

WEDNESDAY, 10 MARCH 2010

IN THE CHAIR: MR PITTELLA

Vice-President

1. Opening of the sitting

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

3. EU 2020 - Follow-up of the informal European Council of 11 February 2010 (motions for resolutions tabled): see Minutes

4. Implementation of Goldstone recommendations on Israel/Palestine (motions for resolutions tabled): see Minutes

5. Situation of civil society and national minorities in Belarus (motions for resolutions tabled): see Minutes

6. 2008 annual report on the CFSP - The implementation of the European Security Strategy and the Common Security and Defence Policy - Non-proliferation Treaty (debate)

President. – I welcome Baroness Ashton, and declare the session open.

The next item is the joint debate on:

– the report (A7-0023/2010) by Gabriele Albertini, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the report from the Council to the European Parliament on the main aspects and the basic choices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in 2008, presented to the European Parliament in application of Part II, Section G, paragraph 43 of the interinstitutional agreement of 17 May 2006 (2009/2057(INI)),

– the report (A7-0026/2010) by Arnaud Danjean, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the implementation of the European Security Strategy and the Common Security and Defence Policy (2009/2198(INI)),

– the oral question to the Council by Gabriele Albertini and Arnaud Danjean, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the Non-proliferation Treaty (O-0169/2009 - B7-0009/2010), and

– the oral question to the Commission by Gabriele Albertini and Arnaud Danjean, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the Non-proliferation Treaty (O-0170/2009 - B7-0010/2010).

Gabriele Albertini, rapporteur. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the Union needs to adopt a new approach and make a joint effort when facing global challenges. The powers recently obtained due to the entry into force of the treaty mean that Parliament engages in frequent, cooperative and effective discussions with our primary interlocutor, Baroness Ashton, who has the honour of acting as the new Vice-President/High Representative for the first time.

Her mandate was subject to our consensus vote in January and, on several occasions, the Parliamentary Assembly was promised that the Council and the Commission would be constantly involved in all the most important aspects of European security and defence. As the report itself confirms, the High Representative is therefore called upon to appear before the European Parliament and to consult it frequently and regularly.

With the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Union's external action takes on a new and important dimension, but actually achieving this goal also depends on the European Union having the necessary budgetary resources. The European Parliament has a key role to play in its capacity as custodian of the democratic legitimacy of external action. The creation of a European External Action Service will give a diplomatic body and system to the European Union which, until now, has only been able to rely on national representation.

The roles of the official representatives, whose appointment is the responsibility of the High Representative, assume great relevance and topicality. Nonetheless, as stated in the report, Parliament is calling for greater powers of ballot and control over the roles and the mandates of individual representatives, upholding the principles of transparency and merit that must guide the High Representative when appointing candidates. It is hoped that we will eventually achieve a situation of double hatting – except in the case of the special representative, whose range of action should be regional – and that we will therefore benefit from economies of scale, making the European Union's external action more efficient and, at the same time, less costly.

After an initial introductory section on strategy, the report addresses the issue of European foreign policy by theme and geographical area. The European Union must make its presence felt with the international organisations to which it is allied, especially the United Nations, the chief custodian of global security. It must play an important role, not only from the viewpoint of its seat on the Security Council, but also in terms of staff and delegations connecting the two bodies. We call on the Vice-President/High Representative to let Europe fulfil its ambition to become an active, strategic and independent partner of a great ally such as the United States in order to respond to the global challenges of terrorism, finance, and the often fraught relationships with industrial giants such as Russia, China and Japan.

The report continues with a geographical analysis of what we can hope to achieve. In the Balkans, the theme of enlargement is introduced: the report praises the gradual achievement of the stabilisation process in Kosovo, where the European Union is present with the EULEX mission, but efforts must still be made to ensure that accession standards are respected for many countries close to candidacy for accession – Turkey and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

In the chapter concerning cooperation with the East and the Black Sea regions, the report deals with the issue of the European Union's energy supply security and dependency. In the section on Russia, it calls for a new partnership and cooperation agreement to be signed. As far as the South Caucasus is concerned, the report calls for the territory of Georgia and its ethnic minorities to be left intact, and for conflicts in Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistria to be resolved.

Middle East: Israeli-Palestinian conflict, where the European Union must play a stronger political role in relaunching the peace process following the Council decision of 12 December 2009. Union for the Mediterranean: resolution of the Turkey-Cyprus conflict. Asia: Afghanistan, critical period for the establishment of a new government after the elections; Pakistan's key role in the fight against terrorism; concern over the violation of fundamental rights in Iran. Africa: positive contribution of the Somali coast defence mission. Latin America: need to create a stable and enduring partnership for relationships between the European Union and Latin America.

I will listen to my fellow Members' comments with great interest and respond to them at the end.

Arnaud Danjean, *rapporteur*. – (FR) Mr President, Baroness Ashton, the report on the implementation of the European Security Strategy that we are presenting today is an annual document by Parliament that provides a kind of interim assessment of the European Security and Defence Policy and submits proposals aimed at improving the effectiveness and visibility of that policy.

This year, this report lies within a very specific context, and thus it should become a force for proposals. This specific context is characterised by the combination of three major cycles.

The first concerns the 10 years of the European Security and Defence Policy, which we celebrated at the end of 2009. The last 10 years showed that Europe was able to conduct civil and military operations at the scene of more than 23 crises. That fundamental achievement can be built on further. It shows that there is a demand for Europe and that the Union has the institutional, political and operational ability to rise to these challenges.

The second important cycle is, of course – and Mr Albertini mentioned it a moment ago – the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon. The change in terms of security and defence goes far beyond a strict semantic adjustment. Indeed, the ESDP becomes the Common Security and Defence Policy, the CSDP, and it must take on a new dimension. The Treaty has enriched the range of tools and the scope of security and defence policy, particularly with the inclusion of assistance clauses, of solidarity clauses, with permanent structured cooperation and, above all, with the creation of the European External Action Service and of your role as High Representative, Vice-President of the Commission.

Lastly, the third major event that characterises the context in which this report was drafted is that NATO which, for 21 of the 27 members of the Union, is still the main reference point where the collective security of the European continent is concerned, is currently revising its strategic concept and that this assessment

by NATO should also lead us, the Union, to define more clearly the conditions of this partnership, which remains fundamental.

In this context, the report's objective is less about persisting with a doctrine than about providing you with a necessarily evolving roadmap, for all the new institutions that are being established and that must learn to work together. The aim is to make the Union more credible, more effective and more visible in security and defence terms. In this regard, the European Parliament absolutely must be given a greater degree of responsibility in these sensitive areas if a policy of which the main aim is to guarantee the security of European citizens is to be fully legitimate.

With this report, we wanted to stress the following points. Firstly, we wanted to point out that, above all, the European Security and Defence Strategy and the Common Security and Defence Policy are there to serve the people of Europe, to guarantee and improve their security. This political ambition is not superfluous; it is not for appearances' sake. It corresponds to a need for our continent to strive to ensure its own security but also to contribute to the stability of the world around us, to tackle the crises and the threats that are developing in our environment. Beyond the traditional armed conflicts that continue to take place in our immediate environment, Europe must be able to express its interests and defend them in the face of the new threats – I am thinking in particular of piracy and cybercrime.

We also felt it important to stress just how unequalled Europe's added value in crisis management is, thanks to the variety of solutions it provides and the balance that it strikes in each of its operations between the civil and military dimensions. Moreover, in this regard, I reject the criticisms that some may direct at the Union's security and defence policy, namely to suggest that it is all about militarisation. I sincerely believe in the complementary nature of the civil and military instruments that the Union possesses, and the recent crisis in Haiti, where you went – and I believe that you were able to observe this good cooperation – testifies to the need to link our civil and military resources so that we can cope with natural disasters and major crises.

Precisely on the subject of these operations, we were anxious to review them all, to highlight what we feel are their strengths, but also, at times, their weaknesses – they have to be acknowledged so that things can improve. We were also anxious to highlight several regions of strategic importance for the security of the Union and to encourage the Council and the Commission to speed up the implementation of global strategies, in particular, for the Horn of Africa and for the AfghanistanPakistan region.

In the area of capabilities – both civil and military – which is a crucial issue in terms of the credibility of our policy, the challenge is to improve the Union's responsiveness. We have to be able to mobilise more quickly and more effectively the material resources and the competent personnel that the Member States have at their disposal. However, we also have to have the capability, by means of a security and defence industry that is efficient, that combines invaluable technological knowledge and that also accounts for hundreds of thousands of jobs in Europe, to provide ourselves with equipment programmes corresponding to these forecasted needs.

The Europe of industry and defence has begun to organise itself on our continent through the defence package. Issues relating to industrial and trade cooperation with third countries should be addressed quickly, particularly in the light of the recent problems encountered by European industries trying to access the US market, for example.

This is a brief, inevitably overly brief, summary of the priorities that appear in this report and which represent all the challenges that you will have to take up. Parliament is ready to play its full role, its full positive and constructive role, to help you realise this ambition, which is a common ambition. Moreover, I wish to take advantage of this opportunity to thank all the political groups that have worked hard to enrich this report. We have all cooperated very well together to maintain a high level of ambition, while taking account, of course, of the characteristics of each of our groups.

I would also take advantage of this opportunity, Baroness Ashton, to address with you today the issue of nonproliferation. On the eve of the NonProliferation Treaty review conference, to be held in May, the European Parliament wished to review with you the Union's commitment in relation to the fight against proliferation, and to the control of arms and disarmament; this is the meaning behind the oral questions that have been put to you and which you will answer shortly.

The international context seems to offer new opportunities on the eve of this review conference. Firstly, President Obama has strongly affirmed his ambition to have a world without nuclear weapons and his commitment to actively seek the ratification of the Comprehensive NuclearTestBan Treaty by the United

States. Secondly, the conclusion with Russia of a new agreement designed to supersede the START Agreement seems to be going well and, lastly, we have the launch of the negotiations on a new disarmament treaty that would prohibit the production of fissile materials for nuclear weapons.

With regard to the reduction in nuclear arsenals, the priority is obviously to reduce the two main arsenals, that is, those of Russia and the United States, which it is commonly believed still alone hold nearly 95% of all the nuclear weapons that exist on the planet. We therefore welcome the commitment made by Presidents Medvedev and Obama to conclude a new reduction agreement in the near future. How does the Union, in this context, envisage supporting these efforts and cooperating with the United States and Russia?

The Union must also rise to the challenges posed to the nonproliferation regime and, more specifically, to those with which we are confronted by the two major proliferation crises that are Iran and North Korea, which remain the main threats to international security. Will the Union continue to commit itself effectively, completely, to resolving these crises, particularly in the case of Iran? We expect your guidance on this major issue, Baroness Ashton. Moreover, the Union has a role to play in promoting cooperation relating to the peaceful use of nuclear energy. You know that this is an important challenge. What actions are being carried out in this context, and what is your strategy on the matter?

Lastly, the European Parliament wants the Union to be a proactive force during the forthcoming Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference. The adoption of a new ambitious and balanced common position by the Union is crucial if the latter is to defend its position. Where do the Member States stand in this regard?

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy*. – Mr President, thank you very much. I am delighted to be with you to discuss the big questions on Europe's international agenda.

I want to begin by thanking Mr Albertini and Mr Danjean for their excellent reports. You have underlined, if I may say, the number, range and urgency of the challenges we face.

From strengthening the rule of law in Kosovo to working with the emerging powers to share responsibility for global governance, from promoting peace in the Middle East – and may I join Vice-President Biden in condemning the decision to build 1 600 new houses in East Jerusalem – to providing shelter to the surviving victims of Haiti's earthquake, which I visited last week, from dealing with proliferation problems such as Iran, to devising effective answers to 'new' challenges such as energy, climate change and cyber security.

Europe is going through a phase of building something new, where people have to adjust their mental maps and institutions have to find their new place. Doing so is messy and complicated – but also exciting, for it is impossible to overstate how important this moment is. Right now we have a chance to build what many across Europe – and many in this House – have long wanted: a stronger, more credible European foreign policy.

Of course, the European External Action Service will be key to delivering this. We have to build a system that is robust, that will enable us to deal with the problems of today and the new problems that will arise tomorrow.

For years, we have been trying to frame and implement comprehensive strategies but the structures and the systems we had made this difficult. With the Lisbon Treaty and the External Action Service, we should now be able to achieve this.

At the heart of everything we do lies a simple truth: to protect our interests and promote our values, we must be engaged abroad. No one can hope to be an island of stability and prosperity in a sea of insecurity and injustice.

Ours is, if I may say, a world in flux. To engage with it effectively, we need to frame it first. To me, the most striking features of today's world are twofold. One, a deep interdependence in political, economic and security terms: technologies, ideas, diseases, money – everything moves. We are connected in ways we have never been before. Two, the fact that power is shifting, both within political systems – roughly from governments to markets, media and NGOs – and between political systems – roughly from the old 'West' to both the east and the south. Both are the outcome of globalisation which is not just an economic but also a political phenomenon, both in its manifestations and, of course, its consequences.

Think of the rise of China and others as major political players, or consider the political impact of the financial crisis. The debts are in the West; the surpluses are in the East. This redistribution of financial power is also

shaping our political discussions. Or consider climate change, which is not just an environmental problem but also one with security and geopolitical ramifications.

So we have to deal with complex problems and we do so in a new geopolitical landscape. We need to adapt. This is not a time to fly on auto-pilot or to stick to the narrow defence of national ways of doing things. It is a time to be smart and ambitious.

Let me give you some figures to illustrate the point. Europe's share of the world's population is 7%, down from 25% a century ago. In the last 60 years, our share of global GDP has shrunk from 28% to 21%. The economies of China, India and others are racing ahead at 10% per year.

Economic weight is translating into political clout and self-confidence. You feel it everywhere: from negotiations on climate change to Iran, to big energy deals in Africa or central Asia. If we pull together, we can safeguard our interests. If not, others will make the decisions for us. It is that simple, really that simple.

My preference is clear. We should respond as Europeans. Firstly, by pulling together, because unity is a pre-condition for influence and, secondly, by taking action, because the answer to a problem cannot be a paper or a meeting. If you want results, you have to act and sometimes take risks. And yes, there is a tendency in Europe to put process ahead of outcomes. Thirdly, by being both principled and creative because we must be both: principled in the defence of our values and creative in how we forge bespoke solutions to complex problems.

As Mr Albertini's report rightly points out, 'a new approach is needed if the EU is to act collectively and meet the global challenges in a coherent, consistent and efficient manner'. Out of that general picture come several core objectives: firstly, to ensure greater stability and security in our neighbourhood, by promoting political and economic reform. This is important in itself for reasons which are very self-evident, but our wider international credibility also depends on getting our neighbourhood right.

Secondly, to address global security challenges, the challenges of our time. For this, we need comprehensive strategies, strong international organisations and the rule of law both within countries and between them.

Thirdly, to build a network of strategic relationships with key countries and organisations because the problems we face cannot be solved by any single actor.

On top of all this comes the creation of the European External Action Service – a means to achieve the other three objectives and a way to deliver the promise of the Lisbon Treaty.

Those are the core tasks to which I have devoted my time since I took on this role. I first went to Washington and New York, which was the right way to start our important relationships with the United States and the UN. I have since been to Moscow, Kiev, the Balkans and Haiti. I will go to the Middle East next week and again to New York at the end of the month. In between, I have chaired the Foreign Affairs Council three times, attended the informal European Council and met with the College of Commissioners. I have worked hard to build the necessary internal consensus, visiting various EU capitals: Berlin, Paris, London, Vienna and Ljubljana. Naturally, I have spent a significant amount of time on the creation of the External Action Service and that will continue in the weeks ahead, including working with you.

That is also why, because of the interests of this House, I have ensured involvement from the European Parliament in the steering group that I set up. I will also discuss it this afternoon at the Conference of Presidents. When I come to the Foreign Affairs Committee on 23 March, we will have an opportunity for in-depth exchanges in the presence of all the relevant committees.

Any time you create something new, there will be resistance. Some prefer to minimise perceived losses rather than maximise collective gains. I see it differently, and I hope the Parliament does too.

This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to build something new, something that finally brings together the instruments of our engagement in support of a single political strategy. A huge chance for Europe. We should not lower our ambitions but, rather, give ourselves the means to realise them. A moment to see the big picture, to be creative and take collective responsibility. If we get it right – and we must – then we will be able to shape a European foreign policy for the 21st century with an external service designed to achieve it: one where we mobilise all our levers of influence – political, economic, development and crisis management tools – in a coordinated way. A service that represents the European Union in geographic and gender terms too. I believe that is the only acceptable way to go.

Let me illustrate what I have in mind when I say 'comprehensive approach' with a couple of examples.

The Western Balkans – I was pleased to travel to the region recently. In a way, the Balkans is the birthplace of EU foreign policy. More than anywhere else, it is where we cannot afford to fail. My purpose was to establish good working relations with political leaders, engage with civil society about what belonging to Europe could mean, and ensure coordination among the different EU actors on the ground. One conclusion I drew was that the region is making progress, even if it is uneven and incomplete. The European perspective remains the overarching framework – both as our objective and as the main incentive for reform. As I stressed everywhere, progress on the path to the EU depends on the commitment to reform at home. On human rights, the rule of law and regional cooperation.

We are backing up our strategy with available foreign-policy tools. In Kosovo, we have our biggest civilian mission and it is a success. In Bosnia, we have adjusted ALTHEA as the situation has stabilised and developed a training programme. We are pushing the European message hard in the run-up to the October elections. Throughout the region, we are making progress on visa liberalisation and people-to-people contact.

So our Balkan Strategy is what it should be: strategic in its objectives, multi-faceted in terms of instruments and tailor-made in terms of implementation.

The second example is the Horn of Africa. It highlights the interplay of state fragility, poverty, resource competition including water, with piracy, terrorism and organised crime. The only possible answer is a comprehensive one, which is exactly what we are doing. Our naval operation Atalanta has been widely hailed as a success. Our next step is to further develop our options for the transfer of suspected pirates for prosecution in the region. We are adding a training mission for the TFG in Somalia, with deployment expected in the spring. Through our Stability Instrument, we are funding flanking measures to build capacity, to train the maritime authorities and moving ahead with long-term development work in Yemen and Somalia on poverty, literacy and health.

The way we are engaged in Georgia follows the same script. When a frozen conflict erupted into open conflict in August 2008, we responded immediately. We took the international lead, we brokered a truce and deployed a 300-strong monitoring mission in record time. Since then, we are engaged across the spectrum of Community and CSDP means of preventing a return to violence and building stability in Georgia and in the region.

With the UN and OSCE, we lead the Geneva talks, the only forum where all concerned meet. We hosted a donors' conference for reconstruction and economic support in Georgia and we included Georgia – together with Armenia and Azerbaijan – in the European Neighbourhood Policy. We continue to promote those reforms and closer ties. We work on trade and visa liberalisation and we support confidence building measures to rebuild ties with the breakaway republics.

There is more work to do in Georgia, and we have a full agenda when we discuss it with Russia, as I did only 10 days ago with Sergey Lavrov. In this case, we demonstrated what the EU can do when we fully mobilise the resources we have. Those who were involved in those incredibly hectic weeks have told me that what was done in this case was exceptional. So we need stronger structures, more flexibility and better preparedness if we want Georgia to be the benchmark for our action in the future.

Let me turn to our common security and defence policy and say that I agree with the broad thrust of the Danjean report about how important our missions are. They save lives, create the space for functioning politics to work and they mean that Europe can draw on all its instruments of power to meet its responsibilities.

It is striking to me how far we have come in the last ten years. More than 70 000 men and women have been deployed in that period in more than 20 missions. We do crisis management in a European way with a comprehensive approach in support of international law and agreements and in close cooperation with our key partners. We work well with NATO together in Bosnia and Herzegovina and along the coast of Somalia. In Kosovo and Afghanistan, it is more difficult because of the political issues. We need to get this right so I am working with the NATO Secretary General to improve EU-NATO relations in practical areas and set a positive climate. Let us see how we can develop our relations pragmatically. The UN is another key partner. There are many good examples of EU and UN cooperation on the ground – the Democratic Republic of Congo, Chad and indeed Kosovo. In recent times, we have got to know each other better, but we can and should strengthen this by focusing on areas such as planning and the sharing of best practice.

In the Danjean report, and more widely, people raise the question of whether it is time for the EU to have its own permanent operations headquarters. It is a serious issue that needs a serious debate. No one contests

that we need a headquarters able to plan and conduct military operations. The question is whether the current system, relying on SHAPE or national headquarters, is the most efficient way or if something else is better.

We often find ourselves approaching this in terms of structures. I think we first need to do the analysis of what functions we need to perform. I see three main functions from which the decisions should flow: one, the ability to plan and conduct military operations, including advance planning, and to be able to react quickly when there is a need; two, the ability to develop civil-military coordination in a more structured way to maximise our capacity; and, three, the ability to establish links with others, to optimise the overall coordination and what we loosely call the 'international community'. If we use that analysis as the starting point for our discussions, we should be able to establish the necessary common ground and move forward to determine what we should do.

The report also calls for the establishment of a Defence Council, an idea that I know has been around for some time. The next meeting in April will follow established practice, but at the informal Defence Ministers' meeting, a consensus emerged based on my proposals to hold Foreign Affairs Councils in Ministry of Defence formation. That would enable Defence Ministers to come together and take decisions, for instance, on capabilities development.

My last point on that relates to the suggestion of a civil protection force. Let us start with the Haiti lessons learned exercise which is now under way. Then let us apply the spirit of Lisbon and see what options we have to mobilise assets of Member States together with EU instruments to support either the UN, OCHA or to act as the EU itself. The watchwords ought to be maximising synergies and avoiding 'hard' or artificial splits between how we handle EU internal and external crises.

Let me, finally, turn to the question of non-proliferation, given the oral question that has been raised. I want to mention briefly the two most significant items: first, the Non-proliferation Treaty review conference scheduled for May in New York. I will be participating with the aim of ensuring that we do get a successful outcome. We should make no mistake: the entire treaty-based non-proliferation system with the NPT as a cornerstone is under growing pressure. To respond, we need to be ready to make our contribution: on access to the peaceful uses of nuclear energy, in particular, for developing countries, while avoiding proliferation risks, and that includes work on the multilateral nuclear fuel cycle approaches – I think 84 countries have benefited from EU assistance programmes; with progress on nuclear disarmament – politically, this is fundamental to create a constructive atmosphere; and by addressing regional proliferation crises, in particular with Iran, which has the potential to derail the conference.

As you know, the EU is leading the efforts to find diplomatic solutions. We fully support the Security Council process on further restrictive measures if – as is certainly the case today – Iran continues to ignore its obligations.

Secondly, there is President Obama's Nuclear Security summit. We share the goal of the summit, namely, to strengthen the security of nuclear materials and prevent terrorists from getting access. I think that the EU has been providing support to the IAEA since 2004 to assist countries in this area and we will continue to do so.

Finally, let me come back to where I started. The demand for European global engagement is enormous. We have to ensure that supply matches demand. The Lisbon Treaty gives us that chance. We should act in line with the letter and the spirit of the treaty, remembering why European leaders negotiated the treaty in the first place. I think the reason was clear: to build a stronger, more assertive and self-confident European foreign policy at the service of the citizens of the European Union. I know many in this House share that goal, and I count on your support to make sure it happens.

Nadezhda Neynsky, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on Budgets*. – Mr President, I want to congratulate Mrs Ashton on her encouraging statement.

At the same time, as the rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on Budgets on the CFSP, I want also to underline that it is of core importance that she initiate an audit of past and present CFSP operations and CSDP civil missions in order to identify their strengths and weaknesses. This way, the European Union will be more effective in providing security, will increase its autonomy and will most notably make wiser use of the relevant budget, which regrettably continues to be underfunded.

Ioannis Kasoulides, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – Mr President, it is frightening to imagine a nuclear device, small in size but potentially lethal for millions of people, falling into the hands of terrorists. Some years back, we could say that this was highly unlikely. We cannot say this any longer.

Countries like Iran and North Korea are in the process of acquiring, or have the capability to acquire, a nuclear weapon. A scientist from Pakistan has allegedly sold know-how to Iran, and North Korea has traded in nuclear material. Nobody is against Iran acquiring nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, but patience is running thin if Iran is buying time in the dialogue with the 5+1, which we support.

The dual-track approach and the preparation of smart targeted sanctions by the UN Security Council are warranted. Nuclear proliferation is at such a critical point that it has led personalities like Henry Kissinger to argue that only the move towards total elimination will ensure non-proliferation and global security.

So we support an international treaty for the progressive elimination of nuclear weapons, a halt to the production of fissile material, bringing forward the comprehensive nuclear test ban treaty, the reduction of nuclear warheads, START, etc., bringing all treatment of nuclear fuel under the control of the IAEA and strengthening its mandate and its verification powers.

Adrian Severin, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – Mr President, I hope we are agreed that we need a proactive foreign policy guided by our European common goals and based on our common values. This policy should recognise the indivisibility of security in the globalised world as it is a source of solidarity of interest both within the European Union and outside.

Such a policy requires and presupposes an adequate institutional instrument. Thus, the priorities are clear and I am happy to see that these priorities I am going to mention are the same as those of Mrs Ashton. An efficient External Action Service, a vibrant neighbourhood policy, a visionary enlargement policy, well-structured partnerships with the strategic players, both traditional and emerging, an effective strategy in coping with the global challenges, namely energy security, non-proliferation, migration, transnational organised crime, transnational expression of poverty, cultural conflicts and so on.

As far as the External Action Service is concerned, we need an institution which should be built not only on the principle of political and budgetary accountability but also on the principle of effectiveness. We should not build a service which preserves the old national competition or the present bureaucratic structure. The two-headed head of the European external actions must wear both hats at all times, thus assuring the unity of the service and the coherence of its action.

On external neighbourhood policy, we need an approach which does not exclude Russia and Turkey. On the Black Sea, we have to move from synergy to strategy. On frozen conflicts, we need regional initiatives and mechanisms of regional cooperation and security under international guarantees.

On global security, we need a new arrangement reflecting the post-bipolar-order realities. We have to promote our values in the world but in a secular way and not as new crusaders.

I think that these and many others are our priorities which circumscribe a Herculean task. Let us work together – Parliament, the Commission and the Council – to accomplish this task.

Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (NL) Mr President, High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission, ladies and gentlemen. Madam Ashton, first of all, allow me to welcome you and say that I very much hope that your excellent and powerful presentation today will indeed herald the end of a particularly difficult period for all of us, which began in November when the Commission's previous term of office ended. If we can agree on one thing, it is this: we cannot really afford such long periods dithering. From the end of November until very recently, it seemed – and I am sorry to have to say this – as if the EU had disappeared from the world stage, or had come very close to it. Let me reiterate that we cannot permit that to happen under any circumstances. Because, obviously, the world will not wait for us. You quoted some figures which clearly illustrate that. However, we have also witnessed a series of events which have clearly illustrated it: the natural disasters that keep on happening, the horrific attacks that keep on happening, the fact that some governments in the Middle East, despite being democratic, have nonetheless taken decisions which have severely hampered the peace process, or the little that remains of it, and so forth. We therefore need a high representative/vice-president of the Commission who will be in a position to be present on the ground and not only in the European decision-making centres, but also in those elsewhere in the world. Both you and we knew that you were taking on a well-nigh impossible task. I admire you for taking it on. We have promised to support you in it. We are pleased to have heard you speak

today and to have been witness to your powerful statement about the European External Action Service, which we all need so desperately. If there is anyone who still has the will to put an end to what the English call turf wars – one side fighting with gloves on and the other without – then I am sure that, if we all work together, we will be able to prepare ourselves well for what lies ahead. Thank you for your attention.

Franziska Katharina Brantner, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, Baroness Ashton, ladies and gentlemen, Baroness Ashton, we listened attentively to what you had to say. Unfortunately, we must observe that we will probably have to wait for some time yet before you develop plans for specific future projects from your essay on your principles, which we actually feel able to support.

Allow me to say a few words about the External Action Service, however, about which I really had expected to hear something much more tangible from you. You repeatedly said that it is about coherence, which is the order of the day. In many cases, we need joint plans and programmes from the External Action Service and the Commission. Anyone who is in favour of leaving numerous policy areas to the Commission or the Council Secretariat should be honest and admit that he or she is in favour of the status quo, of the system under the Treaty of Nice.

For us, an important first point is to what extent we are able to achieve a majority on all the issues relating to civil crisis prevention, civil crisis management and reconstruction. In our view, this is all about the things that are covered by the term peace-building, which is to say, conflict prevention, early warning, conflict mediation, reconciliation and short to medium-term stabilisation. We need a corresponding organisational unit for that purpose and so we are proposing the creation of a 'crisis management and peace-building department'. I would therefore like to ask you your position on the creation of such a department. At this point, I would also like to really emphasise that we support both the common foreign and security policy (CFSP) budget and the Instrument for Stability being incorporated into the External Action Service, yet not as part of, and subordinated to, the Crisis Management and Planning Directorate (CMPD), but instead, in a new structure which I hope that you will create. I would like to hear your position on this.

A second point that is important to us is the connection between the traditional foreign policy areas and new areas such as energy policy, climate policy, justice and internal affairs. What structures are you planning in order to give the External Action Service systematic access to these global policy spheres of the EU and its Member States?

There is one more point that is important to us: this must be a modern service with a balanced staffing policy. This week, we celebrated 8 March. It is thus absolutely clear that we believe the rights of women must be firmly anchored in this service and that women must participate in it. Baroness Ashton, a number of female MEPs have written to you to ask that you ensure that, from the very beginning, UN Resolutions 1325 and 1820 are implemented in the institutional structures of the service. So, my question in this connection, too, is: what are your plans in this regard?

As I said, you have our support en route to a sound common External Action Service. I look forward to your answers.

Charles Tannock, *on behalf of the ECR Group.* – Mr President, the Lisbon Treaty is now a legal reality in the international order, even if it lacks popular democratic legitimacy because most EU citizens, including Britain's, were denied a vote in a referendum. Nevertheless, the ECR Group and British Conservatives are committed to positive engagement and to moving on within the new institutional framework.

We would like to see a similar approach from the Member States and the Commission. It is deeply ironic, in my view, that the first major institutional development under Lisbon, namely the creation of the European External Action Service, threatens to push the EU back towards the very introspection and bickering that Lisbon was supposed to have eradicated. Undoubtedly, the creation of the EAS must be subject to debate and consensus about who does what and does it best, but the CFSP foreign policy elements must remain firmly within the Council.

But we also need strong leadership, in theory enabled by the Lisbon Treaty, to forge a lasting vision for Europe's diplomacy in the world. We look to you, High Representative Ashton, to seize the initiative and to assert the authority and leadership provided to you by the treaty, to knock heads together if necessary and to chart the way forward. We will support you in your efforts if you can show that you are up to the daunting challenge.

The EU has had many years to think about this Service, so this muddling through and hesitation that we currently see does no credit to the EU's ambitions to play a global role in foreign policy through the CFSP.

There are more general points. The Albertini report, which I support strongly, sets out the Union's foreign policy priorities and rightly endorses the EU membership aspirations for the Western Balkan countries, particularly Croatia, Macedonia and Montenegro, for which I am rapporteur.

But it also mentions the transatlantic alliance and NATO, which we believe are the cornerstones of the EU's foreign security policy. It rightly emphasises the EU's responsibility for resolving the frozen conflicts, particularly in Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh in our immediate neighbourhood, and good relations with Ukraine.

But, finally, Taiwan is also mentioned as an important partner for the EU and it should also be enabled to participate actively and fully in international organisations, according to the EU's policy and the 'One China' policy.

Willy Meyer, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (ES) Mr President, Baroness Ashton, Mr Albertini already knows the reasons why my group is tabling a minority opinion on the report on foreign, security and defence policy. We are basically doing so, Baroness Ashton, because we have reached a conclusion. In the countries surrounding us, in the European Union, security and defence policies now have nothing to do with defending territory: security policy is now a projection of foreign policy.

We believe that the prime objective of foreign policy should be achieving disarmament at international level: zero armament, using pragmatic policies that respond to the current causes of insecurity in the world.

The main weapons of mass destruction in the world today are hunger and poverty. These are weapons that we cannot fight using military force. We therefore believe that, based on this consideration, we should commit to a transitional security system that will enable the gradual demilitarisation of all security in the world. We obviously do not agree with the Union being linked to NATO, among other things, because NATO's strategy has been to choose to give a military response to insecurities such as organised crime and terrorism, which have never been matters for a military response.

I believe that this growing militarisation requires the Member States to have increasingly powerful arms industries and to spend more on weapons. We are at our highest level in terms of civilisation and in terms of weapons, more so than in the Cold War, which is a far cry from pragmatic policies moving towards demilitarisation.

No, neither terrorism nor organised crime should be military targets. They should be targets for the police, for the international court services, for the intelligence services, for putting criminals in the hands of the courts, but they should not be the target of a military response.

Therefore, we do not agree with this military focus. We do not agree with having United States military bases in the European Union. We do not want this for any state, we do not want any powerful state to deploy military force in the world, and we therefore believe that respect for international law is very important. We do not agree with the recognition of Kosovo – we do not believe in the recognition of any state that uses force outside of international law – because we believe in international law, and we therefore believe that the decolonisation process of the Western Sahara should be in this report. We do, of course, also ask for the withdrawal of troops from Afghanistan, which as NATO itself acknowledges week after week, is causing innocent civilian deaths. We do not, therefore, agree with taking the path of militarisation.

Fiorello Provera, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Baroness Ashton, Mr Albertini's truly excellent report contains a passage that I consider to be of great political importance: the part connecting the phenomenon of immigration to the policy of cooperation with developing countries.

To control such enormous migratory flows by means of repressive measures and domestic policy alone would be unthinkable. Distributing migrants throughout European Member States would not resolve the problem either. On the contrary, it would encourage new arrivals. A key response for controlling migratory phenomena is the development of a cooperation policy, preferably coordinated at European level and aimed not only at economic progress, but also at social and democratic progress. Emigration must be a choice and not a necessity.

In order that this cooperation policy should be effective and reach those who really need it, it is crucial to promote good local governance, without which there would be inefficiency, corruption, wastage of resources

and poor results. Ensuring local governance and the collaboration of governments is the goal of foreign policy, and cooperation must become an important instrument of European foreign policy: this is my personal message to Baroness Ashton within a sector that I hold very dear, in other words, cooperation.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Mr President, the fact that only very unspecific foreign policy goals were defined in the Treaty of Lisbon is coming back to haunt us now. There will probably also be a price to pay for the fact that, in Baroness Ashton, we have a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy without any real foreign policy experience who was foisted on the Union as the lowest common denominator that the Member States were able to find.

If we keep silent on all the important foreign policy issues, we, as Europeans, will be able to achieve just as little as a bunch of diplomats, who shake hands all over the world whilst professing different courses of foreign policy.

The disagreements about a European External Action Service, too, are something that we cannot really afford. This undoubtedly important new service should not and must not be run down, over the heads of the Member States, into a sphere of activity for Eurocrats.

It is probably time that we chopped our way out of the undergrowth in the establishment of this European External Action Service and that the EU was heard again in the outside world. It is also time that the new High Representative acted in a more sensitive way in respect of these matters, including, for example, in using all three working languages of the Union – thus including German – in the European External Action Service.

We must make the best use of the experience and good relations which individual Member States have with certain regions. Think, for example, of Austria's historical experience with the Western Balkans. In so doing, it must be clear that Europe's security is defended not in the Hindu Kush but on the external borders of the EU in the Balkans. The EU must stop acting as the extended arm and the funder-in-chief of NATO and the United States. European money is definitely better spent on FRONTEX than in the deserts of Afghanistan.

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President of the Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – Mr President, if I might just give some comments directly on the issues and questions that have been raised.

To Mr Kasoulides, on the Non-proliferation Treaty review, it is vital that it succeeds above anything else. We believe we have to take practical steps: a comprehensive test ban treaty should come into force; the fissile material cut-off; support for peaceful uses of nuclear energy to find safe ways of making sure that we avoid proliferation – for example, the contributions we make to the nuclear fuel bank – and support for a very strong and effective IAEA. We must work of course especially, as we have said, in areas like the Middle East, which means that we have to continue to put pressure on Iran and address the issues that are raised there.

Mr Severin, on the External Action Service and the priorities that you gave, well, we are in the same place – exactly so. It is very important to me that the Service has political and budgetary accountability, exactly as you have said, and it must be effected in this double-hatted way. It is going to be essential too, as you have indicated, that we draw in and discuss these issues with other key partners. I think you mentioned, for example, Russia and Turkey. Well, Russia I have already visited. I was spending part of the weekend with the Turkish Foreign Minister: a real opportunity to talk in much greater depth about that relationship for the future. So I would agree wholeheartedly with the priorities that you set out and thank you for those.

Mrs Neyts-Uyttebroeck, thank you for your kind words. I think it was not so much that the EU disappeared from the world stage. It is that the inevitability of that hiatus, of having a Commission that was effective, has now been resolved. And, for my own part, it has been extremely important because, until the Commission came into force, I did not even have a cabinet, never mind an External Action Service. And we are now in a position where we can begin to put the resources together.

I think it is also absolutely right that you raise the importance of being visible on the ground. My difficulty, as you know, is that I have not yet learned how to time travel. But I think it is absolutely essential that, as we look ahead, we look at the priorities that have been set out with which I think this House will largely agree and make sure that my actions are addressed to those priorities, one of which is setting up the Service, which does not yet exist. It does not have a staffing structure. It is not there yet. But when it does have that, we will be able to demonstrate the force of Europe in the best sense of that word across the world.

Mrs Brantner, again your common theme to me of trying to get as much detail as possible: I think it is very important. Some of the issues that you have raised are very critical. We do not want duplication within the different institutions in terms of what we do. We want the geographical desk approach to what we do, and I agree with you about peace-building: that it is a very important part of where the EU should act.

And in a sense, it comes into building the different elements of what we do well – the work we do on state-building, on justice, on the rule of law, the work we do on development programmes, the work we do on tackling the issues of climate change, the work that we do on providing support to governments and to people – all of that is engineered to make us more secure, stable and prosperous but actually, by doing so, we are creating a more secure, stable and prosperous world.

Those objectives are extremely important.

I agree with you completely about women. We need to get more women, for example, into our policing missions, where there are very few that I have seen so far. We need to make sure that women are firmly integrated into the service at all levels. That is a challenge we need to make sure that we address. But, most importantly, what I would say to you is that the External Action Service is at the service of the whole of the European Union.

So, what we do on justice and home affairs across the world, what do parliamentarians wish to do with other parliaments? We must use the Service as we build it to be able to be your servant in helping you address those issues on the ground. I think on those issues, we are in exactly the same place.

Mr Tannock: assertive leadership that is up to the challenge. Well, I hope that you will start to see what you would recognise as assertive leadership. It is very important, as you say, that we address some of these critical issues: the Balkans and the transatlantic relationship are absolutely core and central to what we do. It is why we spend a lot of time in discussion with the United States and why I personally spend a lot of time in discussion and dialogue with them and, of course, Ukraine.

I hope that you were pleased with my decision to go to the inauguration and then to invite President Yanukovich to come to Brussels where he spent one of his first days. He was inaugurated on Thursday. He was in Brussels on Monday in order to begin to further and deepen that relationship for the future.

Mr Meyer, you talked about the issues of foreign policy and disarmament and the issues of whether it is appropriate to think in military terms. Let me just give you two very quick examples, one of which I have already described which was at Atalanta and the importance of having a comprehensive approach to what we do.

We have, off the coast of Somalia, ships which have been extremely successful this weekend, by the way, with the French navy in capturing pirates who were determined to create havoc in that part of the sea. Linked to that is making sure that they are prosecuted and treated properly by reference to our own judicial standards in the countries of that region.

Linked to that is the development programme that the Commission is working on to try and support the economy in Somalia so that it improves. Linked to that is the work that we are about to start on training people to be able to provide security in the region. In other words, it is a joined-up approach and it is a comprehensive approach. That means you use the tools that you need to be able to address the problems that people face.

Another example: having been in Haiti last week, I must pay tribute to the Italians that I saw working there. People fresh from the tragedy of Aquila, but here we had the navy, we had the fire fighters, we had NGOs, we had civilians, we had doctors, we had psychiatrists, we had dentists, we had nurses, all working under the umbrella of the commander, actually, of the ship who had a hospital ship full of people who were being treated from the direct consequences of the earthquake. Young people with amputations; children who had terrible burns who were being treated; teams out there to support them.

What I am trying to say is that I think you have to think about the comprehensive strategy and approach that we can offer that involves using the means that we have and using them to greatest effect.

Mr Provera, on development cooperation immigration, you make an important point, which is that, if people feel they have no other choices, then they will take risks, often with their lives, to leave the country where they live and were born and want to live. Most people want to be able to live in the country in which they have grown up.

So the important thing about development, in my view, has always been to be able to support the economic livelihoods of people in order to enable them to be able to stay and live where they wish to live in order to be able to get the educational support, the health support and so on.

That is going to be a very big part of what we are doing on the ground, and that helps particularly in states where instability, because of climate change, could be very difficult.

Finally, Mr Mölzer, do not be so pessimistic, is what I want to say to you. It is not about operating above the heads of Member States. It is about building something uniquely European – not the same as what happens in Member States, whether it is Germany, Italy, France, the UK or wherever. It is not the same. We are building something different that is about long-term security and stability, economic growth on the ground that we can contribute to that is in our interest but that actually is also about the values that we hold dear.

And, as for my languages, *oui, je peux parler français, mais je ne suis pas très bien en français. Ich habe auch zwei Jahre in der Schule Deutsch gelernt, aber ich habe es jetzt vergessen.*

So I can do the languages, and I will get better and better. I look forward to getting to the point where I can have a real conversation with you in much better German than I can do today.

Elmar Brok (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, Madam Vice-President, ladies and gentlemen, the Albertini and Danjean reports, as well as the motion for a resolution on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, show that important decisions will soon have to be taken and that we need to prepare for that. Allow me to single out a couple of further examples. I believe that the European Union now has an important role to play in a crucial phase in which the aim must be to prevent Iran from building nuclear weapons and that there needs to be a real flurry of activity in the 5+1 group, specifically in connection with the preparation of a UN resolution and the possible extension of sanctions, in order to prevent the advent of a new nuclear State by non-military means. The dramatic situation in the Middle East, and the resolution of the problems there, is connected to this, directly or indirectly.

Baroness Ashton, I would like to thank you for travelling to Kiev to talk to President Yanukovich. It will be of crucial importance to succeed in bolstering such countries so that they do not make any wrong decisions and to be clear that a customs union with Russia and a free trade zone with the European Union are not compatible and for the advantages of making the right choice to be made clear.

I have one more comment to add. In contrast to many foreign and defence ministers, we will exercise the necessary patience to build a sound External Action Service with you. We want this External Action Service. It must be successful. It is a precondition for our ability to speak with one voice. It would be wrong to take excessively quick and thus wrong decisions. We are not under time pressure here – we need a sound result. We do need to consider, however, that, in its history, the Union has been successful where the Community method was applied and that, where it has acted intergovernmentally, it has rarely or never succeeded. It must therefore be clear that those things that are Community policy must not be stealthily transformed into intergovernmental policy via the External Action Service. We need to build in safeguards to this effect so as to secure the efficiency of the unitary service but, at the same time, also the Community policy and the rights of the European Parliament that that involves – in respect of the budget, budgetary control and the granting of discharge – as well as political supervision rights on the part of the European Parliament. We hope for positive collaboration.

(Applause)

Hannes Swoboda (S&D). – (DE) Mr President, I address you, Baroness Ashton, as Vice-President of the Commission, but also as High Representative – as, in contrast to the foreign ministers, I assume that, as High Representative, you also have some degree of political responsibility to this House. Today marks 100 days since the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force. There are two imminent and significant decisions to be made in terms of our direction of travel. One of them – as you, too, said at the beginning – is to expand foreign policy because the climate, energy and other matters are part of foreign policy, and the other is creating a dynamic and effective External Action Service.

Speaking of energy policy, Copenhagen showed that, if we are not united, if we are fragmented, if every Head of Government believes that he or she has to produce something specific, we will achieve less than we would otherwise have done. Not that we would have achieved something amazing, given the position of China and of the United States, but the terrible soap opera that was Copenhagen really should not be allowed to happen again.

Therefore – and I agree with Mr Brok in this regard – we need to obtain a sturdy External Action Service. I, like many of us, am not surprised, but am nonetheless appalled, to see how many of the foreign ministers are making problems for you out of petty jealousy. We are saying this very plainly. Many do give you their support, but many are making problems. They simply cannot tolerate the fact that they no longer have the lead role to play and are instead foreign ministers again. At the end of the day, being a foreign minister is not a bad job, and it does not need to mean that you should decide every detail of what goes on in the European Union. For that reason, we also say clearly from here that we will use our parliamentary capabilities to the full not to prevent something, but to build something constructive. An External Action Service is constructive – as it says in the Treaty of Lisbon – when it is clearly subordinate to you, Baroness Ashton, and also, of course, when it collaborates closely with the Commission.

Similarly, we will not tolerate any legal activity that has hitherto been conducted using the Community method and that is to continue in that way under the Treaty of Lisbon suddenly becoming intergovernmental. That, you see, is exactly what many ministers and perhaps even many Heads of Government want, not only in order to undermine the Commission a little, but also to undermine Community law. That is not acceptable. A clear line must be drawn.

How that will play out in relation to the External Action Service is something there will be discussions about over the coming weeks – as before. I will thus also finish on something that has already been said. It is not a question of timing, even if we do want a solution quickly, but one of content-based presentation. It needs to be said once again, specifically to the Council of Foreign Ministers, that this Parliament will exercise its rights – no more, but also no less – in connection with the budget and the Staff Regulations because we have a goal, which is an effective and efficient External Action Service.

(Applause)

Andrew Duff (ALDE). – Mr President, I think we all expected that there were going to be teething troubles in bringing the treaty into force and we might apologise for failing to include a clause on time travel in the treaty, but the thing we failed to expect and cannot accept is a breakdown of trust between the Commission and Council in setting up the External Service. The solution is found in the treaty, which ought to be appreciated and respected scrupulously.

Article 40 protects the respective functions of the Commission and the Council. Both of them should apply pragmatism to ensure that a strong, effective, coherent diplomacy can be created across the breadth of policy. Catherine Ashton gives us a graphic description of the EU as a rising power from a declining continent. It is quite clear that the Afghan campaign is a problem that commands our attention; a profound reform of strategy and tactics is required. Our task should be to reassess the purpose, cost and duration of our engagement there.

The ALDE Group is anxious to press the accelerator on defence. We must find the common security interests of the 27 states and draw on comparable exercises in these states and a frank appraisal of the strengths of the ESDP missions, creating circumstances for bringing forward permanent structured cooperation in defence.

Reinhard Bütikofer (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, Baroness Ashton, I would like to thank Mr Danjean for his excellent report, in which he explains where we now are in relation to the common security and defence policy. He also explains which points we do not have agreement on.

If Parliament adopts this report, it will have come further than the Commission and the Council, in a few specific points, as this report, for example, once again makes express and positive reference to the Barnier report on European civil protection. It is regrettable that Baroness Ashton has just rejected that idea once more.

Lady Ashton, I regret that one of the few points in your presentation where you said ‘no’ was to this idea of Mr Barnier’s, whereas on most topics, you seem to be at the same place as everybody else.

(DE) The new report, like the Albertini report, supports a Union training mission in Somalia. We in the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance reject that idea. We are stumbling into a mission, there, where it is clear neither what its added value is in relation to what has already been done in the region nor within what broader political framework it is based, or whether it actually makes any contribution at all to national reconstruction in Somalia. The likelihood is extremely high that we are paying over the odds in order to train foot soldiers who will then move on to the next warlord willing to pay the most.

Allow me to make a third comment. This report talks of the goal of achieving Europe's strategic autonomy in the field of security and defence policy. For me, that is excessive – we are biting off more than we can chew here. I do not believe that any of the Member States is in a position to come up with the mammoth military expenditure that we would need if we were taking that wording of achieving 'strategic autonomy' seriously. As it happens, I also think that this would be a strategic mistake in any case. Europe must find its role in a meshwork of European and global security, and such a role cannot be that of a strategic stand-alone. It would therefore be better for us to agree, very rationally and realistically, to enhance those capacities and structures that give us the capability of acting more autonomously.

Paweł Robert Kowal (ECR). – (PL) Mrs Ashton, Mr President, an influential Russian military officer has stated that if Russia had possessed Mistral-class amphibious assault ships, the invasion of Georgia would have lasted about half an hour. Meanwhile, France is selling Mistrals to Russia, despite the fact that the Sarkozy plan has not been implemented, and, at the same time, France is giving its support to the North European Gas Pipeline.

It is difficult to talk about security in Europe if we run away from discussion about the situation on the European Union's eastern border, but this is what happened throughout the work on the report, and I am speaking now, with great regret, to the Chair of the Subcommittee on Security and Defence. Efforts were made, at all costs, not to speak about matters such as the 'Zapad 2009' manoeuvres. Pains were taken not to speak about this, as if policy on security and defence – a common policy for the European Union, which it is our role to create – were the policy of only a few large countries. A great deal was said about what is happening a long way away on the other side of the world, and about what is happening in almost every part of the globe, but at all costs – this approach was also adopted by many Members – attempts were made to run away from substantial problems on the eastern border of the Union. It was an exceptional muddle of a kind of European megalomania and a disregard for the interests of some Member States. This is the reason why we are not going to endorse this report, but it is also a request I would like to make to Mrs Ashton.

(The President cut off the speaker)

President. – Excuse me Mr Kowal, but you have spoken for one minute and 44 seconds instead of your allotted minute.

Sabine Lösing (GUE/NGL). – (DE) Mr President, on behalf of my group, the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left, I would like to make clear at this point that we are deeply concerned about the development of EU foreign policy towards militarisation and an increasingly interventionist policy. That is a dangerous development. I want to say, in all clarity, that we believe that a military approach to conflict resolution or to the supposed stabilisation of countries or regions is absolutely the wrong way to go to achieve greater security for the EU and the world. Military interventions – and Afghanistan, unfortunately, is a very current example of this – bring suffering, death and prolonged devastation, but no peace and no improvement in the situation as far as the resident population is concerned.

The Danjean report lists what are referred to as key threats that constitute a challenge for the EU's future security policy. One of these is climate change – something that has been overwhelmingly caused by the industrialised nations of the West. If people in the countries of the South have to take flight because they no longer have any water and food becomes scarcer and scarcer, they will represent a security problem for Europe. Such a view is cynical and inhuman. If States collapse as a result of neoliberal economic policy, they will constitute a security problem. What we need is not more military, it is a change, an end to the European Union's neoliberal orientation.

The European External Action Service, the European Defence Agency, the creation of a crisis management and planning directorate and the planned start-up fund to fund military operations are designed to make the EU a global player in military terms. We believe that moves towards centralisation in the European External Action Service are a dangerous and undemocratic development. The EU should assume a leading role in relation to demilitarisation and disarmament, especially in the field of nuclear disarmament. There needs to be a push for the obligation incumbent upon nuclear States under Article 6 of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty, which is to say, complete nuclear disarmament, to be honoured at long last. This was a key promise that constituted the basis on which many States signed the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and have, as a result, durably refrained from acquiring nuclear weapons. Reliable guarantees of non-aggression are the best means of preventing proliferation as, otherwise, countries threatened with intervention will attempt to deter such an attack by means of acquiring nuclear weapons.

If nothing else, I would like, in this context, and in particular with regard to Iran, to point out and to warn that military operations or military activities of any kind to prevent proliferation are completely counter-productive and highly dangerous. We will be rejecting the Danjean report and have tabled our own resolution on the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty.

Bastiaan Belder (EFD). – (NL) Mr President, ‘Chinese billions for the Balkans’ is a recent newspaper headline which certainly calls for a European response in this debate since, at the end of the day, the new Chinese investment initiatives are targeting countries which have already become members of the EU or those which aspire to that status.

Council and Commission, how do you view China’s role in the Balkans? After all, it embraces a range of economic activities: from financing and carrying out major public works, to providing investment for industry and agriculture and buying up ports. The crucial point here is that the Chinese approach is definitely incompatible with Western standards. The big question now is: has this Chinese agenda on occasions thrown a spanner in the works of the EU’s laborious enlargement agenda for this region? Whatever your answer may be, the Chinese clock is ticking faster and more productively than the Western one, in this region, as well.

Finally, Madam High Representative, you will be making a trip to the Middle East. Noam Shalit, the father of Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier who was abducted nearly four years ago, is counting on your full support to obtain Gilad’s release. I am, too.

Martin Ehrenhauser (NI). – (DE) Mr President, let me briefly address two issues. First of all, the duty to provide assistance is clearly not compatible with Austria’s neutrality, and for that reason, it would be important to include the following points in this report. It must be stated, firstly, that the duty to provide assistance is not legally binding, secondly, that the use of military means is not necessarily required and, thirdly, that the individual Member States retain the freedom to decide what the assistance they provide actually comprises.

The committee did not accept this, primarily from a content point of view. In my opinion, the very way in which this was rejected also demonstrates a serious lack of respect. I ask for more respect from you, Baroness Ashton, for us Austrians in this very sensitive area.

My second point concerns the minority report. The quality of democracies and societies, of course, is demonstrated time and again by their treatment of minorities. For me, it is a very, very good thing that we have this option of a minority report. I do not agree with all the points in it, but I am very pleased that Mrs Lösing did make use of this option.

(Applause)

Mario Mauro (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would also like to take advantage of the excellent reports by my fellow Members, Messrs Danjean and Albertini, to speak up again in support of the key role of the High Representative. For the good of all, it is to be hoped that she, Baroness Ashton, realises how important her role is, that she defends it, and that she is determined to assert this role when giving substance to the requirements of the treaty, for example in strengthening the European Union’s relationships with its strategic partners, and in consolidating its own leadership in multilateral forums.

In short, we urgently need a strategy that ultimately identifies the real interests that we intend to pursue, and it is important that we involve Member States in significant objectives. It is also important not to let ourselves be conditioned by any interinstitutional disputes over the division of responsibilities – I am referring particularly to the future European External Action Service. Essentially, Baroness Ashton, we want you to play a key role. We want you to play a key role without being bureaucratic.

Allow me, then, to make this observation: I am truly sorry that you have decided not to participate in today’s discussion on Cuba. I know that you have every good reason for this and that you will be the first to participate in the discussion on the Arctic, which is also of great importance. But *Cuba libre* is not only the name of a cocktail: it is the rallying cry of democracy that so many people in this Parliament carry in their hearts. I therefore hope that you will find the time to attend, contribute to and back Parliament’s decision with your strength and with the strength of your role. You are participating in the debate on the Arctic, and you will see that *Cuba libre* goes down better with a bit of ice.

Kristian Vigenin (S&D). – (BG) The report by the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the Council’s annual report was drafted in a spirit of cooperation and dialogue, which is indicative of our approach to all strategic issues. A substantial part of the report is devoted to the ramifications of the Treaty of Lisbon.

On this point, I would like to focus attention on one important aspect of our joint cooperation. The success of the common foreign policy and the actual results from the institutional reforms implemented are becoming a fundamental factor which will determine the attitude of European citizens towards the European Union's ability to defend their interests, to change and to develop. Justified or not, expectations are high for a sharp rise in the European Union's role on the world stage, and we have no right to disappoint Europe's citizens.

Unfortunately, in recent weeks, the European press has, not without justification, been casting foreign policy in an extremely negative light, portraying it as a contest between Member States for posts in the new External Action Service, as a competition between the institutions in terms of which hat Baroness Ashton will wear more often – that of the Commission or the Council – and as an unfair struggle by the European Parliament to achieve greater influence.

You realise that this is harming us internally. Furthermore, it is also particularly damaging as a message to our external partners. Division makes us weak in their eyes.

This is why I am taking the opportunity in this debate to make an appeal. All of us who have a stance on devising and developing the Common Foreign and Security Policy must concentrate on the important strategic issues and endeavour to show, as quickly as possible, tangible results through more dialogue and a constructive approach. We owe it to Europe's citizens to make them feel that they are part of a single European Union whose voice is heard and has clout in global politics.

Pino Arlacchi (ALDE). – Mr President, the joint motion for a resolution on the Non-proliferation Treaty is a very important one, and the ALDE Group and I are very proud to have contributed to its elaboration. The resolution is holistic because it encompasses all the disarmament matters, from the NPT review conference to the issue of nuclear weapon-free zones.

This resolution calls for a Middle East free of nuclear weapons and for the withdrawal of all tactical warheads from European soil, in the context of a brotherly dialogue with Russia. This resolution also frequently refers to a nuclear weapon-free world, a target to be achieved through a special convention and within an 'ambitious' timeframe – this means a short one.

Our resolution is the European answer to President Obama's proposal of the abolition of nuclear weapons. This document should be considered, therefore, as a step on the road to the total ban of atomic weapons. It means to end the paradox of the possession of nuclear devices by some countries, which is legal on the one side, and the complete prohibition of chemical and biological arsenals for all countries, on the other side. Atomic bombs must be made illegal and their possession should one day be considered a criminal act. I am confident this Parliament will continue in this direction with even more drive and more vision.

Ulrike Lunacek (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, Vice-President of the Commission and High Representative, as this Parliament's rapporteur on Kosovo, I am very pleased to have heard you say that you consider the Western Balkans to be a focus of European foreign policy and that the European Union cannot afford to fail.

You also said, however, that Bosnia has stabilised. Baroness Ashton, in the current state in which Bosnia finds itself, stability and stabilisation are actually dangerous. Not everyone is able to take part in the democratic process. The constitution, as it currently exists – the Dayton constitution – was a sign of stability in the 1990s, but it is no longer that today. What kind of strategy do you, do we, as the EU, have to change that? You said that you have a strategy for Bosnia. That is handling by the Office of the High Representative – but where is the EU's strategy? I would like you to tell me that. I think that the EU still needs to develop a strategy in this regard.

When it comes to Kosovo, you described EULEX as a success. That is only partially true. There is still much to be done here, for example, visa liberalisation for the citizens. Baroness Ashton, I call on you to ensure that the Commission immediately starts work on a roadmap in order to make it clear to the citizens of Kosovo that they will not be left on their own.

Unfortunately, you did not answer a question posed by Mrs Brantner. A dedicated department, a dedicated Directorate-General for peace-building within the External Action Service, would be the order of the day. You agree with us that peace-building is important, but will you anchor it in the External Action Service? Will you set up a dedicated Directorate-General for peace-building? That would be necessary to make it clear where the European Union is heading.

When it comes to Mr Danjean's report, I am very pleased that the committee accepted that further developments in the European security and defence policy fully respect the neutrality and the non-aligned

status of some Member States. This means that they themselves decide where, when and how they participate and provide assistance.

IN THE CHAIR: MR VIDAL-QUADRAS

Vice-President

Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR). – Mr President, where the EU can add value, and when it does not undermine our sovereign interests or compete with organisations such as NATO, we can support it.

For the most part, this will mean adopting common positions on certain key issues and civil tasks in the field of humanitarian assistance or post-conflict reconstruction and development, although I have to say that the track record of EUPOL in Afghanistan does not inspire much confidence.

The simple truth is that your role as EU foreign minister is to act as handmaiden for EU political integration. The effect of the External Action Service, the chain of EU embassies around the world, will be to undermine national representation in many capitals, armed perversely with cash that has come from our nations in order to take forward someone else's foreign policy.

The report before us on EU security and defence policy is a manifesto for EU military integration, deliberately confusing military and civil crisis management in order to justify an EU role. It relies on a bogus narrative concerning EU operations and increasingly seeks to involve the Commission in areas which are properly the responsibility of our nations and of the Council.

Virtually every paragraph of this report advocates ratcheting up military EU integration at the expense of NATO and the sovereign integrity of individual European countries.

I recall one of the great red lines of the British Labour Government's negotiating stance when it said it would resist the idea of a separate and permanent EU operations centre responsible for operational planning and conduct of military operations as this would be the clearest example of duplication of NATO, whose SHAPE headquarters performs precisely this role.

Baroness Ashton, when I asked you about this on 11 January, you said you agreed with the position I took then. Now you seem to have changed your mind. I would be very interested to know what you really think now.

Nikolaos Salavrakos (EFD). – (EL) Mr President, the report by Mr Albertini is indeed outstanding and I congratulate him on it. He is a serious person and always delivers serious reports. The presentation by Lady Ashton was equally important and outstanding.

I believe that numerous foreign policy issues are covered, but I consider that everything referred to in the two reports in terms of the proper exercising of foreign policy and security policy is inextricably linked to two things: firstly, a clear definition of the borders of the European Union, so that the European Union is treated with uniform respect and, secondly: resources, in other words money; I have read nothing about resources in either report, even though they are the most basic requirement for an effective foreign policy.

I believe that the new order has brought with it a new global economic disorder. There is social and political disorder and monetary disorder is knocking at the door. What I want, therefore, is for Lady Ashton to coordinate the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and the Committee on Foreign Affairs, so that we can discuss the resources to support the policy adopted.

Philip Claeys (NI). – (NL) Mr President, Madam High Representative, I fear that what you have brought us today is a catalogue of areas for consideration or a catalogue of commonplaces. Unfortunately, your presentation contains very little in the way of strategic vision.

For example, what action do you propose to ensure that we build a greater rapprochement with Russia, instead of allowing Russia to drift further towards cooperation with rogue regimes, such as those of Iran and North Korea? What are your proposals as regards Iran's attempts to develop nuclear weapons? What position are you going to adopt concerning the growing anti-Western and anti-European trends in the Islamic world? A trend that can also be observed in candidate countries like Turkey.

Madam Ashton, are you prepared to defend European achievements, such as freedom of expression and the separation of church and state, in a clear and uncompromising manner, in the face of growing political Islam?

In my view, there can be no repetition of the weak attitude which the EU adopted a few years ago with regard to the Danish cartoons crisis.

Like Mr Provera, I, too, would like to ask whether you are prepared to bring our Common Foreign and Security Policy into play in order to bring the flood of mass immigration into Europe under control? I refer here to both illegal and legal immigration. You have not answered that question.

Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (PPE). – Mr President, I welcome the High Representative, Vice-President, and Chair of the Foreign Affairs Council under those three hats. She has three hats. Our reports refer to the old times. Your office, Baroness Ashton, was meant to be a new era, so I will refer to the new era. You are representing a newborn office, an institution just born, which is having a difficult childhood.

It is a hybrid with an electric engine of Community method and a diesel engine of intergovernmental method. It is an orphan, whose supposed parents, Member States, Council, Commission, look at it with a certain suspicion and distance. Parliament is ready to fill the gap of parenthood.

At this early stage, there are risks of this Service being torn apart by diverging institutional rivalries and interests. Our Parliament was and is the strong proponent of strong EU foreign policy. You can count on us.

Please look at Parliament as your ally, maybe also as an honest broker among those who would be tempted to see only one hat on your head and not all three of them.

Parliament would expect the new institution, like others, to be linked with us by an interinstitutional agreement clearly setting out the rules of cooperation. We intend to codecide, as the treaty provides for, on financial and staff regulations in the spirit of the integral EEAS, not torn-apart EAS. Please consider strengthening your office in terms of competence and political weight by installing deputies to your office – kind of ‘vice-ministers’, including parliamentary ones. That would solve the problem that the day only has 24 hours, the problem which cannot be otherwise solved. You are needed everywhere and we would like you to multiply your possibilities to act on our behalf and on behalf of the Union.

Maria Eleni Koppa (S&D). – (EL) Mr President, Lady Ashton, we socialists and democrats believe in a European Union with a strong presence on the international stage, a Union with a common foreign policy which can speak with one voice in what is becoming a more and more complex world, a Union with a separate defence identity, which gives it independence of choice and action and a particular role in the international sphere. I shall refer, in particular, to the excellent report by Mr Danjean, whom I should like to thank for his productive cooperation.

I wish to raise four points:

Firstly, especially after the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the reference made to the central role of the UN system and the call on it to strengthen multilateral cooperation are important.

Secondly, we support close cooperation with NATO. However, we would emphasise that this cooperation should not obstruct the independent development of the defence capability of the European Union. On the contrary, full account must be taken of the differences between the two organisations and their independence must be left intact, especially as regards decision taking.

Thirdly, I think that we need a paragraph on the need for enhanced cooperation with Russia, which is a strategic partner for the Union in sectors such as energy security, crisis management and others.

To close, I should like to express my satisfaction at the fact that the report now includes references to the need for general disarmament, with the emphasis on light weapons, anti-personnel mines and cluster munitions. At the same time, however, I consider that the European Parliament should take a clearer stand and ask the Member States to provide real support for the Obama initiative for a world without nuclear weapons. Disarmament and the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons can be achieved if each and every one of us takes a step towards attaining this ultimate objective.

Norica Nicolai (ALDE). – (RO) I would like to pay tribute to the quality of the two reports from Mr Albertini and Mr Danjean. This proves that there are people with expertise in this Parliament. I hope, Mrs Ashton, that you will take advantage of this expertise, which is in all our interests.

I would particularly like to highlight the recommendation made in the report on this assembly's cooperation in monitoring EU policies. In light of paragraph 1 of the Treaty of Lisbon, I believe that we can share the

responsibility of this Parliament and the national parliaments for promoting a more coherent approach on this political measure.

However, I want to continue to mention, Mrs Ashton, the need to expect a much more coherent strategy from you on security policy. As far as the External Action Service is concerned, I believe that the staff who will work in this Service and for Europe's citizens must represent proportionally the expertise of the Member States because, unfortunately, very many institutions have achieved a hidden level of incompetence and bureaucracy, which could damage a global, coherent vision of the European Union.

Finally, I would like to ask you a question about the battlegroups, structures which we have created but, unfortunately, have not used. They could damage the image of the security policy, and I would like to see what your vision is. As regards the Atalanta operation, my view is that a much more realistic approach is required because, unfortunately, the successes won by our forces are disproportionate to the intense level of piracy incidents.

Thank you.

Paul Nuttall (EFD). – Mr President, please allow me to speak frankly as one Lancastrian to another, because this is not going very well, is it? It really is not. Earlier on, Baroness Ashton, you said that Europe needs a credible foreign policy. How can we have a credible foreign policy when it has an incredible High Representative?

You seem as if you are stumbling from one crisis to another, so much so that the British Foreign Secretary had to write you a letter this week asking you to buck up, to get on your game. But we in UKIP were on to this from the start. We opposed your appointment because we said you would be clearly out of your depth – and we are being proved right.

It was said that your appointment, made by the Commission, would stop the traffic in Tokyo and Washington. But you have not even been able to appoint the Ambassador to Washington because old Barroso did you up like a kipper!

It is also claimed in the British press that you do not turn your phone on after 8 p.m. at night. But, Baroness Ashton, you are the highest-paid female politician in the world. You are paid more than Frau Merkel, you are paid more than Hillary Clinton: it is a 24-hour job. To top it all, yesterday it was reported that you are being provided with a Learjet. You are expected to do 300 000 miles per year. That would get you to the moon, and most people now would like you to stay there.

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE). – (RO) (It was not my turn, but I will continue anyway.) I would like to begin by congratulating Mr Albertini for the excellent report he has drafted, which highlights the role that the European Union needs to play on the international stage as a global player and lead actor.

I particularly welcome the insertion of paragraph 47 in the text, which underlines the importance of regional cooperation within the framework of the Eastern Partnership and Black Sea Synergy, because I believe that this area is one where the European Union's involvement may lead to real change from both an economic and political perspective.

On the other hand, I would also like to extend my congratulations to Arnaud Danjean for drafting a report which successfully manages to touch on not only all the challenges facing, but also the achievements of the European Union in the area of security and defence policy. I believe that, at the time of the tenth anniversary of the launch of this policy, the proposals made in the Danjean report are extremely important in terms of improving the EU's actions, which will certainly contribute to the security of European citizens and, ultimately, to peace and international security.

I would like to emphasise at this juncture one particular point from this excellent report about the importance of the partnership with the United States in the area of crisis management, peacekeeping and military matters in general. In this respect, the anti-missile defence system project launched by our US partners is important not only for my country, Romania, which has decided to be involved in it, but also in a wider sense, because the proliferation of ballistic missiles poses a serious threat to Europe's population.

I should mention that I supported Amendment 34 submitted in relation to paragraph 87 of the report because I believe that if the anti-missile shield project could help establish a dialogue at European level, the reference to the dialogue with Russia does not make any sense in this context.

Thank you.

Ioan Mircea Paşcu (S&D). – Mr President, the reports drawn up by Mr Albertini and Mr Danjean are very important documents coming at a crucial moment: the Lisbon Treaty has just entered into force, the EU has a new Parliament and transatlantic cooperation looks more promising.

Mr Danjean's report addresses the new security challenges facing EU members. To that effect, it calls for a White Paper which would trigger a public debate and raise the profile of the CSDP, establishing a clearer relationship between objectives and interests, on the one hand, and the means and resources to attain them, on the other.

The report also comes up with – and this is a very good thing – concrete proposals, and points to the areas which need further effort in the military domain. At the same time, some of the proposals, such as the introduction of a European preference principle for defence acquisition and a call for the obligatory participation of the European defence industry in the coming US missile defence system, look pretty impossible to reconcile, while answering every need with a new institution is not always practical.

In general, with Europe constantly diminishing its military expenditure since the end of the Cold War and a public disinclined to support military action in general, the approach to CSDP should not only be mechanical but equally political. Restoring political will in this respect is thus indispensable for a successful CSDP.

Finally, the report is important because it addresses the very topical issue of the role of the European Parliament with respect to CSDP. I want to thank Mr Danjean and my colleagues for their contributions.

Mirosław Piotrowski (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, the motion which has been submitted for a resolution of Parliament on the Common Foreign and Security Policy is intended, among other things, to establish military structures as part of the European Union. I appeal for the establishment of a special European Union defence council and military operations centre. These instruments will serve to give the Union the status of a world player in military affairs.

It should be remembered that out of 27 EU Member States, as many as 21 are members of NATO. Only six EU countries do not belong to NATO, and most of these have declared neutrality. This gives rise, therefore, to a fundamental question – does the motion which has been submitted have as an objective the development of a number of EU countries, or is it also a serious step on the road to building a separate military bloc in competition with NATO? Even in the mid-term perspective, it will not be possible to maintain membership in both organisations at the same time. Therefore, voting in favour of this report, today, will, in reality, destroy the civil nature of the Union, will show the red card to NATO and will be the beginning of building an alternative military bloc.

Ernst Strasser (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, Baroness Ashton, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to start by warmly congratulating my two fellow Members on their reports, which have formed the basis for a very good debate with excellent results. There are a few guiding principles that I would like to mention. Firstly, on the common foreign policy: unfortunately, we currently have a many-voiced image of the European Union. High Representative, I would like to ask and call on you to make sure that we help achieve and indeed ensure that Europe speaks with one voice. That is highly necessary if we are to achieve a pan-European alignment.

Secondly, it is right that transatlantic relations have been mentioned. In the diplomatic field, in the economic field, in security policy and in defence policy, we do need a close partnership with our colleagues in the United States, but as equal partners on an equal footing. It must also be the case that citizens' rights and security issues be dealt with on equal terms, as Parliament ultimately impressively demanded in relation to the SWIFT Agreement.

My third point is that it is right that the Western Balkans are an absolutely crucial factor in the European security and foreign policy of the future. We need to give these States European perspectives. That means politically stable relations, personal safety and economic development. A European External Action Service should and must – and Parliament is on your side in this regard – help to achieve all of this. We perceive this European External Action Service to be a service for Europe and not for the Member States, for the institutions, European thinking and working, not for other interests. Parliament will be on your side on this issue.

Of course, I also support the German Foreign Minister, who is demanding that German should be one of the working languages of the European External Action Service.

Wolfgang Kreissl-Dörfler (S&D). – (DE) Mr President, Baroness Ashton, ladies and gentlemen, yes, we need a common foreign, security and defence policy, but let us use it to obtain a world free of nuclear weapons. We know that that will not happen overnight; we have been fighting for this for too long to think that. However, perhaps we can succeed, together with Presidents Obama and Medvedev, in bringing this goal a crucial step closer.

I also welcome the fact that, according to its coalition agreement, Germany's Federal Government intends to ask for the withdrawal of US nuclear weapons from Germany. That would represent a clear and unambiguous signal. We also welcome the fact that the Secretary General of NATO is to hold a comprehensive debate about bringing the overarching goal of a world free of nuclear weapons closer without having to neglect security interests. That, too, would be a crucial step forward.

Baroness Ashton, I believe that, together with a well-structured External Action Service, there is much that you will be able to achieve. I am therefore full of hope in this regard and I have to say that, in many commentaries that we have to sit through in this Chamber – in particular from a so-called parliamentary group from the United Kingdom – the quality in this House has really suffered terribly.

Eduard Kukan (PPE). – (SK) The excellent reports from my fellow Members, Albertini and Danjean, include many inspiring ideas about how to streamline the main aspects and key opportunities in implementing the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

I would like to stress that right now, when the concept for creating the European External Action Service and operating it in the future is being processed, it is extremely important that this service is set up on a maximally rational basis right from the start. That is, to serve the European Union's primary objectives and the efforts to strengthen its position in the world.

As we can see today, this is not a simple or easy task. In developing the concept of service, we are already seeing that the often conflicting interests of the various European institutions and their individual components are clashing, and sometimes even with groups and individuals within them. To this we can also add the national interests of individual Member States. In this situation, it is necessary for all the players and participants in this process to be responsible, broad-minded and objective in order to be able to rise above their own egos and keep in mind mainly the common objective: the establishment of a diplomatic service that will be operating as a homogenous element, serving exclusively the needs of the European Union and its Member States. Here is the very important leadership role – yours, Baroness Ashton. It would be a mistake if special interests and the desire to impose own opinion at the expense of another at all costs, with the aim of demonstrating own importance and status, were to overcome the need for a broader perspective. The outcome of this effort will bear witness to whether we are really concerned about a stronger European Union or whether it is just another demonstration and contest about whose position within the European Union's structures is the strongest.

Roberto Gualtieri (S&D). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Madam High Representative/Vice-President, I would like to emphasise the fact that we are discussing three excellent documents drawn up by Parliament: ambitious documents that express clear stances, make clear-cut choices and are subject to broad consensus between the groups within this Parliament who care about Europe and its future. It is an important fact, demonstrating Parliament's will and ability to offer itself as a candidate to play a central role in CFSP/CSDP on the basis of what I would call a dynamic reading of the Treaty of Lisbon.

We intend to exercise this role in the process of constructing the External Action Service, not only to guarantee Parliament's prerogatives, but also to contribute to making the service an organisation capable of ensuring that EU external action is consistent and efficient while, at the same time, strengthening and gradually extending the community method.

As regards the Danjean report, I would like to highlight that the concept of strategic autonomy is presented in the context of a multilateral approach, and that it is a condition for strengthening the strategic partnership with the United States. I would also like to highlight the fact that Parliament is united in requesting an Operations Centre, and I am glad that you, High Representative, have declared yourself open to a more exhaustive discussion of this idea.

Concerning the non-proliferation resolution, I would like to underline the importance of envisaging a world free from nuclear weapons, the clear judgment on the anachronism of tactical nuclear weapons and the value of the positions recently adopted by some European governments on this front. Thus, Parliament's message is clear, realistic and ambitious, and we hope that the High Representative is able to grasp and endorse it.

Tunne Kelam (PPE). – Mr President, may I congratulate colleagues Albertini and Danjean on their comprehensive and creative reports on foreign and security policy.

The EU is bound to be a global player, as you said, High Representative, but with seven per cent of the world's population and one fifth of GDP, it will be possible only on the basis of strengthened transatlantic cooperation based on common values.

First of all, the EU should show a determined will to develop coherent strategies in five crucial areas: common strategies for China, Russia, peace in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and energy security.

It is still a major handicap for our credibility and efficiency in the world that often we have not been able to form a unified position in these areas. The principal challenge for you will be to carry into practice your excellent statement about building a single political strategy and taking collective responsibility.

I welcomed paragraph 10 in colleague Danjean's report which urges the Council and the Commission to analyse cyber threats and to coordinate an efficient response to such challenges based on the best practices. Cyber warfare is not a challenge of the future: it has become an everyday practice. Therefore, it is an immediate task for the EU to work out a European cyber security strategy.

Finally, on the European External Action Service: I think the forming of the EEAS should be based on a fair geographical balance and equal opportunities for representatives of all Member States, new and old, with application of the quota system. Only this will guarantee the efficiency and transparency and, finally, the credibility of the new diplomatic service.

Good luck to you, High Representative, and thank you.

Richard Howitt (S&D). – Mr President, High Representative Ashton has asked us this morning to change mental maps, to challenge resistance to institutional change and to avoid narrow defence of national interests. If Parliament means what it says on the CFSP, we have to send a clear message that we will support a strong, comprehensive and inclusive External Action Service and, in observing our own prerogatives, we will not be part of any vested interests seeking to limit the capacity, and therefore the effectiveness, of that service.

That should mean appointments on merit and merit alone, appointments from Member State foreign ministries from day one and from across all of the European Union; it means incorporation of strategic advice on issues like energy supply and environmental policy; it means organisational structures which reflect global reach and give due weight to Africa and to transatlantic relations as well as to Asia, Latin America and our neighbourhood; it means sufficient financial margin, not just for rapid reaction or humanitarian response, but to move monies to reflect new political priorities; it means endorsing Cathy Ashton's decision to put disaster response above disaster tourism and for her to provide key direction to financial programming and it means this Parliament supporting new arrangements with deputising which reflect international practice rather than necessarily sticking to our past rules.

Finally, I am delighted to see the Commission seat empty this morning and, for all those who campaigned for the Lisbon Treaty, we should not restrict their or our support for its full implementation.

Francisco José Millán Mon (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, the Union's foreign policy is entering a new phase, as Baroness Ashton and Mr Albertini have said this morning.

Article 21 of the treaty establishes objective principles. New positions are also created by the treaty, with a High Representative, a Vice-President of the Commission, a permanent President of the European Council, a European External Action Service, and a new Security and Defence Policy, which is the subject of the report by my colleague Mr Danjean, etc.

These innovations aim to ensure that the European Union has a much more effective influence in the world, and I think that summits with third countries continue to be an ideal instrument for achieving this. The European Union does not hold many summits with individual countries, so we should take care with them.

The summit held last week with Morocco was the first summit with an Arab country, and also symbolised advanced status being granted to Morocco. I would have liked you to have attended, Baroness Ashton. I also regret that the King of Morocco was not present. His absence meant that a summit that should have been historic lost political influence, significance and effectiveness.

I hope that the Union for the Mediterranean Summit in Barcelona will also be successful in terms of the level of the delegations.

I also regret the fact that the summit with President Obama planned for the spring is not going to take place. As the Albertini report states, the Treaty of Lisbon sets the stage for strengthening our mechanisms for dialogue with the United States. This and other subjects could have been dealt with at the summit.

The European Union and the United States should not miss the opportunity to deal at a high level with the bilateral matters, conflicts and global challenges that are now mounting up on the world's agenda. It would be paradoxical – and I will finish now – if now that we have the Treaty of Lisbon, we ran the risk of becoming irrelevant in this world that some are now calling ‘post-Western’ or ‘post-American’.

Libor Rouček (S&D). – (CS) Madam High Representative, ladies and gentlemen, in my speech, I would like to point out the need to create a partnership with Russia. The EU States and Russia face many common challenges and threats. I could mention the fight against terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, regional conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan, climate change, energy security including nuclear security, and so on. Neither the European Union nor Russia can solve these problems alone. Cooperation is necessary and cooperation should be the basis for a new comprehensive agreement between the EU and Russia.

I would therefore like to call on the High Representative to make use of her new powers and to speed up the negotiations with Russia. I would also like to ask you, Baroness, to make use of your new powers to coordinate more effectively the positions of individual Member States, as well as of the individual parties involved within out common foreign and security policy, because that is the only way we will be able to secure a unified approach and to promote values such as human rights, democracy, the legal state, equality and even-handedness in mutual relations.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE). – Mr President, I welcome and support both reports and I congratulate both rapporteurs on those documents.

Now for two points. Firstly, on the Danjean report, I would like to bring up an issue that has raised a lot of eyebrows in a number of EU Member States. I am talking specifically about the exclusive talks between Paris and Moscow over the possible sale of four Mistral warships to Russia.

The Mistral warship is clearly offensive in nature and it is indeed very alarming that some EU Member States are engaging in arms sales to third countries which might have very negative consequences for the security of other EU Member States or the EU's neighbours.

The Treaty of Lisbon outlines common defence aspirations and includes a clause about solidarity in the area of security and defence. Therefore, what do you reckon Parliament and other EU institutions should push for? A common set of rules inside the EU addressing arms sales from EU Member States to third countries.

As regards Mr Albertini's report, I would like to stress the importance of stability and security in East Asia. We welcome the efforts undertaken by both Taipei and Beijing to improve cross-state relations and to enhance dialogue and practical cooperation. In this context, the EU should strongly back Taiwan's participation in the International Civil Aviation Organisation and in the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, as Taiwan's participation in these organisations is important to the EU and global interests.

Zoran Thaler (S&D). – (SL) Madam High Representative, I very much agree with you when you say that your key objective is a better and a more credible European foreign policy. That greater stability and security in the Balkans, our part of the world, is your key objective.

We really cannot afford any failure in this regard. I therefore recommend that you commit to two issues: firstly, to resolving urgently the relations between Greece and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, so that our Member State Greece can finally begin to breathe easy with regard to its northern borders; and secondly, to making efforts to ensure that Serbia, in the artificial dilemma of having to choose between the European Union and Kosovo, opts for the European Union, i.e. that it does not isolate itself. Perhaps it might be a good idea to remind our friends in Serbia of one important fact, which is that Serbia and Kosovo will be together again once they both become members of the European Union.

Michael Gahler (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, Madam Vice-President, today you are sitting on the other side. If you switch round every month, that will be fine by me.

As this debate draws to a close, a number of primary evaluations have become clear. We want you to be at the head of an External Action Service in which you – as a fellow Member said earlier – wear both hats at the same time. These two hats should be the only duplication, though – duplication in the structures is not

something that we need. The retention of the Community method must be ensured, not only in relation to the budget and EP supervision. To be quite clear about this, the new service must not be the exclusive toy of the Foreign Ministers, who feel insulted that they will no longer be included in the European Council. The same applies to the appointment of the staff and the filling of important positions within the service.

When it comes to the Danjean report, I would like to give my full support to the line taken by the rapporteur. When it comes to the permanent operations centre, like Mr Van Orden, I have noticed that Baroness Ashton has moved on this issue since her hearing and, I must say, in the right direction, too, as I see it. You have moved from rejection to a test phase. I still believe that, if we are to operate civilian and military mission planning in a fully integrated way in the External Action Service, it makes sense to also run that service from its own operational headquarters.

With regard to the proposal from the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance to establish a Directorate-General for peace-building, I would say that, in contrast to my fellow Members who sit at the left-most edge of this Chamber, I believe the entire EU project, and specifically also our foreign policy, is a unique peace-building project. On that basis, I am not sure that we should be restricting this to a single department.

María Muñoz De Urquiza (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, we believe that the new institutions need some time to establish themselves, but we also believe that we should not take our eye off the ball. What is important is not, as some are asking, for the High Representative to be present wherever the European foreign policy is involved. What is important is for the European Union to be present on the international stage with the capacity to speak out in defence of its positions. This is what the reports are saying that we are debating today.

We therefore advocate a broad European Union policy on cooperation relations with all the countries with which we have interests, especially in terms of human rights, from Belarus to Cuba. We should have this policy for all countries in which we have an interest in terms of human rights, security and global challenges, because the European Union can make the difference, as has been shown with the joint position of the majority of the Member States achieved under the Spanish Presidency in the Human Rights Council in Geneva, and as must be achieved on the Middle East and on Cuba. This is a proactive and reformist step forward in terms of the external action of the European Union. We want a strong, genuine European External Action Service that supports the work of the High Representative and also responds to Parliament's aspirations.

Krzysztof Lisek (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, Mrs Ashton, I would like to express satisfaction at the fact that we can, today, discuss the Common Foreign and Security Policy and the Common Security and Defence Policy with you. In spite of several voices to the contrary, I would like to say that I am certain that the majority of this House wish you well and would like to see construction of the Common Foreign and Security Policy and a professional External Action Service, a service in which you will be able to make use of the best diplomats from all Member States of the European Union.

Our discussion, today, about the Common Security and Defence Policy, is based on the excellent report of my boss on the Subcommittee on Security and Defence, Mr Danjean. The Union must, of course, build the framework of the Common Security and Defence Policy. There are many challenges ahead of us, not only conflicts, but also natural disasters, the threat of terrorism and so on. We must, therefore, strengthen our operational capabilities. The Union must take care of its own security, but must also be active in the face of global challenges. This cannot be done without good cooperation with our allies from across the Atlantic. I think that, not just because most EU Member States belong to NATO, but because of those challenges, in fact, everyone expects that you will manage to initiate a good dialogue and build coherent cooperation between the European Union and NATO.

Baroness Ashton, ending on a humorous note, I would like to express the hope that you have already sent your telephone number not only to Henry Kissinger, but also to Hilary Clinton.

Proinsias De Rossa (S&D). – Mr President, I want to congratulate Vice-President Ashton on a speech with vision and substance.

The problem that some people have with you, Vice-President Ashton, is that you are not a macho general or, indeed, a narrow nationalist. I welcome, in particular, your emphasis on the rule of law between countries and urge you actively to insist that this is the case in the Middle East. Also, your commitment to the important principle of collective gains as against minimal Member State losses.

The Middle East is perhaps the most volatile region capable at the moment of stumbling into a widespread conflagration. You must work closely with the United States and press for the Council statement of 8 December to be central as a framework for progress there.

Finally, I want to recommend strongly that you support the idea of a policy that the Middle East be a nuclear-free zone.

Andrey Kovatchev (PPE). – (BG) I believe that the reports by Mr Danjean and Mr Albertini mark a step towards our much needed common vision for the European Union as a global player in safeguarding peace and security, and I congratulate them on this.

Dwindling defence budgets and the current economic crisis make it patently clear that if we want Europe to speak with a single voice in the world and send out strong signals commanding respect, we must use the available resources more prudently and efficiently.

The role of the European Defence Agency, which has been strengthened by the Treaty of Lisbon, is vitally important for maximising our potential through collective procurement, pooling resources and joint training. The interaction between the civilian and military aspects of the Common Foreign and Security Policy must be used to improve our Union's capabilities and effectiveness.

I expect to see Mrs Ashton, as Head of the European Defence Agency and High Representative, taking on an active role in this direction. Finally, Mrs Ashton, I wish you every success in setting up the common External Action Service. I expect the principle of geographical balance to be observed when appointing the service's staff so that it can truly represent the whole European Union. Europe needs you to be successful.

Ágnes Hankiss (PPE). – (HU) Ladies and gentlemen, First of all, I wish to congratulate Mr Arnaud Danjean on this report, which is comprehensive and, at the same time, thoughtful on each individual question; for my part, I wish to speak on one point only. There are many countries among the Member States of the European Union, including my homeland, Hungary, which would like to play an active role, as full and equal members, in cooperating on European security and defence policy. At the same time, for well-known historical reasons, neither their material resources nor their capacity or even knowledge base allows them, for now, to be on the same footing as the largest countries. I therefore voted for those proposed amendments that seek to facilitate this sort of participation and catching up. On the one hand, this concerns ongoing structural cooperation, which may be and could perhaps have been formulated in such a way that it does not turn into an elite club of the strongest and the largest Member States, in other words, that it does not make unified and uniform demands on each participant, because in this case, certain countries will be left out, but instead, enables the smaller countries to take part according to their specialised abilities. On the other hand, the training networks need to be developed in this regard. I would like to thank the President for including these points in the report.

Ivo Vajgl (ALDE). – (SL) Mr President, Baroness Ashton, today I would like to congratulate both rapporteurs who have so brilliantly led this debate, a debate which has resulted in this document, or rather, the documents of both Mr Albertini and Mr Danjean, being approved.

I would say that these documents have been approved at the right time, at the start of Baroness Ashton's term of office, and that we have demonstrated in a detailed way what we want from the European Union's foreign policy. Baroness Ashton, you have used this opportunity very well in translating these two very specific documents into your own vision of the world and I congratulate you for that. Obviously, I will not always congratulate you, unless you make it clear where you stand on specific problems, dilemmas and crises. Today, I wish to congratulate you, in particular, for making that critical remark about the Israeli Government's action with regard to the construction of illegal settlements.

To conclude, allow me just to add that I think that, on future occasions, we should pay more attention to Japan, our old and trusted friend, and not be so fascinated with China and other fast-growing countries.

Piotr Borys (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, Mrs Ashton, I speak, probably, for everyone present in this Chamber, when I say that foreign policy is one of the most important challenges before the European Union, and we would hope that, under your leadership, Mrs Ashton, the European Union will be a genuine regulator of foreign policy at world level.

I will concentrate on two areas. The first is the political situation in the Middle East. We expect a clear position from you on strategy relating to the fight against terrorism. We expect, chiefly, that the situation, especially in Afghanistan, will be a situation from which it will be possible to withdraw. I would like, here, to suggest

the use of all means, including, mainly civilian operations, as part of efforts to modernise a country which is, today, in ruins after 30 years of permanent war. I think, too, that political involvement in the rebuilding of Afghanistan is a key factor for stabilisation in the country. The second area is Iran which, today, is playing a key role in foreign policy in the region. I think that engagement in the fight to prevent proliferation of nuclear weapons is a crucial task which also falls to you. We wish you great success here and trust that you will be able to coordinate your work well with American policy.

I think the political situation in Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and Iran is crucial from the point of view of world security policy. Therefore, Mrs Ashton, your role in this is invaluable.

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (ALDE). – (ES) Mr President, Baroness Ashton, you have described Operation Atalanta in the Horn of Africa to combat piracy as a success.

However, last week, there was a massive pirate attack on Basque, Spanish and French fishing boats, which forced the fishing fleet to leave the area and withdraw to places where they can be protected, but where there are no fish, not forgetting the hundreds of people who are still held hostage on various boats.

I ask you to apply the resolution that Parliament adopted in December for this Operation to protect fishing boats and to extend that protection. I also call for the strategies to be reconsidered, and for the techniques used by this Operation in the Indian Ocean to be reviewed urgently, along with how it is present there.

Struan Stevenson (ECR). – Mr President, 58 people lost their lives on Sunday trying to exercise their right to vote in the Iraqi elections, and 140 were seriously injured. However, violence, intimidation, threats of attack and blackmail did not deter millions of courageous Iraqis from going to the polls.

There have been repeated attempts to manipulate and distort the outcome of the election. The banning of more than 500 secular non-sectarian candidates by the bogus Accountability and Justice Commission, the repeated bomb attacks on polling day, and the deeply sinister delay in announcing the results, are all disturbing signs of dirty tricks.

The ominous interference of Iran has been a constant feature of this election, and we must today send it this stark warning: do not try to install a puppet prime minister in Iraq, do not try to defraud the Iraqi people of their democratic rights and do not plunge Iraq back into sectarian chaos, because the West is watching you, and you are under the spotlight.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – Mr President, Baroness Ashton's role is described in Article 18 of the Treaty on European Union as contributing to the development of a common foreign and security policy, as mandated by the Council, which, of course, contains the representatives of nation states. However, the same article states that she must be a Vice-President of the Commission, from which she operates. Furthermore, I understand that former Commission staff will be given preference over the staff of diplomatic and foreign ministries when staff are appointed to the External Action Service.

Baroness Ashton, it is clear that your role was designed to undermine continually the influence over foreign policy by Member States, not only individually, but also collectively on the Council. You and your successors will be mandated by the Council only on paper. The real driving force behind the EU's foreign policy will be the Commission; Member States and the Council will be continually marginalised.

Andrzej Grzyb (PPE). – (PL) A coherent and effective policy is the main message of Mr Albertini's report. I congratulate him on this report, as I do Mr Danjean.

I would like to point out that there is also the personnel aspect to carrying out this work. The European External Action Service appears in the report, and despite the fact that this concerns the year 2008 – it is a pity that it is not, already, about 2009 – it is, here, a kind of marker which will be a measure of how, in fact, we carry out the work which now falls to the service headed by Mrs Ashton. I think the geographical balance we are demanding, as well as roles in this process for the European Parliament and national parliaments, seem to me to be extremely important, here. Clear recruitment criteria and a role for the European Parliament in developing the service are matters which are going to be the subject of careful evaluation in this Chamber.

We would like to appeal for this process to be clear and plain, so that it will be understandable to us as the representatives of the individual voters who, after all, make up the European Union.

Jelko Kacin (ALDE). – (SL) I wish to pay my sincere compliments to both rapporteurs, Mr Albertini and Mr Danjean.

I would remind you of a tragic event which took place in Belgrade on 12 March seven years ago. I am referring to the murder of Zoran Đinđić, former Prime Minister of Serbia. They killed him in order to stop the normalisation, democratisation and Europeanisation of Serbia. However, they have not stopped it. All they did was delay it. This event has also had a negative impact on the neighbouring countries and the region as a whole.

Mrs Ashton, I would ask you to help and encourage pro-European forces everywhere in our immediate vicinity. You will need to act in a timely and preventative manner. You have chosen for yourself a new institution and a new role, which are essentially two roles in two institutions, and you are becoming a double figurehead, as it were. There is no going back, either for you or for us. As you can only go forwards, I ask that you justify the confidence we have placed in you.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, comprehensive reports usually require differentiated evaluations, and this is true in this case, too. Thus, I am in favour of a common foreign and security policy that deals with illegal immigration, visa fraud, criminal tourism and bogus asylum claims. I am also in favour of a common foreign and security policy that deals with securing the borders of the Schengen area and clearly taking the bit between the teeth in the fight against organised crime. However, I am critical of, and opposed to, a common foreign and security policy that is designed to give the EU an active role in military issues, where the UN and NATO are already in place. This duplication should be rejected – and, of course, I speak from the special position of being a representative of a neutral State. I also reject the lifting of the visa requirement, an ill-considered lifting of the requirement for Balkan States whereby already, after a few months, around 150 000 Macedonians are en route to central Europe, two thirds of whom have already disappeared into illegality.

This is certainly no way to further the security needs of European citizens – it makes no contribution to security and it also, of course, does nothing to increase our citizens' desire for more Europe.

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE). – (SK) I am concerned that the previous conferences have not produced tangible results in the area of non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. Such weapons and technologies have been proliferating. There is a growing risk of nuclear technology falling into the hands of criminal and terrorist organisations.

The Union should act jointly in this area and take a stand on the issue as a world player, to strengthen all three pillars of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and to achieve universal application and enforcement of the rules and instruments for non-proliferation. I consider it necessary to include the issue of nuclear non-proliferation among the European Union's priorities and to start a constructive dialogue with all the nuclear powers, not just the USA and Russia. The number of countries which have nuclear weapons is not just the five members of the United Nations Security Council. The Union should, therefore, in the interests of global security, make a political and diplomatic effort to ensure that countries such as Israel, India, Pakistan and North Korea become signatories to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty.

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – Mr President, I should like first of all to express my thanks for the contributions that have been made and say how much I thought this was an important and valuable debate in terms of our strategic direction.

I want to say at the beginning that I agree completely with all honourable Members who spoke of the value and importance of the scrutiny of this House and the role of this House, not only in terms of that scrutiny, but also in terms of the expertise that I know exists within it. It is my intention to call upon that expertise and to hope to have as many occasions as possible where we are able to debate and discuss many if not all the important issues that have been raised today.

I will be relatively brief at this point but I will just try to talk about a few of the key areas that I think honourable Members are most concerned about. I shall begin by saying that I did not say 'no' to the Barnier report. What I said was, on the basis of lessons learnt from Haiti and now the support we are offering in Chile, we wanted to look at how much more we could do, how we could operate more effectively, what we should have on standby and whether we should have something on standby. That requires us to consider strategically what we should be doing, and the Barnier report provides the backdrop to do that. I am very grateful to Michel for the contribution that he has made on that – it is the backdrop.

On the Non-proliferation Treaty: a number of honourable Members have raised the importance of the conference that is coming up in May, all of which I agree with. It is very important that we move forward now in terms of what the opportunity of May will afford us.

I also agree that security begins with strong political relations. We have to consistently view our approach in the wider world as being about developing those strong political relationships in order to promote security, not only for ourselves but also for third states, for states with whom we are seeking to have that relationship or with whom we are in dialogue because of the concerns that we have.

A number of honourable Members quite rightly raised the importance of the Balkans. I have indicated in my priorities that this is an incredibly important area of work. It is very important in the period building up to the elections in Bosnia that we promote the importance of the European Union and make sure that national politicians describe to their people the path that they plan to take to get closer ties with Europe and ultimately to become part of Europe.

I agree on the importance of Valentin Inzko and the work he is doing in the Office of the High Representative. He and I are working together to think about the strategic approach – again for a future that takes us way beyond the elections to where we need to be in the coming months and years in order to retain the security. I take the point about the importance of stability: not only do we have to have it there, but we need to keep it there. There is concern in the region that we are seen to be moving forward and, on occasions, I feel we have got a bit stuck in what we need to do next. We need to take that forward.

That is particularly true, as a number of honourable Members have said, in Kosovo, where I have met the government. I have had conversations with the government and with the Prime Minister in particular, to look at what we would do with them in the future. Then there is Serbia, which is pushing very hard to become a part of the European Union. When I met President Tadić and the government members, it was very clear there, too, that this is something they see as being their future, and they too understand the issues that we are concerned about on that journey.

Concerning the debate on Cuba, I would have been there. It is simply that we have a clash. There is the Council of Presidents meeting to discuss the External Action Service and I cannot be in two places at once. That is what the European Parliament decided in terms of timing. I must obey and be present at that. However, I think Cuba is an important issue and I have no doubt that we will return to that subject.

Concerning the separate department for peace-building, my response is that it should be in everything we do and I am always nervous about separating out something, as if somehow it is separate from every bit of work we are doing. If you look at how we are going to operate the External Action Service, it is like an umbrella organisation that takes in clearly the responsibilities under the treaty but which is also your servant and the Commission's servant.

So when the Commission is looking to do things on trade, on climate change, on energy security across the world, the External Action Service can be its tool as well, directly linking the work of the Commission to what happens on the ground. All of that, I would maintain, is about a more secure, more stable world. So for me, it is all about how we build in the idea that we are there to support efforts to ensure that we have peace and that we keep peace.

On Atalanta: I think the points made there are very positive. It is a very important mission, but it is a mission that has to be connected to all the other things we are doing in that region. I also take the point that we need to think about fishing and the strategy on that. That is very much understood.

Working groups: I think it is a very good idea for Parliament to have them. I think senior officials are linking with them well at the moment and we need to continue to do that.

On the operational headquarters: it is not that I have changed my position. What I said in January was that I remain to be convinced. We have now been looking at this, because, as I have been in the job a little bit longer, I am more engaged in the work that we are doing in terms of our missions abroad, whether in Kosovo, whether in Bosnia or whether in discussing what we are doing in Atalanta or indeed, what we have just been doing in Haiti, and so forth.

In my speech, I said that we need to look at what is necessary and then decide how best to achieve it. There are different views, but those views, I believe, will converge around a common theme, and that is what we ought to do. So it is about being convinced one way or the other as to how we do it.

On human rights: I want to describe that as a silver thread. The projection of our values and human rights is essential to everything that we do in the European Union and in the wider world. It is about how we make sure that it is a thread that runs all the way through all our actions in terms of support for the work that we are doing across the world to promote the values of the European Union. I want to look very carefully at how we do that, so it is not something that just becomes an add-on extra to a dialogue. It becomes an integral part of everything that we do.

I agree as well about the strong relationship transatlantically with the United States. They are a strong partner with us on a whole range of things, particularly on crisis management, and it is very important that we build on that. I am also very keen to build on the work that we do with the US in areas of development, for example, particularly in Africa, where there is a potential – I believe, anyway – to do a lot more, certainly in the light of my experience with Aid for Trade as the Trade Commissioner.

We also need to think about other big partnerships. I have been talking to the Brazilian Foreign Minister about the potential of again working together on development where the economies of scale and the ability to collaborate enable us to release resources in a much more effective way to certain parts of the world which are in real need.

I agree too on the cyber threats. This is a very important issue. It is here now. It is an issue we are going to have to keep looking at because inevitably, the threats change all the time.

Just a little bit on the External Action Service. The geographical breadth of the European Union has to be represented within the External Action Service. I agree with that completely, but it will take me time to do it. One of the things that I have said to all the foreign ministers and I say to Parliament is: please resist the temptation to assume that, because the first four or five appointments I make are not from a Member State that you might know best, it does not mean that I will not make appointments in the future from those Member States. We simply have to build it stage by stage. Remember, as honourable Members know, it does not exist at all at the moment. I do not have a team or a staff for the External Action Service because, until the legal basis is done, we do not have anything. We simply have what we had before, trying to bring it together in a more coherent way.

I will appoint on merit and nothing else. There are no favourites here. It is on merit. I want the brightest and the best and that is what I have said to Member States and the institutions. I want the delegations on the ground to be an umbrella, able to support the work of the European Union in all its different elements, as it is represented to third countries, as it works with third countries.

It is essential that it does that as otherwise, we will end up fragmented again. The question is how to do it, and that is why we are in dialogue with the Council and the Commission at the moment. If it were very simple, we would have done it by now. We just have to make sure that we do it properly and effectively. We will work that out in the next few weeks.

In terms of resources, I am going to argue for flexibility. I am going to argue that, if you have a crisis in a particular country or if you realise that you need to be able to move resources, we should deal with it, but deal with it within the context of parliamentary scrutiny. And again, we need to think about how to make that work, not just now but in the future.

We absolutely must avoid duplication; otherwise we will have gained nothing except more bureaucracy, which is not what we want to do. We have to make sure that this is a cohesive service that runs well, operating as an entity within the European Union, supporting and being supported by the other institutions. And, as I have said, we must remember that it does not exist yet. Let us hope that we can get the work done in the next few weeks. With Parliament supporting me, I am sure we will, so we can get this into being. We can lay the foundation stones but it will take time to build it, and that is so important that I hope that every honourable Member will understand.

A couple of final points. On summits: we have lots of different summits. The question that we always have to keep in mind is the value and importance of them. I cannot go to all of them. There are simply too many. I will be at some. We were well represented at the Morocco Summit because both Presidents were there. I honestly believe that if the Presidents of the Council and the Commission are there, we have to start saying that is a strong EU representation at the summit. It does not always require me to be there as well, and they would agree with that.

Finally, honourable Members talked about relationships with countries like Japan, with countries important to us in strategic partnership like Russia, the importance and value of the Middle East, where I will be travelling

from Sunday onwards, and the importance and value of the Quartet, because I will travel through the Middle East. I think I visit five countries and then I will end up in Moscow for the Quartet meeting in order to discuss and debate what we do next.

Finally, honourable Members, thank you for noticing I am on the Council side and there is no Commission. I will change sides. Until there is a seat in the middle, I will keep moving across. It will be your responsibility to remember which side I should be on as I come in.

And, finally can I again thank Mr Albertini and Mr Danjean very much for excellent reports which have given me the opportunity to put forward my views today.

(Applause)

Gabriele Albertini, *rapporteur*. – (IT) I thank my fellow Members, so many of whom have spoken, especially those who approved the key parts of the report, praising and endorsing its content, but also those who expressed criticisms and who, above all, did so in a desire to overcome the regrettably tragic instances where force has been used, and to dream of a peaceful world. A great Greek philosopher, Plato, said that only the dead will see an end to war. However, despite our refusal to bow to this philosophy and our attempts to prevent this happening, reality compels us to use force even on peace missions.

I congratulate High Representative/Vice-President Ashton, and thank her for having mentioned my report: one aspect of her approach that I particularly like is its dual nature, the way it seeks synergy between the tasks of the Council and the Commission. Her very physical location – which will alternate between the benches of the Council, here, and the Commission – exemplifies her wish to wear two hats.

As Parliament, I believe that we must support and promote this synergistic commitment. The European Commission pursues policies for development, neighbourhood, and for stability and the promotion of human rights and democracy; the Council undertakes peace missions and missions to implement the rule of law. This set of themes must find its ultimate expression in the European foreign diplomatic service, which must be efficient, effective, and equipped with the necessary skills and resources to be able to carry out its role as it should, and we will work hard to achieve this.

I also thank the High Representative – and we will discuss this further on 23 April – for agreeing to be present at the hearing of the Committee on Foreign Affairs on the subject of the external service, which we will have the chance to discuss in greater depth. Today marks the beginning of our collaboration, but certainly not the end.

Arnaud Danjean, *rapporteur*. – (FR) Mr President, Baroness Ashton, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for all the speeches which, once again, have helped to enrich the debate, to enrich this report.

I would like to reassure those who have voiced their doubts and, at times, their suspicions, about the fact that this report might open the door to more competition, with NATO in particular, and even to isolation. This is by no means the case; I absolutely do not believe that, and I would add that this does not appear in the treaty, quite the opposite. You can believe a French MEP who has fought tirelessly to have his country reinstated within the integrated structures of NATO.

When we talk about strategic autonomy, what idea are we developing, what policy have we been developing, for 10 years? The answer is the ability of the European Union to intervene via civil and military missions in areas in which other organisations, including NATO, cannot. NATO could not have intervened to put a stop to the conflict in Georgia, where there is no UN or OSCE presence. NATO intervened no earlier than we did in the Horn of Africa to put a stop to events threatening our security interests.

Strategic autonomy also means the ability to intervene with a range of instruments that we alone possess: civil and military instruments, legal instruments, financial instruments, development instruments. The European Union is best placed to develop this global approach in crisis areas.

Our strategic autonomy also refers to our ability, where necessary, not to intervene, either in unilateral military campaigns, or – and this has been pointed out by several Austrian Members – because there are neutral countries among us and because we respect their status.

This is what is meant by European defence and security. This is what is meant by the strategic autonomy that we are developing by means of this policy. Never forget the origins of this European Security and Defence Policy. It originates in a tragic, bloody failure: that of the Balkans in the 1990s, where the European Union

was incapable of coping with a major security challenge on its own continent. Let us not forget that. Our European citizens have not forgotten it, and they would not forgive us if we abandoned the ambition to see Europe play a role on the international stage.

(Applause)

President. – That concludes this item. The debate is closed. I have received six motions for resolutions⁽¹⁾ tabled in accordance with Rule 115(5) of the Rules of Procedure to wind up the debate.

The vote will take place today.

Elena Băsescu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) I would first of all like to congratulate Mr Albertini for drafting this report. I am pleased that the amendments which I suggested have been adopted. Last week, the European Commission announced funding for 43 major energy projects, including four involving Romania. In the future, the Commission must give due importance to the pan-European Constanța-Trieste oil pipeline, as well as to the development of relations with the countries in the Eastern Partnership. Efforts must also be stepped up in implementing projects as part of the Black Sea Synergy in order to ensure more effective cooperation in this area. The Republic of Moldova can play an important role in both the Eastern Partnership and Black Sea Synergy. The European Union must focus particular attention on relations with this country and support it on its journey to EU accession. The EU must have greater involvement in settling unresolved conflicts in the Black Sea region, including the conflict in Transnistria. The development of the transatlantic partnership must be a priority in the European Union's foreign and security policy. Relations with the United States are extremely important in helping consolidate global security and stability. Installation of part of the US anti-missile system on Romanian territory is proof of the confidence placed in my country.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) It is regrettable that the process of multilateral disarmament has been interrupted and that there has been no political will to resume it for several years. For this reason, the coming 2010 review conference between the parties to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty is of particular importance.

As the motion for a resolution which we have signed states, we are deeply worried by the danger presented by a new nuclear arms race. Therefore, the immediate cessation of the development, production and storage of nuclear arms is necessary.

It is necessary for the US to put an end to the development of new generations of tactical nuclear weapons and, moving in quite the opposite direction, to sign and ratify the Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty.

We are also arguing for a peaceful solution to the dispute over Iran's nuclear programmes and calling for the recommencement of negotiations, reiterating our opposition to any military action or threat of the use of force. As well, we warn that any military action could lead to an even deeper crisis in the region.

Edit Herczog (S&D), in writing. – (HU) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty review conference will be held in April-May 2010. It is important that the Member States of the European Union present a unified standpoint at that meeting and that they reaffirm all three pillars of the Treaty: non-proliferation of nuclear weapons, disarmament and cooperation on the civilian uses of nuclear energy. Member States must express their commitment to eliminating trade in nuclear weapons, progressively reducing the existing nuclear weapons stockpile and strictly monitoring the manufacture of materials needed for the production of nuclear weapons and the possession of products required for their production. Member States must take a leading role in applying United Nations Security Council Resolution 1887, adopted in autumn 2009 (on 24 September). Within the meaning of this resolution, Member States must place great emphasis on developing a comprehensive international agreement regulating the elimination of nuclear weapons under strict international supervision. In addition, they need to strive to introduce two concrete measures in the aforementioned areas, in order to set an example for the rest of the world. The EU Member States must promote the comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and the renewal of the START Agreement between the United States and Russia. The EU must treat endeavours relating to nuclear fuel as a priority area and focus on harmonising, tightening and rendering transparent the regulations concerning their storage, transport and trade.

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE), in writing. – (PL) Ladies and gentlemen, I must say that I suspect the annual report on the Common Foreign and Security Policy for 2008 will not arouse such emotion as will our debate on

⁽¹⁾ See Minutes

the subject next year. For I hope that in a year's time, we will know what the European External Action Service looks like, and this new service is, in turn, going to have a huge influence on the development of European foreign policy.

The European Union has ambitions of being a global player. This is good, but those ambitions are not going to be easy to achieve. We have some hard work ahead of us. The European institutions must come to an understanding on the EEAS. This will not be easy, but without it we will not be able to improve foreign policy. We should go back to the fundamental values of the European Union, and use them as a basis on which to build our foreign policy.

We must always remember about solidarity, equality, uniform standards and human and civil rights. We must remember to maintain internal balance, and that we should defend those interests of all EU Member States which are not mutually exclusive. A key matter is, definitely, the need to improve coordination between Community institutions and Member States. Particular national interests should not conflict with our coherence or our community. Paradoxically, even those countries which want to be seen as a driving force for European integration sometimes act against the collective interests of the Union. Let us change this.

Kristiina Ojuland (ALDE), in writing. – (ET) Mr President, some previous speakers have pointed out problems relating to the composition of the European External Action Service, which has begun work following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. I consider it extremely important to adhere to the principle of geographic equality in making up the EEAS and, as with other European Union bodies, to implement positive discrimination in relation to representatives from the new Member States, which is reflected in the transition period and which makes it possible to speed up career development. Representatives from the new Member States lack the necessary decades-long work experience in the institutions of the European Union, which is a prerequisite for filling the highest offices. It would be unfair if all the most important positions were filled by officials from the old Member States, and if officials from the new Member States had to stand on the sidelines for many years. This would obviously be a waste of resources because, for example, the representative from Malta might have much more know-how with respect to the countries of North Africa, Cyprus with respect to the Middle East, Bulgaria with respect to Turkey, Poland with respect to Belarus and Ukraine, the Baltic States with respect to Russia, and so on. I hope that the European Union will not make the mistake of only allowing the old Member States to make up the face of the EEAS, and I hope that instead, it finds an optimal solution which satisfies all the Member States.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE), in writing. – (PL) The situation in the world is creating new challenges for EU foreign policy and requires a broader understanding of security problems. New powers have arisen and are becoming actively involved in global policy in various areas. Therefore, what is needed is dialogue at world level and the establishment of new principles for cooperation and for the division of roles. We must supplement the enormous role in world security played by NATO and the USA by establishing special mobile forces, as part of the EU, which will be able to tackle all kinds of natural disasters and catastrophes. The Union will not only be perceived as an institution which fights for democracy and human rights, but also as an institution which comes to people's aid in times of difficulty. The danger from other threats is clearly growing, and so energy and food security are becoming important. I think it is necessary to develop a new conception regarding the functioning of the EU's external service in which the areas of the Community's operation and the principles of establishing the service are defined, as well as principles for the division of roles and for cooperation with Member States' diplomatic services, to make clear what roles are played by individual EU institutions. Failure to elaborate the division of roles and competences at the outset could be the cause of misunderstandings between different institutions and leaders in the Union, as well as between the EU and Member States. Initial experiences with the function of the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security, and the general expectation that she should be active and present in different places, demand that we think about appointing deputies, or involving other Commissioners in areas of her work to a greater degree, since we have so many of them.

Traian Ungureanu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) I welcome the Albertini report outlining the main aspects of the Common Security and Foreign Policy, especially the paragraphs concerning the development of the Eastern Partnership and European policy in the Black Sea region. The Eastern Partnership and the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly provide a suitable framework for bringing the EU's eastern neighbours closer to European standards, as well as for clarifying certain states' prospects for joining the EU, such as the Republic of Moldova. I wish to emphasise, in particular, the importance of the rapid, specific assistance which should be given to the Republic of Moldova's pro-European government. In this regard, two European measures need to be speeded up: the process for granting EU macro-financial assistance and the visa waiver for journeys made to the EU by citizens from the Republic of Moldova. In the Black Sea region, it is vital to continue the

European objective of guaranteeing the EU's energy security. I support paragraph 21 of the report which calls on the EU to implement the Nabucco project fully and as quickly as possible. Another issue during this debate, which is just as important, is a suitable assessment of the development of the US anti-missile defence project and its importance to European security. Romania's involvement in this project shows that Romania has become a net European supplier of security and has the full capacity to honour its security commitments to allies.

Janusz Władysław Zemke (S&D), *in writing*. – (PL) I would like to make several remarks on the European Security Strategy and the Common Security and Defence Policy.

In the European Parliament's motion for a resolution, the main threats and challenges which Europe faces have been correctly defined. The problem is that we are not able to respond to them sufficiently, at least not always quickly enough. There are three main weaknesses, and if we could overcome them, we would radically improve the effectiveness of the Common Security and Defence Policy. The first weakness is a lack of determination of all the EU Member States to have a common policy and not just a verbal declaration of its necessity. Secondly – weak coordination of the work of numerous European institutions. There is still no reaction centre at Union level for critical situations. Thirdly, and finally, the military and civil potential which is really at the Union's disposal, and not just at the disposal of individual Member States, is too small.

Problems with air transport, for example, are now proverbial, and this is of fundamental significance for a rapid reaction in crisis situations. Only progress in these three areas would make the Common Security and Defence Policy more effective.

(The sitting was suspended for a few moments while awaiting the vote)

IN THE CHAIR: MR McMILLAN-SCOTT

Vice-President

7. Voting time

President. – The next item is the vote.

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

Robert Atkins (ECR). – Mr President, on a point of order, I think you would find that if you took the first vote at 12.00, people would then sit down and participate, rather than waiting for them to sit down and participate and then taking the vote.

(Applause)

President. – I am very considerate.

Sergio Paolo Francesco Silvestris (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, I apologise for this intervention but as an MEP elected in Italy, I consider it my duty to offer, from this Chamber, a respectful and deferential greeting to my country's President, Giorgio Napolitano, custodian of Italy's constitutional values and national unity.

In this Chamber, the Italian President should only ever be referred to with respect and deference.

(Applause)

President. – We shall now proceed to the vote.

7.1. Annual accounts of certain types of companies as regards micro-entities (A7-0011/2010, Klaus-Heiner Lehne) (vote)

Charles Tannock (ECR). – Mr President, I would just like the House to recognise the presence in the gallery of Noam Shalit, the father of Staff Sergeant Gilad Shalit, a dual Israeli-EU citizen cruelly held in detention for more than three years incommunicado by Hamas in Gaza. We in this House all hope that Noam's campaign for his son will be successful and that he will be released shortly.

(Applause)

President. – Thank you, Mr Tannock.

7.2. EU 2020 - Follow-up of the informal European Council of 11 February 2010 (B7-0150/2010) (vote)

7.3. Implementation of Goldstone recommendations on Israel/Palestine (B7-0135/2010) (vote)

7.4. Situation of civil society and national minorities in Belarus (B7-0134/2010) (vote)

7.5. Taxation of financial transactions (vote)

7.6. Single Euro Payments Area (vote)

7.7. Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) (vote)

- Before the vote on Amendment 1:

Tokia Saïfi, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, I shall read out the oral amendment: ‘calls on the Commission to continue the negotiations on ACTA and limit them to the existing European intellectual property rights enforcement system against counterfeiting’.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

7.8. Regulation applying a scheme of generalised tariff preferences (vote)

- Before the vote on Amendment 4:

Yannick Jadot, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, I should like to table an oral amendment to this amendment, deleting two parts of the amendment, namely the words ‘by the Colombian army’ and ‘on Colombia’.

Therefore, the amendment reads as follows: ‘considers that the alarming news concerning the killings of trade unionists in Colombia, as well as the news recently received and now confirmed by Colombia’s public prosecutor that mass graves containing the bodies of hundreds of people killed in recent years have been discovered in the region of La Macarena, are sufficient evidence to enable the Commission to open an investigation in accordance with the regulation.’

(The oral amendment was accepted. Amendment 4, as amended, was rejected)

7.9. 2008 annual report on the CFSP (A7-0023/2010, Gabriele Albertini) (vote)

- Before the vote:

Heidi Hautala (Verts/ALE). – Mr President, this report deals with the common foreign and security policy in 2008. However, it does not mention what happened on 10 March 2008 when Tibetans raised a peaceful protest against the repression of their culture and religion. Today, we have a guest from Tibet, Mrs Namdrol Lhamo, a nun who was confined to Drapchi Prison for 12 years because she had taken part in a peaceful demonstration and then recorded songs in prison. We should pay tribute to her and to the other courageous Tibetans living under the occupation.

I met with the Dalai Lama quite recently, and we came to the conclusion that there is an urgent need for an independent international investigation into what happened in that uprising in Lhasa on and around 10 March 2008, because for as long as there is no such investigation, China will keep accusing the Tibetan Government in exile, and the Dalai Lama, of instigating that uprising and its violent aftermath.

According to the Tibetan administration in exile, at least 220 Tibetans died, many as a result of indiscriminate firing by the police, ill-treatment or torture in prisons. Many more are missing.

(Sustained applause)

- Before the vote on Amendment 1:

Adrian Severin, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – Mr President, we have an amendment here.

Normally, our group would vote against but, in order to let us vote in favour, we would like to delete the words: 'that entails an end to the Israeli blockade'.

This is because the Israeli blockade is too complex an issue, and I believe there is no clear link between the preceding lines and these words. If we can delete these words, I think we could be comfortable with the rest of the amendment, and we could vote in favour. It is a small change, but it would allow us to vote in favour.

(The oral amendment was accepted. Amendment 11, as amended, was rejected)

7.10. The implementation of the European Security Strategy and the Common Security and Defence Policy (A7-0026/2010, Arnaud Danjean) (vote)

- Before the vote on Amendment 5:

Reinhard Bütikofer, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, I would like to propose a vote on an amendment to this motion, which I will now read out.

'Calls on the High Representative/Vice-President of the Commission, the Council and the Member States to overcome the imbalance between civilian and military planning capabilities', and delete the rest, because the rest has already been included in the text.

(The oral amendment was not accepted)

- Before the vote on Amendment 34:

Hannes Swoboda, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – Mr President, colleagues have introduced an amendment which we could agree with if we combine it with the original amendment. I understand the colleagues and we share the view that our strategic decision should not depend on Russia, but, on the other hand, Russia is an important partner.

If the colleagues could agree that we take their amendment and say 'including Russia' – Russia is one of the members of the continental dialogue – we could agree and we could vote for this amendment.

(The oral amendment was not accepted)

7.11. Non-proliferation Treaty (vote)

8. Explanations of vote

Oral explanations of vote

Report: Klaus-Heiner Lehne (A7-0011/2010)

Viktor Uspaskich (ALDE). – (LT) Mr President, I would like to announce that I support this decision, although my card was not working to begin with and that is why I want to announce this. Now to the matter in hand. Ladies and gentlemen, the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on a change to the annual accounting responsibilities of micro-entities. This project caused stormy debate at almost all levels, both in European Union and Member State institutions. I am convinced that we must prepare common European Union rules. However, I would like to underline that by reducing the administrative burden on micro-entities, we must not infringe conditions for fair competition in either the internal markets of Member States or the European Union market. I think that a single tax should be created for micro-entities, which already exists in some states. If it could be calculated, it could be calculated either on the basis of the

number of employees or turnover or territory, depending on the type of business. As a result, those companies would no longer be tempted to engage in illegal activities.

Peter Jahr (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, with the option of relieving micro-enterprises of the obligation to produce annual balance sheets, the European Parliament is clearly coming out in favour of the abolition of superfluous bureaucracy. With an EU-wide relief of approximately EUR 6.3 billion, we are also providing a tangible stimulus towards growth in Europe's small and medium-sized enterprise sector. Since the Member States are able to decide individually about this exemption from the obligation to produce annual balance sheets, I expect that as many countries as possible, especially Germany, will make use of this option. This arrangement will not only enable the enterprises in question to save time and costs amounting to around EUR 2 000 per company; it is also a very good example of how Europe is more citizen-friendly than many people believe it to be. It would be nice if this example in this Chamber could be followed by many further examples.

Tiziano Motti (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I did not back the Lehne resolution. I regret this, because it concerned micro-enterprises, which are the backbone of the economy, but above all, I believe that the resolution, as it stood, created competitive differences between enterprises of the various States, and this is not what we want, especially in this time of crisis. Keeping accounts is actually effective and necessary, for the very reason that it allows enterprises to compete on the market and also obtain bank credit, because the quality of management is measured on the basis of accounts for enterprises and micro-enterprises alike.

I believe that we should work instead to help micro-enterprises obtain incentives to cut taxes, enabling young entrepreneurs and family businesses to be truly competitive on the market, and ultimately allowing them to obtain credit from institution, which, until now, have been chiefly concerned with large enterprises as far as I can see.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – Mr President, I am very happy to support the Lehne report, which will help to reduce the administrative burden on micro-enterprises.

One of the things that comes up again and again when you speak with small businesses is the issue of over-regulation and red tape and of being smothered under a deluge of paperwork. They do have a sound argument when they say that it is reasonable, as micro-enterprises, that they should not be subject to the same rules and regulations as bigger business.

The decision we took today is a sensible one and a well-founded response to the concerns of struggling small businesses in Europe. Most of the time, we are proposing new legislation in this House, but today we modified a piece of legislation. This will lead to a better business environment and increased competitiveness for small businesses and was well worth doing.

Vito Bonsignore (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank Mr Lehne for his report. The European Union looks closely at the world of business – as today has demonstrated – and, in particular, my group, the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) has always included the backing of small and medium-sized enterprises among its own priorities. For these reasons, I think that the action we have undertaken, aimed at reducing bureaucracy and reducing costs for micro-enterprises, is very timely. This measure represents a tangible helping hand for small enterprises at this difficult time.

Finally, I agree with the flexibility of the measure, which offers Member States the chance to adopt the directive at the most opportune time. The purpose of this is to avoid any kind of illegality which might arise from a sudden and excessive reduction of controls.

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0151/2010

Philippe Lamberts, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that the vote we have taken is remarkable in two respects. Firstly, because the three large groups decided to produce a joint resolution, which they submitted six minutes before the deadline, thus preventing the other groups from tabling any amendments to it. This closed attitude is unworthy of this House.

Secondly, if only a text had been produced that made sense! At a time when the Commission, with the same political families, is capable of coming here with five objectives, with six policies to support these objectives, this House comes up with a resolution that says absolutely nothing at all, with the support of the three large political families.

I believe that the resolution does much to ridicule this House which, in such an important debate as Europe 2020, is capable of doing nothing other than stating the obvious.

Ramona Nicole Mănescu (ALDE). – (RO) As is well known, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe was among the first to call for a more specific approach to the economic growth strategy. This is exactly why I would like to welcome the amendments which the EU 2020 strategy is introducing from this perspective.

However, I feel that progress on certain aspects has not gone far enough. Therefore, I would like to draw attention to the fact that the 2020 strategy does not make it very clear what the relationship will be between the Cohesion Policy and this strategy. I think, Mr President, that the Cohesion Policy, as a financial instrument principally for regional development, must remain targeted at regions.

In addition, the Commission's proposal assigns the Council and Member States the main task of implementing and managing the policies arising from this strategy, while overlooking, however, the important role played by local authorities in achieving concrete results at regional and local level.

I believe that the strategy's success will mainly depend on the way in which it is implemented at national, local and regional level.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE). – (RO) A declaration was adopted by the Heads of State or Government during the informal meeting of the European Council held on 11 February to support Greece's efforts to remedy its economic and financial situation. In addition, the topic of what the European Union will stand for in 2020, following on from the Lisbon Strategy, was also discussed.

I believe that this vote is a vote for solidarity because, looking ahead to EU 2020, the established priorities must be pursued in a much more rigorous way, which allows, however, the specific features of each region to be utilised and the problems that each of them are facing to be resolved.

Economic competitiveness must continue to grow in order to create new jobs, while investments are needed in various areas, including education and research. I firmly believe that the problems specific to each region and each European Union Member State will be analysed and dealt with appropriately, based on the principle of solidarity, so that we can meet the targets which we are going to set for 2020.

Investment in education must be backed up by the existence of an infrastructure which supports the practical application of knowledge, social cohesion and the global growth of Europe's economic competitiveness.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, it is clear from the Council conclusions and from the debate which followed in Parliament in Brussels and from the stand subsequently taken by the competent Commissioner and the heads of several Member States that, in times of crisis and when certain Member States are facing serious economic problems, we need, among other things, and within the framework of existing monetary union, European solidarity and new policies to address speculative attacks against certain Member States.

As such, the stands being taken at this time in connection with the creation of European institutions and structures to address such problems, such as, for example, a European monetary fund, are very important. We expect a great deal of the Council in days to come and look forward to effective action to address the problems in this critical period.

Viktor Uspaskich (ALDE). – (LT) Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to talk about the EU 2020 strategy. In principle, we support any initiative that improves the situation in the European Union, but this does not mean that there is no room for criticism and improvement. In my opinion, this can also be said of the European Union's 2020 strategy. Whether we want it or not, we must erase boundaries a little between the economic rules of national states. Of course, in this case, I am by no means talking about such areas as culture, tradition or national heritage. Nevertheless, we must underline that, in economic terms, the European Union market is a common market. Otherwise, it would be the same as if one state had started to apply different conditions to different regions. Therefore, no matter how much large and small EU Member States might resist it, an end date for common economic conditions must be implemented in the European Union. I also welcome the attention to the development of the hi-tech, knowledge economy and science. However, we must recognise that each European Union ...

President. – I am sorry but I think we have heard enough. Thank you so much, Mr Uspaskich. I have cut you off.

Nikolaos Chountis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, I voted against the report, because the EU 2020 strategy treads the same unsuccessful neoliberal path as the Lisbon Strategy, which widened regional and social inequalities, increased poverty and unemployment and was the basic cause of the crisis in the European Union. We therefore need a radical change to the framework within which economic and social policy are exercised, so that they revolve around full employment and stronger social rights.

When the crisis broke, the leaders of the European Union kept their heads down at the informal summit, leaving each Member State to deal with its problems on its own and now they want to monitor public deficits. They treated Greece like the black sheep and they want harsh measures to be taken to the detriment of workers in Greece and other countries.

The anti-social and anti-development Stability Pact therefore needs to be replaced by a development and expansion pact as described in the motion tabled by the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left.

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE). – (PL) The European Union undoubtedly needs a new strategy which will help and allow us to construct our response to the economic and financial crisis. An important element of the strategy should be a strengthening of the free movement of people, and that of all groups: workers, business people, scientists, students and even pensioners, and that is contained in our resolution. Another good feature is the greater emphasis on support for small and medium-sized enterprises. Without the development of such firms, an improvement of the situation in the Union will not be possible.

Some people think the strategy says too little about cohesion policy. I do not know if this is so, because, actually, there is a part about the fundamental significance of cohesion policy for the future of the Union. However, I know that if this is not put into effect, no strategy will improve the situation.

Vito Bonsignore (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, the time has come for us to come of age politically. The crisis has shown that greater coordination and guidance is required from important and authoritative Community agencies, more resources are required for infrastructure projects and more focus on providing genuine support for small and medium-sized enterprises.

We need to organise a major effort to fully implement the internal market, and we urgently need to attempt a common fiscal policy. In the past, many turned a blind eye to the rubbish that the American banks dumped on the global market, falling back on pointless formalities, even within the Union. It is time for responsibility and courage. The resolution that my group and I voted for contains some of these things, but I think that President Barroso, the Council and Parliament should be more courageous.

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – (PL) The new EU strategy is, in fact, the younger brother of the Lisbon Strategy. If it follows its elder brother's example, it will not pass its exams or qualify for anything.

At the same time as the leaders of the European Union were talking about the necessity of adopting the Lisbon Strategy, the Member States were, in fact, restricting the free movement of workers, and also of services. The new strategy is, of course, a little better than the version of a few months ago, where nothing at all was said about cohesion. At the moment, however, it is more like a wish list. We are going to verify the strategy in the European Union's seven-year budget from 2014. I hope it will be a strategy which will not contribute to domination of the new European Union by the countries of the old Union.

Zoltán Balczó (NI). – (HU) I voted against the EU 2020 strategy. I voted against it because it clearly professes faith in neoliberal economic policy. It clearly states that it condemns protectionist economic policy, in other words, the State playing a role in the economy. Yet the financial and economic world crisis has shown that we cannot leave everything up to the markets. Moreover, its imperial conception is clearly evident. It stipulates that rules will enter into force automatically if Member States do not transpose them in time. It seeks to set up a European supervisory authority and, in certain places, it is also clear that it seeks to use binding legal acts to achieve results rather than allowing for autonomous decisions. This is why we voted against.

Inés Ayala Sender (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, as a member of the Committee on Budgetary Control, I would like to say that I, of course, voted in favour of the EU 2020 strategy, because I felt it was important for Parliament to give its opinion. I do, however, have a reservation, which I would like to explain to the House, which is that the wording of paragraph 18 raises doubts about something that is false. That is, something that is not true.

It says that the Court of Auditors has criticised the Commission and the Member States when, in fact, the opposite is true. This is because the management of 80% of the Union's budget has not been criticised; instead, this year, for the first time in 11 years, the Court of Auditors congratulated us and gave us a positive statement of assurance for the slightly more than 33% of the budget managed by the Member States, which is agricultural spending, and because the monitoring system has been improved and now works better.

I therefore think that the wording of paragraph 18 will create a misunderstanding in the public mind that 80% of the budget is poorly managed and that we have been criticised for it. I would like to clarify this for you, ladies and gentlemen, and for the benefit of the European public.

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0136/2010

Ramona Nicole Mănescu (ALDE). – (RO) I voted against the Goldstone report even though, initially, this report seemed to be a well-intentioned initiative to analyse closely the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and identify the best solutions for remedying the situation in the region.

However, I would have liked this report to be more objective, in keeping with the provisions of international and humanitarian law. In fact, I was very unpleasantly surprised to note that in this report, the Israeli Government is measured by the same yardstick as used for Hamas, which is, as we know, an organisation featuring on the European Union's list of terrorist organisations. Therefore, I do not believe that this report will help in any way to ease the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, along with the tensions and general situation in the region. This is the reason why I voted against the report.

Alajos Mészáros (PPE). – (HU) The authors of the report drawn up by Justice Richard Goldstone's team are, in my opinion, internationally recognised experts whose insight and objectivity we have no reason to doubt. The report is non-partisan and balanced and therefore, we must create the conditions necessary for implementing its recommendations. I voted in favour of the report, although I do not agree with it on every point, but it is a good thing that we have taken the position adopted in Parliament today. Hopefully, it will help limit the excesses of the opposing parties and will, in the long run, contribute to achieving the much desired and lasting peace in the Middle East.

Krisztina Morvai (NI). – (HU) In December 2008, Israel launched a brutal attack on the Gaza Strip, as a result of which more than 1400 people died, for the most part civilians, including 450 children. Using objective methods and a wide-ranging gathering of testimonies, the Goldstone report exposed these atrocities and itemised which rules of international law Israel contravened by this brutal action. Naturally, the delegation to the European Parliament of the Jobbik Movement for a Better Hungary voted in support of the European Parliament's resolution on the acceptance and implementation of the Goldstone recommendations and, at the same time, we apologise to the Palestinian victims because the Hungarian Government, shamefully and in diametrical opposition to Hungarian popular opinion, continually adopts a position contrary to the Goldstone report in international fora.

Peter van Dalen (ECR). – (NL) Mr President, the Goldstone report is too one-sided. Too many things have been laid at the door of Israel, and yet it was Hamas that was misusing civilian targets and civilians as shelters, arms depots and human shields. Unfortunately, Goldstone makes no mention of that whatsoever.

Presumably, this one-sidedness is due to the fact that countries such as Saudi Arabia, Libya and Pakistan presided over the preparation of this report by the competent committee of the United Nations. These countries are not exactly world-famous for their brilliant track record on democracy and freedom of expression. If you have truck with countries of this sort, then what they do is infect you. Unfortunately, that is what swayed Goldstone as well and, for this reason, I voted against the joint EP resolution. As a matter of fact, the resolution is just as one-sided as the Goldstone report itself.

Hannu Takkula (ALDE). – (FI) Mr President, I voted against the Goldstone report. I think it is a disgrace that the European Parliament adopted this report, albeit by a narrow majority, because this was a very biased move, and it has to be said that there was a considerable amount of internal disagreement in this House.

I would like to comment on one point. More than 600 Members of the European Parliament quite rightly voted in favour of considering Hamas a terrorist organisation. Despite the fact that we almost unanimously agreed that Hamas is a terrorist organisation, we, or at least the majority, in this House, voted in favour of this report and appeared to approve of the measures contained in it, and of all the 8 000 rockets which Hamas has fired at Israeli civilian centres.

I believe that Israel is under threat, and that is why the country had to defend its civilian population. Given this, it really is a sorry state of affairs that this very biased report went through, albeit by a tiny majority. I hope that such a serious blot on our record will not reoccur, but that as Europeans, we will really fight hard for democracy, human rights and freedom of opinion and do more to bring democracy to the Middle East.

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – (PL) Justice Goldstone certainly cannot be considered a paragon of objectivity. I voted against this report, because I have the impression that the report attempts to present the situation in the Middle East in black and white, showing Israel as the 'Schwarz' character – the villain. Actually, the situation is much more complicated. It seems to me that we should avoid such one-sided, unequivocal judgments. I, personally, have been to a place called Sderot – and I think you have been there, too, Mr President – which has been the target of several hundred missiles fired by Hamas fighters, as Mr Takkula said recently. I think, therefore, that this report is not something which the European Parliament should specially boast about in the future.

Daniel Hannan (ECR). – Mr President, we have heard a great deal about proportionality in this debate, and I wonder what opponents of Israel would consider to be proportionate. I wonder whether they would have preferred it if the Jewish state had simply taken an equivalent amount of ordnance and rained it randomly on Gaza. Would that have been a proportionate response?

I would like also to examine the proportionality, or lack of proportionality, in this report. One has the eerie feeling, reading the Goldstone report, that one is reading about a violent assault in which the author has neglected to mention that the events took place during a boxing match. They have been stripped of all context.

I am not saying that Israel should be beyond criticism, nor am I saying that Cast Lead is beyond criticism. Mistakes were made. Israel wants to get to a position where there is a stable Palestinian entity to be a good neighbour, but this policy of degrading infrastructure has retarded that goal. Equally, the partiality and tone of this report have pushed further away the idea of a two-state solution in which an Israeli entity and a Palestinian one live side by side as peaceable neighbours.

Alexander Graf Lambsdorff (ALDE). – (DE) Mr President, the German Free Democratic Party (FDP) delegation in the European Parliament today voted against the resolution from several groups to implement the recommendations of the Goldstone report. You cannot vote in favour of a report for which the very mandate was highly controversial – not one single Member State of the European Union had given its backing. A report that equates democratic Israel with a group officially listed by the EU as a terrorist organisation and a report that fails to give reasonable consideration to the deeper causes of the conflict is not one that we can vote in favour of.

Our voting choice does not mean, however, that we would reject an investigation into the events connected with Operation Cast Lead. The opposite is the case, in fact. Israel should indeed thoroughly investigate all aspects of the operation, and if violations of the law did take place, they must be punished. Our voting choice likewise does not mean that we would endorse the policy of the government of the State of Israel in the peace process. We have been very pleased to see signs that talks are again taking place between Israel and the Palestinians, albeit indirectly for the time being.

US Vice-President Biden's visit also shows that the Obama administration is serious in its efforts to achieve a lasting peace in the region. It has our support in those efforts. That makes it even harder to understand Israel's snubbing of the Vice-President, with the building of further settlements in the West Bank being approved while his visit was still going on – a measure that drew thoroughly just criticism, and not only from the Palestinians.

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0134/2010

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE). – (SK) I am convinced that the European Union has to send a clear signal to Belarus that it is prepared to reconsider mutual relations if Belarus does not refrain from violating human rights and democratic principles and does not take corrective action.

At the same time, I would like to express outrage over the decree from the President of Belarus regarding control of the Internet which, in many points, is a clear denial of freedom of speech and of the press. Such legal action curtails freedom and democracy in Belarus and deepens the distrust of citizens and other countries, including the European Union, in its state authorities and their representatives. In the context of the recent arrests of civil society and democratic opposition representatives, it is impossible not to see the short time

period between when the decree enters into force in July of this year and the upcoming presidential elections at the beginning of next year.

Jarosław Kalinowski (PPE). – (PL) I would like to thank fellow Members for drawing up this resolution and for its adoption by the European Parliament.

By endorsing this resolution, we have expressed support for the defence of the fundamental rights and freedoms of citizens, including national minorities. It is, at the same time, an initiative to defend the fundamental principles of democracy and tolerance, which are the foundation of Europe. I am pleased by the official position of Parliament on this matter, which supports the Polish minority in Belarus.

I would like to take this opportunity to point out that Member States of the European Union should set an example to other countries and to our neighbours, and should take care that the rights of national minorities in our Member States are fully respected.

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE). – (PL) I voted in favour of adopting the Belarus resolution. In the resolution, we demand legalisation of the Association of Poles in Belarus, which is led by Angelika Borys, and we express our solidarity with all the citizens of Belarus, who cannot take full advantage of civil rights.

Yesterday, I received a letter from the Belarusian Ambassador to Poland. He expresses concern in connection with the intentions of Members of the European Parliament who wanted the resolution to be adopted. In his opinion, those intentions arose as a result of unobjective coverage of the situation in Polish media. This is not true. The intentions which are behind the resolution are much more profound. It is about respecting the fundamental rights of citizens, respecting the rights of minorities and ensuring minimum standards and, as a consequence, it is about the good of Belarus and the good of Belarusians.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE). – Mr President, I supported the resolution on the situation of civil society and national minorities in Belarus and today I would like to express once again my great concern at the recent human rights violations in Belarus against members of civil society and against members of the national minorities and their organisations. I would like to declare my full solidarity with citizens unable to enjoy their full civil rights.

I would also like to strongly condemn the arrest of Angelika Borys, the chairperson of the Union of Poles in Belarus, and also Anatoly Lebedko, the leader of the opposition United Civil Party and the leader of the United Democratic Forces in Belarus, who has been the guest of this House on several occasions.

Regrettably, the people of Belarus are not able to benefit from many projects and proposals the European Union is financing as part of our eastern neighbourhood policy.

Hannu Takkula (ALDE). – (FI) Mr President, as regards the situation in Belarus, I regard it as very important that, as Europeans, we remember what our values are.

I want to bring this to your attention because of the recent regrettable outcome of the vote on the Goldstone report and because in all matters, be they in connection with Belarus, the Middle East, the Far East or Africa, we need to remember the fundamental principles that guide us. They are democracy, human rights and freedom of opinion. This is the right of the entire European Union: the values that unite us and which endeavour to promote these goals. We have to bring this message home in Belarus. We need to ensure that the rights of minorities are taken into account there, and also that religious minorities, who have suffered persecution there in various ways, are recognised, along with their human rights and their freedom to practise a religion.

It is very important that we, as Europeans, ensure that we also take the European message to Belarus, thereby offering a prospect of hope there.

Daniel Hannan (ECR). – Mr President, although I support much of the wording of this resolution, I wonder whether we are best placed to lecture Belarus about the inadequacies of its democracy. We complain that Belarus has a weak rubber-stamp parliament, but look around you. Here we are meekly rubber-stamping the decisions of our 27-member politburo. We complain about the fact that, although they have elections, they rig them; we, on the other hand, have referendums, hold them honestly but then disregard the result. We complain about the survival of the apparatus of the Soviet Union there and yet we maintain our common agricultural policy, our social chapter, our 48-hour week and the rest of the apparatus of euro-corporatism.

It is a small wonder that the old systemic communist parties of the COMECON states were leading the 'yes' campaigns when their countries applied to join the *Evropeyskiy soyuz*. For some of them, in fact, it felt like coming home; I am reminded of the eerie closing pages of *Animal Farm*, where the animals look from man to pig and from pig to man and already find that they cannot tell which is which.

Bruno Gollnisch (NI). – (FR) Mr President, aside from questioning the actual content of this resolution, I would also like to question its principle.

French, Flemish, Hungarian, German and Austrian patriots are the subject of constant legal, professional and political persecution, and this amid the indifference, indeed with the support, of this House, which claims to set an example to practically the whole world and especially to those beyond its borders.

For example, last week we adopted a resolution on Ukraine, which included a provision that many Ukrainian patriots rightly find insulting to their national hero, Stepan Bandera. Admittedly, he endeavoured, under extraordinarily difficult circumstances, to tread a path between two forms of totalitarianism: that of Hitler and that of the Soviets. This does not make him any less of a hero for many Ukrainians, who rightly feel humiliated by the majority of this House.

It is the case that national heroes have generally fought against their neighbours. Does my friend, Nick Griffin, a true British patriot, take offence at the fact that, for us, Joan of Arc is a national heroine? Certainly not! Personally, I would like our Parliament to express the same reservations about the heroes of other foreign countries.

Motion for a resolution B7-0133/2010

Kay Swinburne, on behalf of the ECR Group. – Mr President, the ECR recognises that the financial services industry cannot expect to escape from the crisis scot free. Enormous damage has been done through reckless behaviour, and the cost of sorting out the mess must be borne by those involved. Furthermore, new systems must be put in place to ensure that this never happens again, and that funds are available for emergency purposes to stabilise systemic failures.

It is possible that in the context of international agreement, the time has come for some financial transaction tax. Whatever the doubts about the practicalities of putting such a system into place, no measure should be ruled out as long as it has the backing of the whole international community and as long as safeguards are there to ensure that it works and cannot be avoided.

Most of today's resolution has our backing, but we take exception to paragraph 7 for two reasons. First of all, we oppose new tax-raising powers for the European Union. This paragraph – carefully worded though it may be – suggests that this is a desired outcome. Secondly, the whole point of a financial transaction tax should not be to raise money for pet projects, no matter how worthy. Instead, it must be to ensure future financial stability and to protect against the kind of events that have caused the recent economic chaos.

This resolution, as it stands, is too focused on a transaction-tax solution, implies EU, not Member State, tax-raising powers, suggests utilising the money raised for funding development and climate-change projects instead of stabilising the financial sector and, finally, suggests that an EU tax might be feasible without global participation. For these reasons, we have voted against this specific motion for a resolution.

Joe Higgins (GUE/NGL). – Mr President, I abstained on the financial transaction taxes resolution because it is hopelessly inadequate for tackling the obscene antisocial speculation around the world by giant hedge funds and so-called 'prestigious' banks like Goldman Sachs.

The Wall Street Journal recently reported on a private dinner in New York on 8 February, involving 18 major hedge funds, where speculation against the euro was discussed. For months now, these financial sharks, known as hedge funds, which control over EUR 2 000 billion, have been deliberately speculating against the euro, and against Greece in particular, in order to reap billions in private profit.

Incredibly, the EU Commission not only fails to raise a finger to stop them, but actually conspires with these financial criminals by bullying the workers and poor of Greece, demanding that their living standards be savaged to pay the ransom demanded by these parasites.

We do not need a financial tax. What we need is to take public ownership and democratic control of these hedge funds and major banks in order to use their massive resources for investment that will end poverty and benefit society, rather than destroying society for private greed.

Mario Borghezio (EFD). – (IT) Mr President, we abstained, but my main aim was to take a stance against the clear intention of the European Union and the Commission to introduce a tax, as demonstrated by Commissioner Šemeta's recent statements to *European Voice* about the supposed imminent introduction of a minimum tax on emissions.

We are against the idea of granting the European Union the power to levy direct taxes, an unconstitutional prerogative in almost all Member States, because it violates the principle of no taxation without representation. We will oppose in every possible way any attempt to introduce a direct tax, drawing strength also from the German constitutional court ruling of June 2009.

I wish to remind you that President Van Rompuy hinted at this when, in a mysterious meeting held a week before his appointment to the Bilderberg group, which is not exactly the most transparent group in the world, he announced – and even committed himself to – the proposal of a European direct tax on CO₂, which would cause an immediate increase in fuel prices, services, etc., and would therefore be detrimental to European citizens.

This EU tax proposal is unconstitutional.

Daniel Hannan (ECR). – Mr President, I am unconvinced of the case for a tax on financial transactions but I accept the sincere motives of the supporters of the proposal. It is an issue on which people of goodwill can come to different conclusions.

What there is no case for whatsoever is the imposition of such a tax exclusively in the European Union. A Tobin Tax applied only regionally will result in a flight of capital to those jurisdictions where no such tax pertains, so why has this House just voted in such large numbers for a system which will disadvantage the European Union?

The answer is that it ticks all the boxes of a certain kind of Member of this House. It attacks the bankers, it attacks the City of London and, above all, it furnishes the European Union with an independent stream of revenue, which means that it does not have to go to the Member States.

Taken together with the various other proposals that we see coming for the harmonisation of financial supervision, the alternative investment fund managers directive and so on, we see an epical threat to the City of London and we see the European Union being consigned to poverty and irrelevance.

Syed Kamall (ECR). – Mr President, anyone who looks at the recent financial crisis will wonder how we allowed regulation and supervision to lead to a situation where we ended up with banks being deemed too big to fail and billions in taxpayers' money being used to prop up these banks.

So, when one thinks about this idea of a global financial transaction tax, it may seem reasonable if we want to help the victims of the financial crisis and also help those in poorer countries.

But if we think about how this would actually be imposed, and the real impact, and we follow it through the chain within the financial markets, in reality, you would find banks passing these costs on to their customers. It would also impact heavily on those of us who want to trade with developing countries or entrepreneurs in developing countries who want to trade with the rest of the world, and hit the cost of insurance, which is such a vital part of international trade.

If we really want to tackle this problem, we should not be handing billions in taxpayers' money to corrupt or incompetent governments. We should be making sure that we lift tariff barriers in both the EU and poor countries, to help entrepreneurs in poorer countries to create wealth and take people out of poverty.

Motion for a resolution B7-0132/2010

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) I appreciate the efforts of the European Union regarding the introduction of a single regime for bank transactions within the euro area.

On the other hand, I can see the introduction of these new rules being abused by the banks in order to raise fees they charge their clients. If, on the one hand, our banks, under pressure from the European Union, adjust payments for cross-border SEPA transfers within the euro area so that they are at the same level as internal transfers, the fees for depositing and withdrawing money at branches would concurrently rise. It is clear to all of us that the costs to banks for handling cash at branches in connection with the new rules have not changed in the least.

And, therefore, we have to say loudly that the exploitation by the banks of the new rules which have been introduced in the euro area in order to increase their profits at the expense of our citizens is blatant dishonesty. Therefore, it should be our duty to monitor carefully how the new regulations on financial institutions are being applied.

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0154/2010

Jarosław Kalinowski (PPE). – (PL) I voted in favour of adoption of the resolution because, as a representative of my electorate, I cannot accept that anything should be agreed behind their backs and against their will. The Treaty of Lisbon has given the European Parliament new competences, which is also why the European Parliament should be able to stand guard over the rights of citizens.

I agree with the authors of the resolution, who criticise the way the Commission's negotiations on the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement are being kept secret as well as the lack of cooperation with the European Parliament on this matter. This action is directed against prevailing EU law on universal access to information about the activities of public authorities, and it is also action which restricts the right to privacy. It is good, therefore, that the European Parliament has taken up the matter of the transparency of the European Commission's negotiations, as well as the matter of counterfeiting and its prevention.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – Mr President, with regard to the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), the current negotiations completely lack transparency. To use the current negotiating formula to generate a global agreement is totally contrary to the transparent and democratic processes that we should expect from our lawmakers. Regardless of the content of the agreement, it is unacceptable to avoid public scrutiny when generating policies that will directly affect so many European citizens.

On the issue of content, we need to pay full attention to the European Data Protection Supervisor, who has issued a very strongly worded opinion on these negotiations. He strongly encourages the European Commission to establish a public and transparent dialogue on ACTA. He also states that, while intellectual property is important to society and must be protected, it should not be placed above individuals' fundamental rights to privacy, data protection and other rights such as presumption of innocence, effective judicial protection and freedom of expression. Finally, he states that a 'three strikes' Internet disconnection policy would profoundly restrict the fundamental rights and freedoms of EU citizens.

This is a very important issue for all EU citizens, and how the Commission and Parliament deal with it will say a great deal about accountability and transparency.

Syed Kamall (ECR). – Mr President, one of the important things about this motion for a resolution was the fact that we managed to achieve an alliance right across the House.

One area of common agreement was the fact that, in the absence of any meaningful information surrounding these negotiations, what you saw on the blogosphere and elsewhere were rumours suggesting proposals such as the confiscation of laptops and MP3 players at borders. What was quite clear across the House was that we wanted information and more transparency on the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement negotiations.

The Commissioner last night heard that message loud and clear, and I am very pleased that he has promised to give us more information. If the Commission is negotiating on behalf of 27 Member States and on behalf of the EU, then it is essential that we know what the negotiating position is, and also that there is a full impact assessment on what is being proposed to show how it will impact on EU industry.

I welcome the comments made last night by the Commissioner and look forward to more transparency.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) What worries me is the European Commission's practice and procedure to negotiate the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA).

Negotiations are taking place in secret, behind closed doors, without properly informing the European Parliament and Members, who should, in the end, approve this document. I think we should change the procedures regarding when the European Commission expects Parliament to assume responsibility for any agreements that are submitted to it. And it will not be a good signal to either the European public or the outside world if we repeatedly have to return international treaties to the European Commission for overhaul. Such conduct is not indicative of good communication between the most important institutions of the European Union.

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0181/2010

Syed Kamall (ECR). – Mr President, as many of us know, the GSP system is up for review and the current system is coming to an end.

One of the things that is very important when we look at GSP and GSP+ is that, during the negotiations on the economic partnership agreements, there were many individual states in the proposed regions that were against signing a deal with the EU.

One of the things I have always criticised in the economic partnership agreements is that they take a one-size-fits-all approach to trade. What was also alarming, during the debate with the Commission, was that one of the officials announced that the economic partnership agreements were not only about trade but also about exporting the EU's model of regional integration.

There are individual countries that want to have agreements with the EU and want to be able to export their goods and services to us on a preferential basis. Therefore, what we should propose is to offer those countries that want a trade agreement, but do not fit the criteria of the economic partnership agreements, GSP+ as an alternative, and we should look to be more flexible.

Hopefully, we shall then help entrepreneurs to create wealth and take poor people out of poverty in many of these countries.

Daniel Hannan (ECR). – Mr President, barely noticed, South America and Central America are sliding into a form of autocracy – a kind of *neo-caudillismo*. In Nicaragua, Venezuela, Ecuador and Bolivia, we have seen the rise of regimes which, if not exactly dictatorial, are certainly not supportive of parliamentary democracy – people who, although legitimately elected, then set about dismantling every check on their power: the Electoral Commission, the Supreme Court, the Chambers of their Parliament and, in many cases, dissolving their constitutions and rewriting – ‘refounding’, as they call it – their states along socialist principles.

With all this going on, whom do the Left choose to criticise in that part of the world? One of the few regimes that genuinely enjoys popular support – that of Álvaro Uribe in Colombia, who has the support of more than three quarters of his population because he has restored order to that unhappy country and has cracked down on the paramilitaries of both Left and Right. It shows an extraordinary set of priorities that he should be the person that some in this Chamber have chosen to pick on. Shame on them.

(ES) It is wrong to make things easy for the paramilitaries, how shameful!

Report: Gabriele Albertini (A7-0023/2010)

Alfredo Antoniazzi (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, I thank my colleague, Mr Albertini, for the excellent work he has carried out on this central theme in European politics. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the Union has shouldered greater responsibility for foreign affairs and common security policies, and I believe that many of us here hope that the institution to which we belong will take on greater responsibility and become more involved in foreign affairs.

I especially agree that the High Representative of the CFSP should consult the European Parliament committee responsible when making appointments to managerial posts within the European External Action Service, which is currently being created, and that she should ensure that the European Parliament, as well as the Council, have access to confidential information.

I therefore believe that the corner we have turned with this report is a first, important step towards creating a strong European foreign policy, determined to assert its own role and its own political weight on the international scene.

Nicole Sinclaire (NI). – Mr President, I voted against Amendments 17D and 19, which attacked NATO and called for the removal of NATO bases here in the European Union. Well, one of the last arguments of those who believe in this European project is that the EU has kept the peace in Europe for the last 50 or 60 years. Well, I would actually say that is a lie and that it was actually NATO which kept the peace in Europe with its forces.

I think it is a shame for this House to have allowed such an amendment to be voted on. I noticed that the group which actually proposed this amendment are the remnants of a failed ideology that kept their people behind walls and breached their fundamental human rights. It was NATO forces that protected the rest of

Europe from this nightmare. I wish to place on record my gratitude to the US and Canada and the other nations of NATO for sparing us that nightmare. I believe that it is in the UK's interest to cooperate with all of these countries against a new form of totalitarianism that is the European Union.

Report: Arnaud Danjean (A7-0026/2010)

Alfredo Antoniozzi (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, I voted in favour because I wanted to emphasise that the hope of increasing civil and military synergy and collaboration between the European Union and its Member States, even whilst respecting some non-aligned or neutral positions, is a position that we can all broadly share.

I also consider it important to set up an institution for coordinating mechanisms, such as a permanent European Union Operations Centre, under the authority of the High Representative of the CFSP, which would allow the joint planning of civil and military operations to be efficiently coordinated. The purpose of this would be to eliminate problems, disorders and delays which, unfortunately, continue to arise under the current system.

Nikolaos Chountis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, thank you for your patience. I voted against this report, because it repeats the dangerous guidelines contained in the Treaty of Lisbon for the European defence and security strategy. In other words, it calls for the militarisation of the European Union, legitimises military intervention, recognises the primacy of NATO and the close relationship between it and even promotes – at a time of crisis and major social needs – an increase in military force.

In my opinion, the European Union should, more than ever now that the architecture of the world is under scrutiny, adopt a peaceful policy and a different political perception of security, should follow an independent foreign and defence policy, emancipated from the United States, should seek to settle international differences by political means and should lead the way in respect for international law and the enhanced role of the UN.

I think that such a policy better expresses the views of European citizens.

Written explanations of vote

Report: Klaus-Heiner Lehne (A7-0011/2010)

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The adoption of this report by a large majority indicates the concern we need to have for small and medium-sized enterprises. At the moment, 5.4 million micro-enterprises are obliged to compile annual reports, even though their area of activity is limited to a particular local area or region. If these companies are not involved in cross-border activities or do not even operate at national level, this reporting obligation only serves to create a pointless administrative burden, thereby incurring costs for these commercial companies (approximately EUR 1 170).

This is why this report is recommending that Member States waive the annual reporting obligations for commercial companies which meet two of the following criteria for consideration as micro-enterprises: total assets must be less than EUR 500 000, the net turnover amount must be less than EUR 1 million and/or they must have an average of 10 employees throughout the financial year. Micro-enterprises will obviously continue to keep accounting records, in accordance with the national laws of each Member State.

During the current crisis which Europe is going through, the private sector made up of small and medium-sized companies (including, therefore, micro-enterprises) must be encouraged, while also being regarded, in this difficult climate, as an area for absorbing the workforce made redundant by the state or private corporate sector.

Carlos Coelho (PPE), in writing. – (PT) I am voting in favour of the Lehne report regarding the accounts of micro-enterprises because I support active measures for de-bureaucratisation and those that support small and medium enterprises, which, in Portugal and in Europe, are responsible for the greatest amount of job creation. I raise the issue of the creation of future inequalities in the internal market. As Member States will be allowed to choose whether to apply for this measure or not, we will have countries with different rules for the same firms.

Care will have to be taken to ensure that there are no negative consequences of the way these rules are transposed in relation to the ongoing efforts to combat fraud and tax evasion and also the fight against economic and financial crime (whether at national, European or international level). Care will also have to be taken to protect shareholders and creditors.

Vasilica Viorica Dăncilă (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) The last two rounds of enlargement of the European Union have brought numerous benefits to old and new Member States alike, while also posing a number of challenges. I think that the decision to grant certain facilities to micro-entities should be regulated at European level and not come under the remit of each Member State. This is the only way to successfully cut bureaucracy for micro-enterprises and create a balance. Particular attention must be focused on removing all those difficulties that hamper the activity of micro-enterprises and discourage people from obtaining EU financial support.

Anne Delvaux (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) On Wednesday, the European Parliament approved a proposal aimed at abolishing the obligation for small and medium-sized enterprises to publish their annual accounts. In an effort to reduce the administrative burden, the European Commission proposed that countries that so wish can exempt their SMEs from this annual obligation to publish their accounts imposed by the current European legislation. I was against this repeal because, as a result of the Commission proposal, the European regulatory and harmonised framework will disappear for more than 70% of European businesses.

The option to exempt microentities from the obligation to draw up and publish their annual accounts will not serve to reduce the administrative burden. My fear now is that if the Member States are inconsistent in applying the option to exempt microentities, it will result in the single market being divided up.

That is also why the Belgian MEPs and the Belgian Government are fiercely opposed to the European proposal (Belgium has also rallied together a blocking minority in the Council of Ministers, where the proposal still has to be voted on).

Robert Dušek (S&D), *in writing*. – (CS) The report on the proposal for a directive on the annual accounts of companies resolves the framework and broadens the obligation to submit accounts in the case of micro-entities. The aim of this measure is to reduce the administrative burden and thereby to help boost the competitiveness and economic growth of micro-entities. I welcome the proposal of the rapporteur, who gives Member States a free choice and allows them to exempt micro-entities from the obligation to submit annual accounts, i.e. to exempt them outside the scope of this directive. If it is a matter of entities limited to a regional and local market without having a cross-border field of action, they should not be burdened with further obligations arising from European legislation that is valid for the European market. For the reasons mentioned above, I agree with the wording of the report.

Françoise Grossetête (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted against the Lehne report because abolishing the accounting obligations for these microentities will not reduce the real costs of businesses and will create great legal uncertainty. Such an exemption will undermine the confidence required for relations between very small enterprises and third parties (customers, suppliers, banks).

Reliable information must be maintained in order to obtain credit. Without an accounting framework, bankers and other interested parties, who will still require information, are liable to find an excuse to reduce their lending. This situation will be detrimental to very small enterprises.

Astrid Lulling (PPE), *in writing*. – (DE) Today, I voted against the Lehne report, as I believe that the reduction in administrative expenditure for small and medium-sized enterprises must take place as part of a uniform and comprehensive approach for the whole of the European Union.

Were this proposal implemented, more than 70% of European companies – indeed more than 90% in Luxembourg – would be exempted from the requirement to produce standardised annual accounts.

As a result, an important decision-making tool for the responsible management of the affected enterprises would be lost.

If the Member States did not implement this exemption for micro-enterprises in a uniform way – which is highly likely – this would lead to a fragmentation of the common market.

This measure is thus inappropriate. Those companies that carry out cross-border trade, in particular, would be put at a disadvantage. The only sensible solution is to simplify the rules for all micro-enterprises in Europe on an EU-wide basis.

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) Especially at a time when the economic crisis has hit small businesses hard, it is our duty to endeavour to provide them with all the facilities which might help them recover and offer support again to the European economy. Cutting red tape is important in this context. I

welcome the decision adopted today. I hope that as many Member States as possible will implement it in an ideal and efficient way, for the benefit of small entrepreneurs and the economy in general.

Georgios Papastamkos (PPE), *in writing*. – (EL) I voted in favour of the Lehne report, because it grants Member States the discretion to take account of the various repercussions which the application of the directive may have on their internal affairs, especially as regards the number of companies which come within its scope. The activities of micro-entities are of negligible cross-border significance. Moreover, the publication of annual accounts safeguards transparency and is the *sine qua non* for access by micro-entities to the credit market and to public procurement contracts and to their inter-company relations.

Frédérique Ries (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted against the Lehne report and the Commission proposal. They represent a step backwards in terms of the internal market and pose an obvious risk of distortion of competition between small European SMEs.

Let us be clear, the consequences of this proposal have been woefully underestimated. Moreover, they have not taken account of the fact that, in the absence of a European directive, each Member State will impose its own rules on the matter. It is therefore no surprise to see all the SME organisations, European organisations – and Belgian ones too in my case: the Union of the Middle Classes and the Federation for Enterprises in Belgium – overwhelmingly oppose this proposal.

Yes, a thousand times yes to a reduction in administrative burdens for businesses, and particularly for SMEs, but a consistent reduction, achieved by means of a proposal for a general review of the fourth and seventh Company Law Directives.

Robert Rochefort (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) The proposal submitted to us entails allowing the Member States to exempt certain enterprises (microentities) from the obligation to draw up and publish their annual accounts. I am, of course, hugely in favour of reducing the administrative burdens for businesses, in particular, for SMEs and very small enterprises. However, the Commission proposal cruelly misses the mark: firstly, it is not clear whether the proposed system would really reduce the administrative burden on these businesses (the statistical data currently compiled will have to be gathered by other means) and, secondly, this text, which leaves it up to each Member State to decide whether or not to apply the exemption, is in danger of fragmenting the internal market (in the highly likely event that some Member States will apply the exemption and others will not). This proposal should have been withdrawn and consideration given to the issue of simplifying the administrative burdens on these small enterprises (company law, simplifying the requirements of financial reports, accounting, auditing and so on) as part of the overall review of the fourth and seventh Company Law Directives, planned for the near future. I therefore voted against Mr Lehne's report on the annual accounts of certain types of companies as regards microentities.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The objective of the present proposal relates to the simplification of the business environment and, in particular, the requirements for the provision of financial information by micro-enterprises, with the aim of strengthening their competitiveness and potential for growth.

In this context, I welcome the changes included in the report regarding the reduction in the administrative burden on micro-enterprises, as I believe that it constitutes an important measure in stimulating the European economy and in combating the crisis. This is because the activities of micro-enterprises are confined to single local or regional markets in which the production of annual accounts becomes an onerous and complex undertaking.

However, I do not support the idea of exempting micro-enterprises from the duty to submit annual accounts. That decision, in fact, falls to each Member State to adopt, as it could have direct implications relating to the combating of fraud and tax evasion and the fight against economic and financial crime, as well as for the protection of shareholders and creditors.

I therefore argue for the finding of balanced solutions with a view to adapting the way this measure is applied, rather than having a specific obligation in the document to maintain accounts regarding commercial operations and the financial position. It is, therefore, with some reservations that I am voting in favour of the present report.

Marianne Thyssen (PPE), *in writing*. – (NL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Parliament's adoption of the Small Business Act in March 2009 kick-started a series of policy proposals geared towards making the business environment in Europe more SME-friendly, through administrative simplification, among other means. The abolition of the accounting system for what have been termed 'micro-entities' appears, at first

glance, to be a major act of administrative simplification, but, given the importance of financial information to all stakeholders, including lenders, tax administrations and trading partners, this will, on the contrary, actually open the door to more red tape and higher costs. In addition, companies will be denied a useful tool for internal business succession.

However, I support the Committee on Economic Affairs' request that the impact of the meaning of any exemption granted to micro-entities be thoroughly assessed and placed in the framework of an overall review of the fourth and seventh directives. In my opinion, this proposal does not contain the instruments needed to tackle the issue of red tape effectively.

For these reasons, I voted to reject the Commission's proposal. Given that the report of my esteemed colleague, Mr Lehne, rests on the same principles as the Commission's proposal, nor was I in a position to support his report, either. I look forward to the Council making a wise and well-considered decision.

Derek Vaughan (S&D), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of the proposal to exempt micro-entities (small firms) from EU law on accounting standards. This is an extremely important proposal as it will reduce the unnecessary burden of red tape on small businesses and help over five million firms to make a saving of approximately GBP 1 000 each. The EU has made a commitment to reduce burdens on small and medium enterprises by 25% by 2012 and this law is a vitally important step along the path to achieving this objective. These small firms are often the first step on the ladder to successful employers of the future, and they need to be nurtured, especially during times of recession.

Sophie Auconie (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of Mr Lehne's report on the annual accounts of microentities because, although the European Commission's impact assessment is, in my view, incomplete and insufficient, I wanted to adopt a position that was clearly in favour of simplifying the accounting obligations imposed on very small enterprises. Economically and socially speaking, it does not make sense for a very small enterprise to be subject to the same administrative constraints as much larger enterprises. Very small enterprises account for more than 85% of European businesses; in other words, they are the backbone of our economy, which urgently needs a boost. I therefore believe that a harmonised reduction in their obligations is along the right lines, albeit with an assurance that this will not hinder their access to credit. The assessment should therefore be carried out across the board, with account taken of the whole economic environment that surrounds very small enterprises, their relations with banks, with management centres – in the case of French enterprises – and, of course, with their customers. Let us not always think in terms of obligations but let us have faith in our entrepreneurs and our craftspeople who need us to reduce their administrative burdens.

Françoise Castex (S&D), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted against this proposal because it is liable, in the long run, to backfire on SMEs and, by reducing their access to credit, to deprive them of the conditions of transparency and of confidence that are indispensable to their management and to the dynamism of their activity. I do not believe that one can, on the one hand, request greater transparency from the banks by criticising them for the non-transparency of the financial markets, which led to the current crisis, and, on the other, seek to abolish the tools of transparency that are crucial to economic operators themselves and to the economic regulatory policies that we want to conduct at European level. Simplifying the accounting obligations for SMEs, and particularly for the smallest ones, remains an urgent requirement. The European Commission must urgently review the fourth and seventh Company Law Directives, which alone can provide a comprehensive, fair and consistent solution.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) I welcome the adoption of the Lehne report that will certainly contribute to the reduction of the managerial burdens of micro-enterprises. Small enterprises frequently complain about the excessive regulation, burdens and bureaucracy that often endanger their financial survival. Micro-enterprises are right to argue that they should not be subject to the same rules and regulations as bigger businesses. Let us hope that the rules proposed in this report will lead to higher turnover and greater competitiveness for micro-enterprises. This report still gives Member States the flexibility to transpose the directive at the most appropriate time so as to avoid any difficulty that may arise from the reduction of regulation. However, micro-enterprises will be able to continue to draw up annual accounts on a voluntary basis, submit them to auditing and send them to the national register. In any case, micro-enterprises will continue to maintain their sales and transactions registers for the purposes of administration and tax information. The Commission forecasts total savings of between EUR 5.9 and EUR 6.9 billion for the 5 941 844 micro-enterprises if all Member States adopt this exemption. In Portugal, 356 140 Portuguese enterprises would be covered under this exemption if it were adopted by the Portuguese Government.

Sylvie Guillaume (S&D), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted against the proposal for a directive on the annual accounts of certain types of companies adopted on Wednesday, 10 March 2010. While I am in favour of a significant reduction in the regulatory burden borne by SMEs, I do nonetheless believe that accounting requirements also constitute crucial management instruments for their external partners (bankers, clients, suppliers and so on). By reducing their access to credit, this proposal is liable, in the long run, to deprive SMEs of the conditions of transparency and confidence that are indispensable to their management and to the dynamism of their activity. It is paradoxical, on the one hand, to request greater transparency from the banks by criticising them for the non-transparency of the financial markets, which led to the current crisis, and, on the other, to seek to abolish the tools of transparency that are crucial to economic operators themselves and to the economic regulatory policies that I support at European level.

Anna Záborská (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) The European Parliament, like the European Economic and Social Committee, is supporting the objective pursued by the Commission by presenting this initiative, which entails exempting micro-entities from administrative and accounting requirements, which are costly and completely disproportionate to the needs and internal structures of micro-entities and of the principal users of financial information, in order to enable them to rise to the numerous structural challenges inherent in a complex company, thanks to the full implementation of the European Charter for Small Enterprises and in accordance with a process integrated into the Lisbon Strategy. I regard the Commission's proposal for simplification as positive. Its aim is to ensure that the regulatory framework helps to stimulate the spirit of enterprise and innovation among micro- and small enterprises so that they become more competitive and turn the potential of the internal market to best account. However, micro-entities must still be subject to the obligation to keep records showing their business transactions and financial situation as a minimum standard to which Member States remain free to add further obligations. When all is said and done, I believe that we are helping small and medium-sized enterprises by reducing bureaucracy, and I welcome that.

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0151/2010

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted in favour of this resolution because it promotes the strengthening of economic coordination between the European countries, greater coherence between the Stability and Growth Pact and other European strategies, the implementation of an ambitious social agenda in the fight against unemployment, greater flexibility regarding retirement age and the promotion of SMEs.

I emphasise furthermore the fact that the reform asks the Commission to develop new incentives for the Member States that implement the EU 2020 strategy, penalising in future those that do not comply. This is crucial to making the strategy a success, given that the problems which we are facing are common ones and require a solution at European level.

I also welcome the decision of the European Council for its greater strategic realism, which provides it with greater clarity and fewer but quantified objectives.

Finally, I cannot omit to mention the inclusion of agriculture in this strategy because this was not envisaged in the initial proposal and it is, without doubt, an essential objective if Europe is to achieve its aims, whether from the point of view of economics, foodstuffs and the environment, or in terms of a greater quality of life for its rural zones, which will generate employment.

Elena Oana Antonescu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) The EU 2020 strategy must resolve the problems caused by the economic and financial crisis through measures aimed directly at the sensitive points in Member States' economies. If the Lisbon Strategy was not wholly successful because too many targets were set, a strategy for exiting the crisis must be focused on a few clear, quantifiable objectives such as: providing solutions to combat unemployment effectively, especially among young people, the promotion and provision of support to small and medium-sized enterprises, which generate the most jobs and innovations, as well as an increase in the percentage allocated to research and development from the EU and national budgets up to 3%.

We must be aware that the room for manoeuvre for social policies in Europe will decrease in the future due to the ageing of the population, while the increase in productivity will only be able to come from greater investment in technology and education. If we want a more competitive labour market, we must restructure the social security systems and support more flexible working practices. At the same time, such a strategy must support the development of production methods which respect the environment and people's health.

Regina Bastos (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) On 3 March, the European Commission presented its EU 2020 strategy: 'A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth'. It is a proposal which agrees on five

quantifiable objectives for the European Union (EU) through to 2020, which will provide a framework for the process and which must be translated into national objectives: employment, research and innovation, climate change and energy, education and the fight against poverty.

It is a strategy which focuses on concrete, realistic and appropriately quantified objectives: an increase in employment from 69% to at least 75%, an increase in Research and Development (R&D) spending to 3% of GDP, a reduction in poverty by 25%, a reduction in the rate of truancy from the current rate of 15% to 10%, and an increase from 31% to 40% in terms of young people aged 30 who have a higher education qualification.

I voted in favour of the resolution on the EU 2020 strategy on the grounds that the objectives which it announces map out the path which Europe should follow and that it responds in a clear and objective manner to the problems created by the economic and financial crisis, in terms of unemployment, financial regulation and the fight against poverty. These problems will provide a reference point, allowing us to evaluate the progress which is achieved.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), in writing. – (LT) I voted for this resolution. Since we will be unable to solve the current social and economic problems at national level, we therefore need to solve them at European and international level. The EU 2020 strategy should, above all, be an effective measure to overcome the economic and financial crisis, since the goal of this strategy is the creation of jobs and economic growth.

Huge unemployment in Europe is the most important issue in current discussions, as Member States face ever rising unemployment with more than 23 million men and women without work and, as a result, there are great social and living difficulties. Therefore, most attention in this European Parliament resolution is paid to the creation of new jobs and to combating social isolation.

Moreover, Parliament calls on the Commission to not just take into account unemployment and social problems, but to show effective means of solving these, so that this new strategy has a genuine impact on people's real lives. I would like to draw attention to the fact that Europe has already learnt from its mistakes, having been unable to fully implement the goals set out in the Lisbon Strategy earlier. Therefore, the new strategy for the coming decade must be based on a strong management system and it must ensure responsibility. Consequently, by voting for this resolution today, I am calling on the Commission and the European Council to concentrate on Europe's main social problems and to set out fewer, but clearer and more realistic goals, which it would then be possible to realise.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE), in writing. – (PT) I welcome the recent debates held during the Informal Council of 11 February on the guidelines for EUROPE 2020, the new strategy for Europe. I congratulate the Commission on its initiative and call for greater cooperation with Parliament on such an important matter for the future of Europe. It is essential to invest in knowledge and in reforms that foster technological progress, innovation, education and training to promote prosperity, growth and employment in the medium and long term. I would also like to highlight the importance of concrete ideas for this strategy such as the digital agenda. It is essential to make the most of this potential so that Europe may recover from the economic crisis in a sustainable way. The cohesion policy is equally important in supporting growth and employment. EUROPE 2020, in its regional dimension should, therefore, include this priority as one of the pillars for a richer, more prosperous and fairer society. I appeal to the need to develop mechanisms of financing and governing with practical effects for the accomplishment of this strategy.

Anne Delvaux (PPE), in writing. – (FR) There were high hopes for the Lisbon Strategy, the economic, social and environmental objectives of which were as necessary as they were ambitious. The strategy that succeeds it, the so-called EU 2020 strategy, which we voted on today, seems to me to be far less ambitious. Although it does retain some objectives to be achieved, such as the 3% of GDP to be devoted to research, and the preservation of the Stability and Growth Pact (3%), it is still regrettable that employment and the environmental dimension (which is much reduced) do not occupy a horizontal place in it. We are still a very long way away from a true, global sustainable development strategy.

Nevertheless, I supported this proposal because it is very clear that, in the face of the crisis and its many consequences, especially for employment, we cannot continue to stand idly by. I welcome the adoption of the paragraphs relating to an ambitious social agenda and to improving support for SMEs. In short, a new lease of life is needed. Let us hope that the EU 2020 strategy will provide it. Above all, let us hope that the 27 Member States will do their utmost to implement this strategy.

Harlem Désir (S&D), in writing. – (FR) The 2020 strategy is supposed to replace the Lisbon Strategy. It is, above all, in danger of prolonging the shortcomings, of ending in the same lack of results and of causing the

same disappointment. It is neither a true recovery strategy nor a new perspective for the economic, social, budgetary and fiscal policies of the Union. The myriad good intentions are matched only by the absence of new instruments with which to implement them.

Europe needs a different ambition; the citizens expect more convincing responses. Since the start of the crisis, the unemployment rate has increased by seven million. The banks are speculating again, hedge funds have not been regulated, the citizens are being asked to tighten their belts, drastic cuts are being made in public services and social protection is being cut back. The Greek crisis serves to reveal our lack of solidarity.

That is why Europe must debate a different view of its future, one that is based on true economic coordination, a recovery characterised by solidarity, a green growth strategy, an energy community, a cohesion budget, own resources, investment in education, research, fiscal and social harmonisation, the fight against tax havens and the taxation of international financial transactions.

Edite Estrela (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted in favour of the motion for a joint resolution on the continuation of the informal European Council of 11 February 2010. To achieve a social market economy which is sustainable, more intelligent and greener, Europe must define its priorities, agreeing on these together. No Member State can provide responses to these challenges by acting alone. EU policy cannot be merely the sum of 27 national policies. By working together for a common objective, the result will be superior to the sum of its parts.

This will allow the EU to develop a role as a world leader, showing that it is possible to combine economic dynamism with social and environmental concerns. It will allow the EU to create new jobs in areas such as renewable energy, sustainable transport and energy efficiency. For this purpose, appropriate financial resources must be made available which will allow opportunities to be taken and new sources of global competitiveness to be exploited by the EU.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The European Commission has made public the Europe 2020 strategy, which replaces the unsuccessful Lisbon Strategy and which provides important and ambitious challenges for Europe. These challenges relate, essentially, to five areas considered to be strategic by the Commission: (i) employment; (ii) research and innovation; (iii) climate change and energy; (iv) education and (v) the fight against poverty.

These are, in fact, areas which are fundamental if Europe is to overcome the crisis and reaffirm its role as an important player in the global market, with a high level of development and a competitive economy which is capable of generating wealth, employment and innovation. The European Union does indeed require ambition to defeat the challenges presented by the crisis, but that ambition must not cause problems for the effort at budgetary consolidation which is being demanded of Member States, in view of the weakness of their public accounts and their excessive deficits. For this same reason, I consider it vital that the objectives of the EU 2020 strategy be strengthened.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The principle of solidarity should be the basis for the EU 2020 strategy; solidarity among citizens, generations, regions and governments. This way, we will be able to combat poverty and ensure economic, social and territorial cohesion, by means of sustainable economic growth. This principle of solidarity must constitute the guarantee of the European social model.

We must deliberate on the restructuring of social security systems and on ensuring minimum social rights at the European level that will facilitate the free circulation of workers, specialised personnel, businessmen, researchers, students and retired people. The efficient use of resources becomes a necessity owing to this principle and deriving from the need for sustainability.

This strategy must generate the creation of jobs. We cannot accept that the EU has approximately 23 million unemployed men and women. Therefore, it is fundamental to support entrepreneurship and bureaucratic and fiscal relief for small and medium-sized enterprises.

This does not mean forgetting about industry or agriculture. We must resume the re-industrialisation of Europe. Sustainable agriculture with quality produce must also be our goal. To achieve this, we must advance the sustainable development of our primary sector and take the lead in the fields of scientific research, knowledge and innovation.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) The Europe 2020 strategy, the recognised successor of the so-called Lisbon Strategy, must start by making an appropriate assessment of the methods of its predecessor. If this were done, it would find that the approaches which it implemented – namely, the liberalisation of

important economic sectors and the deregulation and increased flexibility of labour laws – have been the causes of its results in practice: increased unemployment, insecurity, poverty and social exclusion and economic stagnation and recession.

The Commission and Parliament now seek to follow the same approaches. The proposed path is clear and neither the social or environmental rhetoric which it tries to set out are enough to disguise the following: total emphasis on the Single Market, pursuit of liberalisation, commercialisation of more and more aspects of social life, lack of job security, and structural unemployment.

The consensus which exists between the Right and Social Democrats regarding these approaches has been made quite clear. In the final analysis, they have together been its faithful protagonists in recent years. This strategy, essentially, is nothing more than the response of two tendencies within a single system to the structural crisis of that system. In following this approach, the strategy will itself be the origin of new and deeper crises. In following this approach, the strategy will inevitably face resistance and be fought by the workers and the people.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The rejection of our motion for a resolution is regrettable. In it, we not only proposed a broad process of discussion on the proposals which have already been presented by the European Commission and a complete evaluation of the results of the Lisbon Strategy, with the aim of extracting conclusions for the new Europe 2020 strategy, but we also presented a set of new proposals giving priority to increased productivity and the creation of employment with rights, the resolution of the unemployment problem and poverty, and guaranteeing equality in social progress. The new proposals would have created a new macro-economic framework to promote sustainable development, strengthen internal demand and respect the environment, based on improvements in pay, full employment with rights, and economic and social cohesion.

We voted against the joint resolution which was adopted because it does not get to the root of the problem, does not propose measures which are an alternative to the Stability Pact, and nor does it propose an end to the liberalisation or labour market flexibility which have led to an increase in the insecurity of work and low pay. In this way, you allow the European Commission to continue to argue for more or less the same approach, one which has already led to unemployment for more than 23 million people and has left more than 85 million people in poverty.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (S&D), in writing. – (PL) Mr President, for the last two decades, the European Union has been successful in many areas, from three ambitious enlargements to the introduction of the common currency, the euro. European Union citizens work less than the Americans or the Japanese (10% fewer hours per year) and retire earlier. Maintaining these gains at the current level is not easy during a crisis, so I am pleased to hear of the decisive measures on the part of the European Council and the European Commission, which aim to establish a comprehensive economic strategy – Europe 2020.

At the same time, before the European Councils in March and June this year which will give the strategy its final form, there are a number of doubts relating to the European Commission document which was presented on 3 March this year. Firstly, what kind of data will be used as the basis for setting national targets for the 27 different European Union Member States? What penalties or rewards await those Member States which, respectively, do or do not comply with the objectives imposed by the strategy? Finally, what role in the whole process has been reserved for the European Parliament since, until now, the Europe 2020 strategy has been a project piloted exclusively by the Council and the Commission? We must find answers to these questions before the European Council in June. Otherwise, to quote Mr Barroso, the Union will miss its 'moment of truth'.

Bruno Gollnisch (NI), in writing. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, after the bitter failure of the Lisbon Strategy, which was meant to make Europe the world's most competitive knowledgebased economy in 2010, here we have the EU 2020 strategy, which is precisely an extension of that strategy. For flexibility of the labour market, read job insecurity for workers, increased competition at European and international level, the liberal reform of national social protection systems, and absolute respect for the stupid Stability and Growth Pact ...

All the ingredients are there to make this strategy one of national and social disintegration, like the Lisbon Strategy before it. The only innovations are those inspired by your new whims: making European economic governance mandatory and binding, even though the Europe of Brussels has shown itself to be completely ineffective in the face of the global crisis, and tending towards global governance in the name of so-called global warming, which increasingly appears to be an ideological pretext. We shall vote against this text.

Sylvie Guillaume (S&D), *in writing*. – (FR) I voted against this resolution because it does not place enough emphasis on the objective of full employment. Secondly, our priorities should be more focused on the fight against poverty and on sustainable growth. The European Parliament also lets slip the opportunity to emphasise the need to combat all forms of insecure employment, by means of a directive on part-time work, the introduction of a set of social rights that are guaranteed regardless of the type of employment contract, and measures to combat abuses in relation to subcontracting, and even unpaid work experience. Lastly, this resolution chooses to overlook the need to harmonise the tax base, which is of vital importance to the creation of a European social model. There is no doubt that the European Parliament has missed a great opportunity here as regards the construction of a social and sustainable Europe.

Cătălin Sorin Ivan (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) The reality which we have all realised is that the 2020 strategy does not even have enough green or social policies. Another relevant observation is that the objectives are vague and the economic crisis is not being handled in a manner commensurate with its severity. This is why I feel that the role of the resolution voted on in the European Parliament plenary is to make important contributions to the European vision for the next 10 years.

Although our role as MEPs is limited to the letter of the treaty, we can still make a substantial contribution. However, we must expect Member States to demonstrate political will and reflect on our position in a constructive way.

Objectives such as ‘a social market economy’ and ‘a budget reflecting smart, inclusive and sustainable growth’ are vital to overcoming the effects triggered by the economic crisis.

Investment in education, encouraging student mobility and training in new skills which meet the labour market’s demands are courses of action which we must devise realistic action plans for.

Peter Jahr (PPE), *in writing*. – (DE) In the context of the EU 2020 strategy, agriculture will play an important part in Europe’s future success. Particularly when it comes to sustainable growth and employment, and when it comes to climate change, European agricultural policy is highly significant, as it has an indispensable role to play in retaining jobs in rural and peri-urban areas. We should not forget, furthermore, that agriculture supplies 500 million Europeans with high quality food, provides 40 million jobs and is responsible for an annual turnover of approximately EUR 1.3 trillion. The production of renewable energy provides additional jobs and helps to reduce CO₂ emissions and the dependence on fossil fuels. Agriculture is innovative, creates value and is the real source of sustainable regional economic cycles. European agricultural policy must therefore be given greater consideration in the context of this new strategy.

Jarosław Kalinowski (PPE), *in writing*. – (PL) I would like to draw attention to an inconsistency between the targets of the 2020 strategy and the effects which will be the consequence of proposed changes to the budget priorities for 2014-2020. One of these targets is an improvement in environmental conditions. The change of budget priorities suggests a restriction on funds available for the common agricultural policy, which means that, in 2020, agriculture is going to have to be highly efficient or even downright industrial. This means it will be a threat to the environment, and this, in turn, means that the EU would have to depart from the European model of agriculture, which affords particular care to the environment, the landscape, biodiversity, the well-being of animals, sustainable development and the social and cultural values of the rural environment. There is a piece of old and practical wisdom which says ‘better’ is the enemy of ‘good enough’. We should beware lest, in caring for the environment, we do the environment harm.

Elisabeth Köstinger (PPE), *in writing*. – (DE) The objective of the European Union’s future strategy is to accept current and future challenges and to master them as well as possible. In the context of the EU 2020 strategy, the agricultural sector, in particular, will play an important role in relation to the new, EU-defined challenges such as protection of the environment and the climate, renewable energy sources, biodiversity and sustainable growth and employment, specifically in rural areas. Europe must be aware that around 40 million jobs depend on agriculture, directly or indirectly.

The top priority, however, must continue to be the security of the supply of high-quality foods for 500 million Europeans, in particular, against the backdrop of the doubling of food production by 2050. European agricultural policy must therefore be given greater consideration in the context of this new strategy.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The EU 2020 strategy is the latest opportunity for the EU to assert itself as a world economic power, after the Lisbon Strategy became a failure. Against the backdrop of the global economic crisis, the EU 2020 strategy has to be the model which all the Member States must follow in order

to bring us into a new era, with new paradigms which will promote sustainable development based on good practice.

After the loss of many millions of jobs throughout the EU, the fight against unemployment has to be its 'touchstone'. We have to be able to create jobs and make our workforce better trained and qualified. This will only be possible with the complete support of SMEs, which are responsible for the creation of most jobs. However, for the EU 2020 strategy to be a success, we cannot make the same errors which were made with the Lisbon Strategy, particularly the lack of commitment and responsibility on the part of the Member States.

Wojciech Michał Olejniczak (S&D), *in writing*. – (PL) I voted in favour of the joint motion for a resolution of the European Parliament (RC-B7-0151/2010). The EU 2020 strategy is intended to set new objectives, not only for political action, but also for the way in which we think. In order to make a good recovery from the crisis, we have to create common instruments and mechanisms which will not only eliminate the effects of the current economic crisis, but will also allow us to react appropriately to future crises and even not to permit them at all. The Commission, Parliament and all EU institutions should remember that working for the common good of Europe's citizens is, for them, a priority. It is the citizens' problems which are, for us, the most important, and it is the citizens whom we should serve by giving advice, offering help and taking action. In the context of the crisis, problems such as unemployment, poverty and social exclusion are the order of the day. If we want to build a modern, fully innovative, development-based and cohesive Europe, we must guarantee our citizens a sense of security in the future. I am disappointed that, in the original proposals concerning the EU 2020 strategy, agriculture was omitted. Economic reconstruction and realisation of the objectives of environmental policy are included in agricultural policy. Without inclusion of this policy in the EU 2020 strategy, and also in every successive strategy, we have no chance of achieving the objectives, not only in the areas I have just mentioned, but also in many others.

Georgios Papastamkos (PPE), *in writing*. – (EL) I voted against the second part of paragraph 6 of the joint motion for a resolution on the EU 2020 strategy because it implies an intention to further dismantle the traditionally constructed European social state. The EU should make its social union more visible, by rebuffing competitive pressure on the international economic stage from forces which have either clearly stripped down social welfare benefits and structures or which apply social dumping. It would appear that social policy and employment policy are being adapted selectively and flexibly to market forces.

The unifying strategy tends to seek institutional integrity in everything to do with market forces; however, it would appear to be imperfect in terms of policy to regulate the impact of de-unification phenomena (such as unemployment, regional inequalities and lack of social cohesion). Now more than ever, the signs of the times advocate a more social Europe.

Rovana Plumb (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) I voted for this resolution as I believe that the EU 2020 strategy must provide an effective response to the economic and financial crisis and give new impetus and European coherence to the recovery process in the EU by mobilising and coordinating national and European instruments.

I support the need for better cooperation with national parliaments and civil society as the involvement of more players will increase the pressure on national administrations to deliver results.

At the same time, I believe that European industry should use its pioneering role in the sustainable economy and green mobility technologies by exploiting its export potential. This will reduce resource dependency and facilitate compliance with the necessary 20-20-20 climate change targets.

Frédérique Ries (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) Europe is not the world's most competitive economy in 2010. Far from it: with GDP down by 4% and 23 million citizens without jobs, its state of health is not exactly brilliant. If the European Union needs a severe electric shock to get the economy and employment back in a virtuous circle, it must do so with similar objectives but using a method that is completely different from that of the Lisbon Strategy. It must also take account of the negotiations ahead of it in the areas of energy, climate change, industry and agriculture. That is why I support the determination tinged with pragmatism of the new 2020 strategy. Ensuring that 75% of people of working age actually have a job, and seeing the gamble of investing 3% of GDP in research pay off are now, more than ever, objectives that Europe must achieve. Whether the 27 capitals cooperate is another matter, however. That is why we are calling for penalties and incentives to be envisaged for the good and bad students of the 2020 strategy (section 14). Penalties on the one hand, and incentives on the other. The carrot and the stick. It is as old as the hills, but it works.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), in writing. – I voted ‘no’ to motion for a resolution RC7-0151/2010 submitted today for voting in Parliament for the same reason that we Greens did not vote for the Barroso II Commission: because of a lack of ambition. On this occasion, it is the turn of Parliament’s largest political groups to disappoint by adopting a resolution that is pure posture – it does not contain a single economic, social or environmental proposal. I believe that Europeans expect more from this Parliament.

The EU Parliament was sidelined during the design of EU 2020 strategy. Now that Parliament belatedly has a chance to react, its biggest political groups conspire to deliver an empty resolution. This is a missed opportunity to get the European Parliament into the heart of the debate on substance and onto centre stage as an institution.

Richard Seeber (PPE), in writing. – (DE) The question of where the EU should be in relation to employment and economic development in 2020 is of key importance. Especially in times of economic crisis such as these, the EU 2020 strategy should act as the engine driving us out of the uncertainty. That makes it more important to choose the goals in such a way that they can actually be met. The policy is not an end in itself but has the purpose of creating realistic programmes that the population and the economy can keep pace with. The sustainable economy must be a major point in shaping the immediate future.

This is an objective that we must attain step by step, not least because of climate change. The issue of the security of raw materials, too, will, in future, concern Europe more and more, for which reason we should be paving the way for the sustainable use of resources now, and pointing European policy in this direction.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), in writing. – (NL) I voted against the joint resolution, because the three major groups are obviously using it to endorse the business-as-usual approach of the Barroso II Commission. My constituents expect a different approach and want the Europe 2020 strategy to usher in a green *new deal*, a 21st century green revolution which will reconcile human development with the physical limitations of the earth.

The European Union continues to swear by the policy of uncritically increasing growth in GDP. However, the greens and environmentalists want to transform the Europe 2020 strategy from one which strives for GDP growth alone to a broader political concept of the future of the EU as a social and sustainable Union which will place people and environmental protection at the heart of its policies, seek to ensure human well-being and create the best possible opportunities for everyone. In our view, GDP must include a set of welfare indicators, as well as indicators which will take into account broad external economic factors and environmental pressures. My group has therefore submitted an eight-page text which explains our alternative approach in detail. I prefer that text to the three largest groups’ compromise.

Marc Tarabella (S&D), in writing. – (FR) I voted against the resolution on the EU 2020 strategy because paragraph 6, which mentions the restructuring of social security systems and talks about greater flexibility for workers, has been adopted. Moreover, the resolution is more like a mishmash of more or less good intentions to the detriment of precise quantitative and qualitative objectives. Therefore, it would appear that account has not been taken of the almost complete failure of the Lisbon 2010 Strategy.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The Europe 2020 strategy aims to set out a plan for the future to achieve economic growth and the promotion of jobs within the European Union. Its approach must be made on the basis of objectives which refer to a sustainable social market economy, the sustainable knowledge society, and the role of SMEs in promoting employment.

A strong, modern and flexible cohesion policy must be a central element of this strategy. Embodied in the new Treaty of Lisbon, cohesion policy, through horizontal application, has an essential role in responding to the new challenges of the European Union. In this context, the objective of European territorial cohesion can be seen to be fundamental.

The priorities for European cohesion must aim not only at promoting competitiveness at European level, through the efficient allocation of funding, but also at helping disadvantaged regions to overcome their social and economic difficulties and to reduce existing disparities.

The active role of the European regions in promoting this strategy must also be highlighted. The importance of governance at various levels deserves to be highlighted. It will be desirable to have a deep sharing of objectives, tasks and responsibilities relating to the Europe 2020 strategy between the European Union, the Member States and local and regional authorities.

For the above reasons, I voted in favour of the aforementioned motion for a resolution.

Marianne Thyssen (PPE), *in writing*. – (NL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, bringing about an exit strategy from the crisis is crucial in the short term, but something more is needed in the medium term. If we really want to give social market economy, our social model, a chance, we need more economic growth, green growth, that will make us competitive and create new jobs. Undertaking further investment in research and development, in innovative products, production processes and services, is crucial if we are to maintain our standard of living in the global economy.

This impetus towards structural reform is reflected in the '2020 strategy' proposed by the Commission. It is also crucial that the Commission change tack and focus on a number of smaller targets which are measurable and tailored to individual Member States. As the resolution rightly suggests, the strategy will fall short of ensuring that the stated objectives are enforceable. The absence of a genuine penalty mechanism if the objectives are not met, or even if insufficient efforts are made to that end, means that this '2020 strategy' is flawed in the same way as its predecessor.

The joint resolution provides a good basis for further discussions with the Commission, the Council and the President of the European Council. I therefore emphatically voted in favour of this resolution.

Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (EL) The joint motion for a resolution by the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament and the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe on the EU 2020 strategy expresses the joint decision by the political face of capital to use every means to implement the savage attack and anti-grassroots plans of the monopolies against the working classes and workers throughout the EU. The EU 2020 strategy follows on from and extends the anti-grassroots Lisbon Strategy by laying down the strategic objectives and plans of monopoly capital and laying the workers' fundamental wage and social rights on a Procrustean bed. To be precise, we have: widespread application of the famous 'flexicurity', in conjunction with 'lifelong learning', 'training and retraining' and 'mobility' of workers, abolition of collective agreements, shared jobs, drastic wage and pension cuts, an increase in the retirement age and sweeping changes in social insurance, health, welfare and education. It also gives capital massive sums from State coffers in the form of subsidies and incentives for 'green development'. The Greek Communist Party voted against the European Parliament resolution on the EU 2020 strategy.

Anna Záborská (PPE), *in writing*. – (FR) Long ago, Jacques Delors used to say that one cannot fall in love with a single market or a single currency. I am in love with a Union that takes the real needs of families in the Member States seriously, in strict accordance with national and European competences. However, on reading the EU 2020 strategy and our parliamentary resolution, I find that our ambitions are limited to a shy flirtation with the free market economy. There is no acknowledgement of the citizens' investment in social cohesion or solidarity between the generations. Should we not change our perspective on labour relations and the creation of the added value from which society as a whole benefits? The Commission is proposing a quantified target for combating poverty. This move will inevitably bring back the creaming-off process, which hardly helps the poorest citizens. The absence of a list of poverty indicators inadvertently demonstrates a lack of understanding of what poverty means. Poverty means much more than simply being out of work, and those who experience extreme poverty on a daily basis are not just looking for a job; they want proper access to existing rights. Europe 2020 should respond to this situation with greater enthusiasm and determination. I abstained.

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0136/2010

Elena Băsescu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) I read both Judge Richard Goldstone's report and the conclusions of the ambassador Dora Hold, which dismantle many of the arguments presented in the report of the UN Commission headed by Judge Goldstone. While comparing them, I noted the biased tone of the Goldstone report and therefore, I have not supported the resolution on applying the recommendations from the Goldstone report on Israel and Palestine.

Actions must be analysed in a transparent and impartial way in relation to both sides in the conflict. The Goldstone report fails to mention the reason that triggered the Israeli operation in Gaza: nearly 12 000 attacks with rockets and mortars against Israeli civilians. Following the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza, the number of rocket attacks has risen by 500%. While in 2004 and 2005, 281 and 179 rocket attacks respectively were launched against Israeli territory, following the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza (in September 2005) the number of attacks has risen to 946 in 2006, 783 in 2007, while 1 730 attacks took place in 2008.

Not a single Member State of the European Union has voted in favour of adopting the Goldstone report as part of the United Nations Human Rights Council. Compliance with international law must be a priority for all the parties involved.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI), *in writing*. – We decided to abstain on all of the votes on Palestine and Israel. We could not vote for resolutions that purported to give the European Union the power to conduct foreign policy or that were inconsistent with our policy of neutrality on the conflict. We do take a neutral policy position between Israel, the Palestinians and other Arab and Muslim countries. However, our policy is not a neutrality of indifference. In particular, we recognise that attacks on civilians either by states or by organisations are entirely unacceptable. Furthermore, we would be gratified to see an end to the conflict by an honourable settlement.

Nessa Childers (S&D), *in writing*. – Having visited Gaza earlier this year, I have seen in person how vital it is that Parliament acts in this area. The Goldstone recommendations need to be implemented in full, and I will be tracking this issue over the coming months.

Derek Roland Clark (EFD), *in writing*. – Whilst I recognise that the conflict in Gaza and the West Bank is a humanitarian tragedy, my votes do not support the existence of international influence of the European Institutions as I do not recognise the European Union. My votes in Parliament on 10 March 2010 reflect my conscience on this subject.

Proinsias De Rossa (S&D), *in writing*. – I sponsored this resolution which stresses that respect for International Human Rights and Humanitarian law is an essential prerequisite for a just and lasting peace in the Middle East; it expresses concern at the pressures being exerted on NGOs by Israeli and Gaza authorities because they cooperated with the Goldstone enquiry; it calls for an unconditional end to the blockade of Gaza and calls for Europe to publicly urge Israel and Palestinians to implement the Goldstone recommendations. The Goldstone report itself concludes that the extremely high mortality among civilians, including over 300 children, arose from an Israeli policy of deliberately using disproportionate force contrary to international law. It also concluded that the siege of Gaza is tantamount to collective punishment of the 1.5m population, contrary to international law. It recommends that the State Parties to the Geneva Conventions (which includes Ireland) should prosecute those responsible for these policies and their implementation. I am currently preparing a formal complaint to the Irish Police based on the findings of the Goldstone report, to enable the Director of Public Prosecutions to consider the case for prosecutions in Ireland of those responsible.

Göran Färm, Anna Hedh, Olle Ludvigsson, Marita Ulvskog and Åsa Westlund (S&D), *in writing*. – (SV) We Swedish Social Democrats do not believe that Hamas should be included on the EU list of terrorist organisations. We are very critical of Hamas and, not least, of its attacks on the Israeli civilian population, but, at the same time, we are concerned that the unconditional condemnation by the EU may aggravate the situation and cause Hamas to shut itself off even more. We do not share the opinion that the EU's decision to continue the political isolation of Hamas following its success in a free and democratic election is the right one. We believe that the EU must compare the possibility of achieving success by means of isolation and sanctions with the use of critical dialogue and cooperation.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Anyone who has followed for many years, as I have, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, can only conclude with sadness that many of the sincere efforts for a lasting peace continue to be insufficient to persuade and motivate those who have opted for violence to abandon it once and for all. The electoral victory of Hamas and the partitioning into two parts of the Palestinian territory, with each under its own authority, have significantly exacerbated an already grim situation.

As long as Hamas does not accept the legitimate existence of the State of Israel, dialogue will be no more than play-acting. For its part, Israel will have to take care that the stances that it adopts are appropriate and proportional, lest it endangers the international legitimacy which it currently has. Like Yitzhak Rabin, I also believe that diplomatic peace is not quite a genuine peace, but it is an essential step towards it. It is necessary to work in this direction and to remove the obstacles blocking steps towards genuine peace. The report of Judge Goldstone notes some obstacles put in place by both sides in this process, namely abuses and serious crimes which must be investigated, judged and punished.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Attention must be paid to the armed conflict that started in Gaza on 27 December 2008 and ended on 18 January 2009, causing the death of over 1 400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis. The loss of human lives was coupled with the destruction of most civilian infrastructure.

The High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Member States must work towards an EU common position on how to act on the Inquiry Mission's report on the conflict in the Gaza Strip and in Southern Israel.

I want to emphasise that the respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law is essential to the achievement of a fair and lasting peace in the Middle East.

I agree with the call for the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Member States to control the implementation of the recommendations contained in the Goldstone report through the consultation of external missions of the EU and the NGOs that operate in this field.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The adoption of this resolution on the conflict in Gaza by Parliament was a positive step as it recognises the violations of international law by Israel. This proves the impact which the Goldstone report has had on the Middle East peace process by making the constant violations of international law committed by Israel known within Parliament.

The truth is that the Goldstone report contains clear proof of the violations of international humanitarian law committed by the Israeli forces in Palestinian territory during its military operations in 2008.

For this reason, we want the conclusions of this report to be immediately adopted and its recommendations to be put into practice. At the same time, we urge European Union officials to ensure that there will be no strengthening of the EU-Israel association agreement as long as there is no end to the violations of international law and fundamental human rights which Israel continues to commit in the occupied territories of Palestine.

Charles Goerens (ALDE), in writing. – (FR) This is yet another retrospective assessment of the mistakes made by each of the parties involved in the conflict. If the same causes produce the same effects, there is reason to question the causes since the effects are always disastrous. The same causes are the launching of rockets over Israeli cities. The same causes are the disproportionate counterattack by the State of Israel. The same causes are the wretched situation of the inhabitants of Gaza. The same causes are also the exploitation of their misery by the most radical factions. Here is an idea: why not start supporting only those forces in the two camps that have genuinely chosen peace? Those forces exist on both sides and they are all too often accused of betraying their own people since they dream of a scenario in which it is possible to transcend the divisions in a region which has long been the backdrop of one of the most dangerous conflicts on the planet.

Sylvie Guillaume (S&D), in writing. – (FR) I voted in favour of the resolution calling for the implementation of the Goldstone recommendations because it is vitally important to obtain a pledge from the Israeli and Palestinian authorities that they will carry out impartial and transparent investigations into the Gaza tragedy of 2008-2009, not in an aggressive but in a determined way. The Member States, for their part, must work even harder to defend a strong position and must commit themselves to keeping up these demands on their Israeli and Palestinian partners. International humanitarian law must be respected by all the parties involved in the conflict, and the EU's objective must be to ensure respect for these principles.

Joe Higgins (GUE/NGL), in writing. – I voted in favour of this resolution as it underlines the horrific circumstances that the vast majority of the Palestinian population in Gaza live in today and, in particular, calls for the 'immediate' and 'unconditional' opening of all Gaza's borders. I fully support the right of the Palestinian population to self-determination and their right to defend themselves against the repeated attacks of the Israeli army and state forces. However, I strongly disagree with the ideas of right-wing political Islam and of Hamas. I also oppose individual attacks against Jewish workers that further divide Israeli and Palestinian working class people. This only serves the Israeli Government and other extreme right wing groupings in Israel with a pretext to launch further attacks on the Palestinian population. The Israeli Government does not serve the interests of the Palestinian masses, nor of the Israeli working class. Attacks on living standards and democratic rights need to be jointly defeated by Israeli and Palestinian workers. The only solution that can achieve lasting peace in the region is a socialist Israel, alongside a socialist Palestine, in which borders are mutually agreed by both communities and are part of a democratic socialist confederation of the Middle East.

David Martin (S&D), in writing. – I strongly support the findings of the Goldstone report, and am pleased that the Parliament has endorsed its recommendations. I hope the process of lasting peace through a two state solution will be supported by the Goldstone findings.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The EU should be deeply concerned for the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict which, in addition to the victims it has caused, has, for decades, created great instability in the region and in the world.

Even so, I believe that there are differences between what Israel does, as a democratic and sovereign state which shares and promotes the basic values of Western societies, and radical movements such as Hamas which, in the majority of instances, refuses to recognise the existence of the State of Israel. This serves as an obstacle to a full resolution of the conflict.

This does not prevent us condemning, in all situations, the acts of violence which have occurred on both sides of the conflict, which have shocked the world and which can only motivate and commit us still more to finding ways to promote understanding.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) Today's joint motion for a resolution on the Goldstone report once again gives expression to the EU's striving for a fair assessment and review of events during the conflict in Gaza. On 26 February 2010, both sides were once again called on by the UN General Assembly to carry out credible investigations and to submit further reports within five months. The Palestinian authorities have now instituted an independent investigative panel, which is very good news. The European Union's actions on the international stage must be focused on strict compliance with the principles and objectives of the UN charter and of international law. Similarly, compliance with international humanitarian law and the norms of international human rights law by Israel and by the Palestinians is a material prerequisite for the peace process, which is to lead to two States, coexisting in peace and security. With this resolution, the EU is attempting to prompt the attainment of a settled common position on the measures resulting from the report by the UN Fact-Finding Mission on the conflict in Gaza and southern Israel led by Justice Goldstone. The report also argues for publicly advocating that the recommendations of the report should be implemented and that responsibility should be assumed for all violations of international law, including imputed war crimes, for which reason I voted in favour.

Franz Obermayr (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) The joint motion for a resolution on the Goldstone report expounds the European Union's wish for an investigation of the events surrounding the conflict in Gaza fairly and in detail. On 26 February 2010, the UN General Assembly, too, once again called for an investigation within five months into the incidents and the alleged serious human rights violations. According to the latest information, so far, only the Palestinian side has complied, which is a great shame. In my opinion, the European Union must actively go in to bat in international organisations and committees for compliance with and the implementation of international law. That very respect for compliance with international humanitarian law and the norms of international human rights law by both parties in the conflict would be a basic precondition in the Middle Eastern conflict for discernible progress in the peace process, which could now suffer a serious setback, once again, as a result of Israel's planned settlement construction. The joint resolution calls for the recommendations of the report by the UN Fact-Finding Mission on the conflict in Gaza and southern Israel led by Justice Goldstone to be implemented, for which reason I voted 'yes'.

Wojciech Michał Olejniczak (S&D), *in writing*. – (PL) Human rights must be respected by all sides in the Middle East conflict. Every suspicion that human rights have been violated, by any of the sides, should be checked. Here, however, an identical approach must be used for all the sides of the conflict. The Goldstone report is a document which has created a great deal of emotion and controversy. It has met with numerous accusations of partiality. Many have pointed out that the report does not give equal treatment to all the factors which led to the conflict. The international community must not, however, turn its back on the conflict. The Goldstone recommendations include a proposal to conduct international investigations of crimes alleged to have been committed by any of the sides in the conflict. The realities of the Middle East conflict place a question mark over the possibility of doing this. There is a serious danger that the European Parliament will not be able to monitor actions taken by Hamas, but only those carried out by Israel. Taking these circumstances into account, I decided to vote against adoption of the joint resolution at the final vote.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE), *in writing*. – (CS) I have not supported the joint resolution of the socialists, the liberals, the left block and the Greens on applying the recommendations of the Goldstone report on Israel. This report was adopted by the General Assembly of the UN in November last year, by only five out of 27 EU Member States. The reason for this is that the report was not responsibly analysed at the level of the Human Rights Council, and thus the General Assembly voted on an unbalanced report, which describes Israel as a terrorist organisation. I am one of those politicians who strive for an objective and uncompromising investigation into all cases of alleged human rights violation in the Gaza conflict. At stake, however, is the credibility of the conclusions of the investigation. It is not acceptable to allow the politicisation of an ongoing

investigation, which has yet to be completed. The aim, after all, should be to achieve a peaceful solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and the future prosperity of two independent states, Israel and Palestine, and not a power struggle between Europe and the US for influence in this region.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), in writing. – I voted in favour of motion for a resolution RC7-0136/2010 on the Goldstone Recommendations, mainly because it insists on asking for a strong EU position on the follow-up to the Goldstone report and that implementation of its recommendations and accountability for all violations of international law should be publicly demanded, it asks all parties to conduct investigations that meet with international standards within five months, and it demands active monitoring of the implementation of the report by the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission and the EU Member States. Furthermore, it adds new points to what Parliament has already said in the past, such as asking the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the Commission to assess the results of the investigations by all parties and report back to Parliament, recalls that the responsibility and credibility of the EU and its Member States require full monitoring of the investigations and shows concern about pressure put on NGOs involved in the drawing up of the Goldstone report and in the follow-up investigations, including reference to the restrictive measures imposed on their activities.

Olle Schmidt and Cecilia Wikström (ALDE), in writing. – (SV) This is not a good time to adopt a resolution on Israel. We can soon expect to receive a full evaluation of the Goldstone report and I believe that we should not anticipate it. The situation is a sensitive one and the conflict between the parties has become polarised. We must not aggravate the situation by adopting a resolution which will definitely be regarded as unsatisfactory by the parties involved. I also find it strange that the EU can adopt a resolution on a mandate which was not supported by any of the EU Member States on the UN Human Rights Council.

Marek Siwiec (S&D), in writing. – (PL) I do not think the joint resolution on implementation of the Goldstone recommendations on Israel/Palestine fully reflects the views expressed by Members of the European Parliament during the debate which took place in Brussels on 24 February. The resolution does not adequately represent the position of the majority of the political groups which helped to create the document. The report to which the resolution refers – the Goldstone report – is biased, and does not treat all the factors which led to the conflict equally. In addition, the joint resolution does not mention the circumstances which led to the conflict, neither does it contain any reference to the 8 000 attacks on Israeli civilians organised by Hamas and other armed groups. Nor is there any information on the way Hamas has ignored the ceasefire.

Item 7 of the document I am referring to shows plainly that the European Parliament will not be able to monitor actions taken by Hamas, but only those carried out by Israel. Such a position reduces the credibility of Israel's judicial system, and also of Israeli institutions, and undermines their ability to conduct investigations. Therefore, at the final vote, I voted against adoption of the joint resolution.

Catherine Soullie (PPE), in writing. – (FR) Reducing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict to a mere comparison of the number of deaths in one or the other warring camp can only distort our view of this war, which has been going on for too long now. We all agree that it is difficult to find a solution to this conflict, since the causes themselves are complex and deeprooted. Thus, seeing things in purely black and white terms is impossible in this area of the world.

The mission led by Judge Goldstone was tasked solely with listing the violations of international law. Although not all of the conclusions in this report are unjustifiable, voting against these resolutions, which approved the approach and the conclusions of a text that I believe has been managed in a biased fashion but, above all, on the basis of incomplete objectives, struck me as being the most honest intellectual solution.

Yes, we do need to denounce and stop the abuses that are committed by one or the other of the warring parties in that region, but we need to be very careful with regard to the procedure used if we want the justice to be established in the region to lead us in the direction of a lasting peace.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), in writing. – (NL) I voted in favour of the joint resolution on the Goldstone report, not least because it recognises that the people of Gaza continue to live under appalling conditions as a consequence of the blockade and because it calls for an immediate, permanent and unconditional opening of the border crossings. The approved text pushes for the implementation of the recommendations in the Goldstone report and for accountability for all the violations of international law, including the war crimes allegations. The report is the result of a balanced and thorough investigation, which was based on field visits and witness interviews.

According to the report, the parties involved committed violations of international humanitarian law. The report holds senior officers of the Israeli army to account for the following: for the indiscriminate use of white phosphorus, for making no distinction between civilians and combatants, for the human consequences of the blockade, which is an instrument of collective punishment, and for a breach of martial law.

The report contains enough elements to require the UN Secretary General and the Security Council to start legal proceedings, which will be the best way to guarantee that all the doubts and discussions surrounding the events in Gaza are eliminated. I find it regrettable that the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) have not thrown any weight behind this text.

Charles Tannock (ECR), in writing. – The ECR Group does not recognise a substantial amount of the Goldstone report and hence we did not vote in favour of the PPE motion for resolution and the joint motion for resolution. The ECR Group has grave concerns about the legitimacy and biased nature of the report produced by Judge Goldstone and, especially, do not want to see members of the IDF or politicians indicted for war crimes. We do support continued talks for peace and security in the region, we support a two-state solution and we do recognise the humanitarian issues brought about by the ongoing conflict in the region.

Róża Gräfin von Thun Und Hohenstein (PPE), in writing. – (PL) As a global player, the European Union should keep in view not just the good of its citizens, but should also not forget to maintain a world perspective. For this reason, decisions made by Members of the European Parliament should be based on a reality which is more than just European. Voting on the resolution on implementation of the recommendations of Justice Goldstone's report, before the report has been adopted by the UN, is a mistake.

Leaving aside the fact that there was not enough time to debate the report, we were not given a presentation of the report which included comprehensive coverage of the opposing arguments. In a situation in which the Member States of the European Union are not showing the will to take consistent action on Israel and Palestine, adoption by the European Parliament of any kind of resolution is not helpful to the peace process in the Middle East.

For these reasons, I abstained from voting on the resolution of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), and voted against the joint resolution put forward by the other parties. I have particular reservations concerning items J and 10 of the joint resolution, which, while they underline the tragic situation of the residents of the Gaza Strip, do not explain that this is a direct result of the rule of Hamas – a group considered by the international community to be a terrorist organisation. Furthermore, I cannot agree with items 2 and 4 of the joint resolution, which call for implementation of the Goldstone recommendations, while not all of them are legitimate.

Dominique Vlasto (PPE), in writing. – (FR) Thanks to the Goldstone report, it has been possible to highlight the need for independent investigations to be carried out quickly in order to establish the reality of events and the responsibility of the parties involved, and to draw conclusions from any violations of international law and humanitarian law committed during the Gaza conflict. These investigations must be conducted in an honest fashion by the Palestinian and Israeli public authorities. I hope that they will thus be able to facilitate a resumption of negotiations, and I therefore unreservedly support the principle of the investigations. I would also like to emphasise that this conflict in Gaza has caused the destruction of many projects financed by the European Union and intended to mitigate the humanitarian crisis suffered by the population, which is the victim of a shortage of staple goods and of a lack of access to basic public services. The population on the ground needs to be given hope and to continue to believe in a swift resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian problem. It is only under these circumstances that the conditions will be in place to achieve a just and lasting peace between a Palestinian state and an Israeli state that are viable, safe and peaceful neighbours.

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0134/2010

Diogo Feio (PPE), in writing. – (PT) It is not long since I reminded Parliament that elections are not free in Belarus, that freedom of expression, association and protest do not exist and that there have been an increasing number of repressive activities directed by the authorities. Furthermore, political prisoners have still not been freed, the death penalty has not been abolished and there has been no guarantee of either the separation of powers, in particular, the independence of the judiciary, or respect for human rights.

The recent use of the police against the Union of Poles in Belarus and the denial of the rights that they were seeking are two further episodes which serve to weaken European confidence in the Belarusian dictatorship. They call for all European democrats, particularly European institutions and the governments of the Member States, to provide rigorous vigilance and a firm and coordinated reaction to the Minsk authorities, which

continue to be loyal to the worst legacies of communism. The European Union cannot be the partner of a Belarus which does not respect either its own nationals or international law. As the saying goes in my country: 'better alone than in bad company!'.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The European Union should not recognise the legitimacy of the Belarusian Parliament until free elections are held in that country. Therefore, I call on the Belarusian authorities to undertake a complete reform of the country's electoral legislation, in accordance with the recommendations of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe/Office on Democratic Institutions and Human Rights.

The actions of the Belarusian authorities against the members of the organisation that represents the Polish national minority are absolutely reprehensible, as are the politically biased trials and the fact that the judicial authorities apparently take orders from the executive. The EU cannot agree with the decision of the Belarusian authorities to limit Internet access or with the lack of guarantees of freedom of the press, freedom of peaceful assembly and association and freedom to worship in churches other than the Belarusian Orthodox Church, as well as other rights and political freedoms.

I argue that the level of Community cooperation with the Belarusian authorities should be directly proportional to the level of respect for human rights in that country. I still share the concerns about the Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy's statement on the repression of the Polish national minority, which was weak and late.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Since the end of the Cold War, relations between Belarus and the West have been moving forwards in the development of a new understanding and the European Union has been developing positive dialogue in terms of providing Belarus with incentives to make progress relating to democracy and human rights.

The above notwithstanding, the EU cannot accept actions which conflict with international principles and legislation regarding the rights of national minorities. The EU cannot hold relative opinions regarding human rights.

Kristiina Ojula (ALDE), *in writing*. – (ET) Mr President, as a co-author of the European Parliament's resolution on the situation regarding civil society and minorities in Belarus, I voted in favour of the resolution. Although, last year, the Lukashenko regime freed political prisoners and has become somewhat milder, the European Union cannot look the other way in the face of the recent human rights violations concerning members of the Union of Poles in Belarus. It is only possible to extend the benefits of the EU's Eastern Partnership to Belarusian citizens if the Belarusian administration guarantees the human rights and civic freedoms of Belarusians and begins democratic reforms. The concessions made by the regime up to this point have been continually insufficient, and the arrest of the leader of the Union of Poles in Belarus, Angelika Borys, as well as the refusal to allow the movement to be registered and the freezing of its assets, are yet another blow to relations with the European Union. In my opinion, following the continual violation of human rights principles and the rule of law, the European Union has no option but to consider reimposing sanctions on the Belarusian administration.

Wojciech Michał Olejniczak (S&D), *in writing*. – (PL) I voted in favour of adoption of the joint motion for a resolution of the European Parliament (RC-B7-0134/2010). Several months ago, the European Parliament adopted a resolution calling on the Belarusian authorities to end the use of capital punishment on its citizens. Today, once again, we are talking about Belarus, violations of human rights and the principles of civil society. The European Union has opened up to Belarus. We have put the right measures in place, such as inclusion of Belarus in the Eastern Partnership. The trust we have placed in Belarus was supposed to initiate a switch to the tracks of democratisation and respect for civil rights. Unfortunately, this has not happened. In view of this, the European Union must be firm and adopt a stronger position on relations with Belarus, and must take effective action which will guarantee that the rights of minorities will be respected. I hope the present resolution will initiate changes in the desired direction. If this does not happen, I expect a review of the European Union's approach to Belarus and the imposition of appropriate sanctions. Every ineffective solution will be evidence of our weakness.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – I voted in favour of this resolution which was, in fact, a text agreed among all the major groups, including ours. The resolution was unanimously adopted.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE), *in writing*. – (PL) The absence of freedom of speech, problems with registering political and even social organisations and the use of State media for propaganda purposes are

symptomatic of excessively authoritarian functioning of the State. The Union has extended a helping hand to Belarus in the form of inclusion in the Eastern Partnership, a programme which is intended to strengthen democracy and the rule of law. The activities of the Belarusian authorities do not meet international standards for the rules governing conduct towards the opposition and non-governmental organisations or standards concerning the protection of national minorities. It is important to find an adept way out of the situation, in which the Union should show its disapproval by specific measures, such as sanctions or visa restrictions, but, at the same time, we must not isolate Belarus from the rest of Europe, because all of Belarusian society will suffer, and not the authorities condemned by the Union. We should show Belarus how much it can profit from cooperation with the EU, and stipulate that the extent to which Belarus complies with EU requirements will be reflected in the support on which Belarus can rely.

Artur Zasada (PPE), in writing. – (PL) I was pleased to hear the results of today's vote. We have adopted a resolution in which we condemn the recent repressions against the Polish minority in Belarus. Adoption of the document by acclamation has a special implication. It is a vote of the entire Parliament, of all the political groups and of the representatives of the 27 Member States of the European Union. I do not imagine that Belarus will benefit from what is being offered under the Eastern Partnership without the prior re-legalisation of the Union of Poles in Belarus and the return of its property, and, in addition, without the release of political prisoners such as Andrei Bandarenko, Ivan Mikhailau and Arystom Dubski. Today, we have sent Belarus a clear signal. We are now awaiting a response.

Motion for a resolution B7-0133/2010

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), in writing. – (LT) The European Council has underlined that it is important to revise the economic and social contract between financial institutions and the society they serve and to ensure that, in the good times, society is able to take advantage of the benefits provided and is protected from risk. In this matter, the European Council has called on the IMF to consider all possibilities when carrying out a review, including taxes for financial transactions on a global scale. I support this resolution and think that the European Union must reach an agreement on a common position in this matter.

The European Commission must prepare an impact assessment of a general tax on financial transactions and examine its merits and shortcomings. I also agree with the resolution's provision that we must analyse at Community level how the financial sector might fairly help cover damage done to the economy because of it or damage that is linked to government interventions aimed at stabilising the banking system.

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The current motion for a resolution, which comes in the wake of the G20 discussions conducted as part of the Pittsburgh Summit and of the request made by some international bodies, such as the IMF, may provide a solution for both avoiding any new financial disasters and for recovering the sums which the treasuries have made available to the banks to save them from collapse. In any case, the adoption of such legislation in France and Belgium, in a pioneering spirit, is welcome (with the United Kingdom also examining the possibility of introducing similar legislation), and we expect to see its impact.

According to French estimates, the 0.005% tax will remove more than EUR 20 billion from the coffers of French banks. However, how is the banking sector going to respond? Will it restrict the number of speculative transactions, considered harmful, or will it take advantage of capital mobility and continue to carry out such transactions through bank branches located in states where this kind of duty does not exist?

This is why I think that the success of such duties requires a global approach, which also means presenting it to international bodies such as the UN. Even by doing this, it is difficult to believe that a joint global action can be achieved (compare offshore legislations).

Marielle De Sarnez (ALDE), in writing. – (FR) By supporting the resolution adopted today by a very large majority (536 votes to 80, with 33 abstentions), the French delegation of the Democratic Movement has repeated its wish to have an impact assessment and practical proposals from the European Commission on the creation of taxes on financial transactions. We call on the Commission to draft a proposal in order to define a common European position to be presented to the G20 in June. It would also be a good idea to evaluate the extent to which a tax such as this could help to stabilise the financial markets. The questions to which the Commission should provide answers concern the use of this tax to support developing countries' adaptation to climate change and the financing of development cooperation, but also the levers that the Commission could use to persuade its partners to join it in implementing this tax so as to prevent the migration of capital. Above all, however, an in-depth impact assessment must be carried out to ensure that

this tax will not reduce the Union's competitiveness or sustainable investment, nor have negative repercussions for SMEs and individual investors.

Harlem Désir (S&D), in writing. – (FR) In 2000, I tabled with the Globalisation Intergroup the first resolution calling for the Commission to examine the feasibility of a tax on speculative capital flows. The resolution was not adopted, since it was just short of the number of votes required. Ten years have passed, the G20, like several Member States, is no longer ruling out the idea of such a tax, and above all, the financial crisis has served to remind us of the damage that volatile financial markets can cause.

That is why I welcome the adoption by a wide margin of the resolution on taxes on financial transactions. This is only a small step, but the message is clear. Parliament is calling on the Commission to finally take up the issue and to work on an implementation project. A tax such as this would have the twin advantage of helping to stabilise the markets and of generating huge revenues to help developing countries finance their adaptation to climate change and the fight against poverty.

Objectors tell us that it will only be effective if it is global, but make a start we must, as some countries have done with the tax on flight tickets. A waitandsee policy will get us nowhere. We must show the way.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The financial sector has to accept its responsibilities for the economic crisis that still plagues us. Up to now, the real economy, taxpayers, consumers, public services and society in general have been the ones paying for a substantial part of the costs and consequences of the financial crisis. There are several Member States that have called for a tax on financial transactions.

The political and regulatory context in this area is different nowadays. There are new regulatory initiatives, such as the fight against tax havens, the removal of legal loopholes from management accounts, the requirements applicable to stock market transactions and the use of transaction repositories for the register of derived instruments.

The European Union must adopt a common position in the international framework of meetings of the G20. In order to do this, the Commission must assess the impact of a global tax on financial transactions before the next G20 summit.

This assessment must specifically evaluate the effects of the introduction of the tax on financial transactions in the European Union, as opposed to its introduction at global level. Costs have to be determined, as well as whether this tax will contribute to the stabilisation of financial markets.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The various statements made in the preamble to the resolution now approved by a majority of Parliament are positive to see. This is particularly true of the statement that the financial sector must take a fair share of the burden of economic recovery and development, given that up until it now it has been the real economy of taxpayers, consumers, public services and society in general which has had to pay a substantial part of the costs and consequences of the financial crisis. However, beyond this, there was almost regret for any action which might help to lead to a possible tax on financial transactions, through the attachment of many constraints to the application of the resolution. That is why we abstained.

Regrettably, there has been a delay in applying new regulatory initiatives and in advancing the promised fight against tax havens, the removal of legal omissions regarding management accounts, the requirements applicable to stock market transactions and the use of trade repositories for the registration of derivative instruments. It is necessary to make decisive progress and not continue in these muddy waters, which only serve to help financial speculators and large capitalist interests.

David Martin (S&D), in writing. – I support a tax of financial transactions, and I am very pleased that this initiative is gaining such support. In order to be effective, it should be a global tax, and I support measures to introduce such a charge on financial transactions.

Arlene McCarthy (S&D), in writing. – We have voted overwhelmingly today to maintain the political momentum behind a global financial transaction tax (FTT). It is clear that the time has come for radical action to ensure the financial sector pays its way in the wake of the crisis and an FTT could be an important tool. It has strong support from the public and from NGOs and Unions across Europe. An FTT could help reduce volatile and risky financial trading while raising billions to help tackle the effects of climate change and help developing countries who have been hit hardest by the financial crisis. This resolution calls for the Commission to analyse options for such a tax and sends a clear signal that Europe will push for a global agreement to deliver on the public's demand for action. It is disappointing that the ECR Group and its Conservative Members, who are clearly against any financial transaction tax, have chosen in their statements to deliberately

misrepresent today's vote as a call for an EU-only FTT. If Europe takes no action and comes to no view, then we will be left out of the international debate – our vote today is a mandate instead for Europe to help lead this debate.

Nuno Melo (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The Portuguese Democratic and Social Centre Party is, as a rule, against the creation of European taxes. There is also the fact that taxes are important tools at the disposal of the Member States, and more so than ever in difficult times, such as the present crisis. Finally, the different taxation options, whether via taxes or contributions, which are exercised in the various Member States, would necessarily give the tax in question here a more or less penalising quality, allowing injustices at European level, which would not make sense.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), in writing. – (DE) For me, it is an unavoidable truth that the financial sector should contribute fairly to the recovery and development of the economy, especially given that considerable costs and the consequences of the financial crisis were borne by the real economy, taxpayers, consumers, the public sector and society as a whole. A potential tax on financial transactions could reduce the immense volume of speculation capital that has again had a detrimental impact on the real economy recently, and thus also represent a step towards sustainable growth. However, before we consider introducing such a tax, we must carefully weigh the pros and cons. That process is exactly what the resolution proposed by the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs is calling for, which is why I voted in favour of the resolution. A crucial point that is only mentioned in passing in the text but that must be clearly defined before a decision is made is the potential use of the capital that could be generated by such a tax. I believe that the tax must be levied where the transaction takes place, and must also, in other words, benefit the States on whose territory the relevant stock exchanges are located. The exact method of calculation still has to be specified. If the EU insists on levying the tax itself, it must, in any case, be offset against the gross contribution of the Member State in question. Under no circumstances may it be allowed to lead to a tax competence on the part of the EU.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), in writing. – I voted in favour, today, of motion for resolution B7-0133/2010 on taxation of financial transactions, and am delighted that, for the first time, Parliament has demanded an assessment of the feasibility and impact of introducing a financial transaction tax at EU level. This is considerable progress. Pressure must now be exerted on the Commission to propose concrete steps. European citizens expect the costs of the financial crisis to be borne by those on the financial markets who caused it. We cannot therefore be content with a minimalist solution in line with the US proposal, which would generate a few billion euro – a relatively small revenue considering the huge costs. Poverty reduction, the fight against climate change and tackling the financial crisis require additional revenue of several hundred billion euro. A cleverly designed financial transaction tax would provide such a revenue, while simultaneously curbing speculation on financial markets.

Motion for a resolution B7-0132/2010

Edite Estrela (S&D), in writing. – (PT) I voted in favour of the resolution on the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) which aims to promote the creation of an integrated market for services involving payments in euro, which will involve effective competition and in which there will be no difference between payments in national or foreign euro.

SEPA continues to work in an imperfect way and it does not cater for the real needs of its users. The European Community must set an appropriate and binding deadline regarding the use of SEPA instruments, after which all euro payments must be made using the norms of this system. It is equally important to ensure that the adoption of this system will not lead to additional costs for the European public.

Diogo Feio (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The creation of the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) is fundamental to the greater integration of the market for payment services. It will increase competition by treating euro payments across borders and within a country in the same way and it may come to have a direct positive impact on the lives of the European public.

As such, it would seem urgent for national governments to implement SEPA services and to make the rules which regulate this initiative adequate so that there will, in fact, be a simplification of the current position regarding payments services and a reduction in costs for the benefit of consumers.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) will be an integrated market for payment services, subject to effective competition and in which there is no difference between

national and cross-border payments in euro. We should have established a legally binding time limit for the migration to SEPA instruments. Public administrations' migration to SEPA is below our expectations.

Therefore, it is important that all interested parties – legislators, the banking sector and the users of the payment services – be involved in the achievement of SEPA. The continued legal validity of existing direct debit authorisations should be ensured in all Member States, since the obligation to sign new authorisations during the transition from national direct debit systems to the SEPA system would be costly.

Thus, the Commission must establish a clear, adequate and legally binding time limit for the migration to SEPA instruments, no later than 31 December 2012, after which all payments in euro will have to be made in accordance with SEPA norms. The Commission must aid public authorities in the migration process by developing integrated and synchronised national migration plans.

Nuno Melo (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) must quickly turn itself into an integrated market for payments services. However, there is much to be done before this can be achieved and, despite the existence of directives which stipulate the framework for SEPA cards and the SEPA direct debit system, the truth is that these systems are not yet in operation. It is thus necessary to overcome all the obstacles to the implementation of the SEPA system so that it can begin to operate fully as quickly as possible. It is important that the transition period does not last beyond 21 October 2012.

Wojciech Michał Olejniczak (S&D), in writing. – (PL) The Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA) is a concept whose introduction will make everyday life easier for millions of Europeans. Irrespective of which Member State they are citizens of, they will easily be able to make rapid and cheap payments to persons or firms in another Member State at the same cost as payments made within the borders of their own country. In an age of Internet banking, this will bring about increased competition between banks, and this will benefit clients. Introduction of the SEPA is the next step towards realisation of one of the four fundamental freedoms of the common market – the free movement of capital. What is extremely important is that the SEPA will lead to an economic rapprochement between countries in the euro area and countries which, although Member States of the European Union, are not part of the euro area, as well as the other countries of the European Free Trade Area.

Therefore, I fully support the European Parliament resolution on the implementation of the Single Euro Payments Area (SEPA). At the same time, I appeal to the European Commission to give priority to the interests of retail banking clients and to questions of the security of the system while monitoring work on the introduction of the SEPA system.

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0154/2010

Kader Arif (S&D), in writing. – (FR) The resolution on ACTA, which has been adopted today and of which I am one of the initiators, is extremely symbolic because it is unanimous. It is a clear signal sent out to the Commission, which has been negotiating this agreement in the utmost secrecy for two years. Parliament demands complete transparency with regard to the negotiations under way, as well as respect for the treaties, which entitle it to receive the same information as the Council. Whether in terms of the method or in terms of what we know of the substance, I am opposed to the way in which the ACTA negotiations are being conducted. We have many fears with regard to the calling into question of the *acquis communautaire*. Aside from the risk of reintroducing the 'flexible' response, respect for the fundamental rights of citizens, in terms of freedom of expression and of protection of privacy and of data, and the principle of nonliability of Internet access providers and hosts could be called into question. Parliament has already proved its commitment to these principles, and if the Commission does not change its strategy, I will lead the campaign against the ratification of ACTA by Parliament, as we have already been able to do for the SWIFT Agreement.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), in writing. – I voted for this resolution. Undoubtedly, better protection of intellectual property rights and combating counterfeiting and piracy are very important issues in the European Union and worldwide, and I very much welcome the opening of negotiations at international level to strengthen IPR and to fight counterfeiting and piracy more effectively. However, I am very disappointed at how those negotiations are taking place.

Under the Lisbon Treaty, the European Parliament has to be informed immediately and fully by the Commission at all stages of international agreements, which is not the case with the ACTA Agreement. Moreover, the European Parliament will have to give its consent to the ACTA Treaty prior to its entry force in the EU. How will we be able to do it if we are kept in the dark? I very much hope that the European Commission will fulfil its duty and will provide all necessary information on the state of negotiations.

Jan Březina (PPE), *in writing*. – (CS) Mr President, I have voted for the resolution of the European Parliament on transparency and the current state of negotiations over the ACTA Agreement, because I share the doubts of the authors concerning the progress of negotiations to date. These are taking place under a 'restricted' regime, which means that only the European Commission and EU Member States have access to the negotiating documents. The European Parliament is completely left out, and yet its agreement is an essential precondition for the agreement to come into effect. I take the view that digital content and the handling thereof should not be included in the text of the agreement, and if it is included, the provisions in question should not be of a repressive nature. I strongly believe that the ACTA Agreement should not go beyond the framework of the currently valid intellectual property laws and that any penalties for copying digital content should be left to the discretion of individual states. The protection of privacy and the protection of personal data must remain a pillar of European legislation, which will not be undermined by international legal agreements. I am in favour of an ACTA agreement that will combat counterfeiting, which represents a real danger to the economy and the consumer and undoubtedly violates intellectual property rights. On the other hand, copying that is carried out exclusively for one's own needs should be left out. The inclusion of this would, in my opinion, conflict with the right to personal freedom and to information. In short, counterfeiting and copying cannot be treated in the same way.

Derek Roland Clark (EFD), *in writing*. – Whilst we as a group voted against the ACTA resolution on Wednesday, 10 March 2010, we did so on the principle that the ACTA Treaty itself should not exist in any form. It is a catastrophic violation of individual private property. Had we voted in support of the resolution, we would have been recognising the existence of such legislation, but decided on that basis not to recognise the treaty.

Marielle De Sarnez (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) Despite the Treaty of Lisbon and codecision on international trade, the Commission and the Member States are preventing a public debate from being held on the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA). This lack of transparency arouses genuine suspicion, which can only be diminished by consulting the public and the European Parliament. While the fight against counterfeiting is indeed legitimate and necessary, the ACTA Treaty would make authors' rights and copyright more powerful. Must Internet access providers be allowed to control digital file exchanges and impose penalties on users, including cutting off their Internet connection? The cost of such monitoring would be exorbitant for access providers, and the checks complicated. Moreover, Internet piracy is not yet classed as a crime in either European law or international law. Therefore the idea of systematically imposing penalties on such a large scale is unjustifiable, all the more so given that Internet access, in the name of one's right to information, is still a fundamental freedom. The Commission will have to provide Parliament with a document outlining the negotiations and all the positions under discussion. If it fails to do so, Parliament could reject this text negotiated in secret, just as it rejected the SWIFT Agreement.

Edite Estrela (S&D), *in writing*. – (PT) I voted in favour of the resolution on the transparency and current position of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) negotiations because I support a transparent process in the conduct of negotiations.

Following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, Parliament will have to give its agreement to the text of the ACTA Agreement before it becomes valid in the European Union. Parliament's contribution is essential to guarantee that the means of applying intellectual property rights will not obstruct innovation, competition, protection of personal data and the free movement of information.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) Counterfeiting constitutes one of the principal scourges of the global economy and efforts to combat it notwithstanding, it is evident that there is a manifest incapacity for individual states to bring this fight to a successful conclusion. The risks to the health and safety of consumers which the purchase of certain products can involve are today clear.

From a commercial and industrial point of view, this parallel industry, which illegally feeds off the creativity and fame of others, weakens the value of brands and renders their special role less effective. In this way, although it is important to establish an open, free and just market, this can only succeed if counterfeiting is generally rejected and fought against by the main producers. The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement may be a path which it is worthwhile to tread, but it must be understood and debated in a transparent way beforehand, as opposed to what has happened up until now.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) In 2008, the European Union and other countries of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development opened negotiations for a new multilateral agreement aimed at reinforcing the application of intellectual property rights (IPR) and at taking actions

against counterfeiting and piracy (Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement – ACTA). Together, they decided to approve a confidentiality clause. Any agreement related to ACTA made by the European Union must abide by the legal obligations imposed on the EU on matters of privacy and data protection legislation, as defined in Directive 95/46/EC, in Directive 2002/58/EC and in the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights and of the European Court of Justice (ECJ). In the wake of the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, Parliament will have to give its approval to the text of the ACTA Agreement before it enters into force in the European Union. In addition, the Commission pledged to immediately provide Parliament with complete information throughout the process of negotiating international agreements. Therefore, a legal basis should have been created before the beginning of ACTA negotiations and Parliament should have approved a negotiation mandate. The Commission should submit proposals before the next round of negotiations.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The general condemnation of Parliament regarding the suppression of information by the Commission relating to the ongoing negotiations on the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) and the limitations which, by proceeding in this manner, the Commission has attempted to impose on scrutiny and democratic control, have been quite clear. For this reason, we believe it to be important that the resolution points out that the Commission 'has had a legal obligation to inform Parliament immediately and fully at all stages of international negotiations'.

Democratic and transparent procedures in the conduct of negotiations are required, as well as public debate on their content, something which we consider to be positive. Furthermore, we emphasise the argument for the need to respect 'fundamental rights, such as the right to freedom of expression and the right to privacy, while fully observing the principle of subsidiarity', as well as the protection of personal data. That is why we voted in favour.

Bruno Gollnisch (NI), in writing. – (FR) This draft AntiCounterfeiting Trade Agreement, known as ACTA, may seem like a good idea, so great is the suffering of the European economy and European jobs as a result of these unfair practices in the world of excessive free trade that you are imposing on us. However, as is always the case when there is something fundamentally harmful in an agreement negotiated by the Commission, everything is done in secret.

I am thinking of the Blair House Agreement, which sacrificed European farming to feed the appetites of the US agrifood multinationals. I am also thinking of the scandalous MAI, the Multilateral Agreement on Investment, which sought to exempt multinationals from the laws in force in the countries in which they were operating. Fortunately, that agreement did not see the light of day. In this instance, it is the 'Internet' section of ACTA that is in question: it literally boils down to introducing a monstrous worldwide 'Hadopi' law.

Customs could search the MP3 players, mobile telephones and laptops of any citizen suspected of having illegally downloaded a file. Access providers may be forced to cut their customers' connection or to supply information on them. This is unacceptable, and that is why we have voted in favour of this resolution, which calls for complete transparency in the negotiations and threatens to drag the Commission through the courts if it refuses.

Sylvie Guillaume (S&D), in writing. – (FR) I endorsed the resolution aimed at obtaining complete transparency from the European Commission on the subject of the negotiations on the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), which are currently being held in secret. Aside from the risk of reintroducing the 'flexible response', respect for the fundamental rights of citizens, in terms of freedom of expression and of protection of privacy and data, and the principle of non-liability of Internet access providers and hosts, could be called into question here. It follows that the European Parliament, as the voice of the European peoples, cannot be excluded from these negotiations and must receive the same information as that issued to the Council; this is a democratic requirement. Lastly, ACTA must not compromise access to generic medicines. In this context, considering, at this stage, the method and the worrying rumours circulating about its content, I can only vote in favour of a resolution that is critical of such an agreement.

Małgorzata Handzlik (PPE), in writing. – (PL) In the resolution which has been adopted, the European Parliament has clearly declared its support for greater transparency in the European Commission's negotiations on the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement. Piracy and counterfeiting are a growing problem for the European economy and for other economies throughout the world.

The economies of developing countries are increasingly becoming knowledge-based economies. Therefore, we also need clear and effective principles for the protection of intellectual property rights which will not interfere with innovation and competition, will not place an unjustified burden on legally conducted trade

and will protect our privacy and fundamental rights, such as freedom of speech. This is why the resolution adopted today does not challenge the idea of making the agreement itself. However, the negotiations being conducted by the European Commission are not open.

The European Parliament and European citizens are not being kept up-to-date about progress in the negotiations. This absence of information is a cause for concern. We want greater transparency from the European Commission. We want to know, now, what obligations the European Commission's negotiators are accepting on behalf of 500 million European Union citizens.

Elisabeth Köstinger (PPE), *in writing*. – (DE) The Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) negotiations concerning provisions of copyright law and combating counterfeiting and product and Internet piracy represent, without doubt, an important step towards the protection of intellectual property. Regrettably, the Commission's information policy in relation to the negotiations leaves a lot to be desired.

The lack of transparency about the state of the negotiations makes it difficult for the European Parliament to play a constructive part in drawing up the provisions and thus to ensure, in advance, that there is no curtailment of Europeans' civil rights and no violation of the directives on data protection. I support the motion for a resolution (RC7-0154/2010) and thus the European Parliament's call on the Commission to frame its information policy in relation to the ACTA negotiations in a more transparent, complete and thus also holistic way.

David Martin (S&D), *in writing*. – Transparency of the ACTA negotiations is of vital importance, and I am glad the Parliament has called for full disclosure in such powerful numbers. While I am pleased to hear assurances that individuals will not be criminalised for personal use, and that the ACTA Agreement will not be used to prevent generic medicines reaching developing countries, I hope the Parliament will be able to access all documents and monitor the negotiations to ensure this is upheld.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The lack of transparency in the negotiations of the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA) are contrary to the spirit of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union. It is essential for the Council and the Commission to immediately make available all the documentation which has been the basis of negotiations. Non-compliance with this basic duty by the Commission and by the Council could lead to Parliament using legal procedures to gain access to these documents, something which would harm the prestige of the European institutions involved.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE), *in writing*. – (CS) I would like to thank the rapporteurs and all Members who are responsible for the fact that the European Parliament has clearly expressed its uncompromising position with such a huge majority against the non-transparent negotiation of such an important international agreement. We expect that the agreement will open up a new international dimension in the fight against counterfeiting, but without reducing the right of European citizens to privacy.

I also see a problem in the fact that China has not been invited to the negotiations. In the debate yesterday, the Commission told me that it considered this to be a strategic error as well. The idea that China, which is the largest source of counterfeiting in the world, will sign up to a negotiated agreement later is unrealistic. I trust that our critical report today will persuade the Commission to reassess its approach to Parliament, which has joint decision-making powers in new areas, including foreign policy, thanks to the Treaty of Lisbon.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – I supported resolution RC7-0154/2010 on the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement, and I am glad that a large majority of Parliament did so. ACTA risks becoming known as the 'Absence of Commission Transparency Agreement'. In its negotiations on ACTA, the Commission should be upholding the principles of transparency, human rights and the EU Parliament's legal right to information. Instead, the Commission is failing this litmus test of its compliance in informing Parliament under the terms of the Lisbon Treaty. The EU cannot continue to negotiate on ACTA if the people are not allowed to take part in the process.

It is also a totally absurd and unacceptable situation if MEPs, behind closed doors, have to ask the Commission about the content of the agreements we are supposed to vote on. Furthermore, the EU Parliament has shown that it does not accept secrecy and that it cherishes an open Internet for all. MEPs have also shown that the Parliament will not accept to be treated like a doormat. The Commission has been strongly urged to keep us fully and immediately informed on the ACTA negotiations.

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0181/2010

Harlem Désir (S&D), *in writing*. – (FR) The current generalised system of preferences (GSP) will soon be coming to an end. I voted in favour of the resolution, a specific aim of which is to involve Parliament fully in its revision by 2012. This trade regime enables 176 developing countries and regions to benefit from preferential access to the European market in exchange for their ratification of ILO conventions on social rights and of UN conventions on human rights.

Its implementation is unsatisfactory, however. That is why we demand, before the revision, a report on the current state of ratification, implementation of the conventions, an impact assessment of the effects of the GSP during the period 2006-2009, the inclusion of a condition stipulating that 27 fundamental UN conventions must be implemented, and more transparent investigation processes – involving, in particular, regular consultation of Parliament.

It is regrettable that, during this vote, an amendment calling for an investigation procedure to be carried out in Colombia concerning the numerous killings of trade unionists and the mass graves containing the bodies of hundreds of people killed in the region of La Macarena was not passed because of opposition from the right.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The European Union is the world's largest provider of humanitarian and development aid. We know that, every year, the European Union and the Member States give millions to cooperation and development programmes, that this assistance is necessary and that, in many cases, it makes all the difference.

It is, however, my conviction as a supporter of the market economy that development assistance can (and must) be provided by means of trade policies which benefit developing countries. I believe that within this context, there is a role for the Generalised System of Preferences, which allows developed countries to offer preferential and non-reciprocal treatment on products imported from developing countries.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) It is by no means certain to say, as the resolution does, that the current Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) is a mechanism to help developing countries. This mechanism has effects which accentuate the economic dependence of these countries as it leads to production for export, to the detriment of their internal market. To a large extent, it is the large transnational companies, some of them from EU countries, which benefit from this system, rather than the people of developing countries.

Thus, some of the intentions which are supposed to underlie the GSP create a contradiction with its actual results.

On the other hand, against a backdrop of increasing pressure for the liberalisation of international trade, it is apparent that the EU has been using the aim of this regulation as a form of blackmail to gain acceptance of the aforementioned free trade agreements through an unacceptable level of diplomatic and economic pressure on these countries.

For the GSP to become a mechanism of development aid, there will be a need, as we propose, to abolish and then renegotiate both it and other policies for development assistance, forming an effective solidarity, and combating economic dependency and the exploitation of people and natural resources by economic groups within the EU.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The actions which the European Community has undertaken since 1971 in relation to developing countries through trade preferences under the Generalised System of Preferences are a way of making world trade more just and, at the same time, helping those countries with their growth and economic development.

The current regulations expire in 2011, meaning that it is necessary for us to start making immediate efforts towards working on a new instrument which could maintain and, if possible, even further increase the benefits which this system has been providing to developing states, something which is even more important within the context of leaving the international crisis behind us. If we are to avoid unfairness, it is, however, crucial that the new list of countries which will benefit from this system are realistic about their economic situation.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – In the end, I voted in favour of the common resolution on Generalised Tariff Preferences (GPS) (RC7-0181/2010) although I am very sorry and upset that the Colombian Embassy has been very successful in convincing some of our colleagues to keep out almost all references to

the need to investigate the human rights violations in Colombia and decide on the basis of the findings in order to decide whether to withdraw the tariff preferences for Colombian goods.

Report: Gabriele Albertini (A7-0023/2010)

Charalampos Angourakis (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL) The European Parliament report on the EU Common Foreign and Security Policy, in conjunction with the corresponding report on the Common Security and Defence Policy, produced by the anti-grassroots alliance of conservatives, social democrats and liberals in the European Parliament, maps out the constant support of the political mouthpieces of capital for the promotion of even greater militarisation of the EU, especially following the entry into force of the reactionary Treaty of Lisbon, and their active role in promoting the imperialist policy of the EU and the interventions and wars which it unleashes against third countries and peoples in every corner of the planet, in order to serve the interests and sovereignty of monopoly capital under conditions of escalating imperialist infighting.

The report calls for:

- a) effective organisation of the EU's European External Action Service (founded under the Treaty of Lisbon), the new political/military arm for organising, supporting and implementing the imperialist interventions of the EU;
- b) an increase in spending from the EU budget for its military and political interventions;
- c) better interweaving of the EU's political and military capabilities, with a stronger EU/NATO link being pivotal in the more effective exercise of its imperialist interventions using military means.

The Greek Communist Party voted against and condemns this unacceptable report, which is purely and simply a manual for imperialist attacks against the people.

Elena Oana Antonescu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The European Union must develop its strategic autonomy through a powerful and effective foreign, security and defence policy in order to defend its interests globally, ensure the security of its citizens and promote respect for human rights and democratic values throughout the world. Through having more effective European security agreements, Member States must demonstrate receptiveness towards making the European Union a bigger player on the international stage.

I believe that the Council's next annual report on the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) must refer directly to the implementation of the European Union's foreign policy strategy, assessing its effectiveness, as well as offer the conditions for establishing a specific, direct dialogue with the European Parliament, focused on devising a strategic approach to the Common Foreign and Security Policy.

John Attard-Montalto (S&D), in writing. – I voted against amendment 18 as this amendment, in my opinion, contains a paradox. It deplores the logic of militarisation in its introduction and concludes that 'CFSP should be based on peaceful principles and the demilitarisation of security'. My personal position is in line with my country's international status of neutrality and therefore, as the amendment is not at all lucid, I decided that I could not vote in favour or abstain.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D), in writing. – (LT) I support this report, as I believe that a clear and coordinated Common Foreign and Security Policy may contribute significantly to the strengthening of the European Union's powers at international level. Undoubtedly, one of the most important CFSP matters is the EU's increasing energy dependence on sources of supply and transit routes and the need to curb the EU's energy dependence on third countries. I would like to call on the Commission's Vice-President and High Representative, Catherine Ashton, to implement without hesitation Parliament's recommendations on the creation of a consistent and coordinated policy by firstly promoting EU cohesion in maintaining a constructive dialogue with energy suppliers, particularly Russia, and transit countries, by supporting EU energy priorities, by defending the common interests of Member States, by developing effective diplomatic work in the area of energy, by establishing more effective crisis resolution measures and by promoting energy supply diversification, the use of sustainable energy and the development of renewable energy. I am convinced that only by acting together will the EU, in future, be able to ensure the uninterrupted and secure supply of gas and oil to Member States and increase the energy independence of the whole of the EU.

Göran Färm, Anna Hedh, Olle Ludvigsson, Marita Ulvskog and Åsa Westlund (S&D), in writing. – (SV) We Swedish Social Democrats believe that the partnership between the EU and NATO should not be developed solely on the basis of the UN Charter. Therefore, we think it is important for the wording to include the

perspective of the Member States on this question and to take into consideration the different traditions and positions of the Member States with regard to foreign, security and defence policy.

Diogo Feio (PPE), in writing. – (PT) Like many of the Member States (if not all of them), the European Union finds itself confronted with a budget which is much less grand than its ambitions and in no way sufficient for all that it would like to do. The list of the multiple European values and expectations on this matter emphasise this asymmetry.

The fact that, to achieve excellence, policy is an activity in which it is necessary to predict and take measures assumes a particular relevance when the issues in question are matters which are so essential to our common lives, such as foreign and security policy.

The Treaty of Lisbon and the consequent creation of the post of High Representative indicate the conviction of the Member States that there is a real need for promptness, coordination and convergence in European action in matters of foreign and security policy. Only after action in practice will we be able to see if the provisions of the treaty are sufficient and whether what has been set out in its text will play its role successfully.

I am hoping that the Union will be capable of responding effectively to this important challenge.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The report on the implementation of the European security strategy is an annual document by Parliament that assesses European security and defence policy and presents proposals to improve the efficiency and visibility of this policy. With the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the external action of the EU gains a new dimension and importance. Parliament plays a fundamental role here as a guardian of the democratic legitimacy of external action. The creation of a European External Action Service will serve as a diplomatic corps and instrument for the Union which, hitherto, could only rely on national representation. However, it is crucial that the EU has the necessary budgetary resources at its disposal to reach the goals of external representation.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE), in writing. – (RO) I would like to refer to a few points in the 'Western Balkans' subchapter of the report on the main aspects and basic options of the Common Foreign and Security Policy in 2008.

Consideration must be given to the fact that at the Council Meeting for General Affairs and External Relations in February 2008, the decision was made that each EU Member State would decide, in accordance with national practice and international law, their relationship with Kosovo.

At the same time, the advisory opinion of the International Court of Justice is expected during the first half of this year in the case relating to compliance with international law of the unilateral declaration of independence made by the Provisional Institutions of Self-Government in Kosovo.

A balanced approach must be maintained in assessing developments in the stabilisation process in Kosovo, bearing in mind that some tense situations were noted during 2009, including during the election period in November. In this respect, I believe that there are numerous challenges to be overcome, especially with regard to law enforcement, the fight against corruption and organised crime, protection for the Serbs and other minorities, reconciliation between communities and the implementation of economic and social reforms.

Nuno Melo (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The Treaty of Lisbon brought Parliament new responsibilities with respect to common foreign and security policy, and we are ready to take on these responsibilities, and to contribute to the choice of both policies and the individuals who will represent those policies throughout the world, by scrutinising those nominated for the European External Action Service, also including here the special representatives of the EU. The EU has to demonstrate before the international community that it has a foreign policy which is becoming increasingly representative, coherent, systematic and effective. The EU must increasingly come to be the principal driver in building world peace.

Willy Meyer (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (ES) I voted against the Council's annual report to Parliament on the main aspects and basic choices of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in 2008, because I think that the objective of the CFSP should be to define the EU's external policy, not defend its territory. I do not agree with the link between the EU and NATO established by the Treaty of Lisbon. Instead, I support demilitarisation and zero armament. I condemn the logic of the militarisation of the EU, which has intensified with the adoption of the Treaty of Lisbon, and the changes that it introduced, such as the European External Action Service and the role of the High Representative. We are currently witnessing the highest degree of militarisation in history. Weapons expenditure is higher than it was even during the Cold War. The Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left demands the withdrawal of all military bases belonging

to the United States and other countries that are on the soil of EU Member States, and we ask for military expenditure to be used for civilian purposes in order to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) This report attempts to position the EU as a stronger global actor. In so doing, however, it does not give any clear specification of objectives or direction to the common foreign and security policy (CFSP). The demand for a stronger financial footing must therefore be rejected, given this context. In future, international engagements should, in fact, be assessed for how sensible they are and their benefit to the EU. Ultimately, a strategy-based approach should be developed in the CFSP. I feel I must roundly oppose the objective of abolishing the principle of unanimity. This is particularly the case if, as has been stated several times, the aim is to have a closer partnership with NATO. The EU must manage to create its own structures, and must, of course, have the necessary resources available for such structures. When it comes to the numerous operations and missions, many of the current 23 different actions in which the EU is involved should be reconsidered. In Afghanistan, in particular, the strategy followed there under the leadership of the United States is to be regarded as a failure.

The EU's involvement should therefore be reconsidered without delay. In the context of the Eastern Partnership, it is worth pointing out, once again, that Russia's interests must be taken account of for historical, cultural and geographical reasons, and that unilateral action by the EU should be avoided. Since the report does not really take this into consideration, and because it is also deficient in other areas, I voted against it.

María Muñoz De Urquiza (S&D), *in writing*. – (ES) With regard to the Albertini and Danjean reports on the European Union's foreign, security and defence policy, I would like to make it clear that the votes of the Spanish delegation of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament confirm the non-recognition of Kosovo as an independent state. Kosovo has not been recognised by Spain or by four other EU Member States, or by 100 other Member States of the United Nations.

Therefore, both in the Committee on Foreign Affairs and today in this Chamber, we have supported the amendments that were in line with our viewpoint. The position of the Spanish socialist delegation is, however, positive with regard to the stabilisation and enlargement process in which the countries of the western Balkans, Turkey and Iceland are now involved.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – I have finally voted in favour of the report A7-0023/2010, known also as the annual report on the CFSP, mainly because two of our five amendments were adopted (the one on the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue and the one about the expectation that a strategic relationship between the EU and China will be developed). Finally, there were no major changes to the original draft and no surprises on the amendments adopted. The report was, in the end, voted with 592 votes in favour (among which ours) and 66 against.

Eva-Britt Svensson (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (SV) I have voted against the report, which states that the EU's values and interests must be advanced worldwide by deepening the Union's collective strategic thinking. This seems to be a neo-colonial approach. According to Mr Albertini, the EU's competence should cover all areas of foreign policy and all security questions, including a common defence policy, which might lead to a common defence. Europe is divided on this issue. Parliament is also calling for increased budget appropriations from the Member States, in particular, with regard to the need for the EU to establish quickly a large presence at the UN which speaks with one voice. The EU Member States will, of course, keep their own seats at the UN, but the EU, with its one voice, will have a major influence over them. The European Parliament also believes that the EU and NATO should develop an intense and effective partnership. This is in conflict with my country's policy of non-alignment. The citizens of Europe have never had the opportunity to express their opinion on this issue because some of the Member States have refused to hold referendums on the Treaty of Lisbon.

Report: Arnaud Danjean (A7-0026/2010)

Charalampos Angourakis (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (EL) The EU report on the EU CFSP is a call for a widespread war by the imperialist centre of the EU aimed at the peoples. It marks a new escalation in competition with other imperialist centres.

The report:

Welcomes the 70 000 members of the 23 military and 'political' missions of the EU around the world, in most cases, in cooperation with the US and NATO.

Welcomes the imperialist maritime supervision of Somalia by the naval forces of the EU and calls for the EU to set up a Sudanese 'state policing and regular army mechanism' abroad, which must not overthrow the country's government.

It supports the creation of a political/military Crisis Management and Planning Directorate and the creation of a permanent EU operations centre.

It calls for state terrorism to be stepped up and for democratic rights to be strangled in the name of 'combating terrorism' and 'radicalisation'.

It promotes the rapid organisation of the European External Action Service with political and military competences.

It calls for the organisation of military and political interventions, even in the Member States of the EU, within the framework of alleged mutual support provided for in the 'solidarity' clause of the Treaty of Lisbon.

The only interest the peoples have is in overturning the entire imperialist and anti-grassroots policy and the very construct of the EU.

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) The European Parliament has received, through the vote of the EU's citizens, more powers with regard to matters such as the budget and control over foreign, security and defence policy. In these circumstances, Members of the European Parliament must be included by the other EU institutions in the decision-making process and in appointing staff who represent the EU internationally. The powers which the European Parliament has received through the Treaty of Lisbon are intended to increase the legitimacy of the decisions concerning the common foreign, security and defence policy.

This justifies the request to set up a Defence Council as part of the External Affairs Council, as well as the creation of a permanent EU operations centre to deal with operational planning and the implementation of military operations. The discussions about the anti-missile shield, in the current form proposed by the US Administration, must take place across the whole EU, with the active involvement of the European Parliament.

However, it must be made clear that the EU has exclusive rights in determining the defence and security policy, and the interventions of third states are not justified. The European Union decides how best to guarantee the security of its citizens, which must be done based on a consensus among the Member States, and not at all through the involvement of non-Member States.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The EU has variously been defined as an economic giant and a political dwarf, and this is supposed to mean that it has not been provided with the means necessary to pursue some of its aims, in particular, in respect of its foreign policy. There have been many instances which have demonstrated the lack of unanimity of will and action amongst the Member States.

I am doubtful whether this situation can be changed in the short-term. Rather, I believe that this situation is entirely to be expected, given the number of states which make up the Union and their particular histories and interests. The question of common defence policy, something which touches upon the very essence of sovereign powers, has historically always been a matter of distrust for European countries and even today it deserves particular care, and quite justifiably so.

This must not prevent us from searching for deeper cooperation and coordination with the aim of improving our common security and defence. Its nature as a soft power notwithstanding, the European Union should consider becoming a true second pillar in an Atlantic alliance which cannot continue to require the US to make all the sacrifices.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) This report, which brings together the conservative right and the social democrats, is a dangerous symptom of what we have denounced many times regarding the Treaty of Lisbon: its contribution to the deepening of neoliberalism, based on the federalism and militarisation of the European Union as the European pillar of NATO.

At the behest of the great powers, the EU is aiming to settle its own contradictions and reposition itself within a process of arranging forces at an international level, based on a vision involving competition between powers over natural resources and markets and greater affirmation of the European Union as an economic, political and military bloc with ambitions for global interventionism.

Here, the majority of this House has offered the prescription which it has been advocating for many years:

- the militarisation of international relations and internal security on the basis of the aforementioned fight against terrorism;
- the increase of budgets in these areas and the creation of new military capacities which will contribute to a new arms race;
- adaptation to the US and NATO concept of preventative wars and an increase in its intervention at the world level.

The result of these developments could be more conflict, exploitation and poverty in response to the crisis into which capitalism has plunged the world.

The path of peace requires a break with these policies.

Charles Goerens (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) Subject to the following remarks, I voted in favour of the Danjean report. 1) The report calls for the abolition of the Assembly of the Western European Union (WEU). One therefore searches in vain for the slightest reference in the report to the work carried out by the Assembly to further European integration. It is too bad for the work of the European Parliament's Committee on Foreign Affairs when all day long, elements are praised even though they are often less commendable than the ideas that the Assembly in Paris has so far come up with. 2) Parliamentary control of European defence matters will have to take due account of the contribution of the national parliaments. Indeed, they are the ones on which the decision to make national troops and capabilities available to the EU for EU military operations will depend, and for a long time yet. The same applies to the financing of military operations, which are paid for out of the national budgets. The desire to prevent any democratic deficit in European defence matters should guide us in our search for an institutional solution that is truly acceptable at parliamentary level.

Richard Howitt (S&D), *in writing*. – Labour MEPs welcome this annual review of the European Security Strategy and Common Security and Defence Policy, especially in the light of the changes brought about by the ratification of the Lisbon Treaty, and, in this regard, especially welcome the role of High Representative, Baroness Cathy Ashton, in the associated debate in Parliament.

While voting in favour of the report as a whole, we decided to vote against paragraph 20, which proposes the establishment of a permanent EU Operations Centre. It is our longstanding position and that of the British Government that there is no need for such a centre, which would needlessly duplicate existing structures. On Amendment 20, we chose to abstain as, although we wholeheartedly welcome moves towards a world free of nuclear weapons, we note the inaccuracy in this amendment that the 'US' weapons in this context represent NATO, rather than US capability, and, as such, we believe that the question of the removal of nuclear warheads from Germany or elsewhere is a debate to be held by NATO allies including the US. It is not a debate for the EU as a separate multilateral entity.

Nuno Melo (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The Common Foreign and Security Policy and the European Security and Defence Policy are two fundamental pillars allowing the EU to become the principal actor of the international community in the fight against the challenges and threats which were identified in the European Security Strategy.

Notwithstanding the fact that the EU considers the UN Security Council to be the primary responsible party in the maintenance and preservation of world peace and security, the EU must have policies which are effective and shared by all Member States so that it can respond in an effective manner to the those challenges and threats which have a global character.

Willy Meyer (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (ES) I voted against the Danjean report because it proposes a future Common Foreign and Security Policy that is focused on promoting the militarisation of the EU and its interventionism. It does not propose any civilian and peaceful focus or solution to the conflicts, focusing instead on defence and the militarisation of the EU. I am also opposed to this text because it refers to the Treaty of Lisbon and its application. This promotes a move towards the centralisation of powers, with no parliamentary control mechanism, which will turn the EU into a military player on the international stage. Instead of permanent, structured cooperation between the EU and NATO, which is what the report advocates, I am in favour of all activities being conducted strictly within the framework of the United Nations Charter and international law, with strict separation between the two institutions.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), *in writing*. – (DE) Mr Danjean's report into the implementation of the European Security Strategy and the common security and defence policy is very comprehensive and deals with numerous topics that are important for Europe. However, there is a lack of a clear focus on the fundamental shaping

of EU foreign policy over the next few years and also a lack of a strict policy line. On the one hand, the report seeks to strengthen the EU's autonomy in respect of other global players, in particular, in respect of the United States, through having a strong foreign, security and defence policy, and this is something that I welcome. Yet the report again comes out in favour of strong cooperation between the EU and NATO and wants, for example, to create joint institutional structures. The call for a White Paper to be drawn up on the common security and defence policy (CSDP) which clearly defines the objectives of the policy is thus more than advisable. Much as I am critical of the increasing centralism of the European Union, I do support the creation of a permanent EU operations centre.

Such a centre would enable us to both plan and execute diverse operations more efficiently. In addition, avoiding duplication of work would also lead to cost savings. The solidarity clause in connection with natural disasters that is referred to, like the establishment of a European civil protection force, is undoubtedly worthwhile and something that we should indeed strive for. Nevertheless, in the light of the unclear position in various areas, I was forced to abstain from the vote.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), *in writing*. – I have finally abstained in the final vote on the annual report on the implementation of the European Security Strategy (A7-0026/2010). This was the most complex and delicate report for us but we managed well. Two and a half of our 11 amendments were passed (with a very important one calling on the HR/VP to overcome the imbalance between civilian and military planning capabilities). No other major changes were voted. The report was, in the end, approved with 480 votes in favour and 111 against. I, as I said, abstained, together with the rest of my group.

Eva-Britt Svensson (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (SV) I have voted against the report. This document is one of the most militaristic that I have read in all my years in Parliament. The European Parliament is calling for the establishment of a permanent operations centre which will be responsible for the operational planning and conduct of military operations and for strengthening cooperation with NATO. The European Defence Agency will develop military space surveillance capability. In addition, maritime surveillance capability is to be established which, among other things, will limit 'illegal' immigration. The report also calls for more Member States to take part in the EU's military operations than has previously been the case. The EU and Parliament are to become involved in discussions on a strategic concept for NATO. As a citizen of a non-aligned country, I cannot support this far-reaching report.

Traian Ungureanu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) I wish to thank all my fellow Members in the European Parliament for the support they have given me in plenary, voting in favour of Amendment 34 to the Danjean Report on the European Security Strategy.

I initiated Amendment 34 with the aim of modifying the text in paragraph 87 of this report, which referred to the development of the anti-missile shield in Europe in the wake of a bilateral agreement between the United States and Member States, including Romania. The amendment proposes removing the recommendation to develop this system 'in dialogue with Russia' replacing this phrase with a more balanced wording of 'dialogue at continental level'. The new US project involving the development of the anti-missile defence system is strictly defensive in nature and guarantees the security of the whole of Eastern Europe and the Western Balkans. The project is not targeted against Russia. Consequently, I do not believe that there are any reasons for making Russia a participant and, possibly, a decision maker in the project's development.

These considerations have formed the basis for Amendment 34. I am pleased that this amendment was approved by 358 votes in favour. The number of votes in favour highlights that the support given has transcended the boundaries of political groups and national affiliations, demonstrating the importance of the motion for a resolution and the existence of a European majority which shares the same point of view.

Motion for a resolution RC-B7-0137/2010

Nikolaos Chountis (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (EL) I consider that strengthening efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons and achieve a world free of nuclear weapons is an absolute and important priority. Strengthening the Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) by having all the Member States sign and apply it comes within this framework. I opted to abstain from this particular motion for a resolution because it includes a basic point to which I am opposed and which the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left tried, unsuccessfully, to change. I refer to the phrase and import of the view that the EU can 'use every means at its disposal to prevent, deter, halt and, where possible, eliminate proliferation programmes, which causes serious problems'. To be specific, the use or the threat of use of military means,

especially as regards Iran, is extremely dangerous, will not have positive results for peace, and contradicts the perception of the left on military action by the EU.

Diogo Feio (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) The principles which lay behind the signing of the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty and which date back to the period of the Cold War continue to be of relevance today and are even of greater urgency. The fall of the Soviet bloc led to the spread of nuclear material to various states, and the end of unified control over its use and storage raises fears over its irresponsible utilisation or even its deterioration, with unimaginable consequences for the health and safety of the region.

The increase in the number of members of the 'nuclear club', the terrorist threat and the relative ease with which weapons of mass destruction can be built today combine to deepen the climate of unrest in which we are now living. The European Union must be capable of assuming a common and coherent position on these questions, aimed at creating a world which is safer and increasingly free of weapons.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), *in writing*. – (PT) International changes provide new opportunities on the issue of non-proliferation. At the beginning of his term, President Obama stated his ambition of a world without nuclear weapons and pledged to actively pursue the ratification of a complete ban on nuclear testing by the United States. The Union must be up to the challenges of nuclear non-proliferation, especially those posed by Iran and North Korea, which continue to be the biggest threats to international security. As for the reduction of nuclear arsenals, the priority is to continue to reduce the two main arsenals, that is, those of Russia and of the United States, which hold 95% of the world's existing nuclear weapons. Parliament expects a common and ambitious position from the European Union during the next review conference of the Parties to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) Nuclear disarmament at international level is of vital importance. This justifies the need to promote and strengthen the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT) and to ensure its ratification by all states. In the current international climate, the danger of a new nuclear arms race is a matter of genuine concern.

The imposition of disarmament and of the end of the development, production and storage of new nuclear weapons are the basis of the spirit and letter of the NPT. The ongoing dispute over Iran's nuclear programmes requires a peaceful solution, based on negotiations which it will be important to resume. Any military action or threat of the use of force will be counterproductive and will have consequences which are potentially dangerous for the region. In this regard, we must show our clear opposition to plans which could, in any way, open the door to the justification of military intervention, as in the case of Paragraph G of the preamble to the adopted joint resolution.

Charles Goerens (ALDE), *in writing*. – (FR) The Iranian problem is at the heart of the debate in preparation for the Nuclear NonProliferation Treaty (NPT) review conference. To recap: Iran, in accepting the NPT, abandoned over time the option to equip itself with nuclear weapons. If the Republic of Iran were no longer to honour its commitments, we would have two problems. In the short term, this would constitute a threat to stability in a region in which most of the players are tempted to adopt radical positions. In the medium and long terms, Iran's refusal to respect the provisions of the NPT would set a serious precedent as regards regional, and indeed global, security. It would clearly seem that the agitation of the members of the United Nations Security Council, who have the right of veto, plus Germany, is no longer enough to shake things up. A strong signal from the United States and Russia to show that they are both inclined unilaterally to reduce their nuclear arsenal could help give a sense of responsibility to the average nuclear powers that are also ready to disarm. Lastly, a strong gesture from the major powers could perhaps convince countries that are currently acquiring nuclear knowhow to abandon their projects.

Richard Howitt (S&D), *in writing*. – Labour MEPs would like to express our deep commitment to the aim of a world free of nuclear weapons. We are proud that Britain as a nuclear power is leading efforts towards a nuclear non-proliferation agreement in May in New York that involves global consensus. We have supported this resolution with the clear aim of sending the message that the European Parliament and Labour MEPs will support all efforts to ensure we leave behind the bad old days of nuclear stand-offs and mutually assured destruction.

We decided to abstain on Amendment 2 as we believe that military doctrine is a matter for national governments to decide and not in the prerogative of the European Parliament. We also joined with our political group in supporting Amendment 3 as we believe there is a right for all states to develop civil nuclear power, but there is a responsibility for these states to reject the development of nuclear weapons. Labour

MEPs will continue to support disarmament amongst possessor states, to prevent proliferation to new states, and ultimately to achieve a world that is free from nuclear weapons.

Sabine Lösing (GUE/NGL), in writing. – I am fully aware that international nuclear disarmament, and therefore the strengthening of the NPT and its ratification by all states, are of vital importance and that every effort should be made to implement the treaty in all its aspects. To ensure effective multilateral efforts, they must be set within a well-developed vision of achieving a nuclear weapon-free world at the earliest date possible. We must insist on the commitment of the nuclear weapons states under Article VI of the NPT to disarm completely, as it was a key promise and so many countries have signed the NPT and thus forego nuclear weapons permanently. We oppose the phrase in this joint resolution (Recital G): ‘... making use of all instruments at its disposal to prevent ...’.

I warn, in particular regarding Iran, that any military activity to prevent proliferation is completely counterproductive and highly dangerous. I am convinced that the best way to deal with the problem of proliferation would be to abandon atomic energy once and for all, as its civilian use bears great dangers on its own and, moreover, it cannot be excluded with sufficient certainty that civilian nuclear technology will not be used for military purposes.

Nuno Melo (PPE), in writing. – (PT) The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction truly represents a serious threat to mankind, to peace and to international security. Extreme terrorism, unchecked and often fundamentalist, causes the world to fear and to try to prevent groups and governments with unscrupulous leaders from acquiring this technology.

Therefore, it is important that governments that possess this type of weapon progressively demonstrate that they intend to reduce their arsenals, setting a good example. The next summit, scheduled for April of this year, could make a very important contribution to this matter, and there are high expectations of greater stringency and control over the unauthorised trading of nuclear materials.

Let us also hope that the USA and China play an important role in the nuclear disarmament of the Korean Peninsula. It is still important that states do not distance themselves from the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, as it concerns all of us, not just some.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE), in writing. – (CS) I am delighted that the European Parliament has clearly adopted the report on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons. As a Christian, I welcome the fact that the representatives of Western civilisation, more than 60 years after the end of the war, realised that the existence of nuclear weapons was a huge global risk and therefore made efforts to reduce them. The fact that Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea do not intend to sign the Treaty on the non-proliferation of nuclear weapons constitutes a major risk. These countries also fail to fulfil international obligations in the area of nuclear safety. The fact that Iran denies access to its nuclear facilities to the inspectors of the International Atomic Energy Agency constitutes a real safety risk, not only for states in its immediate vicinity, but also for the EU. In conclusion, I would like to thank Members for their effort to make the text of the resolution as balanced as possible.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), in writing. – I have finally given my ‘yes’ to this complex resolution (RC7-0137/2010) on the Non-proliferation Treaty. Basically, I am glad that the original text presented by the PPE, Socialists, ALDE and the Verts/ALE was confirmed and that one of our four amendments was adopted (331 in favour, 311 against), especially, surprisingly, as this was the one calling on all parties to review their military doctrine with a view to renouncing the first-strike option. The efforts of the PPE to delete the paragraph concerning nuclear free zones, including in the Middle East, was defeated.

Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR), in writing. – There are many elements to the resolution we can agree with. We are strongly in favour of a robust and effective Non-proliferation Treaty. However, the resolution as it stands includes some unhelpful elements and the ECR Group therefore abstained. Recital L questions the holdings of tactical nuclear weapons in five European non-nuclear states. We are in favour of the continued presence of such weapons as they contribute to burden-sharing and guaranteeing US military commitment to European security. In a number of places, there are implied criticisms of close allies whereas our criticisms should be aimed at those that are a threat to international security. Neither the UK nor France, nor indeed the US, now produce fissile material for weapons. It is a different matter to say that their production facilities for fissile materials should, at this stage, be abandoned. The call for the establishment of a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East is obviously aimed at Israel. Israel faces an existential threat from neighbours, several of whom have a history of developing nuclear and other WMDs, and indeed at least one, Iran, continues in that direction.

9. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

(The sitting was suspended at 13.55 and resumed at 15.00)

IN THE CHAIR: MR SCHMITT

Vice-President

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

(The minutes of the previous sitting were approved)

11. EU policy on Arctic issues (debate)

President. The next item is the statement by the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy regarding the EU's Arctic policy.

Catherine Ashton, *Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.* – Mr President, I welcome very much the opportunity to discuss with you what I believe is an evolving Arctic policy in the European Union. It is a serious issue of growing political importance and I believe we have to treat it as such.

In the aftermath of the Copenhagen negotiations, it is right that we pay increasing attention to that part of the world which has been witnessing the most tangible effects of climate change. Scientific evidence shows that the ice caps lost more than half of their thickness over the last decade.

Other environmental changes are also having a growing impact on the Arctic's people, biodiversity and landscape, both on land and at sea. Like other international actors, we have been increasingly active on Arctic issues. As you know, the Commission published its Arctic Communication in late 2008, which was welcomed by the Council, and that was followed in December 2009 by extensive conclusions on Arctic issues.

I believe this represents another step in the process to gradually building up a coherent, comprehensive Arctic policy. As you know, the Commission has been asked to prepare a follow-up report in June 2011, and that will be another opportunity to further develop our thinking together. All this work is in progress, and that is why I am very eager today to hear the views of Members of this House.

In this context, the Commission appreciated your resolution on Arctic governance of October 2008, which provided good impetus in the last stages of the Commission's drafting of the communication. We seek support from Parliament for our efforts to ensure the European Union is recognised as a responsible and respected player in the Arctic. Our geographical position and our ongoing programmes in the Arctic are our starting point, but we want to develop this further.

There are three main areas for the work which I would like to mention very briefly. First we want to contribute to the protection of the Arctic region, including its population. The Arctic's ecosystem is very fragile and therefore needs maximum protection and safeguards. At the same time, because of climate change, the resources of the Arctic are becoming increasingly accessible. That offers opportunities, but must be handled with great care.

We want to ensure our citizens and companies are treated fairly, including in the areas of transport and natural resources, and that needs to be done in a very deliberate and careful manner with appropriate environmental safeguards. Both objectives can and should be developed jointly by EU institutions and Member States, especially the three Arctic Member States. All should continue to work closely together with other Arctic stakeholders.

Our third objective is to contribute to robust and enhanced governance arrangements to handle the multiple challenges that affect the Arctic region. That includes the implementation of existing agreements, frameworks and arrangements, including the Arctic Council, and full respect for the UN Convention on the Law of the Seas. But, where relevant, we should take a careful look at whether and how these arrangements could be complemented and developed further.

To be credible, we should recognise that the Arctic region is radically different from the Antarctic and this recognition should guide our policy response. Unlike the Antarctic, which is a vast and inhabited continent surrounded by an ocean, the Arctic is a maritime space surrounded by land which has been inhabited by people for thousands of years and which belongs to sovereign countries. Therefore, proposals to replicate the Antarctic Treaty in the Arctic region would be unrealistic, and they would probably also be detrimental to the proactive role that we aim to develop.

As you know, this is also the view of the Council. We very much want to maintain close cooperation with the European Parliament as we pursue our common goals of gradually building up an EU Arctic policy and we must work together with the Arctic states and the international community to find the most effective way of preserving and protecting the Arctic for future generations.

Michael Gahler, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Madam Vice-President, many thanks for having opened the debate here on this subject, which I think is an important one. Those who are participating in this debate here today will share this view, and I think that we will also be able to achieve a very large consensus in the debate. I am the rapporteur for a report that is still to be drawn up on this subject, and I would very much like to work closely with all those involved.

You mentioned a number of key words. Protecting the environment is very important. You mentioned the resident populations, the resources below sea level, and also fisheries. Another key word is shipping, the shipping routes that climate change is opening up: the Northwest Passage and the Northeast Passage.

In the vicinity of these passages, alongside our three Arctic Member States, are, of course, at least two global players – the United States and Russia – as well as a major partner in the shape of Canada. These States are the immediate adjacent territories with whom we must, at all events, build up and improve our contact in the context of this policy, which we are now aiming to develop.

Where raw materials are concerned, specifically, we have the potential for cooperation – but there is also the potential for conflict if we do not approach this in the right way. The EU will certainly not be planting its flag on the seabed, as the Russians have done. We should, however, seek dialogue with these affected parties in order, in this way, to be able to achieve, in a consensual manner, those things that are important for the region in terms of environmental protection, the extraction of resources and the rights of local residents.

Liisa Jaakonsaari, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (FI) Mr President, a while ago, US Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, stated in an interview how difficult her job was and said that it was about moving from one crisis to the next. Unfortunately, there is very little time left to deal with such core future challenges as the development of the Arctic region.

Baroness Ashton, I suppose you must have felt the same sort of anguish by now, and that is why we greatly appreciate the fact that you are initiating a debate on Arctic policy so early on and that over the weekend, you are going to Lapland, which is part of the Arctic region. There, you will certainly obtain important information.

The Arctic treasure chest that is opening up is full of economic opportunities, but it poses many environmental and security risks, as well as those connected with the fate of the indigenous peoples. Global warming is opening up new sea routes and enabling the exploitation of oil and gas resources in an environmentally destructive way. The Swedish International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), among others, has already published a paper, ominously entitled 'Ice-free Arctic', on China's Arctic policy. That is why the European Union must take urgent action and draw up its own Arctic policy.

The Commission's conclusions you presented to us are welcome, inasmuch as the region, with its oil, gas and minerals, is not just seen as a new Eldorado: the main focus is on the people who live there, and this is a very important aspect of the situation. The EU also has to be willing to hold constructive talks with the indigenous peoples, and that is one way the Union can come to play a decisive role in Arctic policy. For example, Parliament's recent restrictions on seal hunting infuriated the indigenous population.

It is very important to strengthen the status of the Arctic Council, and for that reason, we must now have a greater influence on Canada and Russia in particular, so that the European Union can have a stronger role to play. Arctic research is an important area of cooperation; for example, the University of Lapland, where you are going, is where the University of the Arctic is based, and I am sure that when the Arctic Information Centre is established, as the Commission has indicated, Rovaniemi would be a suitable location.

In addition, the European Union's own structures need to be strengthened. Unfortunately, it does seem to be the case that in the Council, the Arctic Ocean has been trampled underfoot by the Southern and Eastern Dimension, and so this Northern Dimension's Arctic window should now be opened. Baroness Ashton, the Commission needs to clarify the role of each Directorate-General and indicate the person responsible for Arctic issues.

Diana Wallis, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, I should like to say to the High Representative: thank you so much for your statement. I think many of us in this Chamber are so pleased that you are carrying on what was started by the Commission and also followed up by the Presidency statements last autumn.

You underlined the fragile nature and environment of the Arctic. That fragile nature is, as you recognised, a global concern, not just one that concerns Europe or indeed those nations in the Arctic.

The Arctic also presents itself as a unique opportunity for multinational cooperation. It is unique also for us as the EU to have a positive relationship with Russia there, through the Northern Dimension. That is something we must absolutely build on with other partners.

But it has to be a meaningful cooperation overall in the Arctic, and it is worrying – and you did not touch on this in your statement – that we see the development of an inner core of five coastal states of the Arctic meeting outside the architecture of the Arctic Council. This could seriously undermine a very precious cooperation and it has to be treated with some seriousness.

Likewise, we – the EU – have been rebuffed for observer status. We have some fences we need to mend and we need to try to re-establish confidence in what it is that we want to establish in the Arctic.

I believe that the original Commission communication was an amazing document in the way it brought together many cross-cutting issues across a number of DGs in the Commission. This is a good basis on which we can build. We all wait with interest as to how you will coordinate this policy, going forward in the new Commission and with your unique role wearing two hats. But thank you for the start.

Satu Hassi, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FI) Mr President, a sort of cultural schizophrenia is apparent in our attitude to the Arctic region. On the one hand, we are concerned. It is quite obvious that climate change is taking place faster in the Arctic than elsewhere. The region has been compared to a canary in a mine.

Since 1979, the average annual ice cover in the Arctic Ocean has shrunk by around 1.5 million square kilometres, which is the area of France, Italy, Spain and the United Kingdom combined. This melting process is accelerating climate change because it is reducing the earth's reflectance, or albedo. It is releasing methane from the tundra, and could also release it from the seabed. Methane speeds up climate change even more. The melting process also allows toxins that have accumulated over many years to be released into the environment.

While we are concerned about the situation, at the same time, an oil and gas rush has started in the Arctic. Countries are quarrelling and negotiating about how the seabed might be divided up. Moreover, the indigenous peoples are largely being ignored in all this.

The EU should now be promoting a consistent approach to sustainable development. It should control the glittery images of euro and dollar signs and support the protection of the Arctic region by means of the same sort of agreement that applies to the Antarctic. Furthermore, the indigenous peoples should be included in all decisionmaking processes that relate to the region. In any event, there should be a 50-year moratorium on the exploitation of fossil resources in the area.

It needs to be understood that nature and wildlife in the region are delicate and vulnerable. For example, there are much greater problems and worse risks associated with drilling for oil there than elsewhere. Shipping companies also need to acknowledge the enormous difficulties and risks that exist in the region. It is of no help whatsoever if we merely tag a few nice words about the environment and the indigenous peoples on to the decisions we take but our actual deeds mean that we seriously risk contaminating the environment irreversibly and that we violate the rights of the indigenous population.

Charles Tannock, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, when Denmark joined the EU in 1973, the EU assumed an Arctic dimension through the Danish dependency of Greenland. In 1985, Greenland chose to leave the EU but, when Sweden and Finland joined 10 years later, they substantially enlarged the EU's interest in the Arctic region.

Since then, the EU has become one of the many actors with a vital strategic interest in the Arctic – its environment and its natural resources. As countries with territory in the Arctic, the United States, Canada, Russia, Norway and Iceland all defend their interests robustly and vigorously. The European Union should not hesitate now to do so as well and the Arctic Council, in my view, is the best arena in which to do so. The Union's ad hoc observer status in the Arctic Council is inadequate for this purpose. I hope that the High Representative will insist on permanent observer status for the EU at the next ministerial meeting in April next year in Greenland.

It is regrettable that Canada is blocking the EU in retaliation for the Union's ban on seal products, and I hope that, eventually, common sense will prevail. This approach makes little sense, given the fact that six EU Member States, including the United Kingdom – my own – are permanent observers. Nevertheless, the coordination between Denmark, Sweden and Finland on the Arctic Council has been exemplary and has served as a platform for the EU's wider interest to be heard in the region.

The contributions of our ally, Norway, and Iceland, now an aspiring EU Member State, have further galvanised European participation in the Arctic Forum. This is vital because Russia has left us in little doubt as to its own designs on the Arctic, famously planting a Russian flag on the seabed of the North Pole in 2007. We know to our cost that Russia sometimes follows its own rule book in international affairs. Only a united front by other members and the observers on the Arctic Council, working through the EU's Northern Dimension policy, will keep the Kremlin in check. We cannot allow the Arctic to become the new arena for Russia's expansionist tendencies.

Søren Bo Søndergaard, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DA) Mr President, there are many good reasons for discussing the Arctic. A number of them have been mentioned. There is the question of climate change, in that the Arctic region has been hard hit by global warming. There is the question of natural resources, in that the Arctic region offers enormous riches. Then there is the question of the opening of the northern maritime route, which entails totally new transport patterns. However, the crucial question for my group is from what angle we should approach the Arctic. Should our starting point be all the advantages, in a narrow sense, which the EU can get from the Arctic region? Or should our starting point be how the development of the Arctic region can benefit the global community – while at the same time, let us not forget, fully respecting the right to self-determination of the Arctic people?

A key test of this question lies in the position we take: should we work towards the Arctic becoming an area where a new arms race can be allowed to flourish – Russia has played an active part here and others have followed – or should the Arctic, like the Antarctic, be a demilitarised area? Obviously, there is a difference between the North Pole and the South Pole, the Arctic and the Antarctic. However, it is interesting that we have succeeded in forging a treaty on the Antarctic, in which we have ruled out military presence and stipulated that this region may only be used for peaceful purposes. The major issue facing the Commission is whether it should work towards making the Arctic a demilitarised area, and should that be the case, which specific initiatives it should take in that direction.

Timo Soini, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (FI) Mr President, the Arctic issue is important and it has now also come before us here. We in Finland are familiar with conditions in the Arctic. We live there. When Baroness Ashton goes to Lapland, she will find a lot of people who live and work north of the Arctic Circle. When I myself go there on Sunday, I will find a lot of people there who are particularly worried about work and their livelihood, because in a real democracy, people can choose freely where they want to live. They can also live in the Arctic if they wish.

The University of Lapland in Rovaniemi is the best place to carry out this study from the viewpoint of finances and research. Diana Wallis had given a positive appraisal of this in the Finnish newspaper 'Kaleva', and for once I would be quite happy to express my agreement with a liberal view, so I will.

From the viewpoint of the future, we should take three issues into account: nature, animals and people. If these three can be accommodated in every part of the Arctic and can live there in harmony, we will achieve a sustainable Arctic policy, and we will also be able to exploit its logistics and economy, but only by respecting nature, people and animals.

Diane Dodds (NI). – Mr President, I welcome the opportunity to take part in this debate today and want to address a very specific issue that has already been raised by some of the colleagues that I have listened to.

There is no doubt that living conditions in the beautiful Arctic area are harsh, but there is equally no doubt that, with new technologies and advances, the area will inevitably be opened up for greater exploitation of its natural resources, with fisheries being a prime example.

In the Commission communication of 2008, the current extent of fisheries is examined, as is the possibility that new areas could be opened up. It is indeed right that there should be some systematic approach to this. Fishing in a sustainable manner protects stocks and gives a future to fishing communities. The same document also, quite rightly, makes mention of the need to protect indigenous peoples and local populations, using the statistic that about one third of the four million people who live in the area are indigenous to the area – again, a very laudable objective. However – and this is where I warn the Commission – I still see the evidence, in both of the documents, that the Commission has not learnt the lesson from the disaster of the common fisheries policy which, in Northern Ireland, has been responsible for the destruction of the fishing industry.

The top-down approach of always controlling and setting policy targets and methods from Brussels has been an abject failure, yet the inference from the 2008 document and from the Foreign Affairs Council of December 2009 is that the EU will use the same approach in the Arctic region. I urge the High Representative, as she continues to explore how to coordinate policy in this area, to be mindful of this particular issue.

Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, with the development of the modern world, policy on Arctic issues, which has been associated with extreme climate conditions, polar bears and boundless ice fields, is beginning to take on new significance. Development of international trade and increased need for natural resources has caused a growth in interest in the region. As a result of rapid shrinking of the Arctic ice cap, new possibilities for exploitation of the region have arisen. The Arctic is being transformed from an outpost to the centre of interest of countries seeking new shipping routes, endless sources of natural wealth and stocks of fish. However, we already know all this.

The question is – how should the Union react to the nervous preparations for a kind of invasion of the Arctic which have been under way for some time in Russia, the USA, Canada and Norway? Above all, it is necessary to deal with the unregulated legal status of the Arctic region. Policy based on the diplomatic means which have been used until now should produce an international understanding guaranteeing a fair division of potential territorial acquisitions. The lack of legal regulations may make the region a source of conflict which is global in nature. What is needed, then, is systematic and coordinated action which will respond to the challenges which are appearing at rapid speed. Research infrastructure, development of multipartite management of the Arctic based on the UN convention and involvement of the local Arctic population are only some of the elements which must be contained in future European Arctic strategy, whose aim will be to maintain a balance between protection of the natural environment and sustainable use of its resources.

Kriton Arsenis (S&D). – (EL) May I extend a welcome to the High Representative for Foreign Affairs.

The Arctic is the place on the planet where climate change is most obvious. Global warming has caused the ice to recede significantly. The landmark year was 2007, when the ice receded by 34% compared with the period from 1970-2000.

However, the melting of the Arctic ice cap has numerous, drastic consequences. It speeds up climate change. To date, the white surface of the Arctic ice reflected 80% of sunlight falling in the area, thereby affecting global and local temperatures. This reflection is reducing constantly, causing a rise in the temperature of the planet and of the polar area as a whole across a 1 500-metre zone within Canada, Russia and Alaska. In 2007, the temperature rose by 2° between August and October.

At the same time, the melting of the ice has caused unforeseen changes in sea currents. It is having an adverse effect on marine ecosystems and fisheries and reducing the ability of the sea to absorb carbon dioxide, as it affects plankton and other organisms and raises sea levels.

That is why European citizens are saddened by frequent talk of the European Union's participation in escalating competition to reap geopolitical benefits from this environmental catastrophe in the Arctic.

The role of the European Union should not be to win an international geopolitical competition for oil and shipping lanes in the Arctic. Our role should be to safeguard respect for our principles, respect for the environmental integrity of the area, the prevalence of principles such as international competition and respect for UN institutions under whatever new regime arises in the Arctic from the huge environmental catastrophe under way.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS WALLIS

Vice-President

Pat the Cope Gallagher (ALDE). – Madam President, let me take the opportunity to wish Baroness Ashton well during her term in office and I would like to welcome her commitment to maintaining close cooperation with Parliament in the development of what she describes as a more coherent EU policy on the Arctic.

The European Union, of course, has a central role to play in Arctic policy. Two Arctic states, Iceland and Norway, are members of the EEA. EU policies in areas such as the environment, climate change, energy, research, transport and fisheries have a direct bearing on the Arctic.

In my capacity as chairman of Parliament's delegation to Switzerland, Iceland, Norway and the EEA, I am therefore the representative of Parliament on the standing committee of parliamentarians of the Arctic region.

In this capacity, I would like to inform the House that in September of this year, the Parliament in Brussels will host the biannual meeting of parliamentarians of the Arctic region.

(GA) A preparatory meeting will be held in Washington next week and in Oslo closer to the time of the meeting. I believe that the hosting of those meetings will be vitally important to the European Parliament and indeed to the European Union.

President. – I am very sorry, but we had no interpretation for the last part of your speech.

Pat the Cope Gallagher (ALDE). – Madam President, I have no doubt but that everyone in the House will have understood what I said!

I said in conclusion that we would host the conference and I would hope that, subject to your availability, of course, that you might consider my invitation to attend part of this meeting, Baroness Ashton. It is an ideal basis, I believe, for developing a greater understanding of the issues involved, and it enables parliamentarians from across this vast region to forge and to strengthen ties.

Reinhard Bütikofer (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Madam President, I welcome this debate and I am pleased that Baroness Ashton is here and taking part in the debate. You spoke of how this is about protecting the region and the resident population. That is certainly true. When it comes to the indigenous peoples of this region, though, in particular, it is about more than protection that we grant from outside; it is about respect for their right to self-determination. This has to be a very important principle in Arctic policy.

As concerns the protection of nature in this region, it should be pointed out that there are, of course, an especially high number of sensitive areas. I am aware that many of you participating in this debate reject the idea of a moratorium. Perhaps, Baroness Ashton, that was at the back of your mind when you said that 'the Arctic region is radically different from the Antarctic', but even when rejecting a moratorium, the question must be answered – and in practical, not just lyrical, terms – of how the areas of particular sensitivity in this region can be effectively protected under the precautionary principle. We cannot allow the situation to develop to the point where, in the interests of short-sighted economics, the battle cry of 'we need the gas, we need the fish' ultimately overrides all precautionary principles.

I would also like to tie in to what Mr Gahler had to say. Mr Gahler, you spoke about the potential for conflict. This is undoubtedly true. We can also already see that, internationally, these discussions are not characterised solely by a will to find common ground, or else Canada and Russia, for example, would not have attempted to block the EU's observer status in the Arctic Council. The Arctic Council, of course, is itself a soft-law organisation with no fixed budget or staff. It will not do as a governance structure. However, we must take care, when considering new governance structures – and I understood this to be your position, High Representative – to move forwards in an inclusive manner, and to acknowledge that other organisations, too, want to be involved here.

Anna Rosbach (EFD). – (DA) Madam President, I see that both the Commission and the High Representative have taken the view that the EU should lay down a policy for the Arctic. I sympathise, of course, with the idea of protecting the environment in the Arctic and, as a Dane, I am extremely aware of the geopolitical situation. I am also well aware of the problems faced by the local population and we should, of course, respect their way of life. Having said that, I do not think that the EU should have a policy for the area, nor do I think that the EU should take on an administrative role in the Arctic region. That would not be to the benefit of the Union or the Arctic.

In my view, we should leave the Arctic to those countries which are directly involved in the region. It neither can nor should it be the EU's job to set up a policy for all areas, let alone for the Arctic, which is an area where we have traditionally cooperated very well and where only two (and not three, as was said here) of the countries involved are members of the EU. Neither the US, Canada, Greenland nor Russia have expressed a wish to become a member of the EU. You might perhaps suspect that the sudden interest in this area has been triggered solely by the different countries wanting to get their hands on raw materials, rather than anything else. In other words: the best policy with regard to the Arctic would be for the EU to get involved on the sidelines only.

Nick Griffin (NI). – Madam President, there is an English folk tale about King Canute who, by ordering the tide not to come in and wet his feet, showed his courtiers that not even kings are exempt from reality. In doing so, he became a byword for arrogant folly.

King Canute lives on in the Council of the European Union, which begins and ends its conclusion on Arctic affairs with the alleged importance of global warming. This involves a refusal to accept scientific reality. According to the US National Snow and Ice Data Centre, Arctic summer ice has increased by 409 000 square miles, or 26%, since 2007. This is exactly what was predicted by scientists aware that the previous shrinkage of summer ice, wrongly used as evidence for global warming, was in fact nothing more than a snapshot of an ages-old natural cyclical pulse of advance, retreat and advance.

So the Arctic summer ice will not vanish by 2013 and polar bears have not, and will not, drown because of global warming. But millions of hard-working voters are drowning in a sea of debt and taxes, and they are growing very impatient with the political class's use of the global warming fraud to impose undemocratic international governance and bogus green taxes.

The UN has now announced a review of the IPCC's dodgy dossiers and fiddled statistics. On behalf of the taxpayers of Britain, I ask this Parliament to do the same and to stop wasting any more money on the most expensive big lie in human history.

Anna Ibrisagic (PPE). – (SV) Madam President, the Arctic is a unique region which is coming under discussion increasingly often as a result of the melting of the ice cap and the new opportunities that this brings with it. This is a good thing, because we need to have more debates, not just about the impact that the ice melting will have on our opportunities to make use of the resources that have suddenly become accessible, but also about the responsibilities that this involves and how we can best preserve the Arctic and assess the future consequences of our presence and our activities in this sensitive natural environment.

However, before we decide on the common EU policy regarding the Arctic, we should spend more time evaluating the current situation in the Arctic ecosystem, because otherwise it will be difficult for us to take adequate measures. In my opinion, it is both naïve and unrealistic to think that we can simply leave all the resources untouched. Instead, we should focus on ensuring that the extraction of resources, transport, tourism and other industries are all run in the best possible way in order to protect and preserve the natural environment. Of course, this must take place in consultation and collaboration with the local population on the basis of the actual situation and the current conditions.

The Commission's report on the Arctic is a positive first step towards a coherent policy on the Arctic. During the Swedish Presidency, Sweden supported the Commission's decision to apply for permanent observer status on the Arctic Council. However, I believe that both the Commission's report and the debate until now have focused too closely on the water and not enough on the areas of land. Some countries, such as Sweden and Finland, have extensive reindeer herding, mining, farming and forestry activities in the Arctic and it is very important that these are taken into consideration.

Another dimension of the debate which is not often mentioned, but which needs to be highlighted, concerns the EU's strategic objectives and geostrategic interests in the Arctic and the consequences of the change in the conditions in this region for international stability.

Some EU Member States lie within the Arctic region. Other parts of the region are the EU's immediate neighbours to the north. Therefore, it should not be difficult to draw up common strategic objectives and to gain support for them among all the EU Member States. Given the increased competition between different countries and some unresolved conflicts, it must be in the EU's interest to ensure that tensions do not arise over security in the Arctic.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D). – (LT) Today, we are debating a very important matter. The effect of climate change is fundamentally changing the situation in the Arctic region. Due to the impact of global warming, new maritime routes have opened up in the Arctic, offering opportunities to transport oil, gas and other natural resources, but at the same time, this region is becoming very vulnerable because of environmental problems and the division of its resources between states and this may have negative consequences for international stability and the interests of European security. As we discuss the impact of the environment and climate change on this region, one of the main goals of Arctic policy must be to mitigate the negative impact of climate change and help the region to adapt to unavoidable change. Until now, no arrangement has been applied to the Arctic region. The European Parliament has underlined the importance of the governance of the Arctic on more than one occasion. I think that now that the situation has changed, we must gradually begin to form an autonomous European Union policy and the European Commission should, in turn, play an active role in this matter. For a long time, the situation in this region has caused tension between the countries of the Arctic territory and this tension will increase even more as this region becomes increasingly more accessible. I believe that the European Union must initiate a comprehensive dialogue with the other countries and this would open the door to new opportunities for cooperation. I feel that it is also time to start thinking about an international convention on the governance of this region.

Kristiina Ojula (ALDE). – (ET) Madam President, Baroness Ashton, as well as the considerable changes in the natural environment, we must also keep in mind the fact that the thawing of the Arctic Ocean, which has accelerated, has opened up the possibility of a race for new natural resources. This could, however, give rise to a potential security threat to relations between the European Union and other countries. For this reason, I would like to draw your attention to the behaviour of Russia, which is not about fishing, tourism or mineral ores, but about the world's last untouched gas and oil supplies.

Despite the idea arising from the European Commission's Arctic Strategy to engage in cooperation with neighbouring countries in matters concerning adjacent territories, since the turn of the millennium, Russia has not shown any willingness to consider our wishes. Last year's Russian national security strategy sent a threatening signal westwards that, if necessary, Russia is prepared to use military force to obtain new resources in the Arctic. I believe that we should implement targeted policies towards Russia in order to avoid a competitive race.

Indrek Tarand (Verts/ALE). – (ET) Madam President, Baroness Ashton, thank you for immediately dealing with this most important subject during the start of your stressful term of office. Most urgent in my view is the Arctic. You said very directly that the Arctic is not the Antarctic, and that it would be unrealistic to copy the agreement on Antarctica for the Arctic Sea.

I believe that if someone somewhere in the world is to stand for idealism, then it should definitely be the European Commission. And why should the European Commission not present an idealistic proposal to its partners that, before we start a new gold rush in the Arctic Sea, we should apply a moratorium for several decades – that we do not start a process which will create the possibility of an arms race and other threats?

I want to say a few words about the rights of the indigenous people of the Arctic. I believe that, in the dialogue between the European Union and Russia on human rights, the question should be asked of whether the indigenous Arctic people living in the Russian Federation get enough involvement in the work of the Arctic Council. Yes, Antarctica is not the Arctic, but steps which helped to bring about a settlement in the south during the Cold War should not be repeated simply because there is no idealism in the Commission.

I am a native of the country from which the Antarctic explorer Bellingshausen set out. He went and he discovered things, because he was an idealist. I wish you some idealism in your work.

William (The Earl of) Dartmouth (EFD). – Madam President, the European Union wants a comprehensive Arctic policy. This proposition is entirely bizarre. Cyprus and Greece, for example, have historic cultures, but look at the geography. It is really rather hard to understand why a country on the Aegean Sea needs there to be an EU policy on the Arctic.

But an EU Arctic policy is perhaps not so bizarre as the appointment of the supremely unqualified Baroness Ashton, the Sarah Palin of the ex-student Left, as High Representative. At the hearings, it was clear that the High Representative has forgotten nothing and has learnt nothing. And, by the way...

(The President cut off the speaker)

President. – I am sorry but I do not think we should listen to personal comments like that in this Chamber.

(Interjection from the floor)

Your speaking time has finished. We will not have personal comments of that nature.

(Interjection from the floor)

We shall now move to the next speaker.

Sari Essayah (PPE). – *(FI)* Madam President, let us get back to the point. As many of our fellow Members have said, the race is on for the natural resources and administration of the Arctic region.

The Arctic region, however, needs a comprehensive approach, as the High Representative said here. It will have to take account of the extremely fragile nature of Arctic wildlife, the longterm effect of melting ice, and, more than anything, the rights of the region's indigenous peoples and of the other people who live there.

So far, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea and its Fish Stocks Agreement have been enough to regulate the extraction of natural resources in the Arctic sea area and on the seabed. The Arctic Council has concentrated on environmental and research cooperation, but the agreements that focus on the use of natural resources have brought with them a growing need to develop international administration strategies, and the EU, too, may have a role to play here. Furthermore, the EU's Arctic policy needs its own strategy, and it should be jointly coordinated.

An appropriate way for the EU to be involved in the Arctic would be to establish an Arctic Centre. The first time this need for an EU Arctic Information Centre was mentioned was in the Commission's Communication on the European Union and the Arctic Region in autumn 2008. At the Council's behest, the Commission began to explore the possibility of establishing such a centre in the European Union.

The Arctic Centre at the University of Lapland in Rovaniemi, on the Arctic Circle, has indicated its willingness to function as the EU Arctic Information Centre. Finland does not have any territorial claims with respect to natural resources, so the country, as a neutral actor, would be a suitable choice for running the Centre, as Mrs Wallis has also encouragingly stated.

I would therefore urge High Representative Ashton to make a decision on the form an EU Arctic Centre should take, its location and its tasks, thus raising the EU's profile in Arctic policy. I wish you a pleasant trip to Lapland.

Herbert Reul (PPE). – *(DE)* Madam President, in the context of the climate change debate, there is now a more intense debate about the Arctic as a waterway for shipping with the opportunity of perhaps shortening trade routes and thus consuming less fuel – do not forget that that, too, is one side of the picture – which includes the question of whether and in what form resources ranging from oil to gas are present and how they can be exploited. Fishing, too, has been mentioned. Of course, there has been, and continues to be, a very symbolic value to this debate, which was made clear when Russia laid – hoisted is not quite the right word here – its flag on the seabed. The other States, too, are starting to articulate their claims more strongly. With that in mind, I am very grateful to the High Representative for the fact that she is tackling and prioritising this issue.

In my opinion, what has so far been discussed in the European Parliament, and also in the Commission, such as in its 2008 proposal, which has also been referred to, is far too defensive. I believe that this question must be approached offensively, and in both respects. That means both in respect of the issue that many Members have raised here, namely the protection of the environment and of local residents, and in respect of the fact that we need to cautiously face the issue of whether this perhaps also comes with opportunities and to have an honest discussion about that. In the context of an oil report in 2008, we did have initial and very cautious discussions about this issue and set a first course. When we are always talking about how we need diversification and new sources, including for resources and energy supplies, we do have to discuss whether there is a possibility of exploiting these sources without jeopardising nature and the environment. This debate must at least be held – we must use this opportunity. We are in a different technological position today and, incidentally, the technological achievements in this field today are European achievements. If we are talking about further development of the technology, then this must be in all areas. I am grateful that this debate is being held. I hope it will be held in an objective and open way.

Andrzej Grzyb (PPE). – *(PL)* Madam President, who will take control of the Arctic? That is the title of a press article I found when researching the subject. It succinctly, but one might also say pointedly, describes the current situation of the race for the Arctic. In this matter, the question posed by Mrs Ashton would appear

to be very appropriate – how can the European Union be a responsible player in the area of problems connected with the Arctic? Responsible – I stress this. This is why this debate in the European Parliament seems to me to be in every respect useful and good, because it is taking place, here, for the second time, as a result of the first and the present communication from the Council to Parliament, and from the Commission to the Council and the European Parliament.

The Arctic is a region which is not governed on the basis of international law, and the huge interest in the Arctic is, on the one hand, as has already been emphasised, a result of climate change, but, on the other, it is also increasingly clearly being recognised and readily used as a potential resource, especially of energy resources and gas, but also of natural resources such as, for example, fish. There are, of course, dangers associated with this – dangers for the environment in connection with the use of raw materials and fishing, but also for the indigenous people of the region, and that is something of which we must also be particularly aware.

In addition, the opening of a route, the sea lane, in connection with changes in the region, is having a huge influence on the way people are looking at the Arctic. A similar influence is being had by the attempts at actually dividing the territory based on a series of *faits accomplis*, such as a symbolic placing of flags. I would like to say it should be noted that the five Arctic countries are not specially interested in legal regulations, but the Union should, however, be playing an important role in this part of the world, not only by its presence, but principally by its involvement and knowledge. It is essential to build mutual trust, and we can build that mutual trust by an initiative in the area of regulation, such as, for example, the Arctic Charter.

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE). – (RO) I would like to take the floor in my capacity as rapporteur of this Parliament for Iceland.

At present, as you are all aware, Iceland is waiting for the Council to confirm that accession negotiations can get under way. If, as we all wish to see, Iceland becomes a Member State of the European Union, it will be the only Member State located exclusively in the Arctic region. Iceland would, together with Finland, Denmark and Sweden, increase the number of European Union states on the Arctic Council to four, along with the United States, Russia, Canada and Norway.

I believe that this fact is all the more important, given that the European Union has not been given, unfortunately, observer status in this forum.

Furthermore, I believe that Iceland's accession to the EU may contribute, first of all, to the diversification of Europe's energy resources and secondly, to setting up multilateral governance in this region which is attracting ever-growing interest and may give rise, as has also been mentioned in previous speeches, to conflicts. Last but not least, Iceland's accession may result in a coherent and effective European policy in this region.

In conclusion, I believe that when Iceland joins the European Union, the EU will have a more important role in this strategic region.

Thank you.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE). – (CS) It is high time to create a coherent European and Arctic policy that will also resolve lengthy disputes over new territories. As a result of melting, the extraction potential in the new territories will increase to 200 m below the surface, involving millions of square kilometres. Disputes between Russia, Norway, the US and Canada obviously have a geopolitical significance as well. The ice cover has already shrunk by half. The most important thing, however, is to protect the water from pollution, while the nuclear waste in the Russian Arctic is also a key issue.

Madam High Representative, I come from a country which seemingly has nothing to do with the Arctic, but I can assure you that even in the Czech Republic, many citizens are interested in what position the Union will adopt as far as foreign policy is concerned, including influencing the future of the Arctic. This involves the sustainable extraction of raw materials, sustainable transport, conditions for scientific research, the protection of nature and, last but not least, the rights of the indigenous inhabitants.

I follow with displeasure the disputes over both new and historical possessions. I fear that this may even be a new source of serious conflicts. Another one is the dispute over the strategic north passage between Asia and America. Commissioner, you must ensure that the passage falls permanently within international waters, and that the Arctic remains a permanently demilitarised zone. Take an active coordinating role in reaching international agreements on all of these issues relating to the Arctic. The Union should not look on passively, but should negotiate actively and thereby prevent the escalation of conflicts and of the harm to nature.

Bendt Bendtsen (PPE). – (DA) Madam President, it is important that the EU is involved in the debate on the Arctic and it is also good that the EU is engaging with the region, where many interests and concerns are at stake. In my opinion, the most important thing is that the EU's actions are considerate and respectful of the wishes and needs of the indigenous population. The EU should take responsibility when it comes to global warming, which manifests itself very much in the form of temperature increases. In this context, we need to take into account what this means for the people's living conditions. In addition, we know that climate change will facilitate our access to resources, such as oil and gas, and to new transport routes from Europe to Asia. On the one hand, that could be positive but, on the other, we should ensure that we take safety measures which will fully take into account the unique climate and the fragile environment of the Arctic.

With the growing economic interests in the Arctic, it is also important that the EU takes a position on various countries' actions in the area. It should not go unnoticed when countries do not play by the international rules which apply to this region. One telling example currently in evidence is Canada, which is seeking to set up a compulsory register for all large vessels passing through the Northwest Passage from July 2010. I would stress that we are talking about international waters here and that Lene Espersen, the Danish Foreign Minister, has also emphatically said that this is unacceptable. Now, that is a position that I would like to see the EU and the High Representative endorse.

Thomas Ulmer (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, it is a question of us, as the European Union, following a clear strategy and preventing a gold or gemstone rush. Europe must actively involve itself here. Europe, as a partner, can show strength here by speaking with one voice. This relates to shipping on and below the water, fisheries, resources in the form of primary energy carriers and raw materials.

In this connection, we need stable and dependable treaties with the other partners in the Arctic. We need cooperation, not confrontation. We need dialogue in the field of environmental protection in order to conserve natural resources and nature. We need dialogue in the field of animal protection in order to conserve the biodiversity, and we need protection and respect for the local inhabitants and their human rights.

If we can implement positive resource management together with our partners in the Arctic, we will have the opportunity to take new political roads here, and it will also be a first acid test for our common foreign policy – a chance to prove that we, as Europeans, can indeed pursue objectives together.

President. – We now move to the catch-the-eye part of the debate. Before we do so, I just want to clarify that, if, as the President of the debate, I feel speech is being used which tends to disrupt the business of the House, I am fully within my rights to stop that person from speaking.

Riikka Manner (ALDE). – (FI) Madam President, firstly, I would like to express my sincerest thanks to the High Representative for including this important issue in the agenda at such an early stage. I truly hope that the Commission and the whole of the European Union will have a strong role to play in Arctic policy and that the EU will formulate its own Arctic strategy.

A common Arctic policy will create boundless opportunities for the whole of the European Union, in terms of its security, environment, energy, transport, and its indigenous peoples. If we, the European Union are excluded from the debate – excluded from this policy we will be losing a great deal.

I wish to make two more points. Firstly, I hope that the Arctic Council, as an administrative body, will continue to grow in strength and that the European Union will have a strong role to play in it. Secondly, I hope that the plans for an Arctic Information Centre become a reality: this, I believe, will promote dialogue between the Arctic territories. Furthermore, and as has been said before, an excellent and suitable location for it would definitely be Finnish Lapland, and specifically Rovaniemi, which has long been associated with Arctic issues.

Gerard Batten (EFD). – Madam President, the Arctic debate has certainly generated some heat this afternoon! What kind of Parliament is it that tries to prevent its Members speaking when it disapproves of what they say? However, we should not be surprised at this when our new High Representative for Foreign Policy was once described by MI5 as a Communist sympathiser and, when she was Treasurer of the CND, it took money from the Soviet bloc to undermine her own country's defence policy.

This place looks more and more like the Soviet Union every day.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Madam President, if, in future, methane, with its considerably higher warming potential than CO₂, is emitted from the Arctic Ocean in greater quantities as a result of the thawing of the sea bed, we will have a highly dangerous new variable in the sensitive climate system – a variable that urgently requires closer investigation.

The Arctic is not only a concern with regard to the climate, it also involves something of a potential for conflict. The fact that even China has supposedly now begun building icebreakers highlights the importance of a trade route via the Northwest Passage as the ice sheet melts. This potential peaceful use, however, is far less problematic than, for example, the intensified desire of the United States to station military early warning systems in the Arctic region.

The conditions for any conceivable economic exploitation of the mineral resources linked to the melting of the ice should also be clarified in advance. Ultimately, the suspected oil and gas reserves to be found there could guarantee Europe's energy independence.

Birgit Schnieber-Jastram (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, High Representative, I would like to stress one more time very clearly that, as well as the self-evidently important areas such as environmental and energy issues, the question of shipping routes has a very special role to play. Given that ships sailing traditional shipping routes are being seized, since the lives of captains and crews are being jeopardised by this, as these routes are really unsafe, shipowners are looking for new routes. In my home town of Hamburg, this discussion is of very major importance. I would very much like to encourage you to continue on this route in this EU Arctic debate.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE). – (RO) The Arctic region, just like Antarctica, is particularly vulnerable to climate change. In addition, the global climate system depends on its stability. As a leading advocate of the battle against climate change, the European Union must adopt a firm stance on the Arctic region.

The European Union must show restraint with regard to both the use of offshore resources and transit transport through the Arctic region. In the long term, these activities will only end up breaking up even more areas of icebergs and what little is left of the polar cap, thereby irrevocably jeopardising the ecosystems in the area and the populations living in the Arctic region.

Protecting icebergs and the polar cap from uncontrolled human intervention is an absolute must. The European Union must work in close cooperation with the United States, Canada, Norway and Russia and constantly exchange information via SEIS, Eionet and SAON.

John Bufton (EFD). – Madam President, I should like to say to Lady Ashton: this is the first opportunity I have had to comment on your new role. I, like you, come from the United Kingdom. The only difference is that I was elected and you were not.

On the issue of the Arctic, is this going to become a resources race with Russia, America and Canada for fishing stocks and a quarter of the world's oil and gas? You have experienced at first hand the arms race during the Cold War. Will you now be taking us into an ice war? Actions in the Arctic are likely to exacerbate foreign relations and Europe should not even have a foreign policy in the Arctic, and certainly not with someone like you at the helm.

You have proven already not to be capable of doing this job. I have no doubt your leadership will have us all skating on very thin ice. If you had a school report on your first 100 days, it would say 'you must do better', but the reality is that if you were in the office for 100 years, you would still be a failure. Please do the honourable thing and resign.

Catherine Ashton, Vice-President of the Commission/High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. – Madam President, I think it has been a very interesting debate and I am so glad that we have had the focus on an important region of the world. The passion with which people have spoken about the importance of what we do in terms of policy for the Arctic is extremely important for me as I take forward what I believe we should be doing in the future.

I want to assure Members of the House that preserving the environment and dialogue with the relevant populations – indigenous and non-indigenous – are paramount to the approach that we want to take. We want to make clear in all international discussions that Arctic resources should only be accessed and exploited when we have the highest environmental and safety standards and when they are fully respected.

We have to continue to underline that the European Union wants to work together with all the stakeholders concerned in the Arctic to make sure that we face the challenges appropriately. That includes hydrocarbon extraction in that context.

For my part, I think we have much to contribute, from our diplomacy on environment to our climate change policies; from our extensive Arctic research programmes to our policy supporting indigenous policies worldwide. I believe, too, that the Arctic Council has much to contribute. It is because of the work it does, not least in making sure that there is a full participation of indigenous people – in fact, it is the only organisation that allows them to sit alongside sovereign states – that we want to become permanent observers, which a number of honourable Members have indicated would be very useful.

I think it is possible to find a proper balance between Arctic protection and preservation, on the one hand, and the sustainable use of its resources on the other, and we must ensure that we do that properly.

The bringing together of seven representatives from different parts of the Commission – I think you told me yesterday, Madam President – to produce the report is a good example of the future that we wish to have in terms of collaboration and effective working manifested through the work that we do on the ground across the world.

Finally, I very much look forward to going to Lapland this weekend. It will be my third trip there. There is a big meeting to discuss issues with some of the foreign ministers. Concerning Rovaniemi and the possibility of a centre, there are two possibilities: one is an individual centre, or there is the possibility of networking different centres, and we certainly need to examine that as well.

President. – The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Elena Oana Antonescu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The issues linked to the Arctic region, ranging from the effects of global warming to the use of the resources and navigation in this region, have attracted ever-growing attention recently. We must be aware that the planet's future is closely linked to this region's future. The melting of the icebergs in the Arctic region, the growing need for resources and recent technological progress are some of the reasons why the Arctic region has become an area of particular interest to each of us. I think that the European strategy for this zone must focus on protecting and conserving the region, promoting sustainable use of the resources in the context of multilateral governance and, above all, on involving the population of this region in all these measures.

The appearance of new navigable channels also requires much tighter security and environmental standards to be established. Each maritime region needs a particular approach, and Europe can use the experience acquired from the programmes developed in other maritime regions, such as the Baltic Sea and Mediterranean Sea, while also offering models of good practice in this area.

Joanna Senyszyn (S&D), in writing. – (PL) A spectre is hovering over the Arctic. The spectre of global warming. The melting ice is having a crucial influence, not only on nature, but also on social relations, the economy and politics. On that oceanic ice shelf, on an area greater than Germany, Italy and France put together, apart from what is already being used, there are riches such as gas and crude oil. The layers of ice, which are getting thinner year by year, have stopped protecting the deposits from explorative drilling. A ruthless race is in prospect – a madness on the scale of the 19th-century gold rush. The European Union must adopt an unequivocal position on this. It is essential to develop a common, EU Arctic policy, especially concerning the use of new possibilities for the exploitation of natural deposits, dangers to the natural environment and new shipping opportunities.

The Arctic forms part of the territory of three EU Member States: Denmark, Finland and Sweden, as well as Iceland, which is applying for membership. We must remember that this is a completely new situation for the people of the far north, and also for the fauna and flora. The residents of the Arctic are aware of the growing influence of external social, economic and political factors on their lives. Our role is to help local communities find their feet in the new conditions and to protect their culture and language. Just as at the centre of EU policy are its citizens, so in plans to manage the Arctic, the key position must be occupied by the Arctic's people.

Rafał Trzaskowski (PPE), in writing. – The Arctic has long been absent from our agenda, but now it is once again drawing the attention of politicians and academics. The growing concern over the region is a consequence of climate change causing the melting of the Arctic ice cap. Not getting involved in the dispute

over the speed and extent of this process, it is widely assumed that it will eventually open up new possibilities for natural resources exploration and new maritime routes. We all agree that environmental consequences of this process will be profound. What I would like to draw the attention of this House and the EU as a whole to though is its political and, indeed, security dimension. The Cold War showed us how strategically important the Arctic is. We have witnessed economic, political, even military rivalry in this region. For its positive future, there is a clear need for a joint international effort, in which the EU should play an active role. There is a need to find a balance between economic exploitation of the region and its ecosystem, but there is also a need to protect, inter alia, the existing legal regime governing the Arctic, to name just this one issue.

12. Cuba (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on Cuba.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, the death of Orlando Zapata was an extremely negative event, which should never have happened, and we do not want it to happen again in Cuba or anywhere else.

The European Union and its institutions must be committed to condemning events that constitute violations of human rights, and working to ensure that nothing like this ever happens again. This must be the European Union's commitment.

Human rights are a fundamental symbol of the European Union's identity, because we believe in the values of freedom, tolerance and pluralism. It is therefore our personality, our most genuine personality. Where there are violations of these universal rights, the European Union condemns them publicly, and we have done this with Cuba. We did so when we indicated our pessimism and concern regarding the lack of progress on human rights in Cuba, and we did so when we demanded that the prisoners of conscience in Cuban prisons be released. There are currently around 200 prisoners of conscience, some of them in a very complex situation with regard to their health, and one of them is Guillermo Fariñas, who is in a very grave situation and also on hunger strike.

We also did so when we said that human rights defenders in Cuba needed to be protected, and we did so when we said that the Cuban Government, which had a number of prisoners under its jurisdiction, should be called to account for the death of Orlando Zapata.

However, the European Union's policy with regard to Cuba goes further. The European Union's policy with regard to Cuba is structured around certain elements, and I would like to highlight some of them.

Firstly, there is political dialogue. Political dialogue with the Cuban institutions, with the authorities and with the whole of civil society, which naturally also extends to human rights. Secondly, there is development cooperation with Cuba, which is solidarity with the Cuban people, nothing more and nothing less. It also involves promoting progress in terms of culture and democratic practices in Cuba.

These are the fundamental elements of a policy that is essentially aimed at a single target: the Cuban people, their welfare, their progress, their living conditions and respect for their human rights.

Andris Piebalgs, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, the Commission deeply regrets the death of Mr Orlando Zapata and its circumstances. I would also like to express my deep concern for the other political prisoners in Cuba. All of us in this room share the same sense of anger and frustration at the death of Mr Zapata, and we should do our very best to make sure that such events do not happen again in Cuba, or in any other country.

The European Union is rooted in the values of democracy, human rights and fundamental freedoms, which we strive to protect and promote after having suffered, until very recently, violations of basic human rights on our own continent. Human rights are universal and have no borders. This principle is an integral part of our dialogue with all partners in Europe and outside.

Constructive engagement, not a policy of coercion and sanctions, remains the basis of our policy towards Cuba, as underlined in the common position adopted in 1996. This is the rationale that led the Council to decide in June 2008 to lift the 2003 diplomatic measures, as a means to facilitate the political dialogue process and enable full use of the instruments under the 1996 common position. This is also the rationale that has led numerous Member States to resume their development cooperation with Cuba over the past

few months, representing a diverse range of the political parties represented in the European Parliament and reflecting, therefore, the shared view of the important role to be played by development cooperation in Cuba.

At such times in Cuba, inaction would be the worst possible option for the credibility of the European Union as a global actor. What is at stake is not only that credibility, but also our capacity to be present in Cuba. Thus, I firmly believe that the way forward is to pursue and deepen the ongoing political dialogue and continue cooperation with Cuba as a tool for improving the lives of the Cuban people.

Cooperation with Cuba has never been suspended by the European Union, because development is not about supporting the government – it is about supporting the people. Our view has always been that development cooperation constitutes an important element of our relations with Cuba. The ongoing projects in Cuba benefit the population directly by addressing their basic needs, through support for rehabilitation and reconstruction after the hurricanes, food security and adaptation to climate change. Projects are also being run in support of non-state actor activities.

I would like to be very clear that there is no EC funding channelled through the government or public entities. The money is channelled via United Nations agencies and European NGOs, who welcome the presence of the Commission and the European Union in Cuba.

It is important that the European Union continues to address the basic needs of the Cuban population while intervening in strategic sectors through the available thematic or geographical instruments. The task that the EU needs to face in a determined way is to find the right balance between showing openness to dialogue, supporting the Cuban population through development cooperation and reaffirming our principles.

José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (ES) Madam President, when my group asked for this matter to be included on the agenda, it did not do so in order to highlight errors, which are sometimes irreparable, in policies that indulge the enemies of freedom. It also did not do so in order to gain political return from this condemnation.

It did so in order that Parliament, which is the institution at the democratic heart of the European Union, could speak out to condemn the death of an innocent person, and, above all, to express its solidarity with those in Cuba who are fighting, living and dying, like Orlando Zapata, for their freedom and their dignity.

As the European Commission said, the Council's common position is still valid, and it is an honourable position because it asks for the immediate and unconditional release of political prisoners. It is also a consistent position, because it asks for human rights and fundamental freedoms to be respected, in order for Cuba to be rooted in our system of values and not in foreign systems such as those of China or Vietnam.

Madam President, the words of a brave man, Oswaldo Paya, who won the Sakharov Prize in 2002, still resound in this House. He said that the first victory to be proclaimed was that there was no hate in his heart. He said to those who oppressed him, who were his brothers, that he did not hate them, but that they were not going to impose their will through fear.

He said that Andrei Sakharov left a legacy of dignity and of working towards peoples living together peacefully, and that often the voices that count the most are the voices that are not heard.

In this House, we have not been able to hear the voices of the 'Ladies in White', who were also awarded the Sakharov Prize by Parliament. Now we will unfortunately not be able to hear the voice of Orlando Zapata, but soon we will be able to hear the voices of many more Cubans.

In the meantime, Madam President, with the legitimacy that Parliament has in representing 500 million citizens from the 27 Member States of the Union, it needs to loudly and clearly echo the unstoppable shout of freedom that we are hearing from the beloved island of Cuba.

(Applause)

Luis Yáñez-Barnuevo García, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (ES) Madam President, Mr López Garrido, Commissioner, let us never again allow our silence to result in us colluding with liberticide. Let us never again allow a person who fought for his rights and the rights of all to die in prison in Cuba, or anywhere else, without speaking out loudly and firmly to demand that he be saved.

Mr Orlando Zapata Tamayo, a 42-year old black builder, who was only asking for his conditions in prison to be improved, died after 86 days on hunger strike and seven years in prison for demanding that human

rights be respected. During this seven-year period, he was mistreated, humiliated and harassed by his guards, during which time – we should not forget – there was nothing but silence from the international community.

Other prisoners and human rights activists in Cuba are currently on hunger strike, such as the psychologist and journalist Guillermo Fariñas. Ladies and gentlemen, the resolution that we are tabling and debating today, and which we will vote on tomorrow, which I represent on behalf of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, demands that all prisoners of conscience in Cuba be freed. Once again, it is in favour of a democratic transition, and of strict respect for fundamental human rights.

For the moment, let us not enter into a subject that divides us: whether the common position should be maintained or not. Let us focus now on saving lives and on human rights. Let us also open up a period of calm reflection in which we seek out points of agreement on future policy regarding Cuba.

This text does, however, have significant added value. The fact that it is being tabled by six political groups expresses a new era of broad consensus in this House on the subject of human rights.

Let it never again be said that European democratic law yields to the orders – in inverted commas – of Yankee imperialism. However, let it also never be said again that the socialists and democrats are complacent or complicit in communist dictatorships. I say this quite simply because both of these statements are false, and the victims of liberticide, wherever they may be, need to know that we are united in unconditionally defending their cause.

Madam President, finally I would like to thank Mr Salafranca, who negotiated this text on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), Mrs Weber, from the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Mr Romeva i Rueda, on behalf of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, Mr Kožušník from the European Conservatives and Reformists, and other fellow Members who have taken part in this task, which has been difficult and complicated, but which I hope will be successful tomorrow.

Finally, I would also like to thank the Spanish Prime Minister and current President of the European Union, Mr Rodríguez Zapatero, for his encouragement and support for moving forward with this resolution that we are debating today.

Renate Weber, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – Madam President, on behalf of my political group, I would like first of all to express our condolences to the family of Mr Orlando Zapata Tamayo, who has paid the highest price for his convictions.

Over the years, his activism protecting human rights has been an inspiration to many other human rights advocates, inside and outside Cuba.

The resolution which is proposed by several political groups expresses our deep concern about human rights conditions in Cuba. Let us be very honest. The situation has not improved and many independent journalists, peaceful dissidents and human rights defenders are still being imprisoned simply because they want to exercise their right to freedom of speech, peaceful meetings and assembly.

At the same time, Cuban independent NGOs are not allowed to work as the government exercises a draconian control over them.

At the time of this debate, several human rights defenders are on hunger strike. This is a matter of concern as there are indications that Mr Guillermo Fariñas' health, at least, is deteriorating rapidly.

It is too bad that, so far, the Cuban authorities have disregarded the repeated calls from the EU to unconditionally release all political prisoners. This is why I strongly believe that this Parliament should ask the EU to continue to use all possible mechanisms to guarantee the work, and the lives, of those who aspire to a pluralistic and democratic Cuba.

Raül Romeva i Rueda, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (ES) Madam President, I would also like to join personally and on behalf of my group in offering condolences for the death of Orlando Zapata.

Irrespective of each person's opinion with regard to Cuba, this is obviously a regrettable incident in itself, which deserves our condemnation and certainly something more than reflection and remembrance. This event merits the coherent wording of the request that we make in this resolution, which is for those detained for their political motives or motivation in Cuba and anywhere in the world to be freed.

I think that what we are doing is coherent, I think that it needs to be done, and I think that it is important that we also do it – I would like to stress this – irrespective of the motivations that might be behind it. This is part of the agreement.

We also need to ask for these people to be freed immediately, in the case of Cuba, and, above all, recall the delicate situation – as has been mentioned – of some of the people who, following the example of Orlando Zapata, began a hunger strike, especially the case of Guillermo Fariñas.

However, I would also like to warn about the risk of using and exploiting this case politically for other issues which, as Mr Yáñez-Barnuevo has said, could be dangerous. I think it is important to remember that there are many processes under way that are useful, that are working, and that we should not, under any circumstances, be tempted – as some seem to want – to return to past events, to times gone by; to return to the political failure of the embargo, because we know the consequences of that.

Therefore, if we agree that we do not want situations such as that of Orlando Zapata to be repeated, I think it is important that we know how we can move forward together to prevent it from being repeated, starting with facilitating the process of democratisation and normalisation of the island.

Edvard Kožušník, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (CS) I was personally very upset about the death of Orlando Zapata, and I would therefore like, on behalf of the entire ECR group, to express condolences to all of his family. I myself was born in 1971, at the peak of the so-called communist normalisation in my country, which was one of the harshest periods of communist terror that my country went through. The experience which my country had with the criminal ideology of communism is the reason for the great solidarity of Czech citizens with the Cuban people, and we are therefore very sensitive to the sad news that has recently come out of Cuba.

Given that the totalitarian regime in Cuba is still asserting the slogan ‘socialism or death’, forty years after the Cuban revolution, it deserves no tolerance whatsoever. I believe that Orlando Zapata’s death was not in vain and that it will rouse the Cuban people to mass resistance against the communist regime. When Pavel Wonka died in a communist prison as the last victim of communist terror in my own country, the regime collapsed within a year and a half. I hope that Orlando Zapata will be the Cuban Pavel Wonka, in other words, the last victim of communist despotism. Cuba will perhaps soon break free from the grip of the revolutionary old guard and will become a true island of freedom.

I therefore appeal to you. Until there is fundamental and irreversible progress in the release of political prisoners, progress leading to the democratic functioning of the Cuban society and the holding of free elections, as well as a start to the process of structural reforms leading, among other things, to a better standard of living for all Cuban citizens, then it is impossible to consider opening talks on a reassessment of the EU’s common position.

Willy Meyer, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (ES) Madam President, my group deeply regrets the death of the prisoner Orlando Zapata. As is the case for any prisoner, the State was responsible for his safety and for his life. In this case, it is Cuba that is responsible, and we therefore deeply regret his death.

We do not agree with the way that this House manipulates the issue of human rights. Today, we are debating this issue and tomorrow we will vote on it. We did not do this for the military coup in Honduras. This House might be the only parliament in the world that did not condemn or vote against the military coup in Honduras, with its murders and torture.

We therefore do not agree with the philosophy that it depends on where it is happening, which human right is being violated and what the situation is as to whether we need to give an opinion or not.

A week ago, the largest mass grave in Latin America was discovered in Colombia. The authorities themselves are talking about 2 500 bodies, and this may rise to up to 50 000. Is this being condemned? Is this being discussed, voted on and condemned? What is happening with the civilian victims in Afghanistan? What is happening with the persecution in the Western Sahara? No! We will not be part of this hypocrisy.

I think that the fundamental issue is that we establish an equal relationship with the Republic of Cuba in order to tackle all the agendas: the political agendas, the human rights agendas, the penitentiary situation, but on an equal footing, because the European Union still has a common position with the Republic of Cuba, which is the exception to the rule. It does not have a common position with any other country in the world. It does not have one with the People’s Republic of China, which has been mentioned, or with Vietnam. Why is this? Why does it have one with Cuba and not with the People’s Republic of China?

I call on the Council, on the President of the Council, to clearly raise the following question: is the common position going to be ended? It is, in my opinion, one of the most obvious obstacles to moving forward with a frank dialogue between the European Union and the Republic of Cuba, with common, shared agendas that are of mutual interest.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Madam President, the death of the dissident Orlando Zapata as a result of a hunger strike and the arrest of the blogger Yoani Sánchez, who told the world about day-to-day life in Socialist Cuba, make clear that we must continue with the link established in our Cuba policy in 1996 with progress on democratisation and human rights. Hopes for progress under Raúl Castro, of course, have long since vanished into thin air.

The situation of political prisoners, for example, has not really improved. They still do not enjoy anything like the freedoms that the Castro brothers themselves were afforded during their imprisonment during the Batista dictatorship. With its stubborn adherence to the planned economy, Cuba is no longer even capable of meeting the most basic needs of its own population. In Cuba, prosperity and self-initiative are clearly regarded as criticism of the regime. In that regard, even the people of Communist China have things easier in that they can at least improve their lives through their own efforts.

The relaxation of the United States' economic embargo in respect of computers and software services will not be entirely able to meet the expectations that the public has drawn from President Obama's promises, but it will perhaps make it possible for the opposition to be better organised. Not least, it will also be harder for the Cuban regime, with increasing choice, to suppress the free expression of opinion. For this reason alone, we should support Europe's initiatives as best we can and push for further relaxations in the Communist system.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS DURANT

Vice-President

Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa (PPE). – (PL) The tragic death of the Cuban prisoner of conscience, Orlando Zapata, is further proof that the regime of the Castro brothers is ignoring the appeals of the international community to end violations of human rights, quietly getting rid of those who demand freedom and democracy. Today, this tragedy, this tragic death, has acquired symbolic significance. It is a desperate cry for help and for effective action, principally from international politicians and decision makers, who, while building relations with the Cuban authorities, do not want to talk to people from the opposition, and are turning a deaf ear to the voice of the representatives of civil society in Cuba.

We must, as quickly as possible, take concerted action to put pressure on the Castro regime and demand the immediate release of those who have been sentenced to many years of imprisonment for their views.

In recent years, the European Union has been trying to soften its stance and has even lifted diplomatic sanctions against Cuba, in the hope that this gesture will encourage the authorities to respect democratic standards. Unfortunately, the tragic death of Orlando Zapata shows that this policy is naive, ineffective and very clearly should not be continued.

Tomorrow, we are going to vote on the resolution to wind up today's debate. This should be a clear signal of our opposition to the violations of human rights, the inhumane treatment of political prisoners and the lack of respect for fundamental civil liberties in Cuba. We must show that we are in solidarity with the Cuban people. We must be the voice of those who now have no voice in Cuba.

(Applause)

Emine Bozkurt (S&D). – (NL) Madam President, the tragic fate of Orlando Zapata Tamayo has led to deep indignation the world over. In his hopeless situation, Zapata felt the only option open to him was to kill himself by hunger strike. He has had to pay with his life for his protests against his imprisonment and the appalling conditions in his Cuban prison. And why? What crime did Zapata commit which led to him being in that prison in the first place? Expressing and propagating in a non-violent way an opinion other than that of the government is no crime. That does not make you a criminal or a traitor.

Zapata's death is no isolated incident. The psychologist and journalist, Guillermo Fariñas, has also started a hunger strike, because he wants to bring about the release of 26 sick political prisoners. What fate awaits him? Will he, too, soon pay with his life for his campaign for respect for human rights? When is the Cuban

Government going to alter its position? It is estimated that there are around 200 other political prisoners in Cuba. Detaining people for their ideals runs totally counter to the Universal Declaration on Human Rights.

We call on Cuba to directly and unconditionally release these prisoners of conscience and to put an end to this gross violation of human rights. No government can control or govern its people's thinking. Even if you imprison people behind walls or put them behind bars, their ideas will continue to survive. Any attempt to stamp out such thoughts and ideas will always fail. Has Cuba not already had years of experience of this?

The government will simply have to enter into dialogue with people who hold dissenting views. Political dialogue is the only instrument for moving forward. That is what Cuba owes its citizens, because the Cuban people deserve democracy and respect for their fundamental freedoms. Zapata's death must not be allowed to go down in history as meaningless; it must mark an end to the current human rights situation in Cuba.

The European Union must do everything within its power to help improve the human rights situation in Cuba. This is not just a question of political prisoners like Zapata; it is also a question of defenders of human rights being able to freely go about their work. The Cuban Government must take care of the Cuban people. It cannot simply detain people or treat them as criminals, out of fear. Depriving citizens of their freedom is a crime.

Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (ALDE). – (ES) Madam President, defending human rights means condemning the avoidable, cruel and unjust death of Orlando Zapata and calling for those who are still in prison to be released. I hope that this will make the Cuban authorities think, as their regime needs to make progress so that their citizens can enjoy true democracy.

In Cuba, there is a dictatorship because there are prisoners of conscience, because there is fear of debate, free exchange of ideas and plans, because there is fear of freedom. It is not a crime to have ideas; they can provoke, surprise and shock, but they always need to be argued and debated. They never require imprisonment.

Societies think and feel, and so do prisoners, and it is impossible to forbid people from thinking and feeling. This means that the ideas and feelings that people want to repress end up seeping into the consciousness of the whole of society, like water. This is true for Cuban society as well and the protagonists of the revolution that put an end to the regime of Fulgencio Batista should know this more than anyone.

I hope that this resolution helps them to make the transition that they need to make! However, human rights are non-negotiable. Parliament gains in credibility when it reacts with the same strength to all human rights violations in all countries: in Afghanistan, in Palestine, in the Basque Country – my little country – in Honduras and in Colombia. This should be our commitment. It is, of course, the same commitment.

Tomasz Piotr Poręba (ECR). – (PL) I think all of us in this Chamber will agree that the corrupt Communist dictatorship is making any kind of positive change in Cuba impossible. The police state of the Castro brothers is ruining the island economically, destroying civil liberty and depriving many Cubans of the hope of a life worth living.

The future of Cuba lies, of course, in the hands of Cubans themselves, but the European Union can play an active role here. We must demand the release of all political prisoners. In fact, this should be the first condition for any kind of dialogue with Cuba. We must support the activity of non-governmental organisations, support respect for human rights and promote access to independent media, including the Internet.

Promoting democratic change is an area in which transatlantic ties may play a very important role. This is why we should cooperate closely with Washington. By combined effort, we can develop a long-term strategy on Cuba, which will not start with a blind acceptance of the *status quo*, but a far-reaching vision of democratic and economic reconstruction.

(Applause)

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Mr President, this debate demonstrates, once again, that the majority of Parliament is two-faced. The same majority which declined to condemn the military coup in Honduras, ignoring the fact that it led to the imprisonment and death of countless people, is now prepared to negotiate association agreements with a government that is the result of elections rigged by those behind the coup.

Of course, we all regret the death of the Cuban citizen, Mr Orlando Zapata Tamayo, after a hunger strike in a Cuban hospital. However, we must deplore the terms of this debate and its unacceptable position against Cuba, leaving aside the grave consequences of the economic, trade and financial embargo imposed by the

United States on Cuba and the detention in American prisons of five Cuban citizens who only wanted to defend their country.

We cannot continue with an unacceptable common position which prevents the European Union from maintaining open and complete relations with the Cuban Government on the basis of bilateral interests. It is time to end the common position in order to start normalising relations between the European Union and Cuba. We expect this of the Spanish Presidency.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE). – (PL) Madam President, we remember Fidel Castro's famous cry of 'socialism or death'. Today, we can safely say that, from this cry, only death remains. Proof of this are the circumstances which led to the death of the Cuban prisoner and patriot, Orlando Zapata. Castro's dictatorial rule is a disgrace to the idea of democratic socialism.

What is happening in Cuba brings disgrace upon all who are involved in politics under these Left-wing banners. I was ashamed of the European Union, too, when the then Commissioner, Mr Michel, visited Cuba with a proposal of cooperation on development, but carefully avoided contact with the democratic opposition.

We must end this kind of policy, this closing our eyes to the reality of a country in which there have never been free elections, and where prisoners of conscience are serving prison sentences of many years in scandalous conditions. The Spanish Presidency is, today, proposing operating an open policy towards Havana, but an essential condition of this policy must be democratisation of the Cuban regime, release of political prisoners, commencement of dialogue with society, lifting of censorship and restoration of civil liberties. This should be clearly, openly and firmly said to the government in Cuba. Besides, it is in their interest.

We know there are different ways to freedom for people oppressed by dictators. There is the path taken by Poland and South Africa – the way of dialogue and understanding. However, there is also the path which Romania took in its bloody overthrow of the regime. It is in everyone's interest to avoid such a scenario. Which path will Havana choose? The key to this is to be found in Cuba. The policy of the European Union should actively contribute to leading Cuba into the area of freedom and democracy. This, too, should be the position of the European Parliament.

Richard Howitt (S&D). – Madam President, firstly I want to express my own deep sympathy for the death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo and my deepest concern for the four further Cuban prisoners and one opposition activist who have themselves started hunger strikes in protest.

The European Parliament should reiterate our call for the immediate and unconditional release of prisoners of conscience in Cuba – 55 according to Amnesty International, 200 according to Cuba's Human Rights Commission – and we should express particular concern today for the recent detention and beating of Darsi Ferrer, director of a health and human rights centre in Havana. Amnesty International itself has not been invited to visit Cuba for 19 years and should be allowed to do so. We should ask the Cuban Government to agree specific dates for the proposed visit of Manfred Nowak, UN Special Rapporteur on Torture, who we intend to meet in Geneva next week.

As I am one of the people in this House who has always opposed the US embargo on trade, inflicted since 1962, I have welcomed the fact that under President Obama, measures have been approved to allow Cuban Americans to travel more freely as well as sending more money home. I welcomed the review in 2008 of our EU common position leading to the establishment of a political dialogue between Cuba and the EU and re-establishing EC development cooperation, and I welcome the fact that the BBC has recently been given free access to Cuba. But I express disappointment that, in the United Nations Human Rights Council, Cuba has failed to agree the recommendations to ratify the two key human rights conventions – the ICCPR and the ICESCR – and to allow independent inspection of prisons.

I say to the Commission and to the Presidency this afternoon that you – and all of us who visit Cuba – should remain firm in ensuring that we meet members of Cuban civil society. US Deputy Assistant Secretary of State, Bisa Williams, was able to undertake such an unrestricted visit last year and we should insist – any of us that go to Cuba – that we do the same.

Louis Michel (ALDE). – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, Minister, the death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo is tragic evidence of the despair to which a lack or an absence of freedom can lead.

As the Minister said, this clearly should not have happened. We must denounce the detention of prisoners of conscience and demand their release. We cannot support the arbitrariness of a power that obstinately refuses to embrace the exercising of the most fundamental freedoms, but it is my belief that we cannot deprive

ourselves of the virtues of, and prospects for, a political dialogue, which, now more than ever, remains the most tangible expression of our European values.

Relations between Cuba and the European Union have been complex for a very long time now; often, they are based on a lack of awareness and of understanding, which has led to serious tensions and which regularly undermines the advances in and prospects for political dialogue. We all know that Cuba is today at a turning point in its history. More than ever, I remain convinced that we would be wrong not to preserve the advantages and advances, however modest, of a dialogue sustained by particular historical, cultural and linguistic links.

The European Union is, without doubt, the only political power capable of convincing the Cubans that the isolation in which they are confining themselves is suicidal and can only lead them, sooner or later, to a tragic fate. We cannot shirk this responsibility that we have to pursue the dialogue without excluding any of the difficult issues but also without applying – as I believe is all too often the case – double standards.

Marek Henryk Migalski (ECR). – (PL) Liberty will triumph in Cuba. There will be democracy there, and there will be a free-market economy.

The European Union cannot help in bringing down the regime and, I suppose, does not want to, but it should want and should be able to help the Cubans after the system has been changed. The experiences of countries like Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia and Hungary show that this can be done, and that it can be successful. We can help with our experience, and after Castro's overthrow, the European Union should help with its experience and its money, so that Cuba never reaches the situation, described by Polish commentator, Marek Magierowski, in which in the future, the descendants of Orlando Zapata, of whom frequent mention has been made in this Chamber, serve rum on the promenades and boulevards of Havana to the descendants of Castro.

Jiří Maštálka (GUE/NGL). – (CS) I am originally a doctor by profession and I know how difficult it is to save human life. I sincerely regret any waste of human life and I share your sorrow over the death of Orlando Zapata. I have carefully examined all of the proposed resolutions of the political groups. I am afraid I must repeat what I said when we were recently debating the report into the human rights situation in the Central Asian republics. I said then that we were making a mistake in setting ourselves up as mentors with nothing good to say and showing no respect for the specific historical and cultural traditions of these countries, not even for the positive results which these countries have achieved. The same applies to Cuba. I firmly believe that the only way to improve the situation in Cuba is through a dialogue of equals, which Cuban officials are ready for. In this way, we can also help to improve social and economic rights in Cuba. We must not forget that Cuba, despite its difficult economic situation, is always in the first rank of countries providing assistance to others, for example, in the disaster in Haiti. It is true that he who is quick to condemn likes to condemn. We should definitely not take this path.

Mario Mauro (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I truly believe I can declare that we will write a worthy page in the history of this Parliament today and even more so tomorrow when we vote. We are writing it because for once, putting aside our mutual prejudices due to our membership of different groups, we bow down before the supreme mystery of a man's death and acknowledge the truth.

What will we actually write in this resolution? We will write things that may seem simple and go without saying but that are actually very important. We will write that in Cuba, there is no freedom; we will write that in Cuba, there is no democracy; we will write that life is life and people should not be killed. We may take this almost for granted, but it has taken us many years to overcome our mutual prejudice and to recognise a fact that does not offend each of our political faiths, but simply leads us to recognise the basic grain of truth that is the only foundation for discussion.

We must not avoid discussions with Cuba, but must instead insist that any true discussion should stem from the truth, in other words, its failure to recognise the central importance of the individual. What we need, more than handshakes and friendly gestures, are appropriate measures, causing Castro's government to give up any hope of achieving compromises that would attach no importance, or at least only secondary importance, to the question of human rights.

Parliament has, quite rightly, seized this opportunity, unlike the High Representative, who I will again remind, as I did this morning, that *Cuba libre* is not the name of a cocktail: it is a rallying cry that we carry in our hearts, because we want democracy, and we want Cuba to be free.

María Muñoz De Urquiza (S&D). – (ES) Madam President, the Spanish Members from the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament deeply regret the death of Orlando Zapata, and the situation of the prisoners of conscience, and we very firmly call for their release.

The death of Orlando Zapata is regrettable, but it might also be a trigger for us to stop talking about human rights in Cuba and start working for human rights with the Cuban authorities, to promote human rights in Cuba. In order to do this, we need to begin thinking about changing the common position that is preventing us from having any dialogue with the Cuban authorities, who have the capacity to change the human rights situation on the island.

The common position – which, incidentally, is not so common, because a large proportion of the European Union Member States have bilateral relations with Cuba – is an obstacle that is hindering any possibility of political dialogue. It is an obstacle to the European Union implementing the principles that are behind its external action, which include promoting democracy and human rights in the world.

The common position is an outmoded, outdated instrument adopted last century by 15 Member States of the European Union. Now we have 27 Member States. The situation in the world has changed. The United States is holding a dialogue with Cuba on issues as sensitive as immigration. The Organisation of American States has admitted Cuba, on the basis of dialogue in the context of respect for the principles behind the Organisation.

In this new era for the European Union, we need a bilaterally negotiated instrument that will enable us to be effective at doing what the European Union is effective at, which is promoting democracy and human rights. It is an oddity for the European Union to block dialogue with Cuba since, in its external relations, it has negotiated and is implementing agreements with countries that do not meet the minimum standards for civil and political rights and, of course, in terms of social rights either, which Cuba does.

Only dialogue, the mechanisms of cooperation and compromise through an international treaty will enable the European Union to demand anything from Cuba, and those who refuse dialogue are obstructing the search for a dignified way out for those that they claim to be defending.

By contrast, the foreign policy of the Spanish Government has set a good example, as through constructive, exacting dialogue, a considerable number of prisoners of conscience have been released.

As Don Quixote said, if someone is punished through actions, they do not need to be punished through words. We are therefore going to stop talking and start working for human rights in Cuba, in cooperation with the Cuban authorities, which is what the prisoners of conscience need, rather than condemnations from this House.

Ramon Tremosa i Balcells (ALDE). – (ES) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, in the 2003 ‘black spring’ raids in Cuba, 75 dissidents were imprisoned, accused of being spies for the United States. Orlando Zapata was arrested at the same time for disrespect, public disorder and disobedience.

The wives of the 75 dissidents formed the ‘Ladies in White’ group, which was awarded the Sakharov Prize for freedom of thought by Parliament in 2005. Incidentally, I would like to point out that the Castro regime did not grant visas to the ‘Ladies in White’ to come here to Parliament to collect their prize.

The Cuban Human Rights Commission recognises that there are around 200 political prisoners there, 22 of whom are journalists. Cuba is third in the sad world ranking of imprisoned journalists, behind Iran with 52 and China with 24.

Orlando Zapata, aged 42, was declared a prisoner of conscience by Amnesty International. He began a hunger strike on 3 December 2009 due to the repeated beatings that he received and other ill treatment, and died on 23 February, 85 days after he began his hunger strike.

Parliament should express its support for the family and friends of Mr Zapata and express its great concern at the state of human rights in Cuba. This House should send a clear message to the Castro regime, especially in the context of the Spanish Presidency. The Spanish Presidency should, incidentally, be much more active in defending fundamental rights in Cuba.

Finally, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to take this opportunity to call for the immediate release of all political prisoners in Cuba.

Francisco José Millán Mon (PPE). – (ES) Madam President, democracy and defending human rights have an important place among the Union's principles and objectives for external action – I refer to Article 21 of the Treaty on European Union. This Article also applies to relations with Cuba and with the Cuban people, who are very dear to us.

Unfortunately, in the last five years, the Council's actions appear to have been essentially governed by a desire to correct the line adopted in previous years, especially in 2003 when there was an extremely harsh wave of oppression in Cuba. In 2005, the Council suspended the 2003 measures.

Subsequently, there were trips to the island by foreign ministers and commissioners. In June 2008, the 2003 measures were lifted and a global political dialogue was established – as Mr López Garrido reminded us – along with regular high-level meetings. A Head of State of a Member State even recently visited Havana. Unfortunately, the European political leaders who went to the island did not have any time to meet with the representatives of the dissidents, who therefore felt marginalised.

Over all this time, repression in Cuba has continued. There have been no changes or reforms. Nevertheless, political dialogue has been maintained. Now we are all shaken up by the cruel death of the political prisoner, Orlando Zapata.

As is well known, ladies and gentlemen, some governments, such as the Spanish Government, have repeatedly said that they want to cancel the common position. It says something very logical: support for democratic transition, essentially the same thing that is required by the principles and objectives of Article 21 of the treaty.

I will conclude with two points. The common position has not hindered dialogue. This is obvious. What is more, it was reconfirmed recently by the 27 ministers, in June 2009. Secondly, the priority cannot be to change the common position – that would be the last straw! The priority now is to ask for the immediate, complete and unconditional release of all political prisoners.

I see Cuba and Latin America as Western, and the symbols that identify the West are the dignity of human beings and respect for their fundamental rights. I have a final thought: I would like to remind the Council that, in its own conclusions in June 2009, it said that the future of political dialogue with the Cuban authorities was dependent on progress being made, in particular, on human rights. Can anyone say that this progress is taking place today? Can anyone really say that?

Antonio Masip Hidalgo (S&D). – (ES) 'History will absolve me' was the famous statement of a young lawyer who stirred his people. History does absolve him for his revolt against tyranny and then against the United States embargo.

However, it is with the same emphatic judgment, that Parliament, which represents the largest area of freedom and democracy in the world, condemns the dictatorship suffered by the people of Cuba, the violation of human rights on the island, the cruelty to political prisoners and the contempt for its nationals in exile. The judgment of history is clear.

Through this resolution, Members from all ideologies are standing alongside the Cuban people in their struggle. We need to do everything we can to prevent the brutal oppression that they are suffering, which includes cancelling the paralysing common position.

I will pay tribute to Raúl Rivero in the last verses that he wrote in his city of Havana, which say that they do not tax affection, emptiness, suffocation or bitterness. The ruins of the homeland are safe. Do not worry comrades. Now we are going.

Fiorello Provera (EFD). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, once again, the choices and conduct of the Cuban communist regime create a dilemma for our Parliament: is it possible to carry on holding discussions with this regime? For years now, the European Parliament has been asking the Cuban authorities for democratic reforms that respect human rights. But the handover of power from Fidel Castro to his brother, Raúl, has led neither to democratic reforms, nor to the release of political prisoners.

The death of Orlando Zapata in prison, after 85 days of hunger strike, demonstrates the ideological and oppressive nature of the regime. For 10 years, the European Union has financed EUR 145 million of aid measures to Cuba: the results have been far from brilliant. In fact, this funding has helped to keep tyranny alive. If we want to be credible, we must demand that relations with Havana, including development aid, are

tied in to specific and verifiable improvements in the human rights situation for all Cuban citizens, beginning with the immediate release of political prisoners and prisoners of conscience.

We should not throw down an ultimatum but call for change by one of the planet's most oppressive regimes, a faint imitation of an ideology overtaken by history and fast becoming extinct.

Michael Gahler (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, we should make a tangible offer to the people of Cuba, and also to the island's regime: in place of the political status quo, we will fund a transition to democracy in Cuba. The first step must be the release of all political prisoners. In parallel, the United States should end its sanctions, which have helped to cement the regime in place rather than to overcome it. The next step should be for a round table composed of representatives of the regime and of the civil rights movement based in Cuba to draw up a schedule for the transition to democracy and for democratic elections.

Incidentally, Central Europe shows that there is still a future for the former State party – even for that party, then, there is life after the death of the old system. We, as the EU and as Member States, should support this process in a similar way to how we did in Central Europe. Doing so would help the Cuban people, stabilise the region and would also pave the way for a new kind of relations with the US that would not represent a repeat of the pre-Castro era.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Madam President, regardless of the reasons behind it, the death of Mr Orlando Zapata Tamayo is regrettable; it is regrettable that he took his protest to its ultimate conclusion. However, we cannot accept any intensification of unacceptable political and ideological campaigns against Cuba and its people which use this sad and regrettable event as a pretext.

Regardless of the viewpoint of each person with respect to the choices of the Cuban people, those choices and their sovereign right to decide their destiny and the form of political organisation of their state must be respected.

For these reasons, we condemn all and every form of intervention or attack, including the criminal blockade to which Cuba has been subjected for almost half a century.

For these reasons, we also consider that the logical position of the European Union and the path to be followed must be to have a complete normalisation of relations with Cuba by means of the removal of the common position against Cuba, which represents an unacceptable form of discrimination exercised against Cuba and its people.

Above all, we do not accept the immense hypocrisy which affects many of those within Parliament and we strongly denounce the two-faced policy of the European Union.

Antonio López-Istúriz White (PPE). – (ES) Madam President, I am addressing my speech to Orlando Zapata's mother and to those suffering along with him in the fight for freedom in Cuba: they are not alone.

Today, through this resolution – for which, in my capacity as Secretary-General of my party, I would like to thank the authors, and especially all the parties that have signed it – Parliament is speaking out as one against this isolated and decrepit dictatorship. Today, we are signing the beginning of the international death sentence for this regime.

I am convinced, based on the majority of the speeches that I have heard, that we are all united in firmly and clearly condemning the death of your son. Many of us, however, are going further than this statement: you can rest assured that we will remain vigilant in order to secure the unconditional release of all political prisoners on the island.

We will remain vigilant regarding the situation of human rights violations on the island. The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) will, of course, fight to maintain the European Union's common position, and I am sure based on what I have heard that many others will do the same.

We will not give mixed signals, but rather a clear guide for achieving our dream of seeing a democratic Cuba. The supreme sacrifice made by Orlando has produced a response in the good consciences of the whole world. Let us ensure that the silent sacrifice of thousands of Cubans is celebrated in the near future in a free Cuba.

Gesine Meissner (ALDE). – (DE) Madam President, for us, it is relatively easy to talk, when human rights violations take place elsewhere and people are also dying for their beliefs. It is important to make this point. Mr Zapata really has lost his life as a result of his hunger strike, and there are also other prisoners who have now been prompted to go on hunger strike.

We need, therefore, to give specific thought to how we can move forwards in a targeted way. Some have said that we absolutely should not talk to Cuba because the regime there is unacceptable to us. Others – and I do not think this position is a good one at all, Mr Ferreira – have expressed the opinion that there is hypocrisy here and that the people of Cuba should be allowed the freedom to make their own political decisions. I believe that the freedom to make political decisions really stops where human rights are violated and people die. In those circumstances we, as the European Parliament, must do something.

Against that backdrop, it is absolutely right for the specific proposals that have been laid on the table – not least including a few new suggestions from Mr Gahler – to be discussed in detail and for us to consider what we can do to intervene against human rights violations all over the world and to help the people of the world.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Madam President, as we are discussing our relations with Cuba here today in the shadow of the tragic death of Orlando Zapata, we must acknowledge that the view that we have had of Cuba does date from a time when our thoughts were defined by a friend-or-foe framework. We had, on the one hand, the bad Cubans who were vassals of the Soviet Union intent on pursuing international revolution and, on the other hand, the good Cubans, who rescued the country from the grip of the sugar barons, the mafia, the CIA and US imperialism. On one side were the bad Cubans, the Communist oppressors of the people, and on the other those who provided the population with education, medical care and an end to their hunger. Today, if the death of Orlando Zapata is to make sense – if death can ever make sense – we should, at all events, take this legacy very seriously. This death must not be in vain.

The other thing that must happen is that the EU must pursue clear routes, dedicated political routes, and must not allow us to be put under the yoke of the States; we must be free of the old ideological encumbrances and we must be on an equal footing in the political dialogue and push for there to be clear improvements in the human rights situation so that we will soon be able to talk of a free Cuba and the people of the island will be able to live in democracy.

Alf Svensson (PPE). – (SV) Madam President, the USA's trade embargo has been in place for almost 50 years. The embargo has brought poverty and oppression to the people of Cuba, as many different speakers have highlighted.

Many people will be familiar with the report produced by Human Rights Watch in November 2009 entitled 'New Castro, Same Cuba' which proposed that the embargo should be lifted and that Cuba's dictators should have six months in which to release political prisoners. If they were unable to do this, then a more intelligent embargo should be introduced. This would be of the type which has been used on occasions recently and which involves freezing assets and foreign investment and putting in place a ban on travel. The major democratic states and the EU should, of course, support this. It would be interesting to know what the President-in-Office of the Council thinks of this proposal from Human Rights Watch.

Anna Záborská (PPE). – (SK) Engaging ourselves against human rights violations must be a priority for the European Union in all circumstances.

Orlando Zapata, a Cuban political prisoner, died having staged a hunger strike. Another Cuban prisoner is staging a hunger strike as a protest on behalf of 25 prisoners who are in very bad health and whose lives are threatened. It is not a solution to do what the Spanish Government suggested when they offered asylum to the starving prisoner. I am wondering about the Spanish Government, which is chairing the European Union at this time, because their proposal does not address the situation. The immediate release of political prisoners is quite difficult. And so I ask Commissioner Piebalgs to have the European Commission enter into negotiations with the Cuban Government to allow the International Red Cross to visit Cuban political prisoners. This would enable an objective assessment of their condition and help in further negotiations. The Red Cross was allowed to do this at the Guantánamo prison.

Angelika Werthmann (NI). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I, too, advocate compliance with human rights in Europe, as well as in other parts of the world. Mr Zapata's death is a cry for help from a person drawing attention in a very tragic way to what – at least for him – was a completely unbearable situation. I want to see us, as Europeans, take a clear stand for compliance with the human rights enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations, irrespective of the political situation.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, I believe that the debate that we have had regarding the issue of the situation of prisoners of conscience in Cuba, due to the death of one of them, Orlando Zapata, shows that there is a high level of agreement between Members and political groups. I am certain that this will be demonstrated tomorrow in the vote that is to take place on the resolutions

resulting from this debate, which are basically in line with the position of the Council, the Commission and all the European Union institutions. This undoubtedly strengthens the European Union in this essential dialogue with Cuba and in the objective of advancing and improving the lot of the Cuban people.

I think that we can agree that we need to speak out immediately in any place where there is a violation of human rights. I think this is a fundamental principle that has been highlighted, and it should always be measured using the same yardstick.

The European Union must come to the fore as soon as there is a violation of human rights, because that is part of its very personality. In this case, we are doing so in relation to Cuba, by saying and demanding that all the remaining prisoners of conscience in Cuba should be released and that human rights should be respected there.

That is not all, however: we need to work effectively and be effective, achieve results that improve the well-being and living conditions of prisoners of conscience or even make it possible for them to be released.

In some cases, this has been achieved, and in some cases, progress has been made. This is because, amongst other things, there is a fundamental element of European Union policy in relation to Cuba, which is political dialogue. This dialogue was resumed recently – which I believe is a good thing – and, by putting an end to the sanctions which were part of the European Union's position, and which did not make any sense at all, and resuming this political dialogue, it has been possible to do something that had not been possible since 2003: talking to the Cuban authorities about prisoners of conscience.

Naturally, the evaluation that some of you have mentioned, the evaluation of the result of this dialogue, will have to take place periodically, and there will have to be an evaluation of this process this year. Many of you – I am referring, for example, to the speeches by Mr Mauro, Mr Yáñez-Barnuevo or Mr Michel – have highlighted the importance of this dialogue, of this cooperation, and of the moral authority that the European Union has to talk to Cuba and achieve progress, which is the ultimate aim.

We therefore welcome the majority agreement in this House regarding the human rights situation in Cuba, which I believe can be summarised in one message: although we continue to be open to dialogue with Cuba, the European Union is going to continue to demand that all political prisoners be freed there and that the civil and political rights of Cuban citizens be respected.

Andris Piebalgs, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, I believe that this debate again has proven that, on issues of human rights and democracy, Parliament is a lighthouse.

The Commission, too, will never tolerate the violation of human rights and democracy. So that means that it will stay a cornerstone of our policy, not only because of its strength, but we also believe that if you have strong views, you should make them known.

As you know also, our basis for our work with Cuba will lie in continuing the Common Position from 1996. This provides the basis and it is very clear that there should be some basic changes in human rights in Cuba.

At the same time, constructive dialogues that started in 2008 are also giving positive signs. I would not say that we have achieved major breakthroughs, but on a lot of issues, there has been progress.

I believe this is the way we need to continue. And we should also continue meeting civil society. The Commission will follow the Council conclusion that says that, when appropriate, meetings with the democratic opposition will form part of high level visits and we will seek them actively.

President. – I have received seven motions for resolutions tabled in accordance with Rule 110(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Krzysztof Lisek (PPE), in writing. – (PL) Orlando Zapata Tamayo, arrested in 2003 with a group of 75 other dissidents during a crackdown on opposition groups carried out by the authorities, died following a two-month hunger strike in a Cuban prison. I hope the tragic death of one of Cuba's best known political prisoners has reminded everyone that the question of human rights in Cuba has not been settled.

I fully agree with the demands of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and many human rights organisations that the governments of European states should put pressure on the Cuban authorities for the unconditional release of political prisoners, with the threat of blocking every attempt at improving EU-Cuba relations. I am of the opinion that the complete lifting of sanctions against Cuba by the European Union, without negotiating the actual release of all political prisoners, was premature. At the same time, I would like to stress that the citizens of Cuba should not pay for the mistakes of the people who make such decisions. It is high time the country took specific steps towards democratisation, building civil society and respecting human rights, in particular, freedom of speech and association.

I would like to echo the words of the former Prime Minister of Spain, José María Aznar, and say it is unacceptable that, during visits to Cuba, European politicians refuse to meet representatives of the opposition. We must find tools to support the development of a democratic system in Cuba, and pass on to the Cuban nation the universal values associated with building democracy and a democratic society.

Tunne Kelam (PPE), in writing. – The premature death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, after seven years of illegal imprisonment against which he was left with only one means of protest, must be seen as the responsibility of the repressive Cuban regime. It is our responsibility to keep in mind the words of Orlando Zapata's mother: 'You should not have to go through what my son had to experience'. During the last four years of Raúl Castro's leadership, expectations that the Communist dictatorship in Cuba could become more human have clearly been disappointed. People there continue to risk their lives when voicing their opinion. There are still about 200 political prisoners in Cuba. Both the USA and the EU Member States have condemned the death of Mr Zapata, yet this protest has not been strong or timely enough. In cases like this, one cannot, like the Spanish Presidency, waste any time in reacting. The moral of Zapata's case is that one cannot ignore the harsh realities of the Cuban dictatorship. Our policy towards Cuba must remain conditional on genuine changes there. The EU has to take the side of the Cuban people rather than cherish hopes that Zapata's murderers can be trusted.

(The sitting was suspended at 17.25 and resumed at 18.00)

IN THE CHAIR: MRS WALLIS

Vice-President

13. Question Time (Council)

President. – The next item is Question Time (B7-0017/2010).

The following questions are addressed to the Council.

Question 1 by **Georgios Papanikolaou** (H-0052/10)

Subject: Cooperation between the EU and Turkey over illegal immigration

Most illegal immigrants to the EU arrive in Greece from Turkey across the maritime borders. From Greece, they then move on to the rest of the EU.

Given that Turkey quite justifiably wishes to become a member of the European Union, what initiatives does the Spanish Presidency intend to take to put pressure on Turkey to cooperate, since cooperation is indispensable?

How does the Presidency judge progress in the negotiations between the EU and Turkey on the readmission agreement and between Turkey and Frontex on the agreement for exchanging information and involving Turkey in joint operations? Is Greece being notified of progress in these negotiations?

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, as you know, increased cooperation with third countries – with countries of origin and transit in migration – is a key element for the European Union in terms of combating illegal immigration.

This has been one of the major changes, developments and advances that have taken place as a result of what is known as the global approach to immigration and the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum. Cooperation with countries that are the source of migration is one of the most important elements of the new immigration policy – before 2004, there was practically no immigration policy in the European Union

– and one of the prime elements of the policy that arose following the Hampton Court meeting in 2004 is cooperation with countries of origin and transit for illegal migration.

As I said, this is part of the European Pact on Immigration and Asylum, and in this respect, in its conclusions in December last year on enlargement, the Council welcomed the initiation of strengthened dialogue on migration with Turkey, and asked for specific measures to be adopted, for example readmission, border controls, etc.

The Stockholm Programme has reaffirmed the need to act against illegal immigration, and, furthermore, it is clear from the Stockholm Programme and from the Council's conclusions of December 2009, that we need to conclude readmission agreements with Turkey and, in the meantime, apply the existing bilateral agreements.

I can tell you that the last round of negotiations on this readmission agreement took place only last month, on 19 February in Ankara, and the Council is going to continue to support the Commission in its efforts to secure the most favourable conclusion possible to these negotiations.

I must also cite the collaboration and cooperation between Frontex and Turkey. Council Regulation (EC) No 2007/2004 facilitates this operational cooperation between Member States and third countries, and it should also be said that negotiations are taking place on an agreement such as that mentioned in this Regulation between Frontex and Turkey.

This is an operational task involving exchanging information, analysing risks, research and coordinated joint Frontex operations. This is the framework in which operational cooperation is now developing between the Agency and the Turkish authorities.

We hope that these negotiations end as soon as possible, in a fruitful way, and, in any event, the Member States will be kept informed of any future developments.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Thank you very much for your reply. I should like to make a further two comments.

The first is that, today or tomorrow, in tandem with today's debate, the Greek Parliament will be voting on a legislative initiative by the Greek Government which makes it easier and more flexible to acquire Greek nationality than in the past. Of course, this makes Greece even more attractive to immigrants, especially illegal immigrants, who believe that at some point in the future, they will be able to regularise their status. I should like, from a strategic point of view, to hear if the Presidency thinks this is a good move.

Secondly, it was announced in February that Frontex is to create its first outpost in Piraeus, in order to strengthen its presence in the Aegean. Is there any specific timetable for this?

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Honourable Member, I cannot tell you now precisely what the timetable will be for these negotiations that are taking place. What is certain is that the political will for them to succeed is there. The information that you refer to regarding Greece highlights the need and the opportunity for the fight against illegal immigration to be strengthened through these readmission agreements.

We need to support these conversations, these negotiations, which are basically conducted by the Commission. I must remind you that before the end of last year, there was a visit by Minister Billström, on behalf of the Swedish Presidency, and Mr Barrot, Vice-President of the Commission, to Turkey, on 5 November 2009.

This visit was followed by contact from the Commission. With regard to the new Commission, this case is essentially under the remit of Mrs Malmström, who knows the Stockholm Programme very well because she was involved in making it a reality and putting it together. I am optimistic that the information that you are referring to can be compensated for through much stronger regulation of readmission agreements, real readmission agreements with Turkey. I cannot give you a precise timetable for them at the moment, but I can tell you that the Presidency of the Council and the Commission have a strong desire for these readmission agreements with Turkey to be achieved. We do not only want agreements with Turkey, but also with other countries which are sometimes countries of origin or of transit for illegal migration.

I must also tell you that the Frontex agreements, in this case with Turkey, are directly managed by Frontex. In many cases, they are technical and operational conversations, and although the Council as an institution

is not involved in those negotiations, it is kept informed of them and will, of course, inform the rest of the Member States in any case, which naturally includes Greece.

Nikolaos Chountis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, you said that talks are under way between Frontex and Turkey and that the Commission is reporting to the Council on these talks. I should therefore like you to tell us, I should like to know if the basis for these talks between Turkey and Frontex is respect for the border between Greece and Turkey, in other words, recognition of, and respect for, the external borders of the EU. I would remind you that, to date, the harassment of Frontex aircraft by Turkey has been based on this dispute.

I should also like to ask if Turkey has laid down any other conditions in order to reach agreement with Frontex.

Roger Helmer (ECR). – I would like to congratulate the Minister on his excellent answer and the fine work which we in Europe are doing to protect the rights of immigrants.

My fear is that sometimes we fail to protect the rights of our own citizens when they move from one country to another. I think particularly of some of my East Midlands constituents who have spent their retirement savings on a home in Spain only to find, after living there for two or three years, that they have the bulldozers at the door and their rights of property, their rights to the enforcement of contract, are simply ignored by the Spanish courts and the Spanish authorities.

I should be grateful if the Minister could explain to us why this is and what action Spain will take to resolve this problem for European citizens in his country.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, with regard to the question on Greece, of course, the borders of the Member States of the Union are to be respected. The very objective of these agreements is for those borders to be respected.

When there is an agreement with a third country through which illegal immigration may pass, and there is a readmission agreement – which is the objective – and therefore the European Union's agreements with that third country are strengthened – which is the global approach and the philosophy of the European Pact on Immigration – what is happening is that the borders of the Member States of the Union are being strengthened. That is the effect. If we do not have this effective control of illegal immigration because there is insufficient cooperation with other countries, because there are no readmission agreements, those borders are weakened in practice. The objective of these negotiations and readmission agreements is therefore clearly to strengthen borders, which of course includes Greece's borders.

With regard to the question from the honourable Member about British citizens that have moved to Spain and invested some of their savings there, I must say that I am obviously not here representing Spain as a country in its judicial relations with citizens who are there, but rather I am representing the Council of the Union. Those relations or any problems that there may be are settled in the independent courts of the Spanish State. I will therefore refrain from speaking on behalf of a specific country on specific matters that are not relevant to European Union law.

President. – Question 2 by **Marian Harkin (H-0053/10)**

Subject: Domestic violence

In the Spanish Presidency's statement at the plenary session in January 2010, the Presidency highlighted its firm intention to combat violence against women, to propose draft legislation to fight violence against women, and to establish a European Observatory of Domestic Violence. Can the Presidency elaborate on what exactly its plans are in this area and when we can expect such initiatives to be put in place?

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, it is well known that one of the priorities for the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the Union is the fight against gender violence, in other words, equality between men and women in the European Union, which has not been fully achieved 50 years after the birth of the Union. Violence against women is, above all, the greatest form of discrimination, the greatest scourge in European society and other societies in the world, in fact, unfortunately, of practically all societies.

This is an essential objective for the Presidency, because we believe it is an essential objective for Europe. For this reason, as it is an objective for Europe, a problem with a European dimension, in order to combat this phenomenon, we also need a European strategy. This has been included not only in the programme of the

Spanish Presidency, but also in the 18-month programme of the Trio of Presidencies, with Belgium and Hungary.

We are glad that Parliament is an institution that has always played a very active role in this field and has made repeated calls for measures in this respect, against gender violence. For example, in a resolution that it adopted in November last year, Parliament urged the Commission to draw up a general directive on measures to prevent and combat all forms of gender violence. Parliament also urged the Member States to produce more detailed statistics on gender violence.

Echoing Parliament's position, the Spanish Presidency, as I said, considered this to be a crucial issue. More specifically, it has initiated the creation of an observatory on gender violence by the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO), which adopted conclusions on this on 8 March, International Women's Day, which was on Monday. The directive on the protection order against gender violence is also being drawn up. These are two very important, fundamental issues which we hope can be developed and finalised before the six-month Spanish Presidency of the European Council comes to an end.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – Thank you, Minister, and I congratulate the Spanish Presidency on highlighting the issue of gender-based violence. Too often, that issue is literally kept behind closed doors, because that is where most of the violence happens: in the family home. I believe that your initiative will certainly lead to greater public awareness across the EU.

You spoke of the resolution adopted by the European Parliament in November 2009. One of the things that resolution asked for was the possibility of establishing a clear legal basis in this area. I wonder whether you would be supportive of the Commission drafting a comprehensive directive on action to prevent gender violence, and what your view is on establishing a clear legal basis.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, Mrs Harkin, as you know, the Treaty of Lisbon changes the legal bases for European law – for regulations and directives – because it brings together in the Community pillar what was previously three different pillars: the Community pillar, foreign and security policy, and justice and home affairs.

These things have been brought together in a single pillar and a single legal personality, and this means that the normal, traditional Community method is being introduced for foreign policy and for the more specific area of judicial affairs – judicial cooperation on civil and criminal matters – and for police cooperation. This means the Commission and also Parliament having a greater presence at the Court of Justice in Luxembourg.

In the area of cooperation in criminal matters, there is a possibility that still remains, which is that a quarter of European Union governments can take initiatives in this area. This is what happened with the directive on gender violence: Twelve governments have presented an initiative on which the Council and Parliament will have to adopt a final decision, because it is an ordinary legislative procedure matter.

This directive is already being prepared and is in response to the possibility established by the treaty for governments to take this initiative, and which, in our view, has a correct, adequate legal basis, because it concerns judicial cooperation on criminal matters.

We are talking about crimes involving ill treatment, violence against a person, something which is a crime in all the countries of the Union. This is therefore about protecting the victims of that crime. Its legal basis is in cooperation on criminal matters, and we understand that it is therefore perfectly possible – as the legal services of the Council have said – for it to be implemented through this legal text, which will have to be examined and debated in this House.

I hope that this will happen quickly, because I believe that it is what millions of women, and also men, in the European Union are waiting for. They are waiting for this protection, which – as you rightly said – now needs to come out from behind closed doors, not only at national level but also at European level. It needs to become part of the European agenda. This is the aim of the initiative presented by 12 European Union governments.

David Martin (S&D). – I wish to join Mrs Harkin in congratulating the Spanish Presidency on putting violence against women at the top of its political agenda.

I wonder if the Presidency would look at an experience 20 years ago. Edinburgh City Council, financed by European Social Fund money, conducted a campaign called 'Zero Tolerance' in relation to violence against women.

Its conclusion was that you need a holistic approach to this issue. You need information policy, you need housing authorities involved, you need the police involved and you need the judicial authorities involved.

Will the Council examine that project to see what lessons can be drawn?

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Mr López Garrido, you did briefly mention that domestic violence is, of course, not only directed against women, but also against children, and domestic violence is also an issue in relation to the care of the elderly, as a result of excessive demands. To what extent will these areas of domestic violence, too, be included in the remit of the planned European Observatory of Domestic Violence?

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, Mr Martin, of course, the underlying philosophy behind this initiative – which is supported by Parliament, with regard to regulation, in this case through legal channels, through the most effective channels possible, the judicial channels of a democratic state – is what was rightly called ‘zero tolerance’ of gender violence. It involves seeing gender violence as something which, for centuries, has been very deeply embedded, including from a cultural point of view, in the social structures of our societies.

We therefore need a global approach, a comprehensive approach to combating gender violence in order for it to be effective, because it is a form of violence that is very difficult to eradicate, extremely difficult to eradicate. This is why, despite the progress that has been made in the fight against this type of violence at national level, we are still systematically dealing with this scourge, which is often only the tip of the iceberg, because only a small percentage of the violence that actually occurs is reported, so it continues to exist.

We therefore need a global, comprehensive approach, using all of the legal tools available to us, raising awareness in the media and ensuring that education systems are taking the problem into account. On Monday, the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO) adopted this comprehensive, global approach in the fight against gender violence; in other words, ‘zero tolerance’.

With regard to the question put by the honourable Member regarding the existence of violence against children and the elderly, I think that we are talking about violence against the vulnerable; the most vulnerable. As in the expression ‘survival of the fittest’ that we have in many of our countries, in my country, it is, of course, manifested in this violence that is linked to the vulnerability of the weaker person, which in turn demonstrates and expresses the cowardice of the person who is violent towards someone who is more vulnerable, whether it be women, children or the elderly. This is the phenomenon that relates to this situation.

The Council and Parliament did invite the Commission to consider the possibility of an initiative for a European year for combating violence against children, young people and women. This is raised in the Daphne III Programme. It is an expression of the need, honourable Member, for this protection to be extended to all vulnerable people, which certainly include children and the elderly, the two groups to which you referred.

President. – Question 3 by **Bernd Posselt** (H-0054/10)

Subject: Danube Strategy

What steps will the Council take to ensure that it can submit a draft Danube Strategy before the end of the year as planned? What is the timetable and what are the main points of the strategy’s content?

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, Mr Posselt, the strategy for the Danube region is one of the elements on the programme of the Trio of Presidencies of Spain, Belgium and Hungary. As you can imagine, it was at the initiative of Hungary that the strategy was introduced into the programme.

The three countries are therefore committed to helping to develop this European Union Strategy for the Danube region and, in this respect, in June last year, the Council urged the Commission to present it before the end of this year. We are waiting for it to be produced by the Commission.

What the Commission has done is to initiate a public consultation. A public consultation that is going to last until March of this year, and subsequently, looking at the results of the consultation, the Commission will propose the strategy, which we hope can be formally adopted in December of this year in the form of a communication from the Commission. We have to wait for this communication to be produced.

In any case, I do want to say that there has been an important meeting in which progress has been made on the possible content of this strategy, which was held on 25 February in Budapest with the governments of

Austria, Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia, in which important conclusions were adopted, suggesting what the essential elements of this future strategy should be. It is about these countries joining forces, within the European Union and with the coverage of the European Union, using European funds, but in a financially neutral way, to achieve objectives of progress and significant economic, social and tourism-related development.

We are therefore – I repeat – awaiting a communication from the Commission on this, once the consultation has concluded. At that point, the Council will adopt a position as soon as it has the communication from the Commission.

Bernd Posselt (PPE). – (DE) Thank you, Minister, for that sound and exhaustive reply. I just have two brief follow-up questions. Firstly, to what extent does the Danube Strategy relate to the fields of transport and culture? I think both of these are particularly important when it comes to cross-border cooperation. Secondly, is there already a final list of the countries included or is that still to be decided, as Parliament has proposed an expansion?

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, this list of countries is not – as you will understand – something that the Presidency-in-Office of the Council can decide. The governments that I mentioned a moment ago are interested in developing this strategy, and we need to wait for the Commission to publish its communication.

I do want to say that these countries consider that the European Union needs to play a leadership role in this strategy, especially the Commission, by facilitating cooperation in the Danube region.

The statement that I referred to previously, made on 25 February, says how the strategy for the Danube region should be used to increase prosperity, security and peace for the people who live in the region, through trans-regional and trans-national cooperation, as well as coordination at that level.

It also considers the following to be strategic policy areas to be included in the strategy: infrastructure, innovation, cultural and artistic activities, sustainable economic development, tourism, food safety, the economy, cooperation in relation to small and medium-sized enterprises, research and development, migration, sport, education, employment, health, social affairs, along with other areas that the document covers extensively and ambitiously.

I think that the strategy for the Danube region is an important document, and therefore I thank you for your question, which has given me an opportunity to mention it. I think it is an ambitious objective, and we are currently waiting – I repeat once again – for this consultation to take place and for the communication from the Commission, but the political will does, of course, exist. The three members of the Trio of Presidencies and the Presidency of the Council have the political will to launch this strategy for the Danube region.

Paul Rübzig (PPE). – (DE) The Danube is a river, and with rivers you also have to pay attention to how clean they are. I would therefore consider it important to find out what purification plants and what wastewater treatment plants are being considered in order to improve the quality of the river water accordingly. For us, the goal would be for the Danube to be of drinking water quality from its source to its end. My second question is how can hydropower be better utilised for energy generation, but also, and above all, for the storage of water, so that we obtain greater security of supply in Europe in relation to energy?

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) The success of the European Union's strategy for the Danube will depend on an ambitious action plan, as well as on identifying certain specific projects which will improve the lives of citizens in the Danube region.

I would like to know whether the process has started for identifying these strategic projects for developing the Danube region and which criteria will be used as the basis for selecting these projects.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, naturally, I am convinced that the objective to which Mr Rübzig referred is going to be included in this strategy for the Danube region, the dimensions of which I have already talked about.

The objectives of this strategy are really important, and relate to a large number of issues that affect the daily lives of the people who live in the area. They therefore relate to the economy, cultural dimensions, and protecting the environment and natural resources, which obviously includes water.

As has been said, this natural environment is something intrinsically linked to the region, and I am convinced that it is going to be clearly included in this strategy, which must be led by the countries that are promoting it. They are the countries that I listed, which met a few days ago in Budapest to make progress on setting objectives and clarifying the strategy more precisely, as it is not yet sufficiently defined.

I therefore think it is premature – and I am referring to the speech by the second Member who spoke – to talk about the selection criteria for projects or the eligibility of projects, some of which I have mentioned. Others could also be added, for example, the subjects of navigation, energy security, combating climate change, the effects of changes in the financial markets and, in general, all areas which this strategy and its implementation could undoubtedly improve.

I think that we all need to work together in the European Union, because we are talking about something on a European scale that affects the whole of the European Union and its main policies. I am certain, for example, that cohesion policy is going to be the focus of attention, not only social cohesion but a new aspect included in the Treaty of Lisbon, which is territorial cohesion. This is a form of cohesion, a dimension of cohesion that appears in the Treaty of Lisbon and which fits in very well with this initiative regarding the strategy for the Danube region.

President. – As they deal with the same subject, the following questions will be taken together: Question 4 by **Konstantinos Poupakis** (H-0055/10)

Subject: The European Social Model and combating poverty

At times of economic recession and crisis, the unemployed, low wage earners and pensioners on small pensions find it hardest to maintain a decent standard of living. The mobilisation of the European Social Fund and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund has not had the desired effect, since 80 million of our fellow citizens are living below the poverty threshold. The European Social Model is based not only on good economic performance but also on a high level of social protection.

In view of this, how does the Spanish Presidency intend, as part of a joint policy in cooperation with upcoming Presidencies, to support the lower economic and social strata so as to help them survive and, at the same time, protect groups of our fellow citizens who are at risk from poverty and social exclusion, thereby safeguarding the core of a social Europe?

Question 5 by **Liam Aylward** (H-0102/10)

Subject: European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion

EUR 17 million has been provided for 2010 – European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Although this European Year will promote greater awareness of these particular issues, there is a need for an effective joint action in order to make a substantial difference to the millions of people in the European Union who are suffering because of poverty and social exclusion. What action does the Council intend to take which would lead to the adoption of concrete measures during this year? Would the Council explain how this European year, and its associated budget, will be used effectively to attain long-term results?

Diego López Garrido, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (ES) Madam President, the Presidency shares the Member's opinions on the objective of providing a high level of social protection – in particular, in relation to groups threatened by poverty and social exclusion – which is one of the cornerstones of the European social model. This is especially true at a time when we are in an economic recession.

Unemployment: it is currently believed that there could be more than five million more unemployed than at the start of the economic crisis. This has meant that many homes have seen their incomes fall, and many are exposed to poverty and excessive debt. It is also probable that unemployment will continue to be high, and therefore, that this long-term unemployment will result in social exclusion.

Therefore, the social consequences of the economic crisis are going to be an important item on the European political agenda in the next few months, and of course on the European agenda of the Trio of Presidencies, without any doubt whatsoever.

We have an instrument, a tool for this purpose, which is the declaration of 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, which has four specific objectives: recognising people's right to dignity and to play an active role in society; a commitment from public opinion to social inclusion policies; a more cohesive society; and, of course, a long-term effort at all levels of government to combat poverty and social exclusion. This effort is to be especially aimed at protecting the most vulnerable – a concept that I used

when answering a previous question – who are ultimately the ones that suffer most from both poverty and social exclusion. This is the case with children, women and the elderly.

We are therefore, of course, going to support the various initiatives that there may be in relation to poverty and social exclusion and to combating them, and I must say that I hope this is going to become a central objective of the whole of the European Union's growth and job creation strategy. One of the objectives set out in the document presented by the Commission on 3 March is to reduce the number of people at risk of falling into poverty by 20 million.

Konstantinos Poupakis (PPE). – (EL) Thank you, Minister, for your reply.

However, given that, as you yourself said, unemployment reached 10% in 2009, 45% of unemployed Europeans remain out of work for more than a year and flexible forms of employment have mushroomed in the absence of a clear institutional framework, with the result that there are 19 million poor unemployed, we should like to know, because you have always been very precise and I welcome that, what specific, immediate measures and active and passive employment policies you intend to adopt at European level, in accordance with the principles and spirit of the European social model, in order to address the question of poor workers and unemployed persons, especially the long-term unemployed, who face problems of immediate survival.

Liam Aylward (ALDE). – Can the Council outline how it will ensure that the active inclusion recommendation, which is a tool for fighting family poverty and which has been endorsed by the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council, is integrated into the EU 2020 strategy and implemented so as to ensure progress on poverty reduction?

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, I must say once again that this is the first time that there has been the intention to have such an ambitious European strategy for this problem. In other words, a strategy for combating poverty and social exclusion, and especially for actively including the long-term unemployed and the elderly, so we are once again returning to the concept of the most vulnerable in society.

To begin with, in response to the economic crisis that we are experiencing, the European Union has implemented a coordinated policy, an immediate, short-term shock treatment involving injecting public money into the financial system. This triggered what economists call the automatic stabilisers, which is the social protection provided for in welfare states. This meant that there was a reaction that had at least a palliative effect for those people who had become unemployed and those for whom it is difficult, at least in the short-term, to find new employment.

In other words, there has been a reaction that should be taken into account, because it is an existing, current, immediate, short-term reaction by the European Union. In addition to this, the European Union is considering a strategy for combating the poverty resulting from long-term unemployment, based on training, specialisation, retraining or education – which does not end when a person is young – in order to create the conditions for employability. This is a very important part of the EU 2020 strategy that I mentioned before, and it was included in the conclusions of the meeting of the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council that has been mentioned so many times here and took place this week.

It is a European strategy, included among the objectives that the Union is going to prioritise, which is those established in the EU 2020 strategy. One of these quantified objectives – and we will see if they are adopted on 25 and 26 March at the European Council, which has to examine the Communication from the Commission – is a 25% reduction in the number of people who are at risk of entering poverty.

Let us recall that Europe has 80 million people at risk of entering a situation of poverty; reducing this figure by 20 million and, at the same time, increasing the active population are medium-term objectives that are part of the strategy and which will therefore shape a whole series of coordinated European strategies.

Ultimately, ladies and gentlemen, the key is to coordinate our employment and social policies. The Treaty of Lisbon states this quite clearly: we have to coordinate our employment and social policies.

This is what the European Union, hastened by the crisis, is beginning to do. This is the best way to respond to this situation, obviously using the tools that we have in the European Union, which are elements of the European Union, such as the internal market or the European Structural Funds.

Vicky Ford (ECR). – The economic effects are obviously worse in some Member States than others. Thank you for talking about pensioners. My understanding is that the Commission has the ability to withhold structural funds if Member States are not complying with EU legislation.

Could the Presidency undertake to investigate whether the recommendations of the Auken Report, voted through this Parliament last March, have been complied with? These are regarding property owners in Spain. This has had a devastating effect on European pensioners, driving some of them into poverty and exclusion.

Ádám Kósa (PPE). – (HU) I have only one question. Poverty affects two social groups most particularly: the low-skilled and those living with disabilities. In the question, it is stated that two budget facilities were not sufficient to address the problem of these two groups effectively. My question is: does the European Council wish to address how they could help these two social groups and their situation more effectively?

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, the first question, on pensioners who own property in Spain, is very similar to another question put to me previously, and the response is very similar to the one I gave previously.

This is a question of clarifying the application of internal legislation in a Member State, which is what I must refer to. I cannot speak on behalf of the Council on this issue, which has legal channels within a Member State. If it had occurred in any other Member State, I am sure that it would have been dealt with in exactly the same way: through internal legal channels.

With regard to the question on vulnerable people, I absolutely agree that we should place a special emphasis on the two groups to which the honourable Member referred. This is even more the case given that we now have one more tool that we can use: the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, insofar as it refers to the rights of especially vulnerable people, whether they be elderly or disabled, their dignity and their participation in social and cultural life. In any case, it talks about protecting them, protecting their physical dignity and mental integrity against degrading or inhumane treatment.

The European Union has developed various instruments for combating this situation, including a detailed study of the situation. I would like to mention an interesting result of Eurobarometer 2007, according to which half of Europeans think that all elderly people, who are the most vulnerable people, are poorly treated, and even abused in terms of the way in which their needs are met. Nearly half of Europeans think that the way society treats these people is negative, precisely because they are vulnerable.

The Member States and the European Union have applied the open coordination method for exchanging experiences between Member States on this issue. On this subject, it should also be said that, in some cases, we are talking about matters that are dealt with in national legislation. They are matters of national competence, and it is therefore the Member States that need to tackle them, on the basis of, among other things, the principle of subsidiarity.

The European Union can support these policies, but it cannot completely replace them. It can support them, but I think that this is something that also relates to the social dimension, which has already been mentioned. I am returning once again to this because I think it is important. The social dimension of the strategy for growth and job creation features very heavily in the document presented by the Commission, and will be debated by the Heads of State or Government.

I think that this social dimension should have room for the problems that you refer to that did not feature so strongly in the previous strategy. I think that in the future – given that we are experiencing a crisis that has a social impact – we need to take the social impact of the economic crisis very much into account.

Robert Atkins (ECR). – What is the Minister representing the Presidency going to do to protect groups of our fellow citizens who are at risk from poverty and social exclusion as a direct result of Spanish policy towards British and other Member State residents in various areas of Spain whose properties are being expropriated and who are suffering under dubious planning policies? The Minister on behalf of the Presidency cannot evade this issue anymore; he must pursue the Spanish Government and invite them to take the necessary action.

Daniel Hannan (ECR). – (ES) Thank you very much for being here, Mr López Garrido. My question concerns the poverty of the European citizens who are in some areas of Spain. I understand that you are here representing the executive, not the Spanish judiciary, and that you are not a spokesperson for the Autonomous Community of Valencia, but we need an answer. There is abuse that has nothing to do with the written law

but rather relates to the implementation of the law, and that is a problem that has a solution. I am not asking you for anything more than an investigation by the Spanish Government into the abuses identified.

President. – Your Spanish is impressive, Mr Hannan. I shall again leave it to the discretion of the Minister as to whether he wishes to deal with this.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, I do not wish to abuse my position as President-in-Office of the Council to defend a specific government or a specific piece of national legislation. I do not wish to abuse this position, because I am sure I would be criticised for using this platform to defend the actions of a particular Member State or of a central or regional government of a specific country.

You are perfectly aware that this is a matter that is dealt with at national level, for which there are channels at national level. Not only Spain, but all 27 Member States of the European Union, have the rule of law and have sufficient judicial channels to settle this type of alleged abuse.

These judicial channels operate in all European countries, and I am sure that – and I am not only referring to the case of Spain – other European countries where there must surely be abuse or violations of the law have the channels of the rule of law to resolve them.

This is what happens in any European countries where this occurs. I do not wish to evade giving an answer, nor do I simply want to say that I will not answer, but you are well aware that if you ask a question in Parliament, it is possible that I will not wish to use my position as President-in-Office of the Council for a question that is internal to a Member State of the Union.

President. – Question 6 has been withdrawn.

As they deal with the same subject, the following questions will be taken together:

Question 7 by **Justas Vincas Paleckis** (H-0057/10)

Subject: EU-Russia visa regime

The Spanish Presidency of the Council intends to work towards the future abolition of the visa regime for EU and Russian citizens. This may be a long process, and one that will depend a great deal on Russia's ability to implement successfully the action plan drawn up with this objective in mind.

Were the EU to open up to Russia's province of Kaliningrad, or vice versa, this would demonstrate that the EU and Russia are moving towards 'demolishing visa walls'. Both Russia and the EU have an interest in the principle of cooperation on both sides of the border and in an anti isolationist policy regarding the Kaliningrad region. To that end, neighbouring Poland and Lithuania have reached agreement on making it easier for people living in border areas to cross the border, but this has yet to be implemented.

How does Council assess the specific situation of the province of Kaliningrad in terms of the dialogue between the EU and Russia on visa matters? How could this dialogue be used in order to sign local traffic agreements between EU Member States (Lithuania and Poland) and the Russian Federation in order to make border crossing procedures easier for people living in border areas?

Question 8 by **Laima Liucija Andrikiene** (H-0080/10)

Subject: EU-Russia relations: Spanish Presidency agenda

The Spanish Presidency of the EU has set out an ambitious agenda when it comes to EU-Russia relations – it would like to see the conclusion of negotiations with Russia on the new partnership and cooperation agreement (PCA), an agreement with Russia on a visa-free regime, as well as progress on a free-trade agreement between the EU and Russia.

In order to conclude a free-trade agreement with the EU, Russia first needs to become a member of the World Trade Organisation (WTO). Are there tangible prospects that Russia will join the WTO any time soon? Does the Council have a particular strategy on how to compel Russia to join the WTO?

Does the Council see any substantial progress as concerns the negotiations with Russia on the new PCA?

Does the Council consider that the idea of a free-trade regime with Russia is timely considering the disagreements within the EU on the issue? Does the Council consider Russia to be more prepared for a visa-free regime than other partners of the EU, such as Ukraine, Moldova or Georgia?

Diego López Garrido, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (ES) Madam President, I understand that there are two questions, one of which refers to visas, to the visa requirement for Russian and European citizens, and the other refers to relations between the European Union and Russia following the Stockholm Summit and to Russia joining the World Trade Organisation. These are the two questions as I understand them, Madam President.

With regard to the matter of visas, I would like to point out that in 2003, the Council adopted regulations establishing a specific transit document and a facilitated rail transit document. Three years later, the Commission concluded that the entry into force of this system was going smoothly and that both partners were satisfied.

From a long-term perspective – we are talking about the Kaliningrad region in relation to the rest of the Russian Federation – the facilitated transit regime, as it is called, would depend on the future implementation of agreements on visa policies between the European Union and the Russian Federation.

In a joint declaration following the meeting of the EU-Russia Permanent Partnership Council on justice and home affairs on 2 December last year, the participants decided to debate possible changes to the European Union's agreement with Russia on granting visas in order to make travel for European and Russian citizens more accessible, specifically for the residents of the region of Kaliningrad.

In turn, according to the same joint declaration, the European Union and Russia hoped to negotiate and conclude local border traffic agreements between Russia and the neighbouring Member States of the European Union that might be interested in doing so. In this context, Regulation (EC) No 1931/2006 of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down rules on local border traffic at the external land borders of the Member States and amending the provisions of the Schengen Convention authorises the Member States to conclude bilateral agreements with third countries in order to apply the local border traffic rules.

The negotiation of these agreements is, in this case, a matter that is the responsibility of the Member States concerned and of the Russian Federation. The Council, in any case, notes that negotiations are also under way between Lithuania and Russia and between Poland and Russia.

With regard to the question relating to strategic relations between the European Union and Russia, the Council can inform Parliament that following the summit held with Russia in Stockholm in November, there will be another summit during the six-month Spanish Presidency. It will be held in Russia, between the European Union and Russia, which means that there is fresh impetus for relations between both sides.

There is obviously always the possibility of there being complex difficulties in these relations, and there can also be disagreements, but the relationship between the European Union and Russia is a broad and multifaceted one. We have growing economic and trade links, and – we have to admit – a high level of interdependency with regard to energy, common interests in other areas that relate to problems that go beyond even our respective countries, and challenges, including global challenges, which we need to tackle and which we should tackle as jointly as possible.

It will therefore always be beneficial for us to seek opportunities to strengthen our relations with Russia, while always standing firm on our principles and on the values on which the European Union is founded.

With regard to Russia joining the World Trade Organisation, the European Union, supports it, but it is Russia that has to adopt the measures in order to make progress on this.

With regard to the new agreement between the European Union and Russia, both parties agree that it would be good to have a broad new agreement. The agreement on partnership and cooperation between the European Union and Russia, which was negotiated in the 1990s, is outdated in many respects. A great deal has happened and a great deal has changed since the 1990s, and we need to move forward towards this new agreement, in which we are ambitious. We have set the bar high and, if possible, we want to cover all the areas of EU-Russia relations.

Progress has been made in some areas of these negotiations. Other areas are going more slowly, which is the case for trade and investment. In any event, it is very important to us that there are solid clauses and solid agreements with Russia on trade, investment and energy.

With regard to the free trade arrangements, we agree with a free trade agreement being negotiated once Russia has joined the World Trade Organisation, if and when this happens.

With regard to the liberalisation of visas, this is an issue of major political importance that affects Russian and European Union citizens very directly. I think that on this matter, we share the intention of visas being facilitated when this is possible.

What would be ideal would be the liberalisation of visas, in other words, removing the visa requirement, but, of course, there is still a great deal left to do in this respect. Furthermore, we need to balance the assets that are at stake, which concern security, and, furthermore, this always has to be done on a reciprocal basis.

With regard to Ukraine, Moldova and Georgia, each of these countries has a particular situation as far as visa policy is concerned, and we cannot currently predict how much progress is going to be made in those three countries in comparison with the dialogue on visas that we are conducting with Russia.

Bernd Posselt (PPE). – (DE) I would like to bring up the two most critical points one more time. The first concerns democracy, the rule of law and human rights. These are the biggest deficiencies. How intensive is the dialogue on these critical points? We have the feeling that developments in this regard are going backwards rather than forwards.

My second point concerns energy security. How, specifically, do things stand in the energy negotiations?

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Madam President, honourable Member, as you know, one of the Union's priorities or strategic central objectives is energy security. In the European Union – especially since many European Union countries suffered very directly from the gas crisis between Russia and the Ukraine at the beginning of 2009 – we place an extremely high value on energy security, and we definitely consider it to be one of the European Union's major objectives, an objective that is naturally linked to the major objective of combating climate change.

The strategy of the Council and the Presidency of the Council regarding energy and energy security is the need to move towards a greater differentiation in terms of suppliers and sources of energy and its distribution. We therefore need to expand the possibilities, avoiding oligopolies or excessive dependency.

Some European countries have a level of energy dependency on Russia that is clearly excessive, and which also relates to the fact that Europe was divided for a long time during the 20th century and to the fact that in some cases, direct interconnections between European countries do not exist.

When that crisis occurred, we saw that some countries that were not affected by it could not help the countries that were affected, because the interconnections did not exist. Therefore, energy objectives in Europe are extremely important, in the medium and long term, and we are therefore in favour of diversifying energy sources and of promoting projects such as the Nabucco project or the Nord Stream or South Stream projects, which relate to Russia, and of achieving something that currently does not exist in Europe: a single energy market. In order to achieve these objectives, which are facilitated by the Treaty of Lisbon, which introduces this competence over energy, which did not exist before, it is fundamental and essential to establish a strategic relationship with Russia on energy and other matters.

Moreover, we have other instruments in the Treaty of Lisbon that relate to external policy. The Treaty of Lisbon strengthens European foreign policy: there is a President of the European Council and a High Representative, and there is going to be a European External Action Service. In other words, the European Union's external vision has been strengthened, which will strengthen our negotiations in all areas, including the economy and energy, with other countries. This is therefore the vision that I can give you on relations with Russia.

We are negotiating an agreement in which the subject of energy is essential; these negotiations are beginning, and we have the best prospects for them, but obviously, like all agreements, it is something that depends on very complex negotiations that are, in turn, part of a series of negotiations on this cooperation agreement that we want to update – as I said – because a great deal has happened in Europe in the past 15 or 20 years. One of these things is the essential relationship that we need to have with Russia, which is, as everyone knows, one of the countries that has experienced the most changes in recent years.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE). – (PL) Madam President, in reference to Question No 9, which I was to ask on behalf of my fellow Member, Mrs Morkūnaitė-Mikulėnienė, and which is related to the previous question, Russia intends to locate a nuclear power plant near the eastern border of the European Union, in the province of Kaliningrad, and Belarus has similar plans. Bearing in mind the experience of Chernobyl, these plans are causing misgivings over the danger involved. Does the Council intend to take up the question of environmental safety in the next round of talks with Russia? From our point of view, this is rather important.

Janusz Władysław Zemke (S&D). – (PL) I would like to go back to Questions Nos 7 and 8, and to relations between the European Union and Russia. Mr López Garrido rightly said that those relations should be based on values, but if this is so, then the Union has particular obligations towards defenders of human rights in Russia.

In relation to this, I would like to ask the following question: should the policy of EU Member States, and of the whole EU, not include special rules concerning visas for human rights defenders in Russia? This would be to enable such people to obtain visas relatively easily.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) With regard to the intervention on the subject of nuclear security, I must say that the responsibility, which in this area is national, is provided for in the international agreements of the International Atomic Energy Agency, in other words, in the Convention on Nuclear Safety to which Belarus, Russia, Euratom and the majority of the Member States of the European Union are parties.

The Council understands that contracting parties that are located close to a proposed nuclear facility should be consulted, as they could be affected by it. Therefore, the agreement that is currently being concluded between Euratom and Russia, in relation to the peaceful application of nuclear energy, will have to contain provisions on the verifiable requirements on nuclear safety and protecting the health and safety of workers. I would also like to remind you that this issue is dealt with periodically in the context of the dialogue between the European Union and Russia on energy.

With regard to assessing the consequences in an international context, the Council observes that Belarus is a party to the Espoo Convention on Environmental Impact Assessment in a Transboundary Context, which contains binding obligations aimed at assessing the environmental consequences and possible environmental risks. In this case, however, the Council says that the responsibility for organising environmental assessment lies largely with the developers of the projects.

The Russian Federation is not a contracting party to this Convention. We would like Russia to apply the Espoo Convention voluntary in any case. It has also been doing so for some time in relation to existing nuclear power stations.

Finally, with regard to the question put by the honourable Member regarding human rights in relation to Russia, there was a previous debate in which questions were raised in relation to human rights, and I think that the criteria for defending human rights or reporting human rights violations apply wherever they take place. Therefore, no country is exempt from violations being condemned by right – and I would even say out of moral obligation – and we do condemn and should condemn these violations when they take place within the European Union or in one of its countries.

Linking this with visa policy is a leap that is currently very difficult to establish or specify. General negotiations are in progress on visas. I think that it is in the context of these general negotiations on visas that someone could suggest another type of specific channel for facilitating visas, but as I said, at the moment, we are in very broad negotiations on visas with Russia, and I think that this is what we need to focus on: on the organisation of visas in general terms.

This is because it is what could really have the best impact in terms of the free movement of people, and even, I would say, offer the best opportunity as regards Europeans and Europe as a whole for their values to be lived and shared by other members of the public and in places outside of the European Union.

President. – Questions which have not been answered for lack of time will receive written answers (see Annex).

That concludes Question Time.

14. Composition of committees and delegations: see Minutes

15. Documents received: see Minutes

16. Agenda of the next sitting: see Minutes

17. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting was closed at 19.20)