long term.

29. Follow-up of the energy efficiency national action plans: a first assessment (short presentation)

President. – You pointed out that we have slightly dimmed the lighting in the Chamber. I imagine that it is in order to make energy savings.

That is fitting, since the next item is a short presentation of the report (A6-0030/2009) by Mr Gyürk, on behalf of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, on follow-up of the energy efficiency national action plans: a first assessment (2008/2214(INI)).

András Gyürk, rapporteur. – (HU) Thank you for the floor, Mr President. Commissioner, the gas crisis in January certainly had one positive outcome. It enlivened the dialogue on energy policy in every Member State.

Likewise, here in the European Parliament, there has been a lot of discussion about various alternative transportation routes, the expansion of storage capacities, as well as the future role of nuclear energy. However, we have devoted unduly scant attention to energy efficiency. I am particularly pleased that the report on the National Energy Efficiency Action Plans has provided an opportunity to discuss this topic during the last few weeks.

The significance of energy efficiency lies in its ability to achieve perceptible results faster than by any other means. As Energy Commissioner Andris Piebalgs has recently pointed out, EU measures on off mode devices could reduce standby losses by the equivalent of Hungary's annual energy consumption.

We cannot emphasise enough that energy efficiency may remedy all problems concerning energy policy. First and foremost, it may help moderate Europe's energy dependence on third countries. In addition, energy efficiency may also have a beneficial influence on the competitiveness of European industry, and may reduce the burden on our environment. Let us also remember that improving energy efficiency can also reduce the burden on the most vulnerable consumers.

Naturally, there are great differences in circumstance and potential as well as in legislative initiatives among the Member States. Therefore, we agree with the 2006 EU Directive setting out measures for the Member States to summarise in National Action Plans their planned measures for improving energy efficiency.

In the current report, we attempted to draw general conclusions regarding the aforementioned Action Plans. At the same time, our goal was to define necessary future steps in EU legislation. I would like to draw attention to a few crucial points in the report.

First of all, the report calls on the Commission to take stronger action against delays in preparing National Energy Efficiency Action Plans. This time, it must be thoroughly examined whether the plans are accompanied by practical steps taken by the Member States. A major shortcoming of several National Action Plans is that they are a far cry from their governments' policies.

Secondly, resources dedicated to improving energy efficiency need to be increased at both national and Community levels. As a result of the financial crisis, there are very few European citizens who can afford to invest in their energy efficiency. Therefore, existing energy efficiency incentive projects must be expanded at once. This leads us to the next seven-year Community budget, in which energy efficiency must be further emphasised, and tax breaks may also contribute towards genuine improvements.

Thirdly, there is a continued need for legislation in energy efficiency in the European Union. I believe that the European Commission's recommendations have set the right direction in this area. Stricter legislation on the energy consumption of buildings could result in considerable savings, for instance.

Fourthly, national governments must take on a pioneering role in the development of energy efficient solutions. These efforts should be mirrored in extensive education campaigns. Consumers will only set out to invest in their energy efficiency if they are fully aware of its benefits to them.

Lastly, I would like to share one more thought. It is my belief that energy efficiency cannot be treated as a second-rate cause even during a time of recession. What is more, energy efficiency programmes can create hundreds of thousands of jobs in Europe. In a year of massive layoffs, this aspect is hardly beside the point.

Janez Potočnik, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I welcome the opportunity to address this part-session of the European Parliament covering, inter alia, the subject of the Commission's assessment of

the National Energy Efficiency Action Plans (NEEAPs), which was presented in the Second Strategic Energy Review package in November 2008 and the earlier Commission communication of January 2008.

A more detailed technical synthesis of the Commission's assessment of the NEEAPs will be presented in the Commission's NEEAP document this spring.

I would, therefore, like to take this opportunity to thank the rapporteur, Mr Gyürk, on his work, as well as the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy (ITRE) for its valuable discussions and comments.

In the past few years, the Commission has stated very clearly that energy efficiency is the first priority of the European Union energy policy and a very important cornerstone to meeting the 2020 by 2020 targets, and National Energy Efficiency Action Plans play a central role in this respect. The Directive on energy end-use efficiency and energy services sets an obligation, as you know, for the Member States to present these, and to show how, in practice, they are going to achieve their national targets for energy efficiency.

The original deadline for their submission by the Member States was 30 June 2007 but, as you know, many Member States unfortunately were late. The last NEEAPs arrived at the Commission in June 2008.

At this stage, the Commission has completed all the individual assessments and sent letters with the results of those assessments to all Member States. As a follow-up, a number of bilateral meetings took place, and a number of Member States declared they would themselves like to improve their NEEAPs in the coming few months. As has been noted by the members of the ITRE Committee, the first National Energy Efficiency Action Plans have proved to be a really useful exercise. Indeed, many Member States have, for the first time, prepared comprehensive plans of action on energy savings. Many of them confirmed that they found the cross-sectoral effort needed to prepare them very useful.

Under the Energy Services Directive, NEEAPs have only a limited role. However, the Commission, in its communication of November 2008, and in other recent statements has always encouraged Member States to broaden their role.

The Commission will prepare a new European Union Energy Savings Action Plan that will strengthen and better focus European Union actions, helping EU Member States and EU businesses and EU citizens to save energy in a cost-effective way.

In your report, you urged the Commission to propose a binding target for energy savings. The current energy savings objective of 20% of primary energy saving in 2020 today represents a non-binding target, as you know. However, the Commission believes that, with the climate and energy package, as well as the proposals in the Second Strategic Energy Review, we can reach 20%.

Mr Gyürk's report also rightly indicated that financial support must be increased. Financial issues relating to energy savings were recognised by the Commission in the European Economic Recovery Plan of 26 November 2008, and in other coordinated efforts which aim to help create jobs, which are often in small and medium-sized companies, since investments in energy efficiency, and especially in buildings, are mostly related to small-scale renovation projects.

In conclusion, I would like to recall that during the mandate of this Commission, EU leaders have given a real commitment to promoting energy efficiency. Boosting investment in energy efficiency and related new technologies offers an essential contribution to sustainable development and also to security of supply. Energy efficiency has a wider impact, far beyond energy policy. It has a positive effect on the European Union economy in general: increasing efficiency helps create new jobs, stimulates economic growth and improves competitiveness. As you rightly mentioned, that is exactly what we should be doing in these difficult and challenging times.

President. – The item is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 19 February 2009.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Šarūnas Birutis (ALDE), in writing. – (LT) It is clear that oil prices are falling, but once the current economic crisis has passed, prices will rise again. Therefore, let me remind you that it is important to diversify EU energy sources and supply routes more with the aim of mitigating the negative effects which may arise due to a future oil crisis.

The dependency of EU Member States, in particular EU 'energy islands', on the import of energy supplies and existing infrastructure varies. Can we talk of a single energy market, if, for example, the Baltic States, including Lithuania, are energy islands? Europe's inability to speak to the main energy suppliers with one voice is also an acute problem. On paper, we are creating an ambitious European energy policy but, in practice, the bilateral energy policy continues to dominate. Fellow Members, the politicisation of the energy sector does not contribute to stability. We could and should try to change the situation through diversification and solidarity. We must complete the missing energy links and establish an EU coordinating mechanism, aimed at reacting to similar crises. It is essential that Member States which are most dependent on energy supplies have sufficient reserves of these supplies. We must not only look at short-term measures for security of energy supply, but we must also consider the long-term outlook. Europe in turn must diversify energy sources and improve security of supply.

Cristian Silviu Buşoi (ALDE), in writing. – (RO) Energy efficiency is all the more important at the moment as we face real challenges concerning the provision of energy supplies to the EU and as we need to make more consistent efforts to reduce carbon dioxide emissions. I support an approach to the energy efficiency problem which is consistent with the other EU policies, in particular, the package for combating climate change and the necessity to diversify energy sources.

I firmly believe that the R&D sector must be supported as this can make a significant contribution to boosting energy efficiency. The Commission and Member State governments should give stronger support to projects intended to boost energy efficiency, whether we are talking about investments to make public transport as energy efficient as possible, insulating buildings, etc. I think that government resources should be channelled more in this direction rather than towards subsidising the price of energy, as these projects provide, at the same time, support to vulnerable consumers faced with rising energy prices.

I therefore call on Member States to come up with effective and realistic action plans, to provide citizens with as much information as possible about energy efficiency, and to cooperate through the exchange of good practice. I also urge the Commission to support national authorities, particularly in the form of technical assistance.

Daniel Petru Funeriu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) Energy efficiency in buildings is a particular concern relevant to countries which have inherited a large number of buildings constructed according to the poor-quality standards of the Communist era.

I would like to take this opportunity to ask the Commission to establish financing instruments and effective procedures for renovating the heating systems in these buildings, in keeping with the target of a 20% increase in energy efficiency in the EU by 2020.

Iosif Matula (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) Energy efficiency is one of the European Union's major objectives, the achievement of which will mark an important step towards implementing sustainable development. For this reason, apart from Member States' efforts to become actively involved in promoting policies aimed at making energy consumption more efficient, there must also be coordination at Community level in order to achieve much better results.

One way to achieve energy efficiency is to provide buildings with thermal insulation. According to a study, it is possible at Community level to reduce energy loss by roughly 27%, which means, by implication, a reduction in the costs which citizens are obliged to pay.

One problem facing the local communities which are proposing to carry out a project involving the renovation of residential heating systems is the complex procedure which they need to follow. As a result, the measures which will be taken in the future must consider simplifying these procedures. This objective of greater energy efficiency through insulating buildings must also be targeted at the disadvantaged social groups, thereby reinforcing the principle of solidarity in Europe.

Anni Podimata (PSE), in writing. – (EL) Experience from the first assessment of the national action plans demonstrates in practice that conditions in the EU have not yet matured to the point at which measures to promote energy efficiency can be supported. One important weakness in the first energy efficiency national action plans, over and above the huge delay in submitting them on the part of certain Member States, including Greece, is the fact that the ambitious plans are not accompanied by clearly defined practical proposals with added value, despite the fact that, according to recent figures released by the European Commission, if the target of achieving energy savings of 20% were achieved, the EU would use approximately 400 Mtoe less primary energy and CO₂ emissions would fall by 860 Mt.

Consequently, the scope of the potential which promoting energy efficiency gives us, especially at a time of economic recession such as the one we are experiencing now, has not been fully understood. The EU should therefore proceed without further delay to include energy efficiency in all its sectoral policies, with clear proposals and support measures, and to increase Community aid in this direction. Energy efficiency is a key point following the adoption of the package on climate change and can guarantee energy security, a reduction in emissions of greenhouse gases and an invigorated European economy.

30. Applied research relating to the common fisheries policy (short presentation)

President. – The next item is a short presentation of the report (A6-0016/2009) by Mrs Miguélez Ramos, on behalf of the Committee on Fisheries, on applied research relating to the common fisheries policy (2008/2222(INI)).

Rosa Miguélez Ramos, rapporteur. – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, reconciling the correct preservation of ecosystems with sustainable exploitation of marine resources, preventing and controlling the impact of human activity on the environment, improving knowledge and technological development and innovation are tasks that cannot be tackled if we do not have the support of the European scientific community.

Fisheries research is also vital when drawing up recommendations and providing scientific advice to legislators. Greater investment in research and development, and in the collection and processing of reliable data, would result in a more solid and sustainable Common Fisheries Policy.

However, although the phrase that I heard from the mouth of a scientist (*'Not money, but human resources are the problem'*) paints a good picture of the situation, I will not be the one to say that research in fisheries has plenty of financial resources. Instead, I will say that we have a dual problem.

Firstly, Commissioner, the amounts laid down in the Seventh Framework Programme for marine research, which should have been a cross-cutting issue, seem to be insufficient for the integrated approach that is currently desired for this issue.

Moreover, Commissioner, scientists – and I assure you that I have talked to many of them in order to draw up this report, both before and during the process – have problems when submitting projects to the Seventh Framework Programme. These problems can partly be attributed, on the one hand, to the different focus that is required for aquaculture, which is basically industrial in nature, and on the other hand, to research into fisheries and marine science, which is multidisciplinary in nature and more long term.

Up until the Seventh Framework Programme, both of these fields were covered by the same funds, and reported to the Fisheries Directorate-General, which enabled them to complement each other. Currently it is the Research Directorate-General that is responsible, and the result is that it is becoming difficult for the scientific community to communicate the concerns and needs of the sector to those that draw up the guidelines for the calls for proposals.

In addition, within the scientific community there is a perception that the Directorate-General appears to have opted to prioritise basic research without making room for research focused on public policies. I will give you an example: to enrich, from a scientific point of view, Community maritime strategy, or to investigate the relationship between fisheries and climate change.

To summarise, the objective of European Union maritime policy of achieving productive fisheries in a clean marine environment requires that the scientists that work in this field have access to horizontal funding mechanisms in the Seventh Framework Programme.

To conclude, I would like to mention the second problem: the worrying shortage of young scientists in fisheries research, which appears to be the result of professional courses that are not very attractive in comparison with other basic sciences.

It is vital that we establish interesting and rewarding university courses that offer good professional opportunities. It also seems that we need to standardise the different research models applied in the various Member States in order to be able to better compare the results and facilitate the aggregation of data, and to increase cooperation between national research institutions. Of course, I also think that better incorporation of the experience and expertise of fishers into the process of drawing up scientific opinions, on which political decisions as part of the CFP are to be based, is vital.

Janez Potočnik, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I appreciate being able to talk about my own area of responsibility. The Commission welcomes Parliament's report on applied research relating to the common fisheries policy and would also like to thank the rapporteur, Ms Rosa Miguélez Ramos, and the Committee on Fisheries, for their excellent work.

The report comes at the right moment with the preparation of the joint call on marine and maritime research under way. It also coincides with the work programme 2010 for FP7 and the launching of the Green Paper on the reform of the Common Fisheries Policy, which includes a chapter on research. The Commission agrees in principle with the main elements of the report.

We welcome the support expressed for the European strategy for marine and maritime research, where priorities are given to increasing capacity building, new infrastructure, new skills and education initiatives, developing integration across established marine and maritime research disciplines, promoting synergy between Member States and the Commission and new research governance.

The Commission acknowledges the importance of ensuring that a sufficient budget is allocated to fisheries and aquaculture research in FP7, while maintaining a good balance with the other research sectors, particularly in agriculture, forestry and biotechnology: Theme 2 – KBBE, and Theme 6 – environment. The annual budget for FP7 will progressively increase during the last three years of the programme and both the fisheries and aquaculture sectors will certainly benefit from this increase.

The Commission will pursue its effort to support research in line with the report by giving more visibility to fisheries and aquaculture research in FP7, securing a good balance between research in support of policy and more basic research, reinforcing social science in the work programmes, promoting dissemination of results and encouraging more coordination between national research programmes.

Finally, the Commission will facilitate the integration of fisheries and aquaculture research in the broader context of its strategic research agenda, the European Research Area and the new European Union strategy for marine and maritime research.

Bearing in mind the initiatives I have just described, I feel that there is now a solid base upon which we can improve our fisheries and aquaculture sectors through innovative research within the framework programme. They, in turn, will also benefit from improved cooperation and coordination of national research, through the different European Research Area initiatives and within the direction of the common fisheries policy.

If I can add a sentence of my own, I can guarantee to you that it is not more complicated than it was before, simply because the same people are working on it and the cooperation which we have with my colleague, Mr Borg, is really excellent. I think that is how research should be done in the future. We are cooperating across sectors and this is really bringing better results, which could hardly have been the case if this were done in a more sectoral way. I honestly thank you for the great work you have done.

President. – The item is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 19 February 2009.

31. Agenda for next sitting: see Minutes

32. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting was closed at 11.30 p.m.)