

WEDNESDAY, 24 MARCH 2010

IN THE CHAIR: MR BUZEK

President

(The sitting was opened at 15.05)

1. Resumption of the session

President. – I declare resumed the session of the European Parliament adjourned on Thursday, 11 March 2010.

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

3. Signature of acts adopted under codecision: see Minutes

4. Composition of committees and delegations: see Minutes

5. Documents received: see Minutes

6. Lapsed written declarations: see Minutes

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

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

9. Transfers of appropriations: see Minutes

10. Order of business

President. – The final draft agenda drawn up on 11 March 2010 by the Conference of Presidents pursuant to Rule 137 of the Rules of Procedure has been distributed.

By agreement with the political groups, I would like to propose the following changes:

Mario Borghezio (EFD). – *(IT)* I just wanted to inform the President – as I have already done by letter – that the extraordinary committee on the financial crisis has wrongfully excluded the expert, the renowned demographer Professor Bourcier de Carbon, for no reason, describing him as an unsuitable person.

I think that we are dealing with an extremely serious case of someone being excluded on ideological grounds from the position of expert in one of the European Parliament's committees ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

President. – Mr Borghezio, this is not a point of order, since we are talking about a plenary sitting. Please raise such issues during Committee meetings, when this matter can be considered, but in a plenary sitting, points of order have to be about our work in plenary, and not about work in the Committees.

William (The Earl of) Dartmouth (EFD). – Mr President, on 11 March, at the debate on Arctic policy, with a quarter of my allocated time still left, my microphone was switched off by the ALDE/Liberal Democrat Member in the Chair. This is almost without precedent.

Mr President, I have already sent you a letter – to which I have not received an answer – and I would like to ask you under which rule the microphone was switched off and why it was relevant to apply this rule. I was simply making legitimate – and indeed valid – political comments with which the ALDE Chair disagreed.

This is why the microphone was switched off. If the European Parliament censors political comment, it ceases to be a Parliament.

President. – The Vice-President of Parliament who was leading the proceedings at the time correctly applied the procedure related to Rule 20(2) of the Rules of Procedure. I will reply in writing to the letter you sent me.

Thursday

The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) has requested postponement to the next session of the vote on the motion for a resolution by the Conference of Presidents on transition to the Treaty of Lisbon for pending interinstitutional legislative procedures. So this is about postponement of the vote.

József Szájer (PPE). – Mr President, we have asked for the postponement of the vote on this motion, in the interests of the House. We had originally agreed to put it on the agenda on the assumption that everything was in order. However, it was a quick procedure, and we have learned in the meantime that not all of the committees had been properly consulted on this issue. It is a motion by the PPE Group, but some of the committees want more time on this very important and complicated matter, however urgent it may be. We therefore ask for the vote on this issue to be postponed.

(Parliament agreed to the request)

(The order of business was adopted) ⁽¹⁾

11. Welcome

President. – I have some special information for you. I would like to extend a warm welcome to the delegation from the Pan-African Parliament, led by its Vice-President, Mrs Mugenyi. They are with us at our sitting. Please welcome them.

(Applause)

The second Vice-President of the Pan-African Parliament and Chair of the Delegation for relations with the European Parliament. Our Parliaments work closely together, and your presence with us today gives us great pleasure.

I would like to take the opportunity to thank you for the invitation for me to address the sitting of the Pan-African Parliament which will be held in three weeks' time. Unfortunately, I will not be able to be there, but I will send you a letter on that occasion. I am sure we will have the opportunity to meet again.

Once again, I warmly welcome you all.

12. Preparation for the European Council meeting (25-26 March 2010) (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on the statement by the Council and the Commission on preparation for the European Council meeting (25-26 March 2010).

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Mr President, we are, in these first few months of 2010, witnessing an extraordinarily strong dynamic in the European Union, in the midst of the most serious economic crisis we have known for eighty years. At the same time, we are implementing a new treaty, the Treaty of Lisbon, getting new institutions off the ground, and carrying out a very broad reordering of the regulation of our economic systems.

This is happening in a sometimes disorderly fashion, responding to big challenges as we go; currently, for example, the situation of the Greek financial system. However, Europe is meeting this situation by creating new economic policy tools in all areas.

Sometimes, therefore, one cannot see the wood for the trees, but an entirely new way of tackling the extremely complex economy of the 21st century is being created and it is being done through a European approach.

⁽¹⁾ Other amendments to the order of business: see Minutes

It was done in this way when responding to the very serious crisis and there was an immediate reaction in terms of injecting public money into Europe's economies, which led to large deficits.

It was done in this way by undertaking – and we are here in Parliament to approve it – a complete reform of the supervision of the financial system.

It is being done in this way, by coordinating economic policies. The Commission has indicated that it will submit a proposal to this effect, for the coordination of economic policies, essentially within the euro area. Furthermore, we are also, specifically, experiencing very determined and clear action by the European Union to support financial stability in the euro area. This political commitment was adopted on 11 February in order to consolidate and sustain the financial stability of the euro area.

There is another initiative that is undoubtedly part of that set: the commitment to a new strategy for growth and the creation of high quality jobs. This is the main topic of work for the European Council this weekend; a strategy which was articulated and expanded upon by the European Commission in the document of 3 March and which will essentially be studied by the Heads of State or Government in the spring Council, basically from the viewpoint of the so-called 'strategic objectives'. These are the strategic objectives that the European Commission stated in its document, such as the issues of employment, investment in research and development, climate change and energy, leaving school early, education in general and poverty. In addition, the European Council will also tackle the issue of governance, which we consider one of the inadequacies of the so-called Lisbon Strategy. The Council wants this governance to revolve around its own political leadership and the action of the Commission in supervising the Member States' fulfilment of the commitments they have adopted. This will be, of course, with the close collaboration and monitoring of everything by Parliament and, of course, the Union's institutions as a whole.

That will basically be the aim of the European Council's meetings this weekend, including the equally important area of the fight against climate change, in which the EU continues to be a leader. The European Union retains its world leadership in the fight against climate change; it must do so, it must continue holding onto this leadership. There is, moreover, a quantified commitment to the so-called 'fast start'. Let us hope, therefore, that the European Council will quantify and reaffirm that commitment to help developing countries combat climate change over these next few years as well. A commitment by developed countries generally to collaborate with those that are still not developed so that we all arrive at the very important Cancún conference in the best possible condition. At this conference, the European Union must – I repeat – hold on to the leadership it has now, without which the Copenhagen Accords, which we feel are inadequate, would surely not have been reached.

The Member States have unanimously reaffirmed their full agreement with these objectives and that they want to move unequivocally towards legally binding commitments at the Cancún conference in Mexico.

The Heads of State or Government will largely be dealing with those matters. It is also possible – depending on what happens right now, while the European institutions as a whole are sorting out how to cope with the crisis relating to the so-called Greek case – that they will deal with the issue of the financial situation in Greece and the refinancing of the country's public debt. That issue will also arise there, no doubt, because it forms part of a political commitment adopted by the European Union on 11 February at Heads of State or Government level. This was a political commitment to support the financial stability of the euro area, in the sense that if it is necessary to adopt specific measures to maintain that financial stability, such measures will be adopted.

That is, at any event, the principle that will be very much in mind at this weekend's meeting of the European Council.

José Manuel Barroso, President of the Commission. – Mr President, it is indeed a very good and timely opportunity for us to meet today – one day before the important Spring European Council. We have challenging tasks ahead of us. For those tasks, the fresh and forceful backing of the European Parliament is of great importance. Having said this, I want to thank and congratulate Parliament for its resolution on Europe 2020, which it adopted in Strasbourg two weeks ago with broad party support.

I also want to take the opportunity to thank the Spanish Presidency of the Council for its support for the Europe 2020 strategy. That support was clearly expressed at different formations of the Council of Ministers.

But now to the European Council: I believe every European Council must do two things. It must show that it is responding to the needs of the moment, and it must work on Europe's long-term strategic framework and long-term strategic objectives.

The crisis entails several pressing concerns for communities, workers and businesses across Europe. And, as we know, public finances at national level are under unprecedented strain. The European Union must of course tackle these issues, including financial stability. I will come back to this again later.

Europe must not make the mistake of neglecting the imperative of working now to bring about long-term change. That is why the European Council will deal with two of our most obvious long-term challenges: our economic future, and climate change.

We have already debated the Europe 2020 strategy together in this Parliament. Your contribution and your commitment will be indispensable in carrying through our ambitions for smart, sustainable, inclusive growth. So, too, will be the contribution of the European Council.

Our level of ambition must be set by the scale of the tasks ahead. We need to show that we have the vision and the coherence to act. And we must be able to communicate this, to show people that our actions will make a difference where it matters. This is why I believe it is so important that the European Council agrees clear targets this week.

The targets which the Commission has put on the table were carefully chosen. They address the need to increase the level of employment, to invest more in research and innovation, to meet our 2020 climate and energy targets, to improve our educational performance and to combat poverty.

These five headline targets pinpoint objectives which people can relate to, and show that the European Union is leveraging reform in areas that everybody knows are important. This is also about the political will to tackle tough problems.

Of course, the targets must be achievable. They should also require an extra effort compared to the status quo, a recognition by our Member States that change is needed, and I will try to convey to the European Council this sense of urgency for the economic situation of Europe now and for the need of reforms for a more sustainable, more inclusive economy and society in Europe.

What is really important is the measures which each Member State will take to boost its growth rate and address the shortcomings we all know are there. We need national measures to address national problems defined according to national circumstances and in full respect of subsidiarity, but set within a common European framework.

If there is a lesson from the financial crisis, it is that we are all interdependent in the world. So we cannot accept the principles of interdependence globally and reject them when discussed at European level.

A common framework, too, which is supported and should be stimulated by particular European Union measures, what we call in our document 'flagship initiatives'.

These flagship proposals will show the European Union level acting in critically important areas such as the digital agenda, innovation, resource efficiency and industrial policy – and, of course, in some cases, will also help targets to be achieved at a national level.

What we are proposing here is a new departure. Thanks to the Lisbon Treaty, we can go for a new approach to economic coordination, a reinforced economic governance of Europe – one which gives the freedom necessary to target at the national level, but which brings a strong European dimension, and using all the instruments at European level to kick-start the economy. Accepting this approach will be the real test for the European Council.

I am encouraged by the results of the informal European Council. I hope that the European leaders will be present and say 'yes' when it comes to responding to these challenges in a collective spirit.

Regarding climate change, I know that this Parliament shares my conviction that climate change is not a subject that can be put on the back burner. We need to keep this top of our agenda.

The European Union has been in the lead, and we still are – we alone have the reduction commitments clearly backed up with the mechanisms to deliver; we are the number one donors of aid to developing countries on climate issues. So let us move on from soul-searching about Copenhagen and take the initiative once again.

We need a clear, unified and ambitious position. That is why the Commission has put forward a communication setting out the steps needed to reinvigorate international negotiations. At the same time, Commissioner Hedegaard has started a set of consultations with our key partners.

So we should make a serious effort to advance at Cancún – building on the very real substance of the Copenhagen Accord. We should keep Kyoto on the agenda, but make clear that it can only be assessed in the light of a global agreement and not before. We should step up outreach activities and build trust, most obviously with developing countries – which is why respecting our pledges on fast-start finance is so important.

And of course, at the same time, we will continue to implement our 20-20-20 package, showing, in particular, how it is compatible with the work of economic modernisation and reform set out in the 2020 strategy.

These two areas show vividly how Europeans are looking to the European Union's political leadership for action. I am convinced that, if we have the will to be bold, we can show Europe as the decisive influence in building the right future for our citizens.

It is in the same spirit that I will present to the European Council some of the major challenges for the G20 that will take place in June in Canada. In fact, we should never forget that some of those issues are European but they should also be addressed at global level.

Financial stability and the economic and financial situation in Greece are not on the formal agenda of this European Council. However, frankly speaking, I cannot see how it is possible for Heads of State or Government, notably those in the euro area, not to discuss this issue. Let me therefore state our position on this.

Greece is currently in the process of correcting its excessive government deficit. Bringing the deficit down vigorously is crucial and Greece has been taking measures to that effect. In particular, Greece is taking measures leading to a reduction of its deficit this year by 4% of GDP. Such fiscal effort is in line with the course of action recommended by the Commission and the Council, as acknowledged by the Council on 16 March. Naturally, Greece's fiscal effort must be continued; it is the only way to secure a lasting reduction in the cost of debt financing.

In response to the economic and financial situation in Greece, the informal meeting of the Heads of State or Government on 11 February stated that, and I quote, 'euro area Member States will take determined and coordinated action, if needed, to safeguard financial stability in the euro area as a whole'.

The Commission believes it is now appropriate to create, within the euro area, an instrument for coordinated action which could be used to provide assistance to Greece in case of need. It should be clear that the creation of such a mechanism will not imply its automatic activation. Creating such a mechanism is also a question of responsibility and solidarity.

Solidarity is a two-way street. Greece is making an economic effort at this point and by supporting this effort, we not only help Greece, but the stability of the eurozone as a whole. The framework for coordinated action should be understood as a safety net to be used only when all other means to avoid a crisis have been exhausted, including, first and foremost, exhausting the scope for policy action at domestic level.

Beyond technical aspects, any possible solution must reinforce and strengthen the unity and the coherence of the eurozone and its governance. The world economy needs stability. The eurozone is a pole of stability, and it is important that its capacity to provide stability is further enhanced. We may need to resort to intergovernmental instruments for some issues, but they need to be embedded into a joint European framework.

It is my firm conviction that the response to the specific challenges will also be a test to European leaders and to their commitment to the European – and monetary – Union. What is at stake is the essential principle of financial stability that is central to the euro; and the euro is one of the most important creations of the European project and the European construction process so far.

I hope this issue will be solved in a spirit of responsibility and solidarity. That is the European way to do it.

(Applause)

Joseph Daul, on behalf of the PPE Group. – (FR) Mr President, Mr López Garrido, President of the Commission, ladies and gentlemen, the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) expects the European Council to reaffirm European solidarity unequivocally while, at the same time, making everyone face up to his or her responsibilities.

The PPE Group also expects the Heads of State or Government to define their roadmap so as to bring Europe out of the crisis. To what extent are they willing to cooperate, and what are the lines they are unwilling to cross? Do they believe that the recovery of growth and employment depends on true common action, with the resources that that requires, or do they prefer to act on their own as regards innovation, education, training, support for SMEs, and the fight against unemployment and poverty, with all too familiar consequences?

I would remind you that our Member States all subscribed, in 2000, to the priorities of the Lisbon Strategy. However, because they did not equip themselves with the resources, because they did not take the objectives seriously, we are now many years behind, and everything that we said would happen has happened, but outside Europe.

My group therefore expects the European Council to go beyond words and to give serious consideration to our common economic objectives on the basis of the Commission's 2020 proposals, an amended version of which Parliament will propose in June.

I come back to solidarity, solidarity of which a great deal has been said for some weeks now and which is actually the be-all and end-all of European integration, from the creation of the single market to common defence, via the euro. This solidarity has been shown since the start of the financial crisis and it must not be denied our Greek friends, or any other EU country that encounters the same difficulties.

This week, it is imperative that a European solution is found to this crisis, and it must be a Community-based solution – I repeat, a Community-based solution – which must be envisaged in accordance with European rules and within the framework of European financial aid mechanisms. Moreover, if we wish, we can even include the International Monetary Fund in this framework, but always in accordance with European rules. It is in everyone's interests that we guarantee the stability of Europe and of the European Monetary System.

Ladies and gentlemen, on the reverse side of Europe there is solidarity, and, on the front side, responsibility. This responsibility is that of each Member State to guarantee accurate and reliable public accounts. It is also that of the citizens of States that are facing temporary payment problems to make sacrifices, to participate in the collective effort to get public finances back on track and to accept the reforms that are necessary to achieve this, however harsh they may be.

In other words, yes, Europe must show solidarity with Greece. It must ensure that Greece comes through this difficult period. However, Greece, too, must carry out those internal reforms that are required in the short and medium terms and in order to warrant this solidarity, and it proposed them to Parliament yesterday in fact. It now remains for Greece to implement them.

Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the crisis is forcing us to change. The first change concerns the Commission, which I call on to exercise fully and, above all, authoritatively, its role as guardian of the treaties. The criteria of the Stability and Growth Pact must be applied, and the Commission must ensure this. This House will support it in this difficult task.

The second change concerns the governance of our public finances. In a period of growth, it is generally felt that one has the right to conduct one's own budgetary, fiscal and social policy without really worrying about anyone else. However, in a period of crisis, those who have spent the most call for solidarity from those who have been, let us say, more sensible.

Can this continue? I do not think so. It is time for the Member States to coordinate their budgetary, fiscal and social policies better, and let us not be afraid to say it: we want more European governance! Such coordination will only make implementing solidarity-based principles easier, fairer and more natural.

Mr President-in-Office of the Council, I invite you to take initiatives along these lines. As you know, I have a certain amount of experience: it is always in times of crisis that the machine is given a boost. We are in the midst of a real crisis as far as our citizens and the situation on the ground are concerned, and we need political courage.

(Applause)

Martin Schulz, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (DE) Mr President, the European summit must and will deal with the crisis in Greece; that much is obvious. The International Herald Tribune writes something interesting in its leading article today: 'Greece has promised to do its homework and to balance its budget'. The Member

States belonging to the euro area made their solidarity conditional upon Greece's compliance with their demands in this respect.

Greece has delivered, writes the International Herald Tribune. It is the Member States of the euro area that have not delivered – and particularly the Federal Republic of Germany, which is refusing to keep its promise. That is the first point.

(Applause)

The President of the Commission has quite rightly spoken of a safety net. It is not about transferring money from taxpayers in Germany, France, Italy or any other country into Greece's coffers. That is not the objective. It is about enabling Greece to borrow money on the international markets at the same interest rates as are available to the other countries. Interest rates are usually 2.5 to 3%. As a result of the speculation caused by the failure to demonstrate solidarity with Greece, that country is paying 6%. To put it plainly, Greece's attempts to balance its budget are lining the pockets of speculators on the international financial markets.

(Applause)

This means the people there are being robbed. It is foolish, because if this sets a precedent – if the failure to demonstrate solidarity enables people to speculate against a euro area country that is in deficit to the extent that eventually, internal solidarity is unsustainable and the International Monetary Fund has to step in, then Greece will be merely a prologue. The speculators will then turn their attention to Italy, to the UK and to Spain. If we do not want to see a large-scale conflagration, we need now to demonstrate solidarity with Greece.

Solidarity with Greece – and this is a message that we need to get through to the German Chancellor in particular – therefore makes economic sense. It is not a matter of giving aid for the sake of it.

(Applause)

Consequently, we cannot release Mr Barroso from this obligation by saying the International Monetary Fund should now sort it out. It is the Commission that must propose how we can achieve a sensible stabilisation within the euro area. The Commission has made good proposals and I believe that the Council should go along with them. These do not include calling on the International Monetary Fund. Why not? We are in a position to resolve the problem within the euro area ourselves.

Moreover, I am astonished that Chancellor Merkel is bringing the International Monetary Fund into play. The German Bundesbank – which to German conservatives is as the Vatican is to Catholics – writes in its monthly report for March: 'However, financial contributions from the International Monetary Fund to resolve structural problems – such as to directly finance a budget deficit or to finance a bank recapitalisation – are incompatible with its monetary mandate'. That is a quote from the German Bundesbank. Contrary to the statements of her Minister for Finance, the German Chancellor says that the International Monetary Fund should solve the problem. That is not the right way to go.

What we need now is to send a signal to the international markets: you can speculate all you like, but you will not drive the euro area apart. The speculation will not cease until such a signal has been given. To make it clear what kind of speculation we are talking about, we need to draw attention once again to Credit Default Swaps, or CDSs. This is nothing more than a game: I will insure myself against my neighbour's house burning down. Should my neighbour's house burn down, I get the insurance money. If I were to do that, then I would have a vested interest in seeing his house burn down.

We cannot apply the Florian principle – 'Holy Saint Florian, spare my house, burn the others' – in the European Union. That is why solidarity with Greece is an act to stabilise the euro in the euro area. In the end, you have to decide whether you want to have European solidarity or whether you want to give in to armchair politics. I do not want to make it my own, but I would urge you all to listen carefully to the following quote from Wolfgang Münchau in the Financial Times Deutschland – which is not a Socialist journal, and this man is not a Social Democrat: 'In a situation in which European necessities come up against German populism, let us choose European necessities'.

(Applause)

Guy Verhofstadt, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, I believe that the conclusion that all of us – the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), the Greens, Socialists, Liberals and all

the other groups, except the Euro-sceptic groups, which are perhaps pleased with what is happening right now in Europe – can draw is that greater clarity is required within the European Council.

The battle has been raging for weeks now outside the European institutions on the question of what should be done to help Greece and the euro area. We have never seen this before: for weeks now, instead of decisions being taken, there has been quarrelling over the measures that should be taken, and anything and everything is being said.

I shall go further, Mr President. I have a feeling that, in four days, certain Members of the Council have done more damage to the European project than all the Euro-sceptics put together have done in four years. That is my feeling today.

(Applause)

The only way to change and to stop that is to take a firm decision on the basis of a Commission proposal. I am pleased that Mr Barroso has announced today that he is going to propose a solution to the Council, a solution – and I echo what Mr Daul said – which must be European and Community-based, and which is not about requesting what has already been requested for months now, namely that money be taken from taxpayers' pockets and given to Greece. It is not about that. It is, in fact, about the need to have a European instrument that will enable the interest rates on Greece's government bonds to be reduced. The best way of doing this is not to make just one country – Greece – issue these government bonds, but to issue them at European level, since Europe has liquidity and credibility.

There are two elements that count in terms of knowing what the interest rate is: liquidity and credibility. Europe has the necessary credibility and liquidity, and it is on this basis that it will be possible to bring down Greece's interest rates without a single euro of taxpayers' money going to Greece. That is absolutely necessary, Mr President, because today the spread – that is the gap between the German rate, which today stands at 3.05%, and the Greek rate, which is 6.5% at present – is 350 basis points. The only way of resolving that is really to take the necessary step of introducing this European instrument.

A second reason to explain this requirement is that the efforts that the Greeks are going to make – must make, are obliged to make – must serve a purpose. For, if a European solution is not chosen, if these interest rates cannot be reduced, all the efforts that the Greeks are going to make will ultimately go to the capital markets. That is what will happen if a firm decision is not taken during this Council. The Greeks are going to make efforts, are going to make savings, and who is going to benefit? The speculators, the capital markets and so on, as they are going to have much higher interest rates.

(Applause)

That is why Europe must intervene. Europe must intervene to ensure that Greece's consolidation measures are worthwhile. They are necessary, but they must also be worthwhile. That is why we support, and why the whole of Parliament must now support, the proposal that the Commission is going to make, and we must hope that the Members of the Council will keep quiet and approve. That is what we must hope for.

Rebecca Harms, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, I would like to remind everyone briefly once again of how quickly – sometimes practically overnight – we decided to bail out Europe's banks when they were in trouble.

Yet it is only now that we are debating the terms on which this assistance is being granted. We still have not clarified the terms of the repayments and responsibilities, nor have we set out how the banks will be supervised. Bearing this in mind, I must also point out that this Greek crisis – this crisis facing the euro – is actually a European crisis and that discussions have been going on for weeks and months without Europeans being able to garner themselves to make the necessary decisions; as far as I am concerned, it is simply shameful. As a German MEP – I hope you are listening, Mr Langen – I am ashamed of my national government.

We read today that a special summit is taking place in Brussels at which decisions will be made on Greece according to Chancellor Merkel's will – what she wants and what will enable her to return to Berlin from Brussels as the victor – without actually discussing satisfactory solutions with the others. I think it is disgraceful. It means that the tabloids and armchair politics have won, and I believe we should think very carefully – you too, Mr Langen, in your German delegation – as to whether the 'to be or not to be' of solidarity in the European Union should hinge on the results of opinion polls currently being obtained by a German party of which the German Chancellor is a member relating to the prospects of electoral success in a Federal German state.

I think it smacks far too much of populism, and it is intolerable that it has not yet been established that the Heads of State or Government will agree during the regular Thursday and Friday Council sessions on how the euro area is to deal with the crisis in Greece.

(Applause)

I have been following the discussions in Germany carefully and last week I was also in Greece, and I would like to make it clear once more to the citizens of my own country, of Greece and of the EU, that this is a time for solidarity; but that henceforth, Greece will only be able to obtain credit on favourable terms if this is not a one-way street. The days I spent in Greece showed me that the people of Greece now have an opportunity to create a better state. The state of Greece must utilise the crisis to bring about real reforms. We will be doing no one any favours if we now show solidarity without calling on Mr Papandreou to make even more far-reaching reforms than have been announced to date. As I have said, the Greek people deserve much better.

Since I find this populism so prevalent in Germany and because I consider it so dangerous, I would also like to argue this from another perspective: in our analysis, the continued existence of the euro – of a single currency – in the long term can only be secured if Europeans pull together and integrate their economic policy. Otherwise, competition for so-called hard interests will, in cases of doubt, always lead us into the difficulties that we are currently facing. We will then have a lot to do, and once again things will turn bitter, Mr Langen. We need to explain the necessity of integration to our citizens.

We have made as heavy weather of this as when discussing the constitution. We are so pleased that the Treaty of Lisbon is finally in force, yet when faced with our first challenge after Lisbon, we let the tabloid press and armchair politics win out over reason. Chancellor Merkel would be well advised – and that means also by you, my fellow Germans in the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) – to apply the brakes. The necessity of integrating economic policy is what needs to be discussed henceforth. We must be led by transparency, reason and arguments that we can put to our citizens, not by the tabloid press such as *BILD-Zeitung*. Otherwise, as Mr Münchau wrote today, before long, Chancellor Merkel will be returning defeated from Brussels. Then *BILD-Zeitung* will write: the euro must be abolished – we must bring back the Deutsche mark. What will we do then?

It is not yet too late. Germany is in a decisive position. I hope that Mr Sarkozy will not give in and is instead more sensible than Chancellor Merkel.

Michał Tomasz Kamiński, on behalf of the ECR Group. – (PL) Mr President, it is not without reason that we are talking in this Chamber, today, about Greece, despite the fact that, unfortunately, Greece is not on the agenda for the meeting. I would like, in this Chamber, to express approval for the Greek Government. It is a government which, today, is facing protests on its streets. It may be that the protests are coming from the government's own socialist electorate, but it is a government which, in the name of a rational economy and European solidarity, is taking tough decisions, and is not bowing to populism. I regret to have to say that not all European leaders, today, are able to resist bowing to this kind of populism.

It seems to me that Greece does need our solidarity, because Europe is built on the principle of solidarity, but, of course, we must not allow any politician in any country to treat economic policy like going shopping with a credit card with no limit, because things will end up as they have done in Greece. In future, we should very firmly set conditions for Member States, to ensure they follow a rational economic policy, because a policy which is not based on rational foundations ends up as it has done.

Unfortunately, I have to say that, today, we are also facing a problem which is seen so often in Europe, namely that ideology and politics are more important than the economy. This, unfortunately, is how it ends, and we had an example of this with the introduction of the euro. We can say, today, that Greece probably adopted the euro too early, but because politics was put before the economy, we have the crisis which we have today. I would like to say that I hope the European Commission, under Mr Barroso's leadership, will be the guardian of European solidarity and European economic sense, because we need that sense and solidarity.

I would also like to point out that, in response to the crisis in which we find ourselves, we should not look for medicines which will only make the situation worse. I do not think that greater bureaucracy, integration and regulation in Europe could help what is, and should be, our greatest objective – increasing competitiveness. We should not count on officials being able to decide about how to make our continent better, instead of allowing a free economy to do this. We should also respect the differences in economic and social policy which divide European countries and which result from their different history, culture and other factors. We

can, and we should, appeal for European solidarity for Greece, and I hope that I will hear, in this Chamber, expressions of approval for the Greek Government.

Lothar Bisky, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Mr President, it is rare for me to agree with the President of Parliament and the President of the Commission. However, when they both call for solidarity with Greece and warn of renationalisation, then I can only agree with them, because what they say is correct. Moreover, recently in Strasbourg, we heard Mr Barroso thinking aloud as to whether the worst of the speculation on the financial markets should be banned outright. The increasing social chasm in the European Union and within the Member States can no longer be overlooked by anyone, yet the pressing issues associated with this are not on the agenda of the Heads of State at their first summit following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon.

The debate on the EU 2020 economic strategy is naturally already on the agenda. As you are aware, my group is not at all keen on this strategy as it has been drafted by the Commission, because it is based on the failed ideology of competition which led to the crisis. We want a strategy for Europe that gives social and ecological needs priority over competitive interests. EU 2020 is miles away from this. It is quite something, however, when individual members of the Federal German Government turn up and thunder against the few binding goals of the EU 2020 strategy, such as for the employment quota, for research and education and for combating poverty – and that in the European Year for Combating Poverty! I hope that this attitude will not prevail among the majority of the Heads of Government.

Niki Tzavela, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (EL) Mr President, my country, Greece, has many things in common with California. We have a wonderful climate, our land is our asset, our forests burned as have the forests in California, they have held Olympic Games, as have we, and we have ended up with the same problems as California.

I wonder, if California had lending problems, would the central administration of the USA leave it at the mercy of speculators...

(The speaker was interrupted by a heckler)

It is the economy – yes, it is. I realise that. That is why I said what I said before.

– (EL)... or would the central administration of the USA resolve its problem? Do we or do we not have a central administration in the European Union? Are we certain that Greece, which accounts for 2% of the European economy, has caused such a massive problem with the euro? Has it sawed through the cohesion of the euro and is it threatening the unity of the Union?

It is clear, therefore, that we face a crash test of the strength of the European currency and, more importantly, of the intentions of the leaders of the European Union to defend it. If we look back, we can see what we have achieved (30 years ago, I was a young employee at the Ministry of Labour and was trained here, in Brussels, in the single European market). We have achieved the single European market. We have achieved the euro. I do not think that we have achieved anything else in common. That is why you also see me with the euro-sceptics.

I trust that tomorrow, we shall prove that we really have achieved harmony and something in common.

Zoltán Balczó (NI). – (HU) Those who spoke before me all mentioned the solution to the Greek crisis. Meanwhile, Mr Barroso, the summit did not even place it on its agenda. Do you not see this as a contradiction, as hypocrisy? Because it does not appear on the official agenda. Of course, it is not just Greece that found itself in a difficult situation in 2008-2009. Hungary was the country that came close to bankruptcy, partly due to the serious errors made by the government. An IMF loan was accepted there, a move that has extremely serious consequences for the population. We need to face the question of what the lessons of the financial crisis are. Is it that everything is connected to everything else? No. The true lesson was formulated by Prime Minister George Papandreou, who said that over the past twenty years, the Berlin Wall fell, and Wall Street fell. The 'Wall' street fell. Yes, this global financial system, which had become disconnected from the economy, is the fundamental reason why countries find themselves in this situation.

José Manuel García-Margallo y Marfil (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, you are more aware than anyone of how my party wanted to help make the Spanish Presidency a success. We want to continue doing so, but for that you need to make some adjustments and you need to get on with leading the Union right away.

Leading the Union means seeking a solution for Greece. Everyone has said so and I am not going to repeat it. Leading the Union means approving the Directive on alternative investment fund managers as soon as possible and not delaying it, which is what the Spanish Presidency has done. Leading the Union means approving the financial surveillance package as soon as possible, not upholding at all costs a Council agreement that is much more conservative than the Commission's proposal and even more so than the de Larosière report from which it derives.

Parliament will provide the Spanish Presidency with a supervision agreement that can be summarised in two words: more supervision and more Europe. I am sure that the Spanish Government, which has always preached these ideas, will support Parliament and not the other positions that originate from the other side of the Channel.

Leading the Union means strengthening budgetary discipline, and strengthening budgetary discipline means coming up with new ideas to strengthen the preventive aspect. The Spanish Prime Minister knows that the review of the fourteen stability plans that have just been referred to was a purely bureaucratic procedure in the absence of a better idea.

The preventive arm would have to take into account the competitiveness of the economies – because without wealth, there is no way of balancing the public accounts – and it would have to take the foreign account situation into consideration. Tougher sanctions would also have to be implemented so that the agreement really appears binding.

Leading the Union means bringing in a new idea on the issue of governance, on which you have just written in a newspaper. The Spanish Prime Minister told us here how he wanted more governance when Articles 121 and 136 of the Treaty of Lisbon, which are the ones to which the Spanish Presidency now refers, are already in force.

What else does it involve? Tell us what it involves and we will help you. In order to help you, however, we need to know what it is you expect and want, because in this House, vague, vacuous and empty ideas get very short shrift.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ANGELILLI

Vice-President

Stephen Hughes (S&D). – Madam President, we feel that the draft Council conclusions that we have all seen leaked this week could spell a very real danger for the European Union.

The conclusions talk about a timely exit from exceptional support measures. What does that mean in practice? We saw from the Ecofin conclusions last week that they want to see a withdrawal of labour market support measures from the end of 2010. In December, Council talked about the need for all Member States to return to the Stability Pact criteria by the end of 2013.

We feel that timetable is hopelessly optimistic. If we follow that prescription of a rigid return to the Stability Pact criteria by the end of 2013, it will be a recipe for huge cuts in public spending and public provision, unemployment will rise, tax takes will be reduced, and we will enter a period of sluggish growth that could lead to a real reduction in the economic potential of the European Union for many years to come. It is a recipe for disaster.

What we need instead is a smart balance between responsible fiscal policy on the one hand and continued labour market support on the other. We need a sustained social and sustainable exit strategy.

The Danish Labour Institute has produced figures today. They say that, if the emergency exit strategies agreed by 20 Member States with the Commission are followed, an additional 4.5 million European citizens will needlessly be in the unemployment queues by the end of 2013. That can be avoided. We have to avoid it. One of the calls we are making, therefore, is for a two-year moratorium on withdrawal of support measures.

Incidentally, this week, we are also proposing a new European mechanism for financial stability. I hoped President Barroso would still be here because I wanted to say that we would not mind at all if he stole our ideas and presented them as a recommendation to Council tomorrow.

Lena Ek (ALDE). – Madam President, the Council will meet tomorrow to discuss the future of a Europe that is faced with enormous challenges. At the present time, we are dealing with a financial crisis, leading to a jobs crisis, in combination with a climate crisis.

An economic growth based on social and environmental grounds is crucial to kick-start Europe, but I am afraid that the Council and Commission's proposals for governance – however welcome – will be too vague and will not help to achieve the set targets. If implemented as it stands, Europe 2020 will be another Lisbon Strategy – a failure.

Europe should instead dare to attack these challenges head on with bold governance proposals.

Firstly, the open coordination method is not working and must be abandoned. Instead, binding targets should be established and followed up by the Commission, in accordance with the articles available in the Lisbon Treaty.

Secondly, if funding should be conditional on how well a Member State lives up to its obligations according to the 2020 strategy, we cannot keep spending taxpayers' money on governments that lie and cheat with statistics – solidarity, yes, but based on transparency.

Thirdly, the Commission should publish its annual reports with policy recommendations in Parliament before they are discussed in Council.

An open process would create transparency and permit citizen involvement. As European politicians, we should always strive to put the citizens at the centre of our policy. So let us make that promise a reality and upgrade the Commission's kitten to a tiger – and a tiger with teeth.

Roberts Zīle (ECR). – (LV) Thank you, Madam President. We must address the question of solidarity not only in the case of Greece, but also in shaping the long-term policies of the European Union, and I say this in the context of the agreement that we expect in the Council on the goals of the 2020 strategy. What worries me in the Commission's plan is that there are no accents on economic cohesion in this strategy alongside the accent on social cohesion. If we consider this in context with the emphasis on the financial forecast for the period 2014-2020, then in reality, these economic cohesion concepts become significantly weaker in monetary terms. In other words, this means that until 2020, the equalisation of economic disparities will be less dynamic. Indeed, it could come to pass to the contrary that in 2020, economic disparities in the European Union could be greater than they are in 2010. Is that what we wish to see, and is that the true understanding of solidarity within the European Union? I should invite the Council to pay very serious attention to achieving this political agreement, but nevertheless also to stress the goal of economic cohesion. Thank you.

Takis Hatzigeorgiou (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Madam President, I think we have dealt sufficiently and fairly with the issue of Greece. I should like to touch on an issue that also concerns other countries. Mr Schulz said that interest rates currently stand at 2-3% in Europe. I should like to tell you that in Cyprus, the interest rate currently stands at 6%. Anything above this level and the banks are on their knees and nothing can change this picture. We consider that the Council should also work in this direction in future, so that we do not see other countries getting into the same mess as Greece.

I should like to make two proposals:

We gave billions to the banks in a bid to get the banks rolling. Would it not have been better for the state to give this money as the interest rate on a mortgage for a primary residence, given that consumers were going to the bank to pay their instalment?

My second proposal is this: could we not have considered imposing a tax on major cross-border transactions between States?

I have one thing to say about one-minute speeches, Madam President. I am sorry but I wish to say that one minute is not long enough to present a view. In the final analysis, it is humiliating to have to resort to slogans.

President. – I understand that in one minute, you cannot say very much; however, I will now give the floor to Mr Borghezio for another minute.

Mario Borghezio (EFD). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, it is clear for all to see that the euro area is becoming increasingly difficult to govern with every passing day.

The risk of state bankruptcy has not been eliminated, but despite the weekly meetings and summits of leaders and finance ministers, a clear solution has not yet been put in place. I hope that we do not have a mission impossible on our hands. The bailout of a Member State may not survive a probable constitutional appeal

in Germany. These are all points that we should bear in mind and which I do not think have come out during this debate.

I would, however, like to take the opportunity to mention that through its financial measures, the European Union should place solid, practical emphasis on the effective recovery of the small and medium-sized enterprises sector, which has been abandoned.

What proportion of the huge sums given to the banks really ends up in the small enterprises sector, in my country – Italy – for example? How much of the Structural Funds? Only between 1-2% is used in the SME sector in some regions, according to bodies representing SMEs. These are real problems, affecting the real economy, which Europe should address very seriously and urgently.

Werner Langen (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, I would like to start with some praise for Greece. The solution to the Greek crisis must entail tough reform measures in Greece. That is the right path to take. Everything else that has been proposed here runs counter to the European treaties, and I expect both the President of the Commission and Parliament to abide by the treaties and not to make proposals that run counter to the treaties.

To Mr Schulz I would say: turning up the volume is no substitute for knowing the facts. It is not speculators that have resulted in Greece's problems. It is the internal rules – the fact that the Member States have not been prepared to comply with the Stability and Growth Pact. Germany and France – not Greece – were the culprits, setting all the other Member States a bad example back in 2003 and 2004. Not the others.

This is not meant as a criticism of Greece, but if we do not change the rules and the Member States are not prepared to abide by their own rules, then the euro area is going to have problems. Now it is being asserted that the blame lies with speculators. Less than a third of the Greek national debt is secured by Credit Default Swaps. Less than one thousandth of global CDS derivatives relate to Greece. That is just an excuse.

For so long as we are unable to implement the rules and stick to them – and the finance ministers are the culprits here – we will repeatedly find ourselves in difficulties. That is the key; not reproaching any particular Head of Government who is abiding by the European treaties and her own constitution.

(Applause)

Hannes Swoboda (S&D). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, it is quite clear – and it has already been stated, Mr Langen – that Greece must do its own homework. From my point of view, however, it has also been stated quite clearly that there must be solidarity. Solidarity that helps Greece to accomplish what it has to do. Whatever the percentages, speculation may not be responsible for the crisis in Greece, but it is to blame for the huge burden that Greece now has to shoulder beyond what is necessary. That is the crucial thing.

Also, Mr Langen, the Financial Times – a newspaper that is closer politically to your views than to my own – has put it quite plainly: that is the difference between Chancellor Kohl and Chancellor Merkel. Chancellor Kohl would have said 'Let's solve this problem together with Greece'. Chancellor Merkel takes flight and says: 'Well, what does the treaty say? What do the Court of Justice and the German constitution say?' That is the difference – whether you are politically in favour of the integration of Europe or whether you are always looking back home, or have a foreign minister who says 'We are not going to put the money on the table just yet'. Nobody has asked for money to be put on the table.

If you always take the populist path and fail to think of the common future of Europe, then you end up with this cacophony. Or, as another newspaper that is closer to you, the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, says: another day, another proposal. That applies not just to Germany, but to the European Union as a whole. The answer, or lack of an answer, that we have given so far is not acceptable. We need a carrot and stick approach. Measures are needed in Greece – there is no question about that – and they will be tough, very tough. However, we also need cooperation at European level, in particular, to prevent such problems arising. That can only happen – whether in the context of a European Monetary Fund as proposed by Mr Schäuble, or by another means – if we also have European solidarity. I therefore expect the summit to demonstrate European solidarity in order to create a better future.

Fiona Hall (ALDE). – Madam President, the Spring Summit is supposed to be the energy summit.

Had the Copenhagen conference ended with a global agreement, we would already be discussing the technical details of moving to a 30% emissions reduction, and we must still do so.

Firstly, because the level of ambition agreed at the 2007 Spring Summit translates to a much higher than 20% reduction in today's economic circumstances. Just last week, Nobuo Tanaka, the executive director of the deeply cautious International Energy Agency (IEA), told MEPs that the IEA's 2009 World Energy Outlook predicts a 23% reduction in EU emissions and that 30% would represent a good target.

Secondly, if we are serious about achieving up to a 95% target by 2050, then the roadmap requires a cut of at least 30% by 2020.

And, last but not least, it is only the transformation of the EU into a sustainable low carbon and resource efficient economy which will ensure European economic recovery and job creation.

Green jobs lie at the heart of the EU 2020 strategy. Therefore, the Council should back Commissioner Hedegaard and recognise that the conditions are now right to move to a 30% target, and the Council should recognise that the cheapest and easiest way to make that further cut is through energy efficiency and, specifically, a binding energy efficiency target.

EU leaders need to deliver as clear a message at this 2010 Spring Summit as they did in spring 2007.

Konrad Szymański (ECR). – (PL) Instead of having a discussion about implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy, I suggest we concentrate on areas where we do, really, have an influence. We are, certainly, able to help safeguard the common market from protectionism. We are, certainly, able to make European law easier for businesspeople, so that it does not limit the competitiveness of the European economy. Better legislation is, of course, a particular responsibility of this very House, of this Parliament.

Member States will reform if they are exposed to pressure from the world economy. This is why it is so important to give the Member States maximum freedom in the area of competitiveness of systems of taxation, social systems and economic law. By bringing in harmonisation in these areas, we are only maintaining the ills of the European social model. It is freedom, and not successive strategies, which is the correct response to the crisis.

Corien Wortmann-Kool (PPE). – (NL) Madam President, no emergency solution is in place for Greece as yet, and in fact this is not a problem at the moment, as even the Greek Prime Minister said here in Parliament that the country wishes to put its own house in order. Indeed, this is the correct procedure according to the ground rules of the Stability and Growth Pact, and is itself a type of solidarity.

Nevertheless, we have a problem. The euro is toppling, but this can be attributed mainly to the public debate among capital cities, which is giving the impression that we cannot reach a solution. We must put an end to this now, and hopefully we shall do so tomorrow. In my opinion, we need an emergency measure for this case of urgent need, which should unite the European Commission, the Member States and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). There should be emergency loans and nothing more.

Madam President, I hope that tomorrow, we shall look beyond the debate on this crisis. I hope we shall also look at medium- and long-term solutions. We must strengthen the preventive force of the Stability and Growth Pact. Moreover, as others have also said, the new EU 2020 strategy can be successful only if we really achieve sound European economic governance. This will entail not only Member States appearing together at the summit but also the European Commission deploying all the powers conferred on it by the Treaty of Lisbon; all the powers to really act and enforce things. After all, as Mrs Ek also said, a free-for-all is not the way to success.

I very much hope that the emergency measure has been agreed by the time the summit starts tomorrow, so that we can focus on how to lift the Netherlands out of the crisis with a solid 2020 strategy, and also on achieving a solution regarding the way ahead after Copenhagen.

Nikolaos Chountis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Madam President, according to recent statements by officials and articles in the press, it would appear that the most likely 'rescue' scenario for the Greek economy will be a joint effort between the Member States of the European Union and the International Monetary Fund. Mrs Merkel also appears to be pushing things in that direction.

May I say that this is the worst, the most anti-social scenario both for Greece and for the euro area. For the European Union, any such possibility violates Community legality – and I say that for those who defend it, given that no treaty, no legal text makes any reference to any such intervention by the International Monetary Fund or other international organisation in these procedures. At the same time, it creates a political and legal

precedent by making the Stability Pact even more austere and lets the United States of America into the euro area through the back door.

As far as Greece is concerned, any such choice would seriously intensify the anti-labour and anti-social measures taken by the government, measures which you call bold and which have increased poverty, increased unemployment, cut off any prospects for growth and cut off any hope of Greece's emerging from the crisis.

This is the prospect that awaits other countries which may apply such measures under such pressure.

Pervenche Berès (S&D). – (FR) Madam President, Mr López Garrido, Commissioner, is it normal that it should take two European Councils to resolve the issue of euro area countries showing solidarity with Greece?

I heard Mr Langen interpret the treaty. Yes, there is the treaty, the letter and the spirit. Moreover, when one reads Articles 143 and 122, none of the authors of the treaty bore in mind the fact that, after the changeover to the euro, we could be faced with a problem of the kind with which we are faced today. That is why we have to be creative; that is why we have to show solidarity. The idea of referring Greece to the International Monetary Fund seems to us – for those of us who aspire to be responsible and consistent Europeans on the international stage – to be a complete nonsense.

There is one thing that we must do, and that we must hope the European Council will do, namely, to send out a message of solidarity with Greece and a message of responsibility regarding the issue of economic governance. That issue is now on the table; it is serious, it is unresolved. We must address it calmly, we must reduce the pressure and we must not start with the assumption that we have to, in principle, strengthen the tool – an ineffective one so far – that is the Stability and Growth Pact, because it was repressive before it was cooperative.

We need to pursue objectives in terms of public deficit, in terms of debt, but we also need to invent terms of cooperation, of good added value between members of the euro area. This is the challenge facing the European Council, and I hope that it will rise to it with a sense of responsibility.

Mirosław Piotrowski (ECR). – (PL) Madam President, on the eve of the European Council meeting which will define the Union's new economic strategy, we should learn the lessons of the fiasco of the Lisbon Strategy and, working together, take a fair look at all Member States. In order to be competitive in world markets, we have to be innovative, but the redistribution of the main part of our budgetary resources exclusively to that end will *de facto* discriminate against many countries in Central and Eastern Europe, including Poland.

There is a great expectation that thanks to EU funds – as was the case earlier in Spain, Portugal and other countries of the European Union – the air, road and rail transport infrastructure, and also the Internet, will expand. A particular priority should be to help the eastern border regions of the European Union, such as the region around Lublin in Poland, for which a special budget line should be established as part of the 2020 strategy.

The European Council meeting must not send out a signal that poor regions of the Union are going to finance ideas which will bring maximum benefits only to the old Member States.

Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Madam President, the EU 2020 strategy to be discussed at the summit, which follows on from the Lisbon Strategy, proves that the anti-grassroots shotgun measures being promoted by the PASOK government in our country, with the fundamental agreement of all the political forces of capital and the parties of the European one-way street, are not unique to Greece.

They are decided in advance by the political elite and governments of the Member States of the European Union. They form part of the overall strategic plan of capital and are being promoted uniformly throughout the European Union by stepping up ideological terrorism and misleading the working and grassroots movement. The lies and demagogic statements by the representatives of the bourgeois governments, the forces of the European one-way street, that the European Union and EMU will act as a shield against crisis, the fairy tales about the European market of 480 million, the big European family, Community solidarity and other such idealistic talk have failed. The European Union is an imperialist, transnational union between capital and the monopolies which, with a single strategy, is attacking the people and crossing swords for a share of the spoils.

The economic and political problems in Greece, in the Member States of the European Union, will be solved through the fight of the working and grassroots movement, the fight and solidarity of the peoples. It is

obvious that what is happening in Greece is directly connected to the acute competition between the imperialist states and between the European Union, the USA, China and other developing countries.

Thus, in the face of the strategy of capital, the working class and the grassroots classes must set up their own strategic fight to overturn this anti-grassroots policy, in order to satisfy the modern needs of the working-class and grassroots family.

Gunnar Hökmark (PPE). – Madam President, two things. The first concerns public finances, and the second competitiveness.

Last year at this time, we were discussing in this Parliament how to face the crisis. There were those who said ‘let us meet the crisis by spending more and accepting bigger deficits’, and those of us who said ‘now we need to be in control of public spending in order to secure stability for the future’.

Now we see the results. Some Member States followed the policy of spending and accepting bigger deficits, and we can all see the consequences: increased public debt and increased costs for servicing the public debt by increased interest rates. That is the reality which is squeezing out welfare spending and investments in a lot of the Member States.

I think we need to learn from this: we need to abide by the rules we already have and we need to develop and improve the Stability and Growth Pact and make it more able to meet crises in the future.

But we have the same debate now, because some now say that we should delay the exit strategies and the exit from public deficits. That is wrong, because then we will undermine our ability to recover and will increase the cost for interest rates in the Member States.

The second thing is that competitiveness goes hand in hand with our ability to have stable public finances and to make the real changes we have talked about for decades. That is up to the Heads of Governments to do this week.

Udo Bullmann (S&D). – (DE) Madam President, Mr Hökmark, I think we have been in different parliaments in recent years, because the parliament I have experienced is different to yours! I have experienced a parliament in which some say we must look more closely into ratings agencies, hedge funds and private equity corporations. We must regulate them, we must carry out checks on the critical players in the financial markets and the critical products to ensure that we are not veering towards an international fiasco. I have also heard others saying ‘hands off’: the market will regulate itself, we do not need all that. Or as Mr McCreevy said – whenever politics interferes, the result is always worse. We have seen the results.

The international fiasco is the cause of the overindebtedness of the Member States of the European Union. However, we cannot stand here today and say that it was wrong to focus our growth policy on employment and economic activity. It is irrelevant to the debate, just as it is irrelevant to the debate when Mr Langen says that Chancellor Merkel understood the European Treaty. No, she did not understand it at all. What is worse, she is probably in a position to subordinate the European Treaty and its aims for Europe to her fear of losing an important regional election in North Rhine-Westphalia.

These are not the leadership skills that we need in the European Union. We have told the Commission here that EU 2020 is too watered down. There is no meat in it. Please provide some evidence that you are able to acquire new funds. Please fight for a financial transactions tax. Please fight for more economic activity and greater growth prospects in the European Union, to give small and medium-sized enterprises and the workers a chance. Right now, however, we almost sympathise with you for having to save the European Union with governments such as we have at present – governments such as that represented by Chancellor Merkel. Stay strong and create European instruments! That is our main message for the summit, because only then can people hope that we will provide the right answers.

Manfred Weber (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, Mr Schulz said that Greece has delivered and that it is now Europe’s turn. I wonder whether Europe actually needs to say ‘thank you’, nowadays, if Member States in the euro area simply keep to the rules, in other words, if they manage to get back to the 3% criterion. I also wonder what the difference was last year when Ireland faced the same situation and instituted hard cuts. Nobody came forward at that time with the idea of calling on a European Monetary Fund.

Mr Verhofstadt says that speculators are at work. Clearly there is pressure in that regard at the moment, but the fact is that Greece enjoyed major rate advantages thanks to being in the euro area. Our Italian colleagues

used the rate advantage they gained from their accession to the euro area to consolidate. Greece consumed it. We can indeed therefore say that the good European today is not the one who is putting his or her money on the table; the good European is the one who actually implements the rules that everyone has signed up to and accepted, so that they are actually complied with in the European Union.

As a second point, I would like to give my backing to the Commission because the proposals that are on the table for the long-term future represent a move in the right direction. We have agreed the 3% and we therefore need a strong Commission that will, in future, monitor and also enforce that 3% limit. We have seen how the Member States in the euro area are unable to police each other and to observe the 3% limit on their own. That is why I am in favour of a strong Commission that will be able, in future, to see that the criteria are met.

I have one more thought. We should talk positively about the euro. It is not a currency crisis that we have; it is an economic crisis. The euro is a major benefit for everyone. If our leaders in the European Union no longer say that, if that point is no longer made in the Council, people will not know it. That is why I am in favour of this major, strong currency.

Jo Leinen (S&D). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the Greek crisis is a current problem, while the growth crisis and the environmental crisis are long-term problems, and both need to be tackled dynamically with decisions taken by the European Council.

The Europe 2020 strategy rightly states that growth should be intelligent, sustainable and inclusive. When I look at the Council's conclusions, however, I see that they are much more narrowly focused and reduced to the classical growth strategy – a strategy that has failed and that did not get us very far. Growth cannot be intelligent if it is not sustainable and it is also not intelligent if it is not inclusive. That is why I would like to ask the Council and the Presidency of the Council to ensure that this triad, these three pillars, are retained. This is the new development that really should be implemented now.

I am very pleased that growth that saves on resources and on energy is to be a flagship of the European Union. Of course, we have been talking about this for a long time. This will actually help us to save costs, reduce dependencies and solve a series of problems.

I expect the Commission to provide us with a roadmap in the course of 2010, as it is a shared responsibility of the EU itself but also of the Member States, and many areas are therefore on very soft ground and very vague. Above all, we must make the target of 20% energy savings binding. This efficiency target must thus be made legally binding so that everyone knows where things are headed and industry can also realise the relevant investment.

Mario Mauro (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, if I were to ask myself the question frequently being asked in half the bars in Italy, I would ask what the point of Europe is, and I would make a snap reply, from the bottom of my heart.

What is the point of Europe if not to help Greece at this time? I do not think that this idea is crazy because it is in our DNA, in the nature of our political project: in the nature of our political project because it embraces solidarity. At the same time, however, I am struck that those who say they want to combat financial speculation intend to replace financial speculation with political speculation.

Indeed, how can they think of waging this battle against Chancellor Merkel? In other words, how can they think that the aim of trying to show solidarity with Greece is to attack another Member State, because it is simply reminding us that the policy of solidarity must go hand in hand with a policy of responsibility? This is something of which we have often reminded ourselves, with one voice, because we are aware that solidarity and responsibility will enable us to make the European political project practicable for everyone.

We must be certain that what unites us is stronger than what divides us, and in light of this, we must ask the Commission, as from tomorrow, to be ambitious and demand the necessary rigour from the Member States to ensure that they are capable of providing solidarity by means of a project which, in the long term, will be capable of giving tangible form to our European project.

Sergio Gaetano Cofferati (S&D). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the Greek crisis is clearly the most serious problem that Europe is facing, and it is undoubtedly caused by a lack of rigour in the management of public expenditure.

However, the European Institutions' delay in taking steps to address this Member State's moment of difficulty is incomprehensible and unacceptable. Moreover, this delay has already had a negative impact: indeed, it

has opened the door to speculation; it has created, within the Union, doubts over certain countries' intentions with regard to the future of Europe (I do not want us to forget that this is the first major issue that we have had to deal with following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon); it has accentuated the difficulties of the Greek Government, which has had to implement anti-popular measures – not trivial or minor decisions – affecting millions of people, and it has done so without being sure that help was on its way.

Furthermore, it has clearly damaged the founding value of solidarity, which is the cornerstone and the binding force of the idea that we all share of the European Union. Our intervention therefore needs to be free of any speculation. I would like to remind Mr Mauro that Germany is, without doubt, one of the countries to have benefited most from the entry into force of the euro and its effect on interest rates.

We must act swiftly to help Greece. Europe must do so in the interests of Europe.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE). – (RO) The Council of the European Union enthusiastically welcomed the Commission's Europe 2020 Communication.

This document is, admittedly, an absolute necessity, which is precisely why we must scrutinise its content closely. I think that it lacks financial consistency.

It is the Council's duty to ask the Commission to clarify the budget resources and their allocation to the key items in the budget.

In my view, the budget cannot be drawn up before the common agricultural policy and cohesion policy have been reformed.

One of the major areas supporting the EU's development and stability is completely missing, namely, the infrastructure for both transport and energy.

The development of transport and energy infrastructures in the European Union, along with their harmonisation with those existing in neighbouring countries, can provide a powerful driving force promoting sustainable growth and ensuring stable jobs. They can also provide the European Union with much sought-after security in both the energy and transport sectors.

For this reason, I call on the Council to ask the Commission to include these key areas in the EU 2020 strategy for the benefit of Europe's citizens.

Anni Podimata (S&D). – (EL) Madam President, the European summit on 11 February, which was to send a message of support to Greece so that the markets would calm down, has basically been annulled due to the dissonance and uncertainty prevailing within the European Union.

The European Council, which starts work tomorrow, cannot afford the luxury of maintaining the current climate of uncertainty and dissonance. Everyone now acknowledges that the Greek Government has taken very harsh measures, most of which have already started to be applied at the expense of and with sacrifices by the Greek people. However, at the same time, it continues to borrow at exceptionally high interest rates, the most recent example being on 5 March, because there are speculators on the markets making a fortune by betting on the odds of a country going bankrupt and ultimately creating the conditions and preconditions for that to happen.

Today, the debate revolves around Greece; tomorrow it will probably concern another Member State. Will the European Council stop it by creating an effective European preventive mechanism which will safeguard the national economies and the stability of the euro area?

The President of the European Commission spoke about responsibility and solidarity. He was right. Both are needed when you belong to a family such as a euro area. I do not think that anyone can doubt that Greece has fully assumed its responsibilities. However, it cannot face the fury of the market alone at this difficult stage. Eighteen months ago, the markets were threatening to bring down the global economy. Surely Greece will be threatened today.

That is where the concept of solidarity comes in, a concept which should be obvious and which should go hand in glove with membership of the euro.

Andreas Schwab (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, enough has been said about Greece – I want to turn to the future now. With the Europe 2020 strategy, the Commission has brought an important

document into the discussion, one that is intended to lay down quite broad guidelines for how the European Union should be led in future.

I believe that, in the end, we will all need to attain the joint targets that we are laying down in the Europe 2020 strategy. That was one of the major problems with the Lisbon Strategy, on which, ultimately, we all have work to do. Only if all the Member States truly stick to the targets laid down in the strategy will we be able to achieve these targets together. It will not succeed if the European Council believes itself to be the administrative body and if things are organised at the last minute. It will only succeed if those working in this institution truly realise the political leadership role that it has to play.

Furthermore, it will really only succeed if the principle of solidarity is fundamentally laid down in this Europe 2020 strategy. That means, first of all, individual responsibility on the part of the Member States in all those areas where they, themselves, are responsible. This includes reform efforts on the labour market, but it also includes national budgetary policy. Conversely, this also, of course, means an obligation to assist on the part of the other Member States – in other words, Member States that have got into difficulties through no fault of their own will also receive assistance. What is more, it will only succeed if the Commission takes the lead politically. In other words, we absolutely must avoid the mistakes of the Lisbon Strategy. It has often been said in the past that the strategy of cooperation that characterised the Lisbon Strategy failed. We need clear objectives from the Commission, and I believe that Parliament will support the Commission in this area.

Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S&D). – (ES) Madam President, I think we are all aware that five hundred million members of the public will be following the European Council to be held next week with unusual attention.

The reason is that the European Council will have the opportunity to issue a message of commitment to the exit from the crisis, which is what those who are suffering from it the most are desperately waiting for. Furthermore, the exit from the crisis must, of course, be reflected in that commitment to the strategy, it must be convincing in the change of model for growth and in its emphasis on economic, social and environmental aspects.

From the economic point of view, it must be reflected in the commitment to governance. From the social point of view, it must be reflected in the commitment to workers and social protection – the model that made us Europeans – and, in particular, to equality; I want to underscore that emphasis in a document in which the commitment to equality is clearly improvable. Furthermore, from the environmental point of view, it must be reflected in the commitment to recovering the spirit that made Europe the leader in the commitment to environmental sustainability and preventing climate change at the Copenhagen conference and, above all, to acknowledging that deeply disappointing taste in the mouth with which we left the Copenhagen conference.

However, the most important thing of all at the Council meeting is that there must be a clearly European commitment to support monetary union with the coordination of fiscal, budgetary and economic policies on a par with monetary union.

The message of solidarity with Greece is not a message for Greece; it is a message for Europe and Europeans. It is not a matter of rescuing Greece; it is a matter of giving European signs of life, of engagement with deep reality, with the deep historical commitment that monetary union represented.

Understand once and for all, therefore, that we are not talking about Greece; we are talking about all of us.

There have been delays in getting the new institutions going; there must not be any delay in getting the answers going that Europeans expect from the next Council.

Georgios Koumoutsakos (PPE). – (EL) Madam President, it is true that my country, Greece, has failed over the years to develop its economy with the necessary moderation and consistency. Now, however, it has fully assumed its responsibilities. The Greek people are paying a heavy price.

However, we must not hide our heads in the sand. Greece is not the only country in EMU facing serious problems. It was not the only country to take recourse to the toxic services of certain credit institutions. It is not, nor will it remain, the only target of speculators.

We all know – and we know full well – that the Greek issue is a European issue. EMU will remain mutilated without more coordinated economic and fiscal policy and, above all, without solidarity.

The crisis, any crisis is the mother of change. The current crisis may give birth to a stronger Europe and Greece may be the midwife of that change. So let us not shoot Greece down. Let us together shoot down the speculators who would like to see the euro on its knees; that is what the European Council should do tomorrow.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (S&D). – (HU) Madam President, I would like to call the attention of the Commission and of the Council to the fact that when determining the new objectives of the EU 2020 strategy, they must not forget those policies that are currently working well, that is, the cohesion policy and the common agricultural policy. These are tried and true instruments which, although needing reform, can significantly contribute to the achievement of the new EU 2020 objectives. It is regrettable that these two very important Community policies were omitted from the earlier material provided by the Commission. Hungary and the new Member States therefore consider the formulation of these policies, the legal harmonisation of the internal market, and the elimination of the bottleneck in infrastructure and energy security, extremely important. And finally, this EU strategy cannot replace appropriate debate on the budget directive, and we consider it very important that the regional dimension of the cohesion policy also be given space. Thank you for your attention.

Michael Theurer (ALDE). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the debate about the euro, the debate about Greece, has defined recent days. I would like to draw your attention, at this point, to what strikes me as a disturbing piece of news, namely that 40% of Germans now believe that the introduction of the euro was a mistake. We have to be disturbed by that, because the introduction of a Community currency is not a one-way street. Europe's integration process is not irreversible. I believe that we must keep the promise that we gave the German people when they gave up their national currency, namely, that the euro would be just as stable as the German mark.

I am also firmly convinced that we in Europe need a discussion about the social market economy, about the regulatory framework. We should not be talking about how we are making Germany less competitive. Instead, we should be discussing how we can make the whole of Europe competitive so that we can be successful on global markets. That is what our aim must be; that is why I am calling for a debate on the social market economy in Europe.

Ulrike Lunacek (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Madam President, I agree with everyone who feels the need, at this point in time, for stronger European integration, especially in the economic field, and I hope that that will not only be discussed at the euro area summit but also actually at the European Council.

However, the truth is that the population does also – and my fellow Member mentioned this just now – see negative sides to the euro. There was a birth defect when we launched monetary union in terms of having a single currency whilst, at the same time, failing to shape economic policy more jointly. We must now acknowledge that that was a major mistake. The voice of reason tells us that a solidarity fund – for Greece too – must now be set up so that Greece can obtain lower interest rates.

There has, however, been too little mention in this debate of the fact that Greece itself must also do something. One important element would be for it to cut back on its military budget. An EU Member State that spends more than 4% of its gross national income on military expenditure, on armaments from countries such as Germany, France and others, is not what we need in the European Union, and so it is right that there should be cuts in this area.

John Bufton (EFD). – Madam President, I would like to make the point that you could not make this up today. Almost every speaker here has discussed Greece – the crisis in Greece – and yet Mr Barroso said at the beginning that it is not even on the formal agenda for the two days at the European Council. That is incredible. The whole world is watching every day what is going on here.

The truth of the matter is that you are again trying to hide the fact that this project is not working. It is rapidly failing. We have already seen the good people of Germany saying that they are not happy with the situation. But should it not be for the people of Greece to have their say, not the dictators in this place? Surely it should be for the good people of Greece perhaps to have a referendum on whether they should be in the euro. It is their case. It is their cause.

I am sickened by what I have heard today from many. It is a self-centred opinion for those other Member States, looking after themselves. Greece is the problem at the moment. I feel it will go from Greece to Spain and then Portugal and Italy and so on. The rollercoaster will start. Mark my words: the problem is here to stay.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – Madam President, the troubles of Greece and the eurozone should not be seen as an exception. A single currency for such a large, economically heterogeneous region of the world is self-evidently problematic.

The value of a currency should reflect the condition of a state's economy. When the economy thrives, the value of the state's currency will tend to rise. When an economy falls into recession, the value of the currency will tend to fall.

The state of the economy of Greece requires a depreciation of its currency. If it had experienced that depreciation, it would have benefited from a tourist boom.

The euro is not a solution to the economic problems of the world. It is the problem.

The difficulty for Greece is that, if it pulled out of the euro now, it would find that the fall in the value of its reverted currency would multiply its foreign debt. It is truly imprisoned in the eurozone.

This should be a warning to countries outside the eurozone. Join it at your peril. Once inside, you will be locked in for ever.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D). – (SK) I will be very brief, because most of the issues have already been mentioned, of course.

My personal opinion is that the situation we have already been tackling for some months now in Greece is not a unique situation, and it seems to indicate that a new approach is required in terms of adhering to, or, as the case may be, not adhering to the Stability Pact. We have, in principle, two options: either we insist on adherence to what is valid and what is in the treaties and take the full consequences of this, or we understand that the Stability Pact, just like anything else, is subject to a certain amount of development and must therefore also undergo certain changes, and we draw up these changes and carry them through in such a way that not only do we maintain growth and economic stability directly in those states that are members of the euro area, but we also prepare other EU Member States, which are not yet in the euro area, to join, without us having to make dramatic use of the structural funds, for example, in these countries.

Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE). – (FR) Madam President, I have one observation and three proposals. Firstly, my observation: I do not understand why President Van Rompuy is absent from such an important sitting – Minister, you are not a member of the European Council – and I believe that he could have been here.

My three proposals concern Greece's recovery plan. In the medium term, I support Mr Cohn-Bendit's idea, which was in fact mentioned just now: if the European Union were able to make a pact with Turkey to solve the Cyprus issue, we could help Greece recover two per cent of its GDP.

My second proposal concerns finance, since we do not have the instruments. Why does the European Union not support a series of financial commitments, which would enable interest rates to be reduced and which is an objective on which a consensus has been reached within the European Parliament?

Lastly, it has been said that Greece's accounting was flawed. It is not only in Greece that accounts are flawed. I propose that we create public sector accounting standards for the entire European Union so that we have financial statements that are consistent, above board and reliable for all the Member States.

Maroš Šefčovič, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, first let me tell you how impressed I was by the clear demonstration of solidarity and by the calls for responsibility from most of the speakers. This is exactly what we need at this moment, because it is very clear that a European problem needs a European solution.

Sometimes, I wonder if we have not sufficiently learnt the lessons regarding the consequences of our course of actions, if we do not follow European solutions to European problems and try to find something specific even though we have to deal with it collectively.

I think it is very clear that we are not just a group of countries. We are a European family, and if one of our family members has a problem, we must definitely come to the rescue.

The Commission is therefore ready to propose an instrument for coordinated assistance to Greece which will be fully compatible with European law, and I am sure that this is possible.

I would like to thank all of you for support when it comes to the EU 2020 strategy. I cannot overemphasise how our citizens are expecting leadership at this moment, how they expect us to improve our performance and how they expect us to lead them after the crisis and set very solid medium-term strategies, as our international partners such as China, the United States, India and others do.

The time has come for a decision. I was listening very carefully to the calls for better governance. I was listening very carefully regarding improved monetary and economic surveillance and that we have to do a better job of enforcing the Stability and Growth Pact. This is exactly what the Commission has in mind and these very proposals will come very soon.

I would like to thank all of you who supported the Commission on having very clear concrete goals for tomorrow's European Council conclusions. I think it is very important to have a medium-term strategy, but we have to have very clear indicators of where we are going and what our goals are. The Commission therefore insists that the European Council accept these concrete headline goals after the deliberations tomorrow and the day after.

We need higher employment, we need a better gender balance and we need stronger education. It is very clear that we need to invest more in research and development, and it is absolutely clear that we need to fight poverty.

Therefore, the Commission insists on solidarity, on responsibility and on having a concrete strategy for Europe and European citizens.

Let me just express my hope that the positive spirit which was present here, which was clearly supporting solidarity and responsibility, will be just as present during our leaders' deliberations tomorrow.

Diego López Garrido, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (ES) Madam President, I believe this has been a very important debate: a debate on an issue that is at the heart of European concerns at the moment – the Greece issue – but, beyond that, on the economic situation of the European Union as a whole, a debate at which, by the way Mr Audy, the Presidency of the Council has been present, as agreed in Parliament: I represent the Presidency of the Council here.

With regard to the issue of Greece, about which there has been most debate and to which most reference has been made, the Presidency-in-Office of the Council has very clear ideas. Firstly, Europe is an integration of economic policies: we have integrated economies. Secondly, Europe is based on solidarity and therefore has a strong social content. Thirdly, Europe has economic and financial stability.

These three European characteristics are clearly implied in the Greece issue. That is also why the three ways of seeing Europe take account of and reaffirm one another in the very important statement made by the informal European Council on 11 February 2010. That was, I think, one of the most important statements that has ever been made in the Council, because it is a statement that tackles the problem of Greece by talking about solidarity and the absolute political commitment to the financial stability of the euro area; the commitment to act when necessary to safeguard that stability.

I am sure that this weekend's European Council, which is the same European Council that met on 11 February, will strengthen and preserve that stability. A strong political message on Europe will be sent out from that European Council; one of support for its economy, support for its currency and, therefore, a message of support for solidarity, because this is what the public is hoping for, although it is true that a number of Eurosceptics are hoping for failure. Such a failure will not come about in the European Council. Rest assured that such a failure will not come about, but that the political commitment to solidarity at the heart of the European Union and at the heart of the euro area will be reaffirmed.

Moreover, we are going to look further ahead. We are going to look at the short and the long term. We are going to talk about how to engineer a coordinated exit from the crisis, bearing in mind that there will not be a complete withdrawal of fiscal stimuli until there is economic recovery. We are also going to talk about more long-term goals, goals which I would like to single out, in particular, the element of economic, territorial and social cohesion; in essence, solidarity. And we are going to talk about where there will be a new form of supervision different from the Lisbon Strategy. There will clearly be changes in this regard: the leadership of the European Council was not in the Lisbon Strategy.

The coordination of economic, employment and social policies that is in the Treaty of Lisbon was not in the Lisbon Strategy. The importance of the Commission's role – of supervision, tracking, monitoring, control, of laying down requirements to meet the goals – was not in the Lisbon Strategy. The elements of creating

incentives with the structural funds were not in the Lisbon Strategy. Clearly, very important progress is therefore being made.

Finally, Madam President, I shall refer to Mr García-Margallo's speech, which was the only speech aimed directly at the Spanish Presidency by criticising the way in which the European Union is, in his opinion, being led.

I have to tell you, Mr García-Margallo, that the Spanish Presidency of the Council is working in a close and coordinated way – the Community method – with Mr Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, to push forward the essential goals. It is also working closely with the Commission and Parliament.

You referred largely to the economic issue. I would like to ask you whether you think, for example, that adopting a decision such as the one adopted at the European Council – obviously with the participation of the Presidency of the Council – on the political commitment of Europe to the financial stability of the euro area is not leading the European Union.

I would like to know whether you think that it is not leading the European Union to contribute to the holding of a debate this weekend on no lesser subject than the Europe 2020 strategy, in which, by the way, majority support was generally won for the speeches made in Parliament. The debate was also on governance, as a fundamental element in that regard.

I would like to know whether you think that it is not leading the European Union to have negotiations going on at this moment with this House on the financial supervision package. Furthermore, I would encourage you, Mr García-Margallo, to work with this Presidency so that we can reach an agreement as soon as possible between the Council, which has adopted a position, and Parliament. During the Spanish Presidency, by the way, we want to remove the Directive on 'hedge funds' from the European Union and we want to remove it with as much agreement and consensus as possible. I do not think that should be criticised, quite the contrary.

I also think that it is leading the European Union to be very much in agreement and work with the Commission on the proposal that the Commission will submit on the coordination of economic policies in enforcement of Article 136 of the Treaty of Lisbon. Equally, it is leading the European Union for there to be a general policy for getting out of such debt, debt that was essential to the European Union in the face of the crisis and in the face of the social need to tackle the crisis and to protect the most vulnerable. This is unavoidable debt that must be dealt with now, properly, in accordance with the Treaty of Lisbon, in order to get back on track in terms of the Treaty of Lisbon's parameters.

This is leading the European Union according to the Community method. This is leading the European Union, and leading the European Union means holding a European Council this weekend that will clearly express its support for Greece and for the Greek Government.

President. – No, you cannot take the floor using the blue card procedure, because this is reserved solely for MEPs. Therefore, the Minister's speech brings the debate to a close.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Elena Băsescu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) One of the important topics on the European Council agenda relates to the EU 2020 strategy on job creation and economic growth. We need to coordinate European policies so that we can meet the challenges and needs we are facing at the moment. We also need to set clear long-term objectives. Priority must be given to the sustainable development of the European economy. The Commission's new strategy for the next 10 years envisages five courses of action: the creation of new jobs, the battle against poverty, the reduction in the school dropout level, investment in research and development and the reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. The last Member States to join the EU need resources and support from the European Union in order to achieve these ambitious targets. Romania supports the 20-20-20 target on cutting carbon emissions by 20%, increasing the proportion of energy obtained from renewable resources by 20% and boosting energy efficiency by 20%. The more ambitious 30-30-30 target, which envisages achieving a 30% threshold in all three areas, would definitely incur costs which are excessively high for my country. This would be an unrealistic target for a number of European states.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), in writing. – (PT) As a project, Europe has been about peace, social well-being, freedom and growth. It has served as an example in terms of its social model and has also taken the lead on environmental issues, without equal on the global level.

The economic, financial and social crisis that we are currently experiencing requires a concerted response at European level. The crisis in Greece and the attack on the euro require a joint response, but unfortunately, this has been delayed. It is both possible and desirable to find a European solution in order to avoid these constant speculative attacks on the euro.

The EU has credibility and liquidity. If the required coordination is in place at European level, this should be enough to calm the market swiftly and cover the cost of the loans that Greece needs. This is a time that requires solidarity between the Member States and Europe's institutions. It is even a matter of duty. It is to be hoped that the upcoming European Council will take steps towards achieving integrated and coordinated solidarity. Such an attitude is needed if the European project is to move forward. Solutions for the monitoring of each Member State's deficit must be sought later.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The seriousness of the social problems that are being experienced in various EU Member States, including unemployment, lack of job security and poverty, make it vital that the spring European Council gives a serious and thorough response. However, we fear that its responses are aimed mainly at the supposed sustainability of public finances, while neglecting measures aimed at social sustainability.

The response to the situation in Greece is an important matter, especially because what is happening there contradicts everything that was trumpeted about the virtues of the euro and the blessings of being in the euro area: being in the vanguard of the strong currency of rich countries. It was said that being in the euro area would be a safeguard against financial crises, as the country in question would be able to avoid loans and receive money from the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The initial crisis was enough to show that there is no real solidarity within the euro area and that so-called 'economic and social cohesion' is nothing more than propaganda used in electoral campaigns. Now Mrs Merkel is even threatening that Member States which do not fulfil the requirements of the Stability Pact, such as Greece, amongst others, will be expelled from the euro area, forgetting that Germany has been and is the major beneficiary of policies based on a strong euro...

(Explanation of vote abbreviated in accordance with Rule 170 of the Rules of Procedure)

Othmar Karas (PPE), in writing. – (DE) The economic and financial crisis, and Greece, require European action. An end needs to be brought to the public arguments. We await a joint answer from the summit. We say 'yes' to the Greek Government's savings and reform programme – Greece is firmly resolved to do its homework and comply with the European rules. We also say 'yes' to loaning money where the reform programme would otherwise be threatened. We do, however, say a definitive 'no' to fines and to expelling a country from the euro area. All that would do is to institute a domino effect that would lead to a loss of confidence by the markets. We also say 'yes' to Commissioner Rehn's proposal for prior approval of the draft budgets by the Commission. Budgetary and economic data must be inspected by Eurostat and the Commission. I demand a strict review of the books in all the Member States based on a joint list of criteria. The tax systems and those tax rates relevant to the internal market must be harmonised, the economic, budget and social policies coordinated. I demand a 'Europe 2020' planning committee involving the Commission, the Member States, the European Investment Bank, the European Central Bank and Eurostat. I therefore call on the Heads of State or Government to put a joint European willingness to act unambiguously on the record. Greece is an example that Europe must learn from. The conclusions must be drawn at the local, the European and the global level. More European collaboration and less national egoism are the order of the day.

Ivari Padar (S&D), in writing. – I would like to speak about the European Digital Agenda. The Commission's figures show that barriers to the digital single market exist: only 7% of online transactions are cross-border. Although Internet and relevant infrastructure objectives serve as solid prerequisites for further development, improving the infrastructure must be complemented by the creation of a pan-European regulatory framework, utilisation of services and enhancement of ICT skills. By 2020, a single and secure European e-services area should be created. It would provide EU citizens with easy and safe access to all digital services, both public and commercial. Member States should develop national plans for the digital switchover of public services. Particular focus should be on encouraging the participation of lower socio-economic groups, as they are the most likely to be excluded from the digital society. Cross-border e-authentication and digital signatures should be characterised by legal and technical interoperability so that cross border e-authentication could be used by all service providers and consumers across Europe. The comprehensive approach to the digital single market should include reducing the remaining fragmentation in financial services, logistics, consumer

protection and intellectual property. A 100% target should be set for citizens to have both access to, and the ability to use, e-services.

Georgios Papastamkos (PPE), in writing. – (EL) The horrendous financial crisis in Greece and the financial imbalance in other Member States of the euro area raise questions about the static and dynamic strength of the very structure of EMU. There can be no doubt that the restoration of the public finances of a Member State of the euro area is its responsibility. However, the financial crisis has brought the correlation between full, uniform monetary union and the imperfect economic union of the EU to the surface. It has urgently highlighted the need to set up politically directed European economic governance, for Europeanising economic policy and economic risk, for covering the structural deficits of EMU, for more Europe and for coordinated and solidarity-based European action. What is needed is a European support mechanism, a European Monetary Fund equipped with the necessary resources and facility for intervention. Coordinated regulatory intervention is required in order to protect the common currency against speculation. A detailed examination of the operation of the credit default swaps market is needed. The European Council is being called upon to give fundamental answers to the crisis in the euro area and to express real solidarity towards Greece in order to overcome the financial crisis. Greece is not begging. It is demanding that the short supplies of Greek citizens should not vanish into the pockets of international speculators.

Rovana Plumb (S&D), in writing. – (RO) During the current economic and social crisis, combined with the climate crisis, the EU has devised a new strategy for the next 10 years. The EU 2020 strategy must help create a more inclusive Europe, with an economy which is integrated and environmentally friendly. The development of research and innovation must become a priority to enable us to combat the effects of climate change and create green, 'intelligent' jobs. For this reason, the targets set must be mandatory in order to ensure sustainable growth and the development of a more inclusive labour market and decent living conditions for all citizens.

Richard Seeber (PPE), in writing. – (DE) The EU can only succeed if we know what direction we want to take when it comes to the economy and social policy. For that reason, particular attention must be given to the drawing up of the 2020 strategy. The Member States must produce clear concepts, visions and ideas. Producing a strategy for the next 10 years is certainly an ambitious undertaking, but it should be remembered that this is not about the final details. The EU needs to ask itself where it wants to position itself and what priorities it is going to set for itself. One objective which, in the long term, would also yield positive social and economic consequences, would be to create a sustainable energy mix for Europe. A rethink is necessary in this area, and not only because of the ever dwindling supply of fossil fuels and the impact on the climate that non-renewable energy sources have. Europe must also take on the leading role when it comes to environmentally friendly technologies. In my view, however, nuclear power is little suited to leading Europe into a sustainable energy future.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE), in writing. – (PL) The purpose of the European Council meeting which begins tomorrow is, principally, to discuss the general framework of the Union's new Europe 2020 strategy and to evaluate emergence from the economic crisis as well as the situation in Greece and other countries in the euro area. These are closely interrelated topics, for the Union's strategy for economic growth and employment is related to these issues. In evaluating the current situation, we need to answer questions about how the principles of the Stability and Growth Pact are being observed in different countries, and where was the European Commission in all this? We can assume that the Europe 2020 strategy will be viewed in different ways among the Heads of State or Governments of the Member States. This is the result of significant conflicts of interests of individual countries, which, in turn, come from differences in levels of development. For obvious reasons, the countries of the last two enlargements, but not only these countries, are going to fight for a greater emphasis on cohesion policy, infrastructure development and agriculture, although let us not forget innovation and new technologies. The successful development of Europe and a return to a path of growth in the next decade will be dependent equally on realisation of the objectives of the strategy contained in the Commission's proposals, but also on continuation of the more traditional policies. For the Union to cope with the difficult challenges in the global sphere, it must first reduce internal disparities, and this cannot be achieved without respecting the treaty's principle of solidarity.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D), in writing. – (RO) The main theme of the Spring European Council is the EU 2020 strategy. At the start of this year, the unemployment rate reached 10%, while the figure in countries such as Spain and Latvia reached almost 20%. 67% of European citizens feel that job losses are their main concern. European leaders' main concern must be to preserve existing jobs and create other new ones to allow European citizens to make a decent living. This objective can only be guaranteed through making substantial investments in economic and social development, transport and energy infrastructure, agriculture, research, education and health. This is precisely the reason that the European Council must focus particular

attention on the EU's industrial policy. According to European statistics, compared to December 2009, in January 2010, industrial output fell by 2% in the euro area and by 0.2% at EU27 level. At Community level, industry generates 26.4% of GDP, but there are Member States where industrial output contributes only 14% of GDP. The European Union must retain its global competitiveness. In order to achieve this, jobs and industrial output must be kept within the European Union and not relocated to third countries.

IN THE CHAIR: MR MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ

Vice-President

13. Development of the European Citizens' Initiative based on Article 11(4) of the Treaty on European Union (debate)

President. – The following point is the Statement of the Council and of the Committee on Development of the European Citizens' Initiative based on Article 11(4) of the Treaty on European Union.

Allow me to extend a very warm welcome to a group of reporters from my region, Castile-La Mancha in Spain, who have been in the press gallery and are currently visiting the EU's institutions.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Mr President, I am grateful to Parliament for having had the initiative to hold this debate on, it seems to me, one of the most important, most relevant aspects from the democratic point of view, on the development of the European Union and of Europeanism amongst the European public. This relates to a very relevant issue, which begins a new stage in the European Union; as you know, of course, it concerns the Citizens' Initiative. In other words, the possibility for at least one million European citizens, both men and women, from the various Member States, to be able to sign a legislative initiative.

A legislative initiative that is, understandably, addressed to and set out before the Commission, which is the EU body with capacity for legislative initiatives.

The Citizens' Initiative is a very clear priority for the Presidency of the Council. Very clear. It is a priority because we believe that it is a priority for Europe. When a country chairs the Council of the European Union, we believe that it should not implement its own priorities, its own goals simply as a country during that Presidency, but must go further and must be capable of representing Europe's goals.

The Citizens' Initiative, with its possibilities, with those entitlements it gives to citizens – to the approximately five hundred million European citizens – is an essential goal of Europe and for that reason, is one of the priorities of the Spanish Presidency, not through being a priority of Spain, but through being a priority of Europe.

Citizens are hoping that the Treaty of Lisbon will be implemented as quickly as possible after eight years of losing time through institutional uncertainties.

We have to make up that lost time and essentially respond to citizens, for what they want is participation. In other words, we have to gradually effect a rebalancing between the Europe that was being built during the 20th century more from the bottom down – albeit a democratic Europe – and a Europe that is also built from the bottom up.

That is why we believe that the Citizens' Initiative must get going as soon as possible, because it will be evidence of the political will of the Member States, of Parliament and of the Union's institutions to give the public a voice and enable citizens to participate in the life of the Union.

It will also counteract something that is unfortunately happening in the European Union as well: the fact that political debate is, for the most part, likely to be at national level; inbred debate. Here in Brussels, or in Parliament, a European debate is taking place, but in each of the Union's countries, it is the national debate that predominates, not the European debate.

The citizens' initiative is a tremendous device for successfully unleashing a genuine European debate in civil society. The initiatives put forward by citizens of various countries will unleash a European debate in every country, not just a purely national debate.

That is why, Mr President, we have considered the citizens' initiative to be a priority. As soon as the Commission submits its draft regulation – we would like to thank the Commission, and I must say especially

President Barroso and Vice-President Šefčovič, for the concern with which they have prioritised this issue in the Commission's work schedule; we are also grateful that it will take place imminently and very speedily, as Mr Šefčovič will be telling us shortly – we shall have a text that enables us, together with the Council and Parliament, to set in motion what European citizens are undoubtedly hoping for, before this six months are up.

We shall need to work on the different aspects involved, some more technical, others more political, but we must encourage it to happen.

That is why, from the time of the informal meeting of the Ministers for Foreign Affairs at La Granja de San Ildefonso, as Mr Šefčovič and Mrs Malmström – still in office because the new Commission had not yet taken over – will remember, to the first meeting we held with the Commission in Madrid when the new College of Commissioners took over, and now this afternoon in Parliament, we are anxious to push this initiative. I would ask them – this would be the message I would like them to pass on to you, honourable Members – to show the utmost concern for this initiative.

I know that they will. Moreover, I would ask them to bring the utmost speed to something that I believe fairly easily unites general consensus in its various aspects, through the discussions that have taken place in the Council, Commission and Parliament, on the committee in which I participated, the Committee for Institutional Affairs, for example. I therefore think we can put this into practice, as it is one of the aspects of the new stage that is now beginning in the European Union that is most exciting for the public.

Maroš Šefčovič, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I would really like to thank Parliament for putting this very important item on the agenda. I would like to personally thank my dear friend, Diego López Garrido, and the Spanish Presidency, for keeping this on top of the Spanish Presidency's agenda, because I believe that the instrument we are going to have will really change the way we do politics in the European Union.

Until now, the European construct was based on representative democracy. I think this was very well reflected also in the Lisbon Treaty, where it is very clear that Parliament's powers are very much strengthened and when we are going to include the national parliaments more in the European legislative process. And we needed to complement it with greater inclusion of citizens in this process, through this instrument of participatory democracy.

There was the debate, a while ago, on whether one cancels out the other and whether it is a zero-sum game. I really do not think so because I consider both elements of representative and participatory democracy as mutually reinforcing, and both help to create real European political and public space.

I also believe that, thanks to this instrument, we will underline even more the importance of European citizenship for Europeans. As Diego has already said, I am also convinced that this would lead to stronger, better cross-border Europe-wide debates in Europe, more on European topics, and not only on national topics that we see so often in the capitals of our Member States.

The Commission was and is very grateful for the work the European Parliament has already done on the European Citizens' Initiative. For us, the resolution you adopted on 7 May last year was very important political guidance and a very important pointer as to how we should prepare this initiative.

As you know, the Commission, when preparing such important pieces of legislation like this one, wants to engage the European public in as wide a discussion as possible. Therefore, we organised a public debate on this issue, based on the Green Paper that we issued in December last year.

I must say that we have been very positively surprised by the responses we have got. We got more than 300 responses coming from a range of contributors: individual citizens, organisations, public authorities and even some national parliaments.

We evaluated the responses we got and completed the consultation process with a public debate in Brussels, where more than 1 50 stakeholders were in attendance, including honourable representatives of Parliament.

If I had to sum up this debate, I would say that there were a lot of innovative, interesting and positive suggestions coming to the Commission's table. What were the major conclusions? That citizens are very much interested in having this initiative in place as soon as possible, that they would like to have it as user-friendly as possible, that they would like to have it simple, straightforward, understandable and, most of all, accessible.

And, as you would agree, these are clear and very important parameters for having this legislation prepared in this way, because only these parameters would guarantee that citizens would use this instrument for better communication with the Commission and with the European institutions.

Drawing on the results of the consultations and also on the proposals made by the European Parliament, the Commission is currently finalising its proposal. I hope that the College will adopt the proposals we are working on on 31 March. I can also tell you that this probably would not be possible without strong encouragement from the Spanish Presidency. It is very clear that such a top priority for the Presidency must be respected, and I know there is strong commitment from Spain to try to make progress on this initiative within the term of its Presidency.

So, I am very hopeful that, thanks to the constructive approach of the Presidency, the Council and Parliament, we will have this new and very important instrument in place well before the first anniversary of the Lisbon Treaty coming into force.

Íñigo Méndez de Vigo, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, it was in this very House, almost seven years ago, at the end of the constitutional convention, when we Members of the European Parliament and members of the national parliaments succeeded in putting forward a proposal that was accepted by the Presidium. I had the honour of taking it to the Presidium and we approved it. Furthermore, I wish to recall here the names of Mr Lamassoure and Mr Mayer, because it was they who drew up the Citizens' Initiative proposal, a popular initiative that is today incorporated into the treaties.

A popular initiative that is an example of participatory democracy – Mr Šefčovič has explained this very well – and of European democracy, because the issues that need to be covered by this initiative must be European issues, not local issues. Participation by citizens, therefore, and issues dealt with at European level.

Mr Šefčovič, who is preparing this proposal, has not told us what it involves. He has left us with our mouths watering. On behalf of my group, Mr Šefčovič, I would ask that it contain at least three ideas.

Firstly, that it should be clear and simple. In other words, do not let us make things complicated. It must be something accessible to the people, so that they can participate without having had to have gone to university.

Secondly, that it should provide for cooperation between the European authorities and the national authorities, because, in my opinion, the national authorities must play an important role in the way signatures are organised.

Thirdly, that we should educate, through the European Commission and through Parliament, by explaining how this legislative initiative may be used to avoid disappointments. I will give you an example of this that I saw on the Internet. An online petition has already been launched to use the popular initiative to make it possible to change the seat of Parliament so that there is only one.

Well, this is impossible and we must say so from the start; it calls for reform in the treaties and cannot be dealt with by the popular initiative.

There is, therefore, a lot of educating to be done, ladies and gentlemen of the Commission, and of Parliament, in an initiative that the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) endorses and hopes may serve to promote the sense of belonging to the Union and public participation in the Union's business.

Ramón Jáuregui Atondo, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (ES) Mr President, Mr Šefčovič, I was very pleased to learn that the Commission plans to approve this draft regulation next week, on 31 March no less. I believe this is great news, I think it is appropriate and right to congratulate the Commission, Mr Šefčovič and the Spanish Presidency for the boost they have given to this initiative and for agreeing to submit a very important proposal to this House.

Very important because, in the first place, I believe that it strengthens the legitimacy of Parliament. This is because it gives the public direct access to Parliament, not through parties, but in a way that gives direct access to us here with nothing more or less than a bill.

It is direct public access to Parliament that justly strengthens its legitimacy. It strengthens the notion of citizenship, which is at the very root of the European project. From Maastricht to here, it is the citizen who is central to the European project and is the one who is becoming the key player here.

Thirdly, I would say that it is something that gives extraordinary encouragement to the connection between institutions and citizenship, something that we are always demanding and never achieve. It is the opportunity

for people to actually get close to Parliament and learn how it can be useful. That is what leads me also to make a couple of recommendations that are, to a large extent, in line with those Mr Méndez de Vigo was making before.

I think that it is important to draw up a text that is, in the first place, truly flexible. In other words, that it should allow that right to be exercised; that it should afford it to many people, because we need to specify how many countries, what percentages, what systems of signatures. Be flexible, please! Make access to this initiative easy, but let us make it clear as well and not disappoint expectations.

There is a fundamental procedure, beforehand, to be carried out by the Commission to say whether or not a draft initiative will be successful, whether or not it is possible to carry it through. Before signatures are collected, we must say 'yes' or 'no', in order not to disappoint expectations: clarity and flexibility in this project, ladies and gentlemen, and, of course, well done.

Anneli Jäätteenmäki, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FI) The European Citizens' Initiative is important because it is one of those rare innovations introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon that we might say will, in real terms, increase opportunities for the public to make a contribution. This is obviously just a small step forward and collecting a million names will be quite a job; even then, we can only suggest that the Commission should do something. The Commission will then, in its wisdom, decide whether it does anything or not.

If the citizens' initiative experiment is successful, as I hope it will be, it is very possible that afterwards, we will be able to make further progress along the path towards direct influence. That is why it is very important now, as we establish a framework for the citizens' initiative, that that framework is defined in such a way that the initiative can be introduced easily and that it is clear and comprehensible. We should not raise false hopes or create misunderstandings.

A procedure for advance conformity has been discussed. I think that it is something that should be considered very carefully. It may have its good aspects, but I do not know if it is right to trim down the initiatives at that stage. Let us allow the public to have their say.

In my opinion, it is important that the threshold for the various Member States – the number of countries involved – should not be too high: a quarter would be sufficient to regard the initiative as having gone ahead and to make it seem likely that it will be taken forward. We need to ensure that the Regulation does not create needless barriers to the implementation of the citizens' initiative, but that it makes it clear and simple. Let us hope that there will be a good deal of initiatives and that the Commission will take them forward.

Gerald Häfner, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr López Garrido, Commissioner Šefčovič, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that we have, at this point, a major opportunity for Europe, this shared Europe of ours, that began with treaties between States – the classical instrument of foreign policy, in which the citizens were more or less spectators – to now increasingly become a Europe of the citizens.

What we are discussing today is the first instrument that provides for direct citizen participation at the European level. I think it is clear to everyone what an opportunity this offers, in particular, for the creation, for the gradual development, of the likes of a European public, a European *demos*, which this Europe does need, as we continue to debate matters in France, in Italy, in Portugal, in Germany, *et cetera*, thus, essentially more or less separately. As far as relates to the citizens, there are hardly any Europe-wide debates at all. A European citizens' initiative of this kind could help to bring such debates about, however, and it could help to overcome, to some extent, Europeans' feelings that Brussels is a long way away and that they – the citizens – have no voice in Brussels. What we are doing here is creating a first instrument that will allow the citizens to make their voices heard in Brussels. The crucial thing, however, is what form we give it. I want to make the point very clearly that it has not yet been determined whether this measure will ultimately be a success or a disappointment. That depends on the form that we choose for this measure.

I can well understand, Commissioner Šefčovič, that you are unable to present details to us today, as I know that you have not completely made your mind up yet. We do have an opportunity, here, however, to perhaps briefly put a couple of points on record together. There is, therefore, one very particular point that I would like to bring up.

For me, the success of this will rise and fall by the fact that the Commission proposal or at least, ultimately, what is decided as a legislative proposal here, not only contains hurdles and stipulations that citizens must observe, but also stipulates that the Commission must seriously work on a citizens' initiative that has reached

it, as, in my view, it would be extraordinarily frustrating if a million citizens had signed such an initiative and, in the end, the whole thing just disappeared, silently and unceremoniously, into a wastepaper basket. We need three levels of admissibility checking. Firstly, the formal level: does it have the necessary signatures? Secondly, the legal level: is the matter at hand one of the competences of the European Union, does it not violate current law? Then, finally, we need a content-based check, and, in this regard, I think it is important that the citizens are invited to this examination, that there is a hearing, that they are valued and their concerns are discussed, and that they do not just receive some *ex cathedra* letter from on high. This is by way of encouragement.

Briefly, I have a second piece of encouragement to mention. One third, or nine Member States, seems to me – and seems to us in this House collectively – to be too high. Parliament has declared itself in favour of a quarter, and this figure must be seen in conjunction with the second hurdle, namely the hurdle within the Member States. In the talks that we have had, I proposed that this be graduated depending on the size of the Member States, as it makes a major difference whether a large or a small State is involved, and I see that there is openness to this proposal.

Due to the time constraints, I cannot now go into any other points. I hope that we can together bring this first instrument of transnational democracy into being.

Syed Kamall, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, I think many of us should welcome any initiative that takes power away from the European Union and other political governments and devolves power closer to the citizen.

In one respect, I would like to make a request for more flexibility. Why should we predefine the issues on which citizens can raise an initiative? If they want to raise an issue, let us be held accountable and let us give our view on whatever we think. If, for example, it is on the place where Parliament should sit, we should respond. Why should we avoid the issue? Let us tackle what the citizens are asking us head on.

There is one issue that I would like to make clear, and that is transparency. It is going to be difficult for any individual, or group of citizens, on their own to collect the required number of signatures. Therefore, you might see a number of organisations organising the collection of these signatures. They should be transparent about their funding, so that you do not get organisations who hijack the process to basically request more funding for initiatives they believe in. Let it truly be an initiative of the citizens and not of civil society organisations and NGOs.

Søren Bo Søndergaard, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DA) Mr President, our citizens' mistrust of the European Union is growing. The low turn-out at the EU elections speaks volumes. If the European Citizens' Initiative is interpreted in such a way that only a few are able to take advantage of it, this will only exacerbate the situation. Our group is therefore calling for the rules not to be made too stringent. For example, issues may still be relevant to Europe as a whole even if the first million signatures come from only a very few countries. However, as the European Parliament, we can also do something to take the citizens' initiative seriously. We can take a decision in this Chamber that every time a citizens' initiative is approved, we will undertake to conduct a debate here – a debate that may lead to a statement on the initiative in question. In this way, we will also be taking citizens' wishes seriously and I hope that the groups can work together to bring about the adoption of something along these lines, for example, in the form of an amendment to the rules of procedure.

Frank Vanhecke (NI). – (NL) Mr President, I have been listening to everything that has been said here up to now with clear-headed, and thus very great, scepticism. After all, our own experience – gathered from the referendums in the Netherlands, France and, last but not least, Ireland – has taught us how the eurocracy responds to the will of the people and expressions of this will. What is this European Citizens' Initiative, in essence? In essence, it is a mere palliative, a sham intended to suggest a modicum of citizens' involvement in the Treaty of Lisbon without really bringing that involvement into the decision-making process. Indeed, this is clear from everything we have learned up to now: complicated procedures, constraints on the topics and, if anything should emerge in the end, this is to be considered and, in particular, decided on in exactly the same eurocratic, rather undemocratic enclaves as before. What we need in Europe are binding referendums, for example, on the accession of Turkey. These are necessary in order to restore democracy but, unfortunately, the European Citizens' Initiative is merely a kind of castrated caricature of such things.

Carlo Casini (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I welcomed the statements by Mr López Garrido and Mr Šefčovič.

The new Treaty of Lisbon urges us to swiftly adopt a systematic course of action to promote the citizens' initiative, which is testament to the existence of a European people. Indeed, it is a well-known fact that one of the harshest criticisms of the Union is that it is not a fully democratic structure. The Treaty of Lisbon has sought to reduce the democratic deficit in several ways, including by making provision for at least one million European citizens to submit a proposal for a legislative initiative.

This new instrument, in order to be a serious tool, will have to produce legal effects of a certain importance. It certainly cannot have equivalent value to the pre-existing petitions which are signed by a wide range of individuals – a clear distinction must be made – and it must therefore be regulated in such a way as to prevent its abuse and still allow broad discussion, as the expression of informed and verifiable popular consensus.

However, the most important aspect of the initiative laid down in Article 11 of the Treaty of Lisbon is its symbolic significance: the democratic deficit is being tackled not only by the decision-making power of the people's representatives, but even more so by the very existence of a European people which is not just the mathematical sum of the citizens of the individual nations.

Therefore, with regard to the rules we are considering, there are two aspects that I consider to be particularly important: the first concerns the subject matter, which must be – as someone already said – a European issue; the second is the distribution of the minimum number of signatories across a significant number of Member States, representing an appropriate percentage with respect to the electoral weight of each country.

I hope that the new rules will help citizens of France, Italy, Germany, Spain and so on feel that they are, first and foremost, citizens of Europe.

Zita Gurmai (S&D). – Mr President, the European Citizens' Initiative is one of the major innovations of the Lisbon Treaty, aimed at increasing direct democracy in the European Union. This new tool should be correctly used by being fully exploited. Furthermore, its credibility must be assured.

In this respect, serious requirements need to be addressed. Let me briefly mention only two, knowing that there are several others. The collected signatures must be verified appropriately. This is a crucial question that can cause serious problems, as the relevant legislation is very different in our Member States. We must find the optimal solution – the appropriate balance between different rules and common requirements.

The second topic is the admissibility of the initiative. Again, every aspect must be examined carefully in order to find the best way to go. Should the topic of the public discussion be limited in the defence of the values of the Union, or should freedom of expression prevail? Are they mutually inclusive principles?

I welcome and am grateful for the progressive work of Vice-President Šefčovič and the Spanish Presidency. I am glad that the stakeholders had the opportunity in February to discuss the majority of the questions that need to be solved so that the citizens' initiative is operational.

I would really like to know the outcome of the meeting. How is the Commission going to handle the issue of verification and admissibility of an initiative, and at what stage? Of course, when we prepare a report here in the European Parliament, we really have to be clear what approach we are going to deal with. I strongly believe that we are here to represent the European citizens and we have to be clear that we are capable of sending a very strong message for all of us.

I strongly believe that the Spanish Presidency is doing an excellent job as a member of the trio together with Belgium and Hungary, my good comrades. So, thank you very much again, Vice-President. You did an excellent job. Let us continue.

Diana Wallis (ALDE). – Mr President, this is an instrument that has huge potential and could deliver an important democratic signal to Europe.

When I think of my own country, if you want to get forward a legislative initiative in the UK, you have to find a Member of Parliament, they have to be lucky enough to win an annual ballot or lottery, and then it is likely to get talked out by the government of the day.

So, I think we are about to deliver something very important and very exciting into the hands of Europe's citizens. That makes me proud, but it has to be user-friendly, accessible and credible, and that means we will have to be reasonably strict about it being within EU competence and adhering to human rights at the outset.

We will have to be able and want to give support to promoters to meet the technical requirements. Most importantly, parliamentarians should be prepared to act together with initiators of an initiative. This does

not compromise our rights. It is something that we can join hands with citizens over, but they must direct their message to the Commission. We can help, and that way we can establish together a real European democracy.

Isabelle Durant (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, my colleague, Mr Häfner, has mentioned some of the conditions for ensuring that this initiative is, as he said, feasible, credible and legitimate.

I, for my part, would like to draw this House's attention, on the one hand, to the opinion of the Economic and Social Council, which is very interesting, and which could also shed light on the decisions to be taken and, on the other hand, to stress the fact that participatory democracy works when everyone – the MEPs, the Council, civil society organisations and unorganised citizens for whom the citizens' initiative is an opportunity – has a role to play.

In this regard, Commissioner, pursuant to Article 11 of the treaty, which also provides for the possibility of establishing a structural and organised dialogue with civil society, I would like to ask you what kind of initiative you envisage – on the model of the social dialogue provided for by the treaties – and to know whether, alongside the citizens' initiative, which is very interesting and very useful, you intend to organise the dialogue with civil society in a structural and interinstitutional manner.

Peter van Dalen (ECR). – (NL) Mr President, now that the Treaty of Lisbon has entered into force, citizens can launch citizens' initiatives. This represents progress, as citizens are still too far removed from Europe and it is difficult to involve them in policy development. I see the European Citizens' Initiative as a good opportunity to increase support for Europe among citizens.

Mr President, I wish to draw attention expressly to a citizens' initiative that was launched recently. It is an initiative by Mr Kastler, who is present here today, and it calls for Sundays to be kept free as a day of rest and reserved for family and contemplation. I endorse his plea fully and wholeheartedly, and am working with him to collect as many signatures as possible in the Netherlands. I would appeal to everyone to support and publicise this initiative. Such initiatives can indicate what citizens consider important. I call on Parliament and the Commission to take these signals very seriously, as Europe is there for citizens, not the other way round.

Lena Kolarska-Bobińska (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, the increased role which the Treaty of Lisbon gives to the European Parliament, as well as the European Citizens' Initiative, are a very important step towards the strengthening of European democracy. However, in order for the initiative to fulfil its role, procedures must exist which would not limit its democratic character at the outset.

The European Parliament does not, in fact, play any role in the process of the citizens' initiative at present. The previous Parliament voted that the Commission should decide which of the initiatives that are submitted will be accepted and which rejected. I think the European Parliament's role should be much greater, here. Parliament should work together with the Commission to evaluate and give opinions on initiatives which are submitted. In this way, decisions on the admissibility of proposed initiatives would lie equally in the hands of the representatives of the electorate, and not only of the executive. Parliament is currently the only European Union institution which is chosen in free, democratic elections, and the citizens' initiative is, in fact, about the problems and views of the people. If an initiative is rejected by the Commission, and so by the executive which is supposed to put it into effect, this may not be understood by the citizens.

It is also important that the organiser of an initiative – a social organisation or a non-governmental organisation – clearly and explicitly specifies the subject and objective of the initiative, although it does not necessarily have to submit a motion for legislation. I think, too, that the procedures concerning initiatives should be harmonised in the Member States, because too much variety will make it difficult for us to gain broad support for these initiatives.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D). – (SK) The citizens' initiative, as one of the powers of EU citizens, represents significant progress for democracy and for the direct participation of the broader public in political life.

I very much appreciate and value your approach in this matter, Commissioner Šefčovič. I would now like to refer to the questions put by my colleague, Zita Gurmai, because I, too, consider it important to find an answer to some of these questions. One of them concerns the place and method of formalisation, in other words, the place where signatures will be collected under an initiative, be it in a government office or

somewhere on the street. In connection with this, there is also the question of whether there will be a conflict with other human rights, for example, the right to freedom of expression.

The second question concerns the financing of the whole process. Who, therefore, will be responsible for financing citizens' initiatives? Will it be the European Union or will it be the Member States or the actual citizens who are mounting an initiative? In the worst case scenario, it would amount to a violation of democratic principle by establishing solvency as a condition of involvement.

Last but not least, it will be essential for the Commission to specify a precise time limit within which these signatures will be collected, or, as the case may be, collected in a valid manner, not forgetting, in particular, the need to retain the openness and transparency of the whole mechanism in such a way as to prevent it being abused by the interest groups that operate throughout the EU.

I offer you my sincere thanks, Commissioner, and I will be keeping my fingers crossed for you to succeed in this.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – Mr President, as somebody who has campaigned twice for a 'yes' vote to Lisbon and promoted the citizens' initiative as positive, I disagree with my colleague. I think it is not just a fig leaf. Yes, there are constraints, but it has potential, and it is a real meaningful step towards facilitating participatory democracy.

I have discussed this matter with citizens. I have facilitated citizens to participate in the Commission's consultation and in the hearings in the Petitions Committee. However, we must not just consult with citizens: we must listen to what they say and we must ensure that their views are taken on board in any legislation we produce.

This is an opportunity for the EU institutions to clearly show that the citizens' initiative will reflect the views of European citizens from start to finish. This legislation must be citizen-friendly and it must be highly visible. There must also be easily accessible assistance and help given to citizens who wish to organise a petition. It should be made clear where the Commission can act and where the Commission cannot act. It would simply lead to further accusations of a democratic deficit and cynicism and anger on behalf of citizens if a million signatures were to be gathered for a petition and then it were deemed to be outside the competence of the EU.

So we need absolute clarity on this and we need to be proactive. While we need to squeeze every possibility out of this legislation, we must not promise more than we can deliver. The citizens' initiative is like a newborn baby. It has unlimited potential but it must be handled with care when it takes its first tentative steps.

IN THE CHAIR: MR SCHMITT

Vice-President

Eva Lichtenberger (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, in designing this instrument, we have an enormous responsibility to bear, as the hopes of citizens who think European and who want to push and assert European concerns at European level are riding on us. We must avoid those errors that are currently looming in relation to petitions at all costs. We need to avoid the European Citizens' Initiative becoming just a wailing wall where there is no follow-up to the complaints made. Active citizens are awaiting the result; they are waiting to see what form we give to the initiative.

If we set the hurdles too high, we will be frustrating a major potential for Europe. Think about it. It will take an enormous effort for interested parties in a particular subject to collect a million signatures. If these are then thrown straight into the bin without being properly dealt with and without the proper follow-up, then we have probably done democracy in Europe a disservice. It is therefore of particular importance how the Commission deals with this concern. For me, this is the key issue.

Mariya Nedelcheva (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, Mr Šešćovič, Mr López Garrido, ladies and gentlemen, the citizens' initiative is an additional contribution to the creation of a true European civil society. It is a new opportunity for European citizens to have a greater say in the decision-making process. I hope that its introduction will help strengthen the sentiment of belonging to the same entity, our Europe, since this European sentiment is unfortunately very weak and all too often lacking.

Looking beyond the technical, administrative and practical aspects associated with the actual implementation of the initiative, I believe that our message must, above all, be political. Indeed, we must not lose sight of the

guiding principle that underpins the introduction of this initiative: bringing citizens closer to the institutions, stimulating their interest in Europe, promoting their involvement, and making them stakeholders of European policies. That is what we must always bear in mind.

Whether we are talking about the minimum number of Member States from which the signatures derive, the collection, verification and checking of those signatures, or the admissibility of initiatives, we will have to ensure that citizens are not hindered in their desire to present an initiative.

For example, I would like to point out that the costs involved in having a notary validate the signatures must be reasonable. Some Member States, which have already introduced this type of initiative at national level, at times charge excessive amounts. It is these kinds of obstacles that we must avoid in the case of the citizens' initiative.

Lastly, we must not lose sight of the enhanced role of our Parliament. As the guardian of the democratic will of the European citizens and the guarantor of budgetary transparency, it must have a greater involvement in the process of implementing the initiative. Only in this way will we make the Union's extra bit of soul a true democratic heart.

Proinsias De Rossa (S&D). – Mr President, this is one of the most important democratic advances for the European Union. Two thirds of the people of Ireland voted for the Lisbon Treaty and one of the reasons was because of the availability of this citizens' initiative. For the first time, citizens on a transnational basis can request that the Commission bring forward proposals. But this needs to be a transparent process. We must know who is organising these initiatives and we must know who is funding these initiatives. They must not be captured by corporate interests.

The Commission, which will have to decide on whether or not to act on a proposal, must not be the body that decides on its admissibility, in my view. I believe we must expand the role of the Ombudsman to decide on a central European level what is admissible and what is not admissible.

The minimum number of states that is necessary, I believe, should be seven, not nine, as proposed or indeed as suggested by the Commission, and I must argue and insist that the one million threshold set by the treaty should not be breached. It must not be raised by having a high proportion of citizens in Member States and a high number of Member States. It is extremely important that the treaties are complied with.

And, finally, could I say that I believe it should be possible to enable citizens to register on the Internet.

Ulrike Lunacek (Verts/ALE). – (ES) Mr President, I want to begin in Spanish by thanking the Spanish Presidency for having taken the decision to present the initiative earlier than was originally expected. Many thanks for that.

(DE) I will now continue in German. I would like to thank the Commission for having taken on the Spanish Presidency's initiative and for having come out and said, 'OK, we will act quicker than that, we will put forward the proposal next week'. We hope that there will be a finished proposal by the summer. That is important in order to meet the expectations of the citizens.

Like many of those who have spoken before me, I believe the planned nine-country hurdle is just too high. My proposal would be to start at five, which is a fifth of the Member States. It is not easy to collect a million signatures, even if, perhaps, you can use the Internet to do so. It is necessary, however, to show the people that we want them to participate in this shared Europe of ours and to hold a real European debate. I think it is important that the legal, formal and content-based examination of this matter takes place right from the outset and not once people have already begun to collect signatures. There should also be support for the initiatives, for example, with translations. If that happens, we will be able to once again enthuse the citizens about our shared Europe – and more strongly, too.

Anna Záborská (PPE). – (SK) Commissioner, thank you for providing an outline of the next steps. We have progressed from conceptual goals and several lines of text in the Treaty of Lisbon to a directive through which the EU will be regulated.

The citizens' initiative shows the citizens of the EU a further means of European integration. Member State citizens will have the opportunity to lobby European institutions. It should be pointed out, however, that the right to a citizens' initiative may be a democratic instrument, but it also opens the door to a federalised EU. I support the citizens' initiative, but it will be necessary to integrate the competent Member State authorities into it as much as possible. The protection of national constitutions must be given precedence and guaranteed.

As the Commissioner said, this initiative must be balanced, and I might add that in no case should it be allowed to serve as a pretext which might threaten the principle of subsidiarity. The framework for the application of this measure must be clearly defined, so that we can avoid unrealistic expectations on the part of some institutions, and particularly on the part of EU citizens.

Judith A. Merkies (S&D). – Mr President, I am very happy with the citizens' initiative. If you do not mind, I will switch to Dutch to explain why I am so happy!

(NL) Mr President, I am delighted with the European Citizens' Initiative because citizens currently have the chance to indicate their wishes just once every five years, but this way they will be able to play a genuine role in the European Union in the interim, too. It is also important, therefore, that they know when they can come knocking at our door. In fact, it is not our door but that of the European Commission. Does the man on the street know when it is possible to appeal to the Commission? A far-reaching information campaign is necessary to let citizens know. I must say that the critical point to make in this regard is that the citizens' initiative will be truly mature only if all the European institutions take the one million citizens' voices seriously; and ministers and Heads of State or Government should also listen to these. Of course, this means that, if one million European citizens wish to dispense with the Strasbourg site, that desire too must be heeded.

Fiorello Provera (EFD). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am sure that this right of initiative granted to European citizens by the treaty will help bring the peoples closer to Europe and to the European institutions to a greater degree than the costly awareness campaigns funded by the Union which, hitherto, have produced modest results: electoral turnouts confirm this.

This initiative certainly further strengthens democracy, since it allows citizens to propose laws directly. In other words, it is a form of direct democracy which complements parliamentary representation.

We must not let this opportunity slip through our fingers. The Commission must make this right of initiative straightforward, understandable and accessible, and assist and support citizens from the initial stage of the process through to the signature collection stage, for example, by determining the admissibility of their proposals. This is a practical contribution to European democracy.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, we often refer to the need to increase the participation of European citizens, to the need for us to get closer to the Union's institutions, to the citizens of all the Member States. We debated this intensively at the last European elections, when we saw in many Member States that participation was particularly low.

A very important event has occurred between then and now, which has changed the very structure and operation of the Union. I refer, of course, to the Treaty of Lisbon, an important treaty, the epicentre of which is the citizen, the basic pillar of which is how all of us, Parliament, the Commission and the Council, can get closer to the citizens. This principle finds specific expression in the citizens' initiative in Article 11(4). This is an important and exceptional arrangement which promotes democracy, political equality and transparency.

Of course, what we want is for this arrangement to be applied correctly and to see it in practice. This is where the problems arise. While all my fellow members are right to highlight the need for this procedure to be reliable, for the role of the Commission and the role of Parliament to be defined, we must all be able to work together so that this important citizens' initiative, if signatures are collected, does not go to waste.

My conclusion is this: we all have a responsibility to promote this initiative. We all have a responsibility to explain this right which all our fellow European citizens now have, to give them to understand that they personally can set procedures in motion, without any other intervention, at the level of the Union's institutions.

Above all, our message must be clear and must be contained in a simple, understandable, comprehensible procedure which, if nothing else, functions for everyone, functions for the citizens, functions for Parliament, for the Union's institutions, for the Member States and for all stakeholders in the procedure.

Carlos Coelho (PPE). – (PT) Only a few months ago, some were saying that the Treaty of Lisbon would never come into force. Yet here we are, beginning to think about how we are going to implement it and laying down some of its provisions.

The Treaty of Lisbon has an important contribution to make in fighting the democratic deficit. I am talking about the strengthening of parliaments (both the European Parliament and national parliaments). Even more importantly, I am talking about investment in a Europe for the public, with rules on the area of freedom,

security and justice, on monitoring subsidiarity, and with the realisation of this innovative initiative which stems from public action.

I endorse what has been said by many of my fellow Members and especially by my colleague, Mr Méndez de Vigo, but I would like to emphasise that when regulating this instrument, we must ensure that it is truly Europe-wide. It needs, of course, to avoid being the expression of the will of the public in only one country or a limited number of countries. We do, however, need to seek a solution that will encourage and stimulate public involvement. If we have to choose between being very strict and rigorous or being more generous, I would err on the side of being more generous. If we come up with solutions that discourage public participation, we are betraying the spirit of the Treaty of Lisbon and denying the European public because, ladies and gentlemen, we need more Europe and a Europe that is aimed more at the public. We need the European public to have greater involvement and to actively exercise their citizenship.

Milan Zver (PPE). – (SL) I would like to express my satisfaction and pleasure that we are today discussing this initiative which will, I am sure, reduce what we call the democratic deficit or partially eliminate it.

Generally speaking, it is a fact that democracy is today taking a backwards step. As some research suggests, democratic dialogue is becoming narrower and the notion of democracy is being confined merely to democratic elections and nothing more. All of this has an impact on the mood of our citizens, who are becoming increasingly passive, and is reflected in low electoral turnouts, or even in a lack of trust in the institutions of democracy.

For this reason, it is very important that we have adopted the Treaty of Lisbon because it expands the role of parliament, both the role of national parliaments and that of the European Parliament. Above all, it enables citizens to take forward initiatives and I am delighted that is the case. As a result, we are now witnessing something that we could describe as a European democracy project taking shape on a European level and I think that we have already made a major leap forward in this respect.

However, this so-called European democracy must, of course, be further extended to cover other areas, including, for example, nominations for the European Commission. In brief, there are a number of areas where the European institutions involved could be further extended in democratic terms. I firmly believe that this project, i.e. this initiative, could greatly strengthen European democracy.

Salvatore Iacolino (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we have a wonderful opportunity today: the chance to assert a value, namely the instrument of participatory democracy being offered to citizens under the Treaty of Lisbon. The fact that after only a few months we are discussing this instrument is, in my view, in itself an absolute value that should be safeguarded.

I am certain that it will, of course, be crucial to determine clearly and precisely what is meant by a significant number of Member States. We must use a criterion which combines, on the one hand, the citizens' drive to participate in the institutions and, on the other, our drive to give this instrument democratic validity.

Naturally, the procedures must be simplified, straightforward and flexible. I personally have visited several schools in the last few weeks, and was met with a great willingness to listen, but, above all, I gained a great awareness of the increased role that children wish to play in a Europe which is changing, in particular, under the Treaty of Lisbon. Therefore we need transparency, objectivity and change in order for this instrument to serve society but, at the same time, to serve the institutions. In this regard, Parliament is being called upon, together with the Commission and the Council, to decide, precisely, on simplified procedures.

Martin Kastler (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am one of those people who has brought one of the first citizens' initiative petitions into being, specifically, on the subject of protecting Sundays. Today, we have the pleasure of debating – and then deciding upon – a potential way of involving the citizens in the process of Europe's political work. That means that this is a potential way to bring about more democracy and to counter Europe-fatigue.

That said, I am not here just to give praise. Rather, I have two requests to make of you, when you now take this Regulation into its final phase. Firstly, we Europeans are technologically advanced people. I would like to ask you to make the Internet the definitive medium so that a citizens' initiative with a million signatures is also admissible with electronic signatures, which are also legally binding.

Secondly, I would like to point out that what we are doing here is just a first step. I would like to go a step further. We now have a right of initiative for the citizens. It would be my wish, however, for us to also have referendums, as we have in my home region of Bavaria, at the European level in future. What happens is that

there is a petition for a referendum, then, when enough people have put their name to it, there is the possibility of a referendum. It would be my wish that we should also have this in Europe.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (S&D). – (PL) Mr President, public consultations on the European Citizens' Initiative have just ended, and it turns out that the consultations attracted only 323 respondents. This result shows that all the European Union institutions should now strongly engage in promoting this new instrument, because at the moment, it can be seen that very few people are aware of its existence. The results of the consultation do, however, show the direction which the Commission should take in framing appropriate executive legislation.

Firstly, it is essential to establish common principles, which would apply throughout the Union, for the collection and authentication of signatures, and also to ensure that citizens will be subject to the same requirements, for example, as regards age.

Another important matter is the introduction of a certain form of evaluating admissibility *ex ante*, with the assumption that initiatives and initiators are aware that formal recognition of admissibility is not equivalent to the Commission putting forward a legislative proposal on a particular matter.

I am sure the European Citizens' Initiative can become an important instrument by means of which debate will be conducted in the future – broad debate on matters of interest to all Europeans. For this reason, I eagerly await an appropriate regulation from the Commission.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – Mr President, the use of the referendum – direct democracy – is not an exotic version of democracy. It is the original form – government by the people and not government on behalf of the people.

So perhaps we should be grateful to the EU for introducing this. I think not. The EU only likes democracy when it can manage it and arrange for a result that it wants. We have heard that the power to call such a referendum will be limited by mischievous provisions, such as the EU's competence and the EU's own version of human rights, which, in reality, means political repression, limitation on freedom of speech and even on freedom of thought.

One final point is that democracy means government by the people – an identifiable and cohesive unit – and not government by an arbitrary collection of persons. Mass migration has made this difficult to achieve. Europe as a whole has become even less of a single people than it might otherwise have been. Nevertheless, it is better than nothing, and we might, at least, demonstrate that this initiative was a hollow promise.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). – (RO) I believe that the inclusion of the European Citizens' Initiative in the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon marks an important step in the consolidation of democracy in the European Union.

Another important way of exercising and consolidating democracy is the use of referendums. I wish to digress at this point by telling you that three referendums have been held in Romania since 2004, with the last one on the switch to a unicameral system and a reduction in the number of MPs. There was a 51% turnout, with an overwhelming majority voting in favour of the proposal.

I wish to welcome the Commission's initiative in launching a broad public consultation on the regulation online. This will determine the number of states from which signatures need to be collected, the minimum number of signatures from each country, and the rules for verifying them.

I would like to end by asking the Commission when it thinks that this regulation will come into force, as I believe it must be finalised as soon as possible.

Olga Sehnalová (S&D). – (CS) Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, in the last few years, the European Union has experienced a crisis of confidence on the part of its citizens. One of the signs of this is the very low turnout for elections to the European Parliament, arising from the widely-held feeling that citizens cannot influence events in the EU through their vote in any way whatsoever. I therefore warmly welcome the possibility of citizens' initiatives which the Treaty of Lisbon opens up for EU citizens, and in this context, also the public consultation with the Commission and the Green Paper on how to bring the citizens' initiative to life in concrete terms. I agree in principle with most of the proposals in the Green Paper.

However, if we hold out a helping hand, we should not at the same time be afraid that EU citizens will grasp it. Therefore, if we care about maximising the dialogue with citizens, I consider some of these limiting measures to be too strict. These mainly concern the minimum number of Member States that the citizens

signing an initiative must come from, and the definition of a so-called substantial number of states. The proposal for one out of three states, in other words, nine at present, is, in my opinion, discouraging and unrealistic for prospective initiatives in practical terms. A reduction in this number to 20% would, I believe, be a step in the right direction for the general public of the EU, who will, for example, also take note of the greater emphasis being placed on the role of the macro-regions in creating EU policy. And why not?

Csaba Sógor (PPE). – (HU) The possibility of a European Citizens' Initiative can promote the development of public debates on European questions, leading to a true European public sphere. The representatives of civil society can address those social questions which the political groups now represented in the European Parliament cannot or do not wish to raise. Of these questions, I would like to emphasise one in particular. I consider it important that, parallel to the advance notice of proposals for a resolution and even before the gathering of signatures begins or perhaps after a certain number of signatures have been collected, the Commission should give an opinion, based on its own competence and on Community law, as to whether the proposal in question would be acceptable. A rejection on formal grounds or due to a lack of legal basis after the million signatures have been collected can portray not only the Commission but the entire European Union in a very unfavourable light.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D). – (LT) The Treaty of Lisbon provides for the strengthening of the role of civil society in European institutions and the opportunity for European citizens to initiate legislative proposals. The citizens' right of initiative would allow no fewer than a million citizens to call on the European Commission to take law-making initiatives in a specific area.

However, collecting such an amount of voters' signatures is really difficult; therefore, in order to establish an effective mechanism for democratic participation and to ensure the accessibility of this initiative to citizens, the opportunity must be provided to initiate a proposal, with clear guidelines and a simplified and appropriate procedure.

Unfortunately, since the Treaty of Lisbon entered into force, the citizens' right of initiative has not been put into practice. None of the aspects of the citizens' initiative have been discussed yet, and there is no concrete action plan on how to guarantee the transparency of initiatives and democratic accountability, so that citizens do not fall victim to the representation of large companies' interests.

Thus, the civil dialogue is the most important element of the democratic model of Europe and of my own country of Lithuania and is an essential foundation for this, so I call on the Commission to take all measures to ensure that this citizens' right of initiative is properly implemented as soon as possible.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – (GA) Mr President, our colleagues have done many interesting things in relation to this issue and they agreed unanimously that this is a wonderful facility to put in the hands of our citizens.

The citizens' initiative was a powerful and convincing argument against the 'no' side in the Treaty of Lisbon referendum in Ireland, especially when they argued that it was a grab for power by the European Union rather than a truly democratic attempt to involve the citizens. But there is a big difference between putting something into a treaty and putting it into effect, and there is a big challenge here for us.

On the one hand, there is a danger – and a real danger – that the process could be hijacked by vested interest groups and by powerful lobbies who would have no difficulty in getting a million signatures. That is why the suggestion by my colleague, Mr De Rossa, concerning the involvement of the Ombudsman, might be well worth considering.

On the other hand, however, this has real possibilities for citizens. One initiative started by my colleague, Mr de Castro, is well worth considering, that of making Sunday special and whether we want to rest on the seventh day, like our creator, or treat it the same as any other day of the week. That is an important consideration.

So I think there is great scope here, and I look forward to its development.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Mr President, I must express my deep satisfaction regarding the debate that has taken place. This was, moreover, a debate that has taken place at the request of Parliament, which specifically wanted this debate to be held on the citizens' initiative, and I consider there have been a string of speeches in which I have seen absolutely unanimous support for this as a priority of the Spanish Presidency of the Council. Furthermore, there is support for it to be carried out quickly.

In this respect, I believe that Mr Šefčovič's announcement of the presentation of the text of the regulation on 31 March was welcomed with great satisfaction by all of you as well. Once again, I thank the Commission for the speed, concern and enthusiasm with which it has dealt with this matter and the fact that we can therefore, as of now, begin this legislative procedure. I hope that it will end as soon as possible with the setting in motion of this legislative initiative, which almost everyone who spoke considers necessary, urgent and indispensable.

I believe that this can, moreover, be interpreted as support by all the parliamentary groups and all the honourable Members, including those who, like Mr Kamall, in his extraordinary speech, supported the popular legislative initiative because, in his opinion, it will weaken the European Union.

Mr Kamall is not here... I am sorry that he is not, I am sorry to give him bad news and discourage him, because this initiative will strengthen the European Union, not weaken it at all. It will strengthen it because it is an initiative which, in short, strengthens the two essential concepts of the European Union: democracy and citizenship. These are the two main political pillars of the European Union: democracy and citizenship.

This is an initiative which, to some extent, tries to offset that paradox which we see: a European Union that is increasingly powerful, and Parliament is proof of that; that is increasingly influential; and that has an ever greater effect on the lives of the public. Yet it is a European Union that is unconnected with the debate that is carried out in each country.

It is a paradox that affects democracy itself. This citizens' initiative will, as Mr Méndez de Vigo said, extend a series of debates of European importance, on issues that are European, not local. This is because it forces contact between people from different countries; therefore, it is clearly European in effect. It is undoubtedly one way of strengthening this democracy, and also the citizenship or European *demos* referred to by Mr Casini, who is, moreover, Chair of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Citizens' Rights, which will, for the most part, be dealing with this initiative.

That citizenship that Mr Jáuregui considered so important in his speech, that so much represents the roots of the European Union; or Mr Sógor, who referred to it as well; or Mr Häfner, who mentioned it too. As Mr Kastler also said, this initiative must be applied. It is an appeal to citizens, because European civic identity develops when it is put into practice; not simply when a right is obtained, but when that right is put into practice and exercised. That is what I think is the important thing that should happen as soon as this citizens' initiative enters into force.

I once again repeat my thanks to the Commission and to Parliament, which, I am sure, will deal with this matter meticulously, thoroughly and swiftly. Mr Iacolino mentioned a particularly speedy procedure to enable us to see this initiative emerge as soon as possible and Mrs Băsescu, in her speech, also appealed for the speed with which we want to see the initiative set in motion.

Maroš Šefčovič, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I would first like to thank Diego for an excellent summary of today's debate. I would like to thank all of you for your support and positive expectations linked to the citizens' initiative. I can assure you that I will be happy to present to you the proposal at the earliest convenience after its adoption.

Because of time constraints and the fact that the proposal is not yet finalised, we could not go into details today. However, I am very thankful for your views and opinions because they really reflected the nature and the quality of the views and opinions we have been collecting in the preparations of the European Citizens' Initiative.

There are many things on which we all agree. The first one is, clearly, transparency. I can assure you that we are looking for a solution which would guarantee, through the registration of the initiative by the Commission, that we would know who the organisers are and how they are financed. We would have a very strong indication whether the initiative is really genuine, whether it is really a citizens' initiative, and whether it is really a European initiative. I think it must include all these elements in order to make good and successful use of this new instrument.

We all agree on practicality. We would like to have a system which is user-friendly. We would like to create a system where the citizens would not have the feeling that they have to go through a very burdensome procedure to collect or to give their signatures. We are looking into these opportunities and, of course, we are looking into ways in which modern IT technology – so characteristic of our century – can be used.

It is clear that there are different systems for the verification of signatures in the Member States. One of the clear responses we gathered from the public consultation was that the citizens would prefer having a certain uniformity when it comes to the verification and the collection of signatures. At the same time, we got the clear message from the Member States that we should look for a system which would not be too burdensome or too complicated for the national authorities, because it would be the Member States who would have to verify that the signatures collected for the citizens' initiative are real and genuine.

I listened very carefully to your calls for having very clear procedures once the initiative is successful and once the signatures are collected. I would like to assure you that we will definitely do that. In the proposal, there will be very clear deadlines – when, how and in what timeframe the Commission will have to react when the citizens' initiative is successful.

As you have listened to the opinions here, you will agree with me that the most difficult issue we have to tackle is the issue of admissibility – how we can find a solution which would avoid the frustration of citizens, how we can protect EU values, and how we can keep this institute of the European Citizens' Initiative serious and real. I can assure you that there are no easy answers to these questions and to these slightly contradictory requests.

The Commission is looking into the option which would defend European values and human rights from the outset. At the same time, we would like to have a clear view that the proposals for the citizens' initiative have a genuine potential to be successful.

We would like to avoid possible abuse where we might get proposals for the initiative every second week on nonsensical issues on which there would be an obligation to pronounce a view on admissibility, and then for it to be appealed to the Court – initiatives whose only reason for proposal would be the self-promotion of the potential organisers for negative political agenda. We have also to bear this in mind. I hope that we will find the right balance on how to keep this admissibility check in adequate proportion.

To give a short answer to Vice-President Durant's question concerning communication with civil society, I think that the European Citizens' Initiative is the best answer. We have a very good structured dialogue organised by the European Economic and Social Committee and I had a very lengthy debate with them just two weeks ago. I think that strong and wide public consultations are taking place through the smart-legislating proposals. We will widen this and use it even more in the future.

In view of the time, let me conclude by saying that I am really looking forward to being back soon with a proposal. I look forward to our mutual discussion on this issue and what I hope will be very dynamic and speedy procedures so that we can have this very important instrument approved as soon as possible.

President. – The item is hereby closed.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The new legislative framework on the European Citizens' Initiative is undoubtedly welcome. There had long been a case for citizens to have access to such an instrument. On the other hand, I share the sentiments of those who have taken the floor today and called for the regulations which will be used as the basis for implementing the citizens' initiative to be simple, accessible, easy to understand and involve as little red tape as possible. This is the only way that the citizens' initiative will actually manage to become a proper instrument available to Europeans, which they can use to make their voice heard. This is the only way that the EU will successfully move closer to its citizens and become more democratic.

Joanna Senyszyn (S&D), in writing. – (PL) The Treaty of Lisbon gives the citizens of the European Union the right to propose a legislative initiative. This is one of the most important steps in the building of civil democracy and direct inclusion of the citizens in the EU decision-making process. The European Citizens' Initiative can contribute to a reduction in the gap between the institutions and the citizens, and can support the development of European civil society. Therefore, rapid adoption of a regulation to govern the process, conditions and procedures for presentation of such an initiative is essential. The citizens of the European Union eagerly await this.

The European Citizens' Initiative is mainly about greater involvement of the citizens in creating European law. Therefore, I would like to raise the matter of digital signatures in the citizens' initiative, as an additional channel for attracting interest in European politics. Since we can already vote via the Internet and carry out

banking operations online, we are certainly able to develop a secure system which would allow us to identify digital signatures.

Transparency of procedures is also important. The organisers of initiatives must be publicly responsible for transparency concerning the financing of the campaign to collect signatures. Even the establishment of clear criteria for the course of such a campaign does not ensure protection from possible abuses of this instrument by Eurosceptics, for whom collecting a million signatures, with the use of significant financial resources, may not constitute a major problem, as the last European Parliament election campaign showed. One solution could be to oblige initiators to maintain an Internet site containing financial information, such as sources of income, expenses and financial reports.

Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa (PPE), in writing. – (PL) Today's debate is another step on the road to establishing the final form of the European Citizens' Initiative. The idea to create a tool enabling the citizens to participate more fully in the democratic life of the Union was mooted as far back as 2005 after the unsuccessful constitutional referendums in France and the Netherlands. Those votes reflected a noticeable lack of communication between the European Union and its citizens. Even the recently published results of the social consultations, starting with the Green Paper on a European Citizens' Initiative, show the low level of interest on the part of individual citizens. The Commission received as few as 1 59 responses from individuals.

The citizens' initiative makes it possible for us to change this situation and give a stronger voice to our citizens by giving them the right to call directly on the Commission to bring forward new policy initiatives. To guarantee that the initiative does not become an instrument in a political game, we must not make demands of our citizens which are too strict. However, we must make sure that guarantees against abuses are met. It is important that the European Citizens' Initiative be a truly supranational instrument which will be citizen-friendly and easy to use. It should be simple, understandable and easily accessible. If the draft of an initiative does not meet formal requirements, its idea should remain and be presented in the form of a petition. In this way, the work put into its preparation and the effort invested will not be wasted. Fulfilment of these conditions will allow Europeans, for the first time in the history of our integrated Europe, to have a real and direct influence on the creation of European policy.

14. Situation in Tibet (debate)

President. – The next item is the Commission's statement on the situation in Tibet.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE). – Mr President, I see that the EU Spanish Presidency is leaving the meeting room, so I would like to express my deep disappointment that neither the Spanish Presidency nor the High Representative will be present for this discussion and that their seats will be empty.

It is a disgraceful move against the European Parliament, which is the only EU institution elected by the people of Europe, and it sets a very bad precedent, especially having the Treaty of Lisbon in force.

May I ask you, Mr President, to forward to those who will be absent that the agenda of the plenary session is decided by Parliament, not by the Council and not by the EU Spanish Presidency, and that at least one of them should have been present here today.

President. – I was informed that the Spanish Presidency had already announced earlier, a month ago, that, to its greatest regret, it cannot stay beyond this time.

Maroš Šefčovič, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I would like to thank Parliament for putting this issue up for debate today, because I think that it is worth discussing and I think we should start by stating the fact that our relationship with China – which we consider to be very important and strategic – has made enormous progress over the last number of years. Having such a strong strategic partnership would and does definitely permit us to tackle all issues, including the most sensitive ones.

We have constructed an impressive framework of high-level interactions where we regularly address the global challenges that our citizens are facing without neglecting the issues where our views may differ – and Tibet is definitely one of them.

It is evident that differences with China on Tibet remain. We have real concerns about the human rights situation in Tibet, about the fact that Tibet has remained largely closed to international media, diplomats and humanitarian organisations and also about the lack of progress in talks between the representatives of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese authorities.

The EU position does not leave any room for misinterpretation. Therefore, let me stress: the EU respects the sovereignty and territorial integrity of China, including Tibet. We respect the 'one China' policy.

However, we have always supported peaceful reconciliation through dialogue between the Chinese authorities and the representatives of the Dalai Lama. This dialogue has to be constructive and substantive, addressing all core issues such as the preservation of Tibet's unique culture, religion and traditions and the need to achieve a system of meaningful autonomy for Tibet within the Chinese Constitution.

The dialogue should also address the participation of all Tibetans in decision making. For the EU, Tibet is a human rights issue. We have consistently passed this message on to our Chinese counterparts and listened carefully to their views, and we make every effort to understand their position in a spirit of mutual respect.

But human rights are universal, and the situation in Tibet is a legitimate concern for the international community, a point that we regularly make to our Chinese interlocutors.

In the Sino-Tibetan dialogue, the Tibetan side has recently submitted an updated memorandum on genuine autonomy for the future of Tibet. We welcome that the Tibetan side has reiterated its firm commitment not to seek separation or independence.

We are also pleased that the Dalai Lama remains committed to the middle-way approach and to dialogue as the only means for achieving a mutually acceptable and lasting solution.

The EU welcomes the fact that both parties continue to hold talks even if we note with regret the lack of results and the lack of momentum.

Let me conclude by appealing to the representatives of the two sides to continue and intensify the dialogue with an open spirit and with a view to achieving a durable solution in Tibet. From our side, I can guarantee the EU's wholehearted support to such a process.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – Mr President, the ninth round of Sino-Tibetan talks failed to produce any concrete results and has not improved the situation of the Tibetan population on the ground. We regret the absence of any statement by the EU before the end of the talks, and hope that the European Union will release a statement on the evaluation of the outcome of the talks. The European Parliament would like to know in what way the EU Council could help create a mutually acceptable solution to the Tibet issue and ensure basic human rights and genuine autonomy for Tibetans.

My second point is to remind you that the European Parliament insists on the importance of the European Commission supporting development and civil society projects in favour of the Tibetan population in Tibet and of Tibetan refugees in exile – in India, Nepal, Bhutan – in economic and social fields such as health and nutrition, livelihoods and education, access to jobs, gender issues, the environment and the revitalisation of settlements. On this last point, the Tibetan revitalisation plan for refugee settlements, drawn up by the central Tibetan administration in Dharamsala, presents the needs of the Tibetan community in exile and could be taken into account and supported by the European Commission.

Finally, President Obama recently met with the Dalai Lama in the White House. We look forward to seeing Baroness Ashton inviting the Dalai Lama and meeting him in Brussels. This would create an opportunity to start coordinating national positions on Tibet and to define a unified and clear EU position and policy on this issue. The appointment of an EU special coordinator for Tibet, which is mentioned in the EU budget, could be a useful tool in helping to define a common European position and strategy on Tibet.

María Muñoz De Urquiza, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (ES) Mr President, it is now two years since the events, the uprisings, in Tibet, and we hope that, following the demonstrations on this occasion, there will be no repetition of the assaults, arrests and deaths that occurred two years ago.

In any event, the timeliness of this debate is very doubtful, because Parliament has stated its opinion on the issue of China on a number of occasions over the last few months and, above all, because China is a big international player whose relations with the European Union go well beyond the issue of Tibet. Although the issue of human rights is very important, Parliament only states its opinion on Tibet and not on human rights. At any event, in this debate, our position, the socialist position, is very clear: we hold exactly the same position as the European Union. In other words, we defend human rights and we also defend dialogue, meeting and agreement. In this respect, we are entirely in favour of and delighted by the resumption of negotiations between the Chinese authorities and the representatives of Tibet, and we plead for a mutually

acceptable solution based on respect for the religious and cultural rights of minorities and within the framework of the territorial integrity of the single State of China.

I deeply regret the fact that the Vice-President of the Commission and the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy is not here, because it is she who chairs the Foreign Affairs Council and who ought to attend debates on foreign policy.

Furthermore, to say that the Spanish Presidency is wrong not to be present at this debate is deeply unfair, because the Spanish Presidency is indefatigable. Mr López Garrido's presence in this House to talk about all matters is almost superhuman.

We have equipped ourselves with a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy who presides over the positions of ministers on matters of foreign policy and it is she who ought to debate these issues with Parliament.

Niccolò Rinaldi, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, it seems clear that China has no intention of negotiating or engaging in dialogue with regard to Tibet.

China's involvement in international trade, the Olympic Games and past changes in Beijing's leadership have not led to any substantive change in policy. In the meantime, the David versus Goliath struggle continues, especially with China altering the demographic balance in Tibet, which is of great concern, and, when necessary, even using military repression, as happened two years ago.

In particular, something which, in our view, is part of the heritage of mankind, namely Tibetan culture and spirituality, is disappearing. Obviously, China's Communist Party knows very little of spirituality and cultural identity. In this respect, if we accept what could be defined as cultural genocide in Tibet, we will have to be prepared to accept many more episodes of this kind in the future.

We must not give up. What we are asking, first and foremost of the Chinese, is to accept Tibetan culture for what it is. They accepted the specific nature of Hong Kong being a country with two systems, so they should accept being a country with three systems. China's shoulders are broad enough to enable it to do so.

We are asking the European institutions, from Baroness Ashton to the Council, not to let down the European citizens who have shown their attachment to the Tibetan cause in many ways. We are also supporting – as is Mrs Andriukienė – the creation of a coordinator for Tibet.

This is a battle for freedom which therefore concerns the identity of our continent. When it comes to whether or not to renew the arms embargo on China, I think we should take this matter into account too.

Heidi Hautala (Verts/ALE). – (FI) Mr President, I, too, strongly condemn the Spanish Presidency for walking out of this House. They did not even listen to what Mrs Andriukienė was saying. She asked the Council to have the courage to be present during this debate and express their view of the Tibet question.

Mr President, you made a mistake: you said that Spain had stated that they could be here until 18.50. This is not true. They had originally said that they had to leave at 17.00, but they were obviously able to be here for almost two hours longer when the citizens' initiative was being discussed.

There must be no repeat of this. I assume that the Commission, whose Vice-President is Baroness Ashton, is in earnest and will do what it just said it would. That is, our relations with China are so important that we must also be able to discuss difficult issues such as the Tibet question.

I take the view that now is just the right time to renew the European Union's support for Tibet. We must do something about the fact that nine rounds of negotiations between China and the Tibetan Government in exile have not led to any outcome, and I completely agree with Mr Rinaldi here. It would appear that China does not want anything from the talks. China wants to continue to violate Tibetan cultural, religious and language rights. We cannot accept cultural genocide of this sort.

A month ago, I went to Dharamsala and I met the Dalai Lama. I talked with him for an hour just before he left for the United States to meet President Obama. I was convinced that I had to propose in Parliament that we should discuss the situation in Tibet.

The Dalai Lama is a calm, peaceful person, and it is quite wrong for China to claim continually that he is a dangerous separatist and that he caused the unrest and riots we witnessed in Tibet two years ago. On the contrary, the Dalai Lama has said that representatives of China are welcome to study documents in the

archives of his government in exile in order to assure themselves that he had not fomented violence. Despite this, the claims persist.

I am calling on the European Union to condemn these remarks and raise the matter with China. If the European Union is not bold enough to defend Tibet, not many others will. We can take a leaf from President Obama's book: he had the courage to receive the Dalai Lama. In my opinion, it would be a very normal gesture if the European Union's High Representative also did something similar, as has been proposed here.

We need to keep this matter alive in the European Parliament. Reference was also made here to the fact that we need a special representative for Tibet. We have all kinds of special representatives. Why could we not have a special representative for Tibet, for whom there is even cash in this year's budget? It is quite intolerable that the Council should walk out of this debate. The Council is cowardly and does not have the courage to face up to this problem, which is a question of defending human rights.

Charles Tannock, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, the fate of the people of Tibet and their remarkable Buddhist culture remains uppermost in the minds of those of us in this House who believe in human rights.

Since the Communist forces of the People's Republic of China (PRC) invaded 61 years ago, Tibetans have faced a systematic suppression of their unique way of life. The mass migration of Han Chinese and the arrival of the high-altitude railway at Lhasa have further consolidated Beijing's hold on Tibet.

Meanwhile, the Dalai Lama, from his Indian exile, continues his peaceful campaign to highlight the situation faced by his people. Uighur jihadists have also exploited recent unrest in Tibet to foment their own violence against the Chinese Government.

Tibet should be given the maximum possible autonomy and we know that this is possible under the 'one country, two systems' mantra that applies not just to Hong Kong but also to Macao, so why not Tibet?

Beijing will undoubtedly dismiss our concerns in this Parliament as an unwarranted intrusion into their internal affairs, but a fresh and more relaxed approach to Tibet by the PRC could well pay dividends for China's internal security as well as its external image in the world.

I would also like to add my voice to those who deeply regret today the fact that there is no presence from the Council or from the rotating Spanish Presidency, or that the High Representative for Foreign Affairs is not present.

Oreste Rossi, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I was stunned by Commissioner Šefčovič's words just now when he said that we respect the territorial integrity of China. This means that the Commission recognises China's right to occupy Tibet, which is a very serious matter.

While the Tibetan people continue to be threatened, the Dalai Lama, in the 2008 Memorandum and in the Notes attached to it this year, has confirmed his commitment not to seek the separation and independence of Tibet, but effective autonomy for the Tibetan people within the framework of the constitution of the People's Republic of China: a compromise policy of mutual benefit aimed at preserving Tibet's culture, based on compassion and non-violence.

The Tibetan people expect responses from the Chinese Government; for example, talks with the Dalai Lama's representatives and consenting to the request made by the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights to send a delegation to uncover the harsh reality.

The European Parliament should also listen to the Tibetan community. By strengthening national synergies, it could try to establish a European coordination network for the Tibetan people who, without robust action on the part of the international community, are in danger of being wiped out.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS KOCH-MEHRIN

Vice-President

Edward McMillan-Scott (NI). – Madam President, Tibet is a beautiful country and its people are devout, they are patient and they are oppressed – probably the most oppressed by the Chinese in that whole region. I think that the debate this evening has shown an extraordinary consensus of view around Parliament on, for example, the appointment by the EU of a special coordinator for Tibet.

Events push us towards making some decisions in this House. This week, Google has abandoned China. We have the continuing problems of human rights in China, with the disappearance of the Christian human rights lawyer, Gao Zhisheng.

All these things highlight the attention we need to pay to China, and indeed Tibet, and I would like to remark that, with the Shanghai World Expo opening in May, all people doing business in China should have regard to the United Nations Global Compact for businesses, some 4 000 of whom have signed up to it.

Finally, can I just say that, if the EU will not appoint a special coordinator, I believe Parliament should appoint a rapporteur for Tibet.

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE). – (PL) Madam President, the matter of Tibet and of the Tibetans continues, unfortunately, to be an important problem. The situation is not as bad as it was two years ago, when the anniversary of the Tibetan uprising was accompanied by brutal persecution, murders and torture. On the other hand, we cannot say that the situation is good. Several days ago, some schoolchildren were arrested for attempting to celebrate the anniversary of the uprising in Gansu and Kanlho. Tibetans are forbidden from doing anything to rescue their own culture, identity and religion.

The Chinese authorities say that the Dalai Lama is a private person. This reminds me of the efforts of Polish Communists, who, 25 years ago, said the same about Lech Wałęsa. I hope the Tibetans' struggle will end with the same success as the Poles achieved, and that truth will be victorious this time, too. Today, the 21st meeting of the Tibetan Task Force for Sino-Tibetan Negotiations begins in Dharamsala. This is an institution which operates under the auspices of the Tibetan government-in-exile and is intended to help in this dialogue.

It seems to me that the European Union, too, should do something to ensure that the dialogue is genuine. Sometimes, we complain that not much can be done, but in this case, we can take specific measures, and this has already been mentioned, today. This is why the absence of the Council is so important – our appeals are directed to the Council, which appoints special coordinators. I, too, subscribe to this appeal, because this request has been expressed many times in the European Parliament's resolutions on Tibet – the request for a special coordinator, who will have a real influence on the dialogue which is taking place between the Tibetans and the Chinese.

One more thing: I cannot understand how it is that in 2014, China is going to host another Olympic Games event – this time it will be the Youth Olympic Games – while we are unable to force China to make advances in the field of human rights. This is sad, indeed.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (S&D). – (HU) Madam President, I am convinced that our image of the Tibetan processes is an oversimplified one. The area is undergoing a process of modernisation while, at the same time, the criticisms that have been expressed are justified. It is clear that the only lasting solution would be autonomy, and indeed an expanded, true autonomy. As I pointed out in Beijing, during our visit, when the European Parliament's delegation was there, by analogy with the 'one country, two social systems' approach, this autonomy could be developed along the lines of 'one country, two religious systems'.

It is not enough to formulate criticisms. China would be open to dialogue, open to an official representative of the European Union, be it Romano Prodi or Benita Ferrero-Waldner or Margot Wallström, serving as a mediator between the Dalai Lama and the Beijing leadership. It would be good if the Commission, Ms Catherine Ashton and the Council thought this through. At the same time, we are talking about Chinese relations, but do my fellow Members know that the European Council has never in the course of its history put the relationship between the European Union and China on the agenda? Nor was it ever debated in the Council of Foreign Ministers. Therefore, in order for us to succeed, criticism on the matter of Tibet is not enough. We also need a conception and mediation.

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – (PL) Madam President, I greatly regret that this important and necessary debate is being held in the significant absence, or perhaps I should say the insignificant absence, of Mrs Ashton. She, in particular, should be here, today, and should not only participate in theatrical performances as she did yesterday, when she spoke to the Members of six Committees about her plans on the subject of the European External Action Service. After all, Tibet is also an important challenge. We may agree or disagree on Tibet, but, really, Mrs Ashton should be here.

It seems to me that this shows the European Union wants to wash its hands, because it is easier that way, because, in fact, many Member States, whose representatives are Members of this Parliament, prefer to do

business with Beijing, and it would not be convenient for them to express an opinion or speak about China. Today, Mrs Ashton is like Pontius Pilate, who washed his hands. This is embarrassing.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Madam President, recently, we have heard time and again of serious violations of human rights in Tibet, of torture, of cases of arbitrary arrest and detention without trial.

When the occasion of the 50th anniversary celebrations of Chinese rule in Tibet is used to espouse a view of a liberation of the Himalaya region, it is a little bit rich! This shows, once again, that history is written by the victors and that there is always great invention in the justification of acts of war. That is also an art, by the way, that is being exploited in Iraq and in Afghanistan, and one in which the United States has also found some support amongst a few Member States of this Union.

Nonetheless, we must still, in my view, continue our efforts to obtain better living conditions for oppressed minorities such as the Tibetans, the Uighurs and the Mongols. It is not enough to offer minority rights in the form of purely folkloristic performances for foreign tourists.

I believe the fact that, over recent years, China has spent approximately EUR 15 billion on developing the region and that, in the run-up to the 2008 Olympic Games, it also stated that it was willing to hold talks, shows that international pressure absolutely can bear fruit.

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE). – (RO) Mr Kaczmarek spoke earlier about the protests in 2008.

Two years have passed since then and we do not even know today how many people were detained, how many were arrested and, subsequently, how many were perhaps released.

We do know what these people were doing: they were participating in a peaceful demonstration, waving Tibetan flags or distributing pamphlets.

It is shocking that two years after these protests, we do not know exactly how many of these people were involved in the action and punished by the Communist Party. Indeed, I am concerned about the Chinese Communist Party's interference in the independent operation of the justice system by requesting people's arrests and rapid convictions. National security cannot be used as grounds for abolishing fundamental civil rights.

I also want to take this opportunity to emphasise the need to adopt a common European position on human rights and the protection of minorities in China.

If we fail to adopt such a position, we know what happens. We have seen it in the past where Chinese Communist leaders try to intimidate EU Member States individually.

I would like to end by reiterating the position which I also expressed during the January plenary, namely, that dialogue on human rights is an instrument which has proved to be ineffective and inadequate. I believe that this issue must be dealt with during summit meetings. In fact, Catherine Ashton admitted yesterday during the meeting we had as part of the Committee on Foreign Affairs that the approach based on human rights dialogues needs to be reviewed. I agree with the High Representative in this regard.

Marek Henryk Migalski (ECR). – (PL) Madam President, I can understand why businesses and private entities put profit above respect for human and civil rights. I can even understand why individual countries behave this way, but I cannot understand why the European Union is doing this, because the European Union was established on values which, today, we call European values.

What is the European Union's reaction to the very events which we are talking about at the moment? The absence of Mrs Ashton – we have spoken about this – the exit of the representative of the Council at precisely the moment when we began to talk about Tibet, and, finally, the Commissioner's initial speech.

Mr Šefčovič, you said you are appealing to both sides for dialogue. Was that a joke? Do you really mean to appeal to the representatives of Tibet for that dialogue? I was under the impression that they are willing for this. If you have the courage, please appeal, principally, to the Chinese authorities, because it is they who are making this dialogue impossible.

Tunne Kelam (PPE). – Madam President, Tibet and its cultural heritage is our common treasure. It is in our common interests that the Tibetan identity, religion and language be preserved and developed under the best possible conditions.

Sadly, this is not the case. Under the cover of industrial development, there is cultural genocide taking place and Tibetans are on the verge of becoming a minority in their homeland. This can be prevented only by granting them a genuine autonomous status. The EU can be influential in contributing to the start of an unprejudiced and constructive dialogue that would respect both sides.

I would note, Commissioner, your statement that Tibet is our legitimate concern. As a result of such a dialogue, and through opening up Tibet to foreign media and UN human rights experts, the Chinese Government has everything to gain, not only domestically but, most of all, internationally. China can become truly great only by showing respect towards its minorities. As a goodwill gesture, the Dalai Lama, whose authority is recognised worldwide, should be allowed to visit his homeland.

The EU should take full advantage of the Lisbon Treaty in showing active solidarity – through concrete acts – with the fate of a nation whose existence is under threat and whose natural right to autonomy and safeguarding its culture is being harshly repressed. I support the idea that Baroness Ashton should meet with the Dalai Lama and that the EU should provide for a special representative for Tibet after all.

Peter Šťastný (PPE). – (SK) On 10 March, we commemorated the 51st anniversary of the uprising in Tibet, but also the second anniversary of the protests, both violently suppressed by the Chinese armed forces.

The main issue is the unwillingness of China to hold a dialogue with the legitimate representatives of the Tibetan minority, and the attempt at gradual assimilation and the destruction of culture and religion in Tibet. I know personally what a godless and materialistic communist regime is capable of. One of the oldest cultures and one of the oldest religions, which have survived for many millennia, are in grave danger. The global public cannot remain silent. I myself am a member of the Friends of Tibet group in the European Parliament. Such groups now operate in many of the world's parliaments, for example, in the US, Germany, Australia, India, the Czech Republic and elsewhere.

I am proud to announce that, from 9 March, a Friends of Tibet group will also be operating in the National Council of the Slovak Republic. I believe that together, we can help to solve the Tibetan problem by mediating negotiations between top Chinese representatives and His Holiness, the 14th Dalai Lama. This is also a possible way to successfully conclude and resolve the problem of Tibetan refugees, most of whom live under difficult conditions in neighbouring countries. I appeal to the Commission not to forget this hard-pressed group of people in its programmes.

Jarosław Leszek Wałęsa (PPE). – (PL) Madam President, we are optimistic about today's debate, because it seems to me there is a great deal of unanimity here. However, on the other hand, there have, in fact, already been very many such debates here, and we are very good at talking. I do not want to fly into a holy rage because I am a hypocrite, just like basically everyone in this Chamber. A hypocrite who is dependent on something – on those cheap goods from China. However, at this moment perhaps, we ought to have enough self-respect to speak categorically and oppose certain things, and to respect those ideals which are dear to us.

Perhaps the first and most important step will be something which has already been mentioned here, something we have talked about. I am referring to the appointment of a special coordinator for Tibet. Someone who will guide the process, someone who will take responsibility on our behalf for the challenge related to the problem of Tibet, so that we will not sit on the fence, and so that we will say firmly and resolutely that human rights and civil liberties are important to us. Let us do this. Let us do it now.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE). – (ES) Madam President, talking about Tibet here today is a matter of justice and a matter of responsibility. I therefore disagree with those who think that this issue 'was not of concern'.

We have been reporting this matter for many years and I am concerned to see that, despite the enormous efforts being made by the Tibetan delegation, and especially the Dalai Lama, to promote dialogue, to move closer to the Chinese authorities, to find a fair and lasting solution to this conflict, the blockade situation is continually caused by the Chinese authorities.

We in the European Union cannot go on putting up with this game, far less fuel it. I therefore consider it essential not only to once again remind you of the urgency and relevance of this debate, but also to remind you anew that the one currently standing in the way of a solution is China.

We must also be clear in this respect. The only way in which the European Union can be consistent when it says that it is committed to human rights is by accepting that it must also bear a cost in terms of business and in economic terms. Otherwise, nothing will be credible in terms of human rights.

László Tőkés (PPE). – Madam President, on 10 March, we celebrated the 51st anniversary of the popular uprising in Tibet. Since then, through his consistent and persistent commitment to represent genuine autonomy for his people, the Dalai Lama has offered the world a model on how to pursue democracy through non-violent means.

We Europeans keep learning from His Holiness, the Dalai Lama. Recently, he voiced his solidarity with the ethnic Uighur minority and he took the side of Aung San Suu Kyi and other democratic dissidents. Here in the European Parliament, we are committed to ensuring the protection of human and minority rights around the world.

(The President cut off the speaker)

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Madam President, I will go straight to the Commissioner for clarification. For me, Tibet is an occupied country, and I believe that many other Members in this House, across all the groups, share this view. Even you, Commissioner, cannot render international law null and void. I believe this to be a concern that really pulls on the heart strings of every European citizen. Everyone knows of the sorrows and the cultural genocide in Tibet, and everyone feels sympathy, and it is only right to ask the important question: where is the EU in all this? We are very quick to judge small countries that commit transgressions. We react strongly, and we pass our judgment on small countries very quickly. Yet, when it comes to judging large countries, economically important countries such as China, we are very careful politically. We tread on eggshells, both politically and diplomatically. It is no sign of courage and backbone for us to tear into the minor offenders only to screw our eyes shut when it comes to China. We are likewise unable to put pressure on China through millions in development aid. I therefore expect the High Representative...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Ivo Vajgl (ALDE). – (SL) I am one of the few who recently had an opportunity to visit Tibet.

Progress of some sort has come to Tibet, but this progress has resulted in more bad than good, because it has broken down traditional cultural values, marginalised traditional Tibetan architecture and imposed a modernised image on Tibet's spiritual life. Rivers have been polluted and motorways which blot the Tibetan landscape have appeared.

However, there is some progress under way in Tibet. We cannot deny that and I think that our demands on, and expectations of, China should go hand in hand with a demand that Tibet should also benefit from this progress, and that life there should not just go on as if in a museum.

Maroš Šefčovič, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, I think that the debate today once again has clearly shown that we have genuine concerns over the situation in Tibet. I think that the interventions have underlined that these concerns remain real and legitimate more than 50 years after the Tibetan uprising on 10 March 1959. Moreover, our discussion has underlined the necessity for both parties to promptly resume dialogues.

I can inform you that the European Union welcomes the resumption of the dialogue between the envoys of the Dalai Lama and the Chinese Government, which was restarted again in September 2002. Since then, we have strongly supported this dialogue and hope that this process will lead to positive results and to resolving outstanding issues in a peaceful and sustainable way for Tibet.

In its political dialogue and in its further contacts with China, the EU's representatives regularly encourage China to use this process pragmatically in order to address all outstanding issues relating to Tibet. While China considers this to be an internal matter, it took note of EU views and concerns and informed the EU of its own point of view on the matter.

I have to underline that the EU also raises the human rights situation in Tibet in its political dialogue and in its human rights dialogue with China. Moreover, the EU consistently stresses the importance that it attaches to the respect of freedom of expression and of religion in Tibet.

We closely followed the latest development in this dialogue, and the dialogue between the Chinese Government and the representatives of the Dalai Lama is taking its course. I can inform you that during the past month,

we have been debriefed by both sides on the latest round of talks and have encouraged them again to make substantial progress.

To conclude, let me express my belief that the debate here today has also confirmed our continued commitment to the involvement with China on this issue and the work we will be pursuing together with the aim to achieve improvement of the respect of human rights and freedoms in Tibet.

President. – The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (S&D), in writing. – (PL) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, two years ago in Lhasa, peaceful protests were made by a number of monks, to which the Chinese authorities responded with brutal intervention from the police and the army. Dozens of civilians were killed and several hundred were wounded. Since that time, the Tibetans have held over 200 peaceful protests, with the involvement of a variety of social groups, including teachers, students and intellectuals.

In the previous parliamentary term, the European Parliament adopted eight resolutions on Tibet and debated the matter many times. The results of these efforts are still not satisfactory. Recently, the Chinese authorities detained 30 pupils from a school in Machu, who, on the second anniversary of the events in Lhasa at the beginning of March, gave expression once again to their convictions and began a peaceful protest. We have, doubtless, not even heard about many similar incidents.

Therefore, I propose that this problem be included in the responsibilities of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and given a broader perspective. This would be followed by specific action and, I hope, visible results. Thank you for your attention.

Danuta Jazłowiecka (PPE), in writing. – (PL) The media, today, are full of information about China. Reports, articles and books write unrelentingly about China's development and modernisation, and about the economic miracle which is taking place there. In this context, the media have, recently, also been writing about Tibet.

The American magazine *Newsweek* stated in a recent report that 'China is doing a lot of good for the Tibetans', because it is helping what is one of the world's poorest regions to emerge from its backward state. The report points to Chinese investment in transport and telecommunications infrastructure, education, health and access to water and electricity. So it seems that President Hu Jintao's plan is being put into effect, which, while improving Tibetans' standard of living, is attempting to force them to relinquish their freedom of speech, freedom of religion and aspirations for autonomy. However, can his strategy be successful?

The unrest in Lhasa, which broke out two years ago on the anniversary of the anti-Chinese uprising, as well as the events of two weeks ago, have shown most emphatically that the Tibetans feel persecuted in their own land. The history of my own country has taught me that any price would be worth paying for liberty and dignity. Economic interests cannot be made a reason to forget the persecuted and the suffering.

It seems to me that the European Parliament is a body which should call particularly strongly for the right of the Tibetans to preserve their identity. We represent, here, the people of the European Union, and on their behalf we should assure the Tibetans of our solidarity.

Csaba Sógor (PPE), in writing. – (HU) On 10 March 1959, the Tibetan people, in a revolutionary mood, defended their leader, but their initial enthusiasm was mercilessly crushed by the Chinese communist regime's 'peaceful liberation' that claimed several thousand civilian victims. Since then, the Dalai Lama, forced into exile, has been conducting his peaceful protest for half a century. Since that time, Tibetans have not been allowed to commemorate that day freely. In Eastern Europe, where I come from, the story is a familiar one. Although here, it seems that we have done away with similar practices on the part of communist systems, I think that we should not forget the lessons: in every people's history, there are events whose commemoration should not be forbidden. However, what we are talking about here is more than that. As a representative of a national minority community, I empathise with the plight of the Tibetan people, and ask my fellow Members to support with their votes Tibet's peaceful efforts along the path to autonomy.

15. One-minute speeches on matters of political importance

President. – The next item is the one-minute speeches in accordance with Rule 150.

Rule 150 states that we may spend a maximum of 30 minutes on this item. We had more than 74 requests to speak under this item. That will clearly not be possible. Thirty minutes and 74 speakers for one minute will simply not work.

Therefore, we have, for the first time, selected in advance the Members who will be granted speaking time using clear criteria, namely that those who requested speaking time in another debate with one-minute speeches but did not get chance to speak will now be granted speaking time where possible, whereas those who have already spoken in other debates will not be granted any speaking time.

All of those who have not been granted speaking time were informed of this in advance by e-mail. Therefore, they do not need to be here to wait in vain for their speaking time. I hope that you understand that. This was the only possible way to enable the debate to proceed in an orderly manner.

Therefore, those who have been granted speaking time can now begin straight away.

Alf Svensson (PPE). – (SV) Madam President, on 11 April, Sudan intends to elect a president and a parliament as well as regional assemblies. These are the first elections in Sudan in 24 years and we are following developments in the country with a great deal of interest.

The International Criminal Court in the Hague has issued a warrant for the arrest of Sudan's President, Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir, who took power in a *coup d'état*, for crimes against humanity. We all know how Sudan has suffered under his rule of violence. In just the first few months of this year, no fewer than 400 people have been killed in southern Sudan. It is difficult to say how free the election will be. On Monday, al-Bashir threatened to expel the international election observers. He said that if they interfere in Sudan's affairs, he would cut their fingers off.

We know that Sudan is a country in need. At the International Donors' conference in Cairo last Sunday, Egypt's representative said that the countries of the world will need to find a little over EUR 1.4 billion for the reconstruction of Sudan's Darfur region. It is my hope that the election in Sudan will create the conditions for a ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D). – (LT) Recently, there has been much talk about the recovery of the EU economy, but the majority of Member States have yet to see the end of the crisis. In public, discussion of the crisis is limited to the state of public finances, although the rapidly increasing unemployment in some Eastern European Union Member States has already reached a critical level. It is strange to hear EU and EP high officials praising some governments for their excellent work when, each month, the number of unemployed in those countries is growing at a catastrophic rate, social guarantees are being reduced and the number of people living below the poverty level is increasing. It is becoming very difficult for the people in such countries to understand whether the European Union is implementing a policy of poverty reduction or actually increasing poverty in the social area. In my opinion, governments that have been unable to resolve unemployment stabilisation problems should not receive praise. The European Commission should take greater responsibility and responsibly supervise the implementation of national government crisis management plans, especially in the area of social reforms, and assess the effects of such reforms on the people.

Sonia Alfano (ALDE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, 16 people convicted of various types of crime have been elected to the Italian Parliament and, at the last European elections, Italy sent three MEPs who have been convicted by final judgment.

There is no law in Europe prohibiting people who have been convicted by final judgment, or who are awaiting further legal proceedings, from standing for election; everything is left to the discretion of the Member States. Italian citizens have come up with the 'Clean Parliament' programme. We therefore call on the Committee on Constitutional Affairs to amend the Act concerning the election of representatives of the European Parliament by direct universal suffrage to make it a condition, in order to stand for election to the European Parliament, not to have any criminal convictions, including those that have not become final.

The Chair of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs in the last Parliament, Mr Leinen, undertook to do this, but everything was left to his successor, Mr Casini, who has already stated that the Committee on Constitutional Affairs will not pursue it.

We would point out that not only is this the responsibility of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, but that Article 223 (formerly 190) of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union actually stipulates that the European Parliament should implement a uniform electoral procedure throughout the European Union.

Catherine Grèze (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Madam President, Hondarribia airport is classed by the civil aviation authority as one of the most dangerous in the country. Its runways are located above the town centres of Hendaye and Irún, and the Franco-Spanish Treaty stipulating the number of authorised flights is being flouted. Yet the airport's extension is being planned against the advice of the riverside residents and of the elected representatives on both sides of the border, who are already against maintaining the current level of traffic.

Does the European Commission approve of the destruction of the protected nature areas of the Bay of Chingoudy, the site of the Ramsar Convention and a Natura 2000 site, the regeneration of which it itself financed?

Moreover, the Basque Eurocity of Bayonne-San Sebastián already has an underused international airport, which is far away from any vulnerable nature areas. Would it not be better to improve the services provided in Biarritz by introducing non-polluting forms of transport? I should like to know which measures the President is going to take with regard to this extension.

Marek Henryk Migalski (ECR). – (PL) Madam President, I would like to raise the problem of the murder of the Russian journalist Maxim Zuev. Mr Zuev was killed about a week ago in Kaliningrad. He was a well-known journalist and blogger. This is not the first case of a journalist being killed in Russia. Since the year 2000, there have been at least a dozen such cases. This is a disturbing phenomenon, because we know that if there is no freedom of speech, and if journalists are not able to work, there is no freedom at all, and there is no democracy. In our dialogue with Russia, we should always draw attention to this.

I hope to organise a seminar in the European Parliament this year, provided I obtain the consent of my delegation for Russian affairs and the Committee on Foreign Affairs. I think every one of us, in talks at various levels with our Russian partners, should emphasise that freedom of the media and freedom for journalists to do their work is the foundation for dialogue and freedom both in Russia and in the European Union.

Nikolaos Chountis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Madam President, I should like to report to you on the fact that recent articles state that US public prosecutors have filed charges against the German company Daimler for bribery of foreign officers in a bid to win and sign government contracts. The bill of indictment states that the company has been involved in a long-term bribery process. The same issue arose with Siemens, which applied the same practice and corrupted the governments of thirty countries in a bid to win contracts from public corporations, a scandal which is still rocking Greece.

As a result, apart from the financial crisis, we also have a moral crisis. Until recently, the German Government did not prosecute bribery outside its borders and pretended that it knew nothing of these events. Finally, instead of acting, instead of activating the Fraud Prevention Committee, the European Commission does not defend the legality and, in numerous cases, does not safeguard European citizens' money.

Nikolaos Salavrakos (EFD). – (EL) Madam President, I must announce to the European Parliament that, at 02.15 this morning, the Turkish corvette Bafra violated Greek territorial waters, coming within just 18 miles of the Athens coast, and even asked to board and search a Greek merchant vessel sailing alongside.

This proves that everything said in the first part of the debate about Greece's so-called economic problem is not wholly accurate. Greece's problem is mainly political. It comes from the fact that this neighbouring country is threatening Greece with a *casus belli* and is systematically provoking the Greek armed forces, not only with violations of its waters, but also of its airspace.

(The President noted that there was a problem with the microphone)

... I must tell you that Greece has taken strict measures which, in the final analysis, are literally throttling Greek households and Greeks are now at the end of their tether. It has worn down the resistance of Greek society and the economic strength of the Greeks.

As I said, its problem is mainly political. We are not asking for money from any European citizens. We are asking for the support of the European Union as an entity, so that we can overcome these irregularities in the markets which are attacking the euro.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Madam President, around ten years ago, the then 14 other EU Member States imposed their so-called ‘sanctions’ on my country, Austria. For seven months, there was an ‘ice age’. Austrian ministers were no longer permitted to take part in informal Council meetings, but Austria was still allowed to continue to pay fees as a net contributor. Apart from sanctions, there was also a result. The independent report from the Wise Men clearly established that the Freedom Party’s involvement in the government did not pose any danger to democracy and human rights. The conclusion was that the EU sanctions that were disguised as bilateral measures had no valid legal basis. They were an unwarranted encroachment on Austrian sovereignty. I do believe, however, that the EU learnt from this to have respect for the political opinion of others and for the national sovereignty of the Member States and their citizens, and that is certainly a good thing. Moreover, in view of the peace in the east, I also hope that one of the main investigators, the current MEP, Louis Michel, will feel that, after ten years, he can once again go to Austria on holiday.

Véronique Mathieu (PPE). – (FR) Madam President, yesterday, France paid tribute to one of its police officers, Jean-Serge Nérin, a French brigade leader who was killed in the most cowardly way by ETA on 16 March, during a shoot-out in the Paris region.

Although responsible for the deaths of almost 830 people in 40 years, this is the first time that this terrorist organisation has attacked a French police officer. Mr Nérin’s death reminds us of our duty to cooperate in the fight against terrorism.

Very early on, Franco-Spanish cooperation proved to be a model of its kind within the European Union. France and Spain were the first Member States to introduce joint investigation teams within the European judicial area. Implementing European arrest warrants also proved very effective.

Unfortunately, these cooperative efforts between our police officers and our judges were unable to prevent Mr Nérin from being killed. We shall therefore have to increase our cooperation if we are to combat terrorism more effectively.

Joe Higgins (GUE/NGL). – Madam President, a major campaign of people power in Val di Susa in north-west Italy seeks to stop a high-speed train project known as TAV being built.

Stretching from the French border to Turin, the very beautiful Val di Susa is only one to two kilometres in width but already has a major motorway, another main road and a railway line.

The ‘NO TAV’ campaign has clearly shown that there is no justification for TAV. Only 38% of current rail capacity is used. It would be massively damaging to the environment, destroying or polluting aquifers and releasing dangerous concentrations of asbestos and uranium from tunnel excavations.

Only big business and major construction interests stand to gain. Tens of thousands of people have mobilised in opposition and, scandalously, police violence is being used to intimidate the campaign.

I call on the EU to withdraw all funding for TAV and for the cancellation of TAV. The ‘NO TAV’ campaign’s motto is ‘Sarà dura’. They will not flinch. A victory for people power in Val di Susa would be a victory for common sense and for the environment.

Paul Nuttall (EFD). – Madam President, I am increasingly concerned about the way local councils in my constituency in the North West of England are using car parking charges to top up their revenue.

Take the small town of Congleton, for example, which is a local semi-rural community. The introduction of car parking charges will severely damage local industry and a fall-off in trade will result in a loss of revenue, forcing already hard-pressed SMEs into bankruptcy and possible closure.

People are blaming the British Government, some blame the Unitary Council and others point the finger at the town council but, as always, the dark hand of the European Union lies in the background, for they are all working towards the framework set out in the EU’s European transport policy for 2010.

You see, this is the genius of the EU: it is always one person removed. Whether it is post office closures or fortnightly bin collections, the finger always gets pointed elsewhere and the corruptive influence of Brussels does not appear on the radar.

Nicole Sinclaire (NI). – Madam President, I come from the West Midlands, and 20% of the West Midlands is classified as green belt.

The green belt has successfully protected the beauty of our countryside and blocked arbitrary urban sprawl. However, encouraged by the European Union, the UK Government has increased house building, endangering the green belt, which is particularly close to my heart because it is near to where I live on the Meriden Gap.

This shows a lack of respect for our culture and traditions, but what do you care? Since the UK joined the European Union – or the European common market, before that – you have blatantly disrespected our culture and traditions, and there is nothing less to be expected of you.

Elena Oana Antonescu (PPE). – (RO) I am standing up to speak today before you and my fellow Members in order to express my view that Europe needs a new, much better integrated strategy for resolving the problem of violence against women.

This issue has been dealt with in an ever-increasing number of European states on a bipartisan basis by parties which have a very different view of society in general. The reason for this suggestion is that the problem of domestic violence extends beyond the area of ideology and is a direct and immediate part of the human and political vision of a more just and balanced society.

I wish to emphasise the need for action to prevent psychological violence as well against women. Recent studies have shown that this kind of violence always precedes acts of physical violence.

I welcome the fact that the Spanish Presidency has taken up the battle against the various types of violence against women by means of the European Union's political priorities. However, these measures must continue. Setting up a European inter-gender violence monitoring centre and introducing protection orders and an emergency telephone number are intended to restrict the occurrence of this phenomenon in the European Union, while providing support in the battle against violence outside the EU as well.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D). – (LT) I am delighted that the European Union and the Member States have made a commitment to combating poverty by declaring 2010 the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, since almost 80 million of Europe's inhabitants are living below the poverty line. Many Europeans, even those in employment, are struggling with poverty every day and do not have opportunities to enjoy a decent life. EUR 17 million has been earmarked to implement Europe's planned action in 2010 and this budget will be used to organise information seminars, work groups and public consultations in order to overcome poverty stereotypes. This is an excellent initiative, but how do we ensure that these funds will be used effectively and transparently and will directly reach those citizens who need that aid most. I would like to stress that it is impossible to curb rising poverty in a year. Therefore, I would like to call on EU structures and Member States to take concrete action and make long-term commitments at all levels of authority to ensure the transparent and targeted allocation of funds intended to directly help people experiencing poverty.

Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL). – (EL) The decision by the Israeli Government to push ahead with its plan to build 1 600 new homes in East Jerusalem, to extend the settlement on the West Bank, to maintain the isolation of the Gaza Strip, and to generally step up the attacks by the Israeli army in the occupied Palestinian territories reveals to even the most ardent disbeliever the criminal plans of Israel and of the imperialists in general against the Palestinian people and the people in the area as a whole.

Israel is unleashing a new round of murderous attacks against the Palestinian people and has secured the support of and upgraded its relations with the European Union, the USA and NATO under conditions of escalating infighting between the imperialist Quartet. This support was repeated with particular emphasis and zeal by the United States of America during the recent visit by the Israeli Prime Minister to the United States, which stressed that Israel is something more than a top priority for US geostrategic imperialist plans in the area as a whole.

We are fighting with all the workers to create ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) After the Second World War and the redrawing of boundaries, about 400 000 Slovaks remained in Hungary and a similar number of Hungarians in Slovakia.

The Hungarian minority in Slovakia still exists in the same numbers today, but in Hungary, the situation is different. The Slovak minority has been decimated from the original 400 000 Slovaks to less than 33 000, in other words, not even one tenth of the original number. This is because the Slovak Government provides

the Hungarian minority with education in the mother tongue at more than 700 schools, while the Hungarian Government allows the Slovaks in Hungary just one single elementary school.

That is why the recent criticism concerning the education of Hungarian minorities in neighbouring countries by President Sólyom, a man who looks on complacently and passively while his administration stifles the ethnic minorities in his own country, can only be described as an obnoxious, hypocritical and malicious provocation of the Serbs, Romanians and Slovaks who, in contrast to the Hungarians, genuinely look after the ethnic minorities on their own territories. After all, the Hungarian ombudsman for ethnic minorities also warns that Hungary is continuing to work towards the total assimilation of ethnic minorities.

Rareş-Lucian Niculescu (PPE). – (RO) The European Union has extremely stringent food safety regulations and producers are obliged to invest huge sums of money in order to comply with these regulations.

Nevertheless, more than 75% of all chickens slaughtered in the European Union are contaminated with bacteria, according to a recent study carried out by the European Food Safety Authority.

Salmonella and *Campylobacter*, two of the most toxic bacteria, are present in the carcasses of three quarters of chickens reared on European farms.

Once studies of this nature get into the mass media, they naturally raise concerns among consumers. Against this backdrop, we must ask ourselves two questions. Firstly, what can we continue to do to ensure that Europeans have access to safe, good quality food? Secondly, is it possible that the rules which are currently in force, although they are stringent and, incidentally, extremely bureaucratic, are not the most suitable?

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (S&D). – (HU) The new Member States are now implementing the 2007 European Union wine market organisation. In the process, the European Commission acted in contravention of the law – too bad there is no one here – when it unlawfully registered the Tokaj label, upon Slovakia's request, both as a Protected Designation of Origin and as having Protected Geographical Indication. This is contrary to EU regulations because this wine can belong to either one category or the other. The Slovak request is now no longer in the Community's E-Bacchus database among the protected designations of origin. The Commission has thus put an end to this illegal situation, and I thank them for it. There is, however, another irregular situation, because the Slovak national law on which the registration is based does not exist, since Slovakia has repealed it. For this reason, I ask the Commission to remedy this irregular situation.

Zbigniew Ziobro (ECR). – (PL) Madam President, the European External Action Service is going to be the diplomatic corps which represents the Union and assists the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs. In the work of this service, consideration must be given to the cultural and national differentiation which exists within the Union. Every country must have the feeling that its own interests, its own culture and its own experience are being properly represented in the service.

For this objective to be achieved, what is needed is sharing, or participation, on an equal basis. Meanwhile, how is the corps of the European External Action Service being created? It is to be composed of staff from the appropriate services of the General Secretariat of the Council and the Commission, as well as personnel delegated by national diplomatic services. Diplomats put forward by the Member States are to make up only one third of the whole corps. However, irrespective of the background of the staff and their route into the service, the principle of proportional representation of all the citizens of the Member States should be adopted. After all, staffing in all the Union's institutions is managed according to this principle. I see no reason for things to be done differently in this case.

Nuno Teixeira (PPE). – (PT) Recently, the European Union concluded an agreement with the countries of Latin America under the auspices of the World Trade Organisation in which it committed itself to substantially and progressively reducing the tariffs on imports of bananas from those countries. I would like to call your attention to the fact that this agreement has directly negative effects on European banana producers, particularly those in Madeira, Portugal. It will be even more detrimental to banana producers on the Canary Islands, Spain.

I would remind you that the situation of producers in these regions is already seriously hampered by the physical characteristics and mountainous terrain of the islands and by the size of their holdings, which mean that they face permanent difficulties that impede their development.

Urgent measures therefore need to be taken to help banana producers from Madeira and the Canary Islands, in view of the serious and immediate impact that the new Geneva Agreement will have on the European

import market and, as a result, on the production and commercialisation of bananas that come from these outermost regions.

Nessa Childers (S&D). – Madam President, it has now been over a year since the aircraft maintenance firm SR Technics announced that they were closing their facility at Dublin airport, with the loss of over a thousand jobs. In an effort to compensate for those losses, an application was submitted in October 2009 to the European Globalisation Fund (EGF) on behalf of SR Technics workers. However, this form was rejected as ‘incomplete’ by the Commission and I can confirm that, almost five months later, the Irish Government has still not submitted a complete application.

While the Irish Government has been distracted by an economic collapse of its own making and a spate of ministerial resignations in the last few months, an application form with the potential to transform hundreds of lives has been left sitting on a minister’s desk.

This House is aware that the Irish state coffers are bare. A cynic would be forgiven for thinking that the government’s inaction may be down to its own difficulty in meeting its end of the bargain if the EGF payments are finally secured. Would the Irish Government be prepared to do something about that?

Artur Zasada (PPE). – (PL) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to address you all and, in particular, Mr Potočník, on a matter which is troubling people who are involved in speedway, a sport popular in many EU Member States. The matter concerns implementation of Directive 2002/49/EC relating to the assessment and management of environmental noise.

Implementation of this directive means that riders are being forced to fit new silencers to their bikes. These silencers mean, on the one hand, a reduction in attractiveness of the spectacle itself, because the noise is an inherent feature of the sport. On the other hand, the silencers mean greater danger, danger for the riders themselves, the danger of damaging their health or losing their life. In connection with this, I would very much like to ask Mr Potočník to consider putting forward a proposal for an amendment to exempt speedway from Directive 2002/49/EC.

László Tőkés (PPE). – (HU) Madam President, in the province of Vojvodina in Slobodan Milošević’s country, Serbia, Hungarians continue to be assaulted. The perpetrators are either acquitted or sometimes charges are not even brought against them. Decades ago, there were some 400 000 Hungarians living in Vojvodina, making up one third of the population. Compulsory emigration and massive settlement of members of the majority have reduced their numbers to 290 000 over the years, and their proportion of the population has dropped to 13%. The method by which mass assaults on minorities are carried out was introduced by the famous Serbian secret service, the UDBA, aimed at ethnic Albanians in particular. The spontaneous legacy of this practice continues today against Hungarians. Madam President, the European Parliament should take decisive action to stop the anti-Hungarian terrorism in Serbia. A condition for the latter’s accession to the European Union should be to do justice to the many tens of thousands of victims of mass murders since the Second World War, as well as a ban on the violence against Hungarians that continues to this day.

Joanna Senyszyn (S&D). – (PL) Madam President, women are under-represented in science and scientific research. In Europe, they account for 30% of researchers and only 18% of professors. Among those involved in the management of science, we account for 27%. Poland, where the share of female board members in institutions of higher education and scientific institutes is 7%, is in second-to-last place among the 27 Member States of the Union.

This is why the ‘Women in Science’ research project, prepared by the Polish-based Academic Enterprise Foundation, is so important. The project concerns research into the causes of discrimination and the search for effective anti-discrimination measures. Citizens’ projects, which come from citizens themselves and are directed at citizens, have the greatest chance of success. I appeal to the European Commission for special support and practical help for social organisations which take up such matters. When the citizens of the Union write to the Commission, their letters must not go unanswered.

Jim Higgins (PPE). – (GA) Madam President, as I was saying, I was very pleased when I heard former Commissioner Kuneva state that a review of Council Directive 90/314/EEC is needed. And why is that? Because it has many faults.

It does not take into account people who are booking their holidays themselves on the Internet without using a travel agency. The directive does not give any protection to consumers who are based in one country and who purchase a product or flight or accommodation in a country outside the European Union.

As well as that, the directive does not mention scheduled flights. It has many faults and I am extremely pleased to say that former Commissioner Kuneva was correct when she said that there is a real need for a new directive.

Ioan Mircea Pașcu (S&D). – Madam President, 20 years ago, the Romanians were dying for freedom, including in education, which, until then, was subject to tight political control. As a result of their sacrifice, universities have gained their freedom too, which they have enjoyed ever since.

It would therefore be sadly ironic if the current attempt by the Romanian Ministry of Education to speedily pass new legislation which practically eliminates that freedom and opens the door to the repoliticisation of the system were successful.

For instance, in the draft, the rectors elected would have to be confirmed by the Minister, who is himself a political appointee, and universities would be forced to merge on arbitrary criteria, or could even be closed and their assets repossessed.

As a professor myself, and as an MEP, I consider it my duty to my fellow professors in this House to expose such intended undemocratic practices that are openly opposed to the Lisbon Strategy on education and cannot be tolerated in an EU Member State.

President. – That concludes this item.

Thank you all for your understanding and for the disciplined proceedings. I hope that all of those who did not have an opportunity to speak this time will get the chance to do so next time.

16. Priorities for the 2011 budget – Section III – Commission - Budget guidelines: 2011 - other sections (debate)

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

– the report (A7-0033/2010) by Mrs Jędrzejewska, on behalf of the Committee on Budgets, on priorities for the 2011 budget – Section III – Commission (2010/2004(BUD)) and

– the report (A7-0036/2010) by Mrs Trüpel, on behalf of the Committee on Budgets, on the guidelines for the 2011 budget procedure, Section I – European Parliament, Section II – Council, Section IV – Court of Justice, Section V – Court of Auditors, Section VI – European Economic and Social Committee, Section VII – Committee of the Regions, Section VIII – European Ombudsman, Section IX – European Data Protection Supervisor (2010/2003(BUD))

Sidonia Elżbieta Jędrzejewska, rapporteur. – (PL) Madam President, the budget procedure for 2011 is a highly specific and exceptional one because it concerns the first budgetary year which will begin and be approved in accordance with the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon. It might be said we are pioneers in this exercise, which is why, of course, a particular responsibility rests upon us. The Treaty of Lisbon gives Parliament additional powers in the area of the budget. It is up to us as to how we use those powers, and we are counting on a constructive dialogue both with the European Commission and with the Council, so that the new possibilities provided for by the Treaty of Lisbon can be used in the best and most effective way.

A very significant new feature introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon is that we will not now have two readings of the budget. This means that both Parliament and the Council will only have single readings. This, of course, poses a particular challenge – that of discipline. As Parliament, we have to be disciplined, because we are going to have – to put it simply – only one chance. There will not be a repeat – a second chance. We have to establish very many things at the conciliation meeting. For the new budgetary procedure to proceed efficiently in the autumn, we must work together and be disciplined.

This year is also exceptional, because in view of the late election of the European Commission, the Commission has not had the opportunity to present its annual policy strategy. It is, therefore, both highly exceptional and interesting that it is the European Parliament which is expressing its thoughts first, and that the first opinions on the budget for 2011 come from the European Parliament in the form of this report, and not from the European Commission, as was the case in every 'ordinary' year.

Why else is 2011 so special? The budget for 2011 is the fifth budget in the Multiannual Financial Framework. As you know, the Multiannual Financial Framework covers the years 2007-2013. We have already learned a great deal during the four previous budget procedures. In Polish, we say we have reached the wall. In English,

they say they have reached the ceiling. However we say it, we are in a situation where the Multiannual Financial Framework is becoming exhausted. We are, in fact, reaching the wall, the moment when the margins are very small and Parliament's room for manoeuvre, of any kind, is radically reduced. The margins are very small. Particularly worrying are the margins in Heading 1b – around EUR 1 million, and in Heading 3b – around EUR 9 million. For this reason, of course, our options are limited, and this is why the report of the Committee on Budgets which I have drafted so strongly demands, expects and requests an ambitious review and revision of the Multiannual Financial Framework, not just because those margins are coming to an end, but also because when the revision is carried out, it will be necessary to take into account the significant budgetary consequences of the Treaty of Lisbon.

The Treaty of Lisbon gives new powers to the European Union in areas such as space policy. What is significant is that it also establishes the European External Action Service. Reflection on the budget is also essential, and on how we intend to realise the EU 2020 strategy. None of these undertakings was provided for in the Multiannual Financial Framework. We must, now, begin a discussion about how to finance these new plans and ambitions.

I would very much like – and the report of the Committee on Budgets carries this message – the guiding principle of the budget for 2011 to be youth. Young people are already the driving force and future of Europe. Education and investment in youth is also an investment in the present and the future of Europe, society and the economy. I would like to stress how important a moment in everyone's life is the transition from the environment of school, academic learning and education to the first job. This is a very difficult moment, especially during a crisis. I would like to mention some statistics: 21 people between the ages of 15 to 24 are unemployed. It is very important that the European Union should not be indifferent to this difficult aspect, either, and that we work together so that the difficult moment of transition from education to the labour market will be made easier for young people.

I would like to emphasise that in an era of rapidly advancing technological change, and also of demographic change, we must create a society based on knowledge, with citizens who are able to change their qualifications during their life and professional career, who are given the possibility to make such a change and who also receive the support of the European Union in this process. The support of the European Union should include programmes of international exchange at an academic level, as well as for practical experience and training, and also at professional level. This will, at the same time, increase the level of social integration and the flow of knowledge, and will make it possible for the citizens of the European Union to be truly mobile. Mobility, as you know, is, quite rightly, a fundamental freedom guaranteed by the treaties and a foundation of an efficient internal market.

I will now switch to English because I am now going to be replacing Mrs Helga Trüpel. So I am now playing a different role, not only concerning the European Commission's budget, but now the other institutions and the Parliament's budget. I have prepared to speak in English which accounts for the change of language.

At this stage of the procedure, the purpose of the resolution is to paint a general picture – in a budgetary context in particular – and to issue some guidelines for the administrative budgets of different institutions, including the European Parliament and excluding the Commission, about which I spoke earlier.

The general context is that the circumstances under which the budget for 2011 will be adopted are very challenging because the margin under heading 5 is very limited and because the successful implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon is the priority for all the European institutions. The entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty changes the procedure for the adoption of the budget and therefore requires even closer cooperation and dialogue among the institutions. Interinstitutional cooperation covers several aspects – such as translation capacities and recruitment – and exchanging best practices and improving effectiveness could be achieved for areas that have so far not been considered in this context, such as EMAS, non-discrimination policies and teleworking.

The development of a medium- and long-term building strategy has been a concern of the Committee on Budgets for a long time, not only as regards the Parliament, but also regarding the other institutions. Uncertainties as to the size and the shape of the budget for the External Service and the Court decision on pay adaptation make the financial situation in heading 5 even more unpredictable.

Turning specifically to the European Parliament's budget, the Bureau's guideline document contained the following objectives for Parliament's budget: developing expertise to Members, as far as research capacities and library briefings are concerned, and adapting institutional aspects deriving from the Lisbon Treaty. Therefore, the committee emphasises legislative excellence, which is a top priority.

IN THE CHAIR: MR McMILLAN-SCOTT*Vice-President*

Janusz Lewandowski, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I am in a listening mood this evening. I am listening to Parliament's priorities for 2011, just as I was listening to the guidelines the Council accepted on 16 March. I can agree with the major points and I can agree that this is not the routine annual procedure for two reasons mentioned by Parliament's rapporteur.

The first is that we are adjusting to the post-Lisbon Treaty environment. We have partly adjusted, but some work remains to be done. Good cooperation between the institutions is needed more than ever, because of a single reading in Parliament.

What has been already agreed are some transitional period arrangements agreed at the November conciliation. A pragmatic timetable permitting predictability in the budget has been in place since 1975 and has also been confirmed. What remains are the modalities in the Conciliation Committee. This is essential now, given there is a single reading of the annual budget. Therefore, tomorrow, in the course of a triologue, the Commission is going to present the modalities for discussion and how we can agree the conciliation technicalities before starting the real procedure for 2011.

The second reason for the annual procedure not being routine is that we are in a post-crisis Europe where many Member States are struggling with budgetary deficits and indebtedness, and many with even more challenging problems. Therefore, more than ever, we should attach importance to sound financial management, to accurate forecasting and the rational implementation of a budget.

The budget headings which appear to be under-financed are easy to detect. Here I am referring to heading 1a and heading 4. It is due to this spirit of cooperation that we are able to modify the financial perspective four times in the course of a procedure, i.e. four annual procedures.

Our conclusions should be presented in the framework of a report on the functioning of the interinstitutional agreement which will be issued on the same date as the draft budget, 27 April, and sent to Parliament.

Our rapporteur, not my rapporteur this time, but the parliamentary rapporteur, Sidonia Jędrzejewska, (my services are now being trained on how to pronounce the rapporteur's name properly) rightly places youth and the opportunities for youth at the centre of her report. In other words, the report on priorities is clearly upgrading heading 3. This concerns education and the place of youth on the labour market and is justified in this respect when we see the numbers of unemployed.

But it is equally important that we should deliver promises of a recovery plan. That is also what is important for the citizens of Europe.

What is important is implementation. That should be at cruising speed by 2011. Efficiency in administration is also important and in this respect, I have to underline that the Commission, despite the adjustment to the Lisbon Treaty, will not request any new posts this year.

We are to adopt the draft budget in the college on 27 April and, as is the custom, present it immediately on the same day to the members of the Committee on Budgets in Parliament.

Therefore, I am looking forward now to starting the procedure for 2011. I am promising a good spirit of cooperation, which will really be needed this time, given the prototype procedures to be tested this year.

Thijs Berman, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on Development*. – (NL) Mr President, Mr Lewandowski, in the economic crisis, the EU budget, too, inevitably comes under pressure; this is only natural. Brussels, too, must watch how it spends every public euro. Nevertheless – and I am speaking here on behalf of the Committee on Development – investment in developing countries must remain a priority. Sustainable growth in poor countries will afford people opportunities they do not currently have. Not only that, but their development forms part of the solution to our crisis. Developing countries are a market, and a fast-growing one at that. Europe will just have to spend its funds more shrewdly, for example, using a combination of subsidies and loans for micro-finance support. Better access to financial services in poor countries will enable people in those countries, too, to achieve their ambitions. We must protect the development cooperation budget, however hard that may be. European Commissioner for Development, Andris Piebalgs, must continue to bear responsibility for his own budget, rather than High Representative Ashton doing so, as currently seems to be the intention. After all, choices relating to poverty reduction must never be dependent on our diplomatic interests.

José Manuel Fernandes, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (PT) I welcome the fact that we can deem the 2011 budget the 'youth' budget. As such, it contributes to the adoption of the proposals that we submitted to help young people, for example, in access to employment, as is also the case with the so-called Erasmus first job initiative. Promoting entrepreneurship among young people, providing incentives and strengthening innovation and the digital agenda are other proposals that will contribute to sustainable economic development in Europe, and will result in the creation of new jobs.

With regard to Parliament's budget, it is worth noting that the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) supports a budget that is both sustainable and rigorous, in which every expenditure item is justified. We believe and recommend that Parliament should abandon a budgetary model that is purely incremental. Instead, it should move towards a zero-based budget, which makes efficiency, and therefore savings, possible. A long-term building policy needs to be set out as a matter of urgency in order to make this concept of sustainability, rigour and efficiency a reality.

We still need to find out more and more thoroughly about what our fixed expenditure is. This must still be followed by a cost-benefit analysis of the various policies implemented. We would stress once again that excellence in lawmaking should be Parliament's main priority, and that our institution must have at its disposal all the resources necessary for this to be achieved. The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, which requires a single reading of the budget, will call for greater cooperation and more dialogue. For our part, this dialogue must be honest. We are committed to seeing that it is.

Francesca Balzani, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the 2011 budget guidelines are the first step towards the next European budget, a very definite step.

In the Committee on Budgets, we have made a great effort to establish the main identifiable priorities that highlight European action. The first priority is young people, not only because they are the resource on which to focus for innovation, research and development, but also because they are the basic starting point for farsighted social policies.

However, the 2020 strategy is also a main priority: tackling unemployment, climate change and, above all, the need to genuinely and practically implement this new strategy for the future, allocating sufficient resources to it, without compromises and without cuts.

However, these guidelines are also a very realistic first step. There is much less leeway in the financial perspective and this means that there are insufficient resources to carry out what is most important: new actions. This is particularly sensitive with regard to the first heading, the heading on competitiveness, growth and employment.

There is, however, another important issue: the budget also needs to be highly flexible and to be able to respond quickly to citizens' needs, to people's needs and to changing needs. So there are priorities, but there are also essential conditions in order for the budget to really be a useful instrument to help Europe grow.

These include sufficient resources, clear-cut implementation of future strategies, above all, the 2020 strategy, and lastly a definitive solution for a flexible instrument that – alone – can enable us to face future challenges.

Ivars Godmanis, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, I would like to stress three points.

Firstly, concerning the Structural Funds – approximately 35% of the budget. We are doing only half as well as we did in 2000-2006. The current absorption rate in all funds is 14% and it was 25% before. So the question is how to take into account, how to deliver, how to fulfil this part of the budget. Otherwise, we will have a situation where the money is not used. On the other hand, it could be a reserve.

Secondly, we have to reimburse some claims from the earlier period and the Commission has planned five billion to provide this. However, in some countries which have not claimed more than six months' reimbursement, I do not think that all the money will be asked for. There is also the question of whether this money will be used or not.

I also have to say something about two very serious matters regarding roll-over budgets which go from year to year. In the agriculture budget in 2009, payments were EUR 2 billion less for rural development than in 2008. Now much more money is due to be paid out but the question is whether all projects will be fulfilled in 2010 or not.

Lastly, regarding the Seventh Framework Programme. If we look at heading 1a concerning the Seventh Programme for R&D, payments in 2009 were significantly smaller than in 2008. So the question is whether delivery will be satisfactory. Then we can plan the budget according to the situation. We have so many needs in other areas as well. So are those reserves or not?

Zbigniew Ziobro, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) Mr President, the motion for a European Parliament resolution on priorities for the 2011 budget contains a paragraph which reminds us that the financing of priorities must not be detrimental to fundamental areas of European Union policy, such as cohesion or structural policies or the common agricultural policy. That paragraph has the nature of a stipulation which would appear to be necessary, in view of the previously defined budget priorities. Indeed, those priorities leave much to be desired.

The panacea for the disease of the crisis which is eating away at Europe is supposed to be, first and foremost, innovation. However, the motion overlooks the fact that the poorest regions of the Union often do not have at their disposal the conditions for the development of innovation. There are countries where the foundations of a modern economy are, as a matter of fact, only just appearing. If Europe is to be a continent of equal opportunities, the answer to this state of affairs is, principally, cohesion policy and structural policy. Especially during a crisis, we should remember this aspect of EU policy, particularly the solidarity aspect, so as not to perpetuate the division of the continent into poor and rich parts.

Miguel Portas, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (PT) Today we are beginning the debate on the broad guidelines for the 2011 budget, and the suggested priority is youth. This prioritisation is particularly important at the moment or during the period of life that marks the transition between studies and the labour market. In itself, this choice of priority is something to be welcomed.

One proposal, for example, is the creation of an Erasmus first job programme. The problem is that in politics, the devil is in the detail. What are we talking about when we talk about an 'Erasmus first job'? How are we to implement it? By diverting Erasmus funds to students, or by creating a new programme with fresh money? This is not a mere detail, and neither is the matter of whether Erasmus is aimed at insecure jobs, or rather at decent jobs that will represent a real future for young people. Is it, ultimately, a programme that will combat youth unemployment, as it is intended to do? Or will it end up being a programme that is simply aimed at covering up unemployment? I believe that these questions go to the very heart of the debate. The most pertinent issue in 2011 will still be the unemployment that is rampant in the EU. It is our responsibility to tackle unemployment.

This should provide a challenge for the European budget, but the 2011 budget is being held hostage by a financial framework which has been agreed for seven years, and which has not been altered, despite the crisis. Without a thorough and rigorous review of this financial framework, the budget that we are set to approve at the end of the year will be condemned to stagnation and mediocrity even if we adopt the best priorities in the world. They will not go beyond mere intentions and will only have a minor bearing on the structure of the budget.

Marta Andreasen, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – Mr President, the proposed 6.5% increase on the Parliament budget for 2011 is yet another indication of how far this House has departed from the real world and the interests of its voters.

How can we explain to our constituents in normal times, let alone in times of crisis, that the total cost they are paying for each one of us exceeds GBP 2 million per year? How can we tell them that if they want a high-level parliament – which some take pride in – this is the bill they have to pay? How do we explain to all those who are losing their jobs that we, the MEPs, need more staff because of the Lisbon Treaty? Or that the officeholders in this Parliament need an increase in their allowances because they work harder?

The 15% of youth who are unemployed in the UK, or worse, the 45% of youth who are unemployed in Spain, will not be able to see how this increase will help them get a job. Many of them are fairly well educated. They only lack job opportunities. I, frankly, would not be able to respond if they asked this question.

Can somebody explain to my voters how the fact that this Parliament has two seats, one in Brussels and one in Strasbourg, will help them pay the mortgage, feed their children and educate them, because this is a big part of the GBP 2 million cost that I spoke about before.

As regards the Commission, it is all very nice to talk about noble objectives such as investing in youth and education, promoting the study of languages and fostering innovation for economic development and job

creation in Europe, but the Auditors' report gives no comfort on how European Union funds are being spent, nor do the outstanding commitments show the EU is very good at planning.

No proposal for an increase in the budget should be tolerated ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Angelika Werthmann (NI). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the priorities for the European Union's 2011 budget revolve around the economic and financial crisis. Associated with this are the positive joint efforts to implement an exit strategy that is as comprehensive and socially just as possible.

I would like to concentrate on two aspects. Firstly, a central element of the 2011 budget is the focus on young people. They will certainly play a key role in Europe's future. Investment in youth means thinking today about the Europe of tomorrow.

Secondly, the current situation demonstrates very clearly how quickly jobs can be destroyed, even in a strong economic area. The 2020 strategy also focuses on innovation. The hopes that are legitimately associated with this will create new jobs and alleviate the social difficulties.

László Surján (PPE). – (HU) Fellow Members, we all know that the European Union's budget needs serious reforms. We also know, however, that these reforms cannot be put through within the framework of a one-year budget. What is our problem? Our big problem is that this is an extremely inflexible budget. We cannot rise adequately to the daily challenges, or even to the annual challenges except with difficulty. And there is, of course, little room for manoeuvre, the options are limited. The rapporteur has produced a balanced proposal. She has taken into account the realities of the situation and formulated sound targets. I hope that Parliament will follow and support the text and proposal before us.

It is a particularly good thing for us to turn towards young people, for otherwise young people will turn away from us, away from the concept of Europe. I would like to speak for a few more minutes about the cohesion policy. The cohesion policy is not a form of do-goodism. True, there are enormous gaps between the developed and the underdeveloped regions. We seek to eliminate these differences, or at least to shrink them. But when we raise a region up, it is the competitiveness of all of Europe that is increased, and we grow stronger and better in the face of global competition, assuming, of course, that the Member States take advantage of the opportunities, the money does not remain unused and moreover, the money spent brings results. Otherwise, there is no greater waste. The waste is even greater than that caused by the fact of there being two seats, if programmes are run that do not produce the necessary results. I hope that there will be progress in this regard. The Committee on Budgets is very keen to see that we get value for our money. Thank you for your respectful attention.

Derek Vaughan (S&D). – Mr President, I welcome this report on Parliament's budget guidelines and I welcome the discussion on what our priorities are to ensure that Parliament can do its job.

The initial report was perhaps understandably vague and general. However, the amendments at committee stage ensured we are now clear on what is important. The Committee on Budgets tried to balance the need to recognise our responsibilities following Lisbon with the need to keep increased spending as low as possible and that is particularly important with margins and public finances being so tight. I am sure all Members will take that point on board.

That is why deciding our priorities in these guidelines is crucial and, of course, it is not just about spending money. It is also about looking for savings and it is about spending the money in the best possible way.

Therefore, I am pleased that, for example, the need for an integrated knowledge management system that would bring together all the different sources of information for Members and citizens is widely accepted.

The analysis of Europarl TV, to see if it is effective or not, is also welcome. An evaluation of a secretarial allowance and the global cost of employing more staff, including accommodation, I believe is also vital, as is a medium- and long-term building strategy for the Parliament and other institutions which perhaps we should be working with much more closely than we are already.

And, of course, there is always the difficult issue of the 20% threshold agreed so many years ago. I and the Committee on Budgets believe that any changes to that 20% should be the subject of a discussion between the Committee on Budgets and the Bureau and eventually between all the different institutions. It should not be a unilateral decision.

The S&D Group have tabled a few more amendments to be voted upon tomorrow which we believe will improve the guidelines even further. One amendment points out the difficulty of putting all administrative expenditure under heading 5; another amendment calls for the early publication of the guidelines and estimates to ensure we can make our decisions in a proper and timely way. I hope tomorrow, colleagues will support these and other amendments which are aimed at improving the guidelines.

I would also hope that colleagues would recognise that, following the agreement of these guidelines, we will have to undertake difficult discussions on the estimates recently published by the Secretary-General. Only then will we begin to talk about our priorities and only then will we have the proper discussion to achieve the balance between functioning as a Parliament and keeping our expenditure as low as possible.

Carl Haglund (ALDE). – (SV) Mr President, in hard economic times such as these, budgetary issues are difficult and sensitive. The guidelines for the 2011 budget also include the European Parliament's own budget. The expenditure in heading 5 has traditionally been apportioned in such a way as to give Parliament a share of less than 20%.

As a consequence of the Treaty of Lisbon, people are now saying that Parliament should devour a greater proportion of the money. A review of the increased need for resources that Parliament's new powers may give rise to is certainly justified, and we have already received more money for 2010 precisely as a result of the Treaty of Lisbon.

At the same time, the Treaty of Lisbon cannot be used as some kind of new money-dispensing machine for Parliament. We also need to be able to make our own organisation more efficient and to try to make savings where possible in order, by doing so, to also be able to finance any additional needs.

Now people are also calling for increased appropriations for the staff that support Members of the European Parliament in our work. The intention is surely a good one, but it is interesting, for example, that the MEPs in my group more or less unanimously feel that there is no urgent need for this and that it is not necessary in these economically meagre times.

The guidelines that we are to approve today are good, and I think we should view them as a challenge to examine our own expenditure with a critical eye.

Peter van Dalen (ECR). – (NL) Mr President, we are living in financially and economically difficult times. Everywhere, belts are being tightened, and public authorities, too, are having to control expenditure and make economies. In addition, citizens have little confidence in European policy, and this concerns me greatly. I wish to present two proposals relating to the examination of the next budget, therefore. Firstly, we MEPs must all be just as accountable for our general expenditure allowance of EUR 4 200 per month as we are for all our other allowances. This is not the case at present, which is not what I would call transparent. Moreover, I shall be tabling an amendment in this regard when we discuss the report by Mr Staes during our April part-session.

Mr President, my second point concerns the budgets of the national Information Offices of the European Parliament. I consider these particularly generous, and take the view that they must be cut by a third over a three-year period. I call on my fellow Members to support these proposals. This would demonstrate our desire for transparency and our intention not to give ourselves special treatment.

Bastiaan Belder (EFD). – (NL) Mr President, the 2011 budget brings us face to face with the priorities of the European Union. At this economically difficult time, the Union must first realise that its financial resources come from Member States, who face having to make drastic cutbacks. It is not only Member States who must make cuts, then; the EU should also trim down its public funds and spend these in a more targeted manner.

I have a substantive question regarding the priority the rapporteur gives to youth. As a rule, social and youth affairs can be handled very well by Member States. Yet I would draw attention to one issue where EU support is truly indispensable. The report mentions young people's transition from education to the labour market. I would ask the rapporteur whether she also means to devote attention to the specific needs of vulnerable young people. Here I have in mind young people who have grown up in children's homes and who suffer from a severe lack of vocational guidance. Last month, on a visit to Bulgaria, I saw a truly inspiring example of this. I welcome European support for such Member State initiatives wholeheartedly, for example, within the framework of the Structural Funds. I am counting on you.

Nick Griffin (NI). – Mr President, the most important priority of any budget should be only to spend your own money. Spending someone else's without their permission is not budgeting, it is theft.

British taxpayers are fleeced to the tune of GBP 6.4 billion in direct payments to the EU annually and we are still denied our referendum. Taking that money, without a democratic mandate, is not a victimless crime. Fifty thousand of our pensioners died of cold this winter because they could not afford to heat their own homes. Our soldiers are killed by Taliban bombs because we cannot afford blast-proof vehicles. Thousands of cancer victims are denied expensive life-saving drugs. GBP 6.4 billion would right all those wrongs and still leave change to build eight new hospitals and 50 schools.

There should be only one budget priority – slash spending and stop robbing Britain. Our pensioners, soldiers and cancer victims need the money more than the EU. To you, it is a budget. To them, it is a matter of life or death.

Salvador Garriga Polledo (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, I welcome Mr Lewandowski, an old friend of this House who now sits on different benches to those of the Members.

I also want to welcome the return to the traditional system of budgetary guidelines. I believe that this is a good thing, because in this way, the Commissioner can listen to Parliament's budgetary priorities before drawing up the draft budget.

The things the Commissioner is hearing or will be hearing today are very different to those he undoubtedly hears every day from the various general sides that put pressure on him to let them have a bigger budget.

We in Parliament are not going to put pressure on him for the time being. As he knows, we will be doing that from September onwards. For now, we just want Mr Lewandowski to be very clear about what the budgetary priorities of Parliament represent. They represent our suggestions.

New challenges for the 2011 budget arise every day. We already have new pressures in category four, where we are allowing for a very tight margin that will be made tighter by the need to include the Baltic Sea Strategy.

We shall have pressures in agriculture, not only because we are using codecision for the first time, but, above all, because we are intending to use it through Parliament and we will not agree to further cuts to the agricultural budget to fund other areas. We shall also, of course, need to resolve the ever-problematic issue of category five: administrative costs and greater transparency.

One last thing: this House is very open to saving money from both the EU budget and from Parliament's budget. What we political groups are not open to, I believe, is putting up with the demagoguery of certain people who make it their way of conducting politics.

Göran Färm (S&D). – (SV) Ladies and gentlemen and, in particular, our former fellow Member, Janusz Lewandowski, who I would like to welcome back. I would like to comment briefly on both reports.

Firstly, I would like to thank Mrs Jędrzejewska, who has produced an excellent report. However, we in the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament have tabled amendments to a couple of paragraphs that we think are important.

Firstly, we need to make it clear that climate change is still a major priority. We must not ease the pressure on this issue on account of the failure in Copenhagen, but instead must work hard to carry out our own task, namely to find solutions to the problem of financing.

Secondly, with regard to the Europe 2020 strategy: our strategy requires the Union to also invest in and improve the implementation of the strategy. We must fight proactively to develop the economy and for an ambitious social agenda, and these are political areas that quite simply require more substance.

Among other things, we need to send a clear message to the Member States and the Council that it will be necessary to review the budget ceilings for the next three years, particularly in heading 1 of the budget, which is the heading dealing with growth and employment.

When it comes to Parliament's own budget, even if we have significant needs, we must take account of the economic situation and impose major constraints on ourselves. We need to strengthen Parliament and especially the capacity of the political groups to be able to fulfil the requirements of the Treaty of Lisbon. In all other respects, however, we need to look for ways to make savings and increase efficiency. This is

particularly relevant, as heading 5 of the budget, for administration, is severely stretched. We recently discussed the new External Action Service, for example, which will certainly require extra resources.

We must focus on Parliament's core task and elsewhere employ a great deal of constraint.

Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR). – Mr President, in times of economic stringency, faced with cuts in public spending right across European countries, all the EU's institutions should be looking at how to cut costs and waste.

Parliament should be taking a lead. Instead, it continues in a self-indulgent manner, with its costs and staff numbers constantly increasing with no thought of constraint. In any other organisation, new priorities would be met by compensating reductions elsewhere, but not in this House it seems. MEPs bear the brunt of public blame, but it is the overinflated bureaucracy, needless excesses and the redundant buildings which cost the money.

How can you continue to justify Parliament's GBP 94 million annual self-promotion budget with eight million spent on the superfluous Europarl TV and this bizarre scheme for a GBP 2 million House of European History? It is ridiculous that you maintain so-called information offices in every Member State, at an annual cost of 40 million, when it is the job of 736 MEPs to answer any questions their constituents may have.

It is a continuing scandal that this Parliament has not demanded that Member State governments stop the Strasbourg circus once and for all. We need to send a clear message to our governments on this and save 200 million a year.

Ingeborg Gräßle (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to start by talking about the Commission's budget. The European External Action Service is something that I take a particular interest in. However, this is not yet included in the budget that the Commissioner is soon to present. However, the question of how much it will cost is of key importance for us. I am in favour of us including this service within the Commission, as that is where it belongs. One thing is clear: what happens in this service will have significant consequences for the budget, including in relation to the multiannual programmes. We cannot have administration of multiannual programmes outside the Commission. We cannot allow this under any circumstances.

Our choice of legal construct for this service will be very important, as the budgetary consequences will be directly dependent on this. For that reason, what is most interesting about this budget is what it does not include. We very much hope that the Commissioner will soon be able to supply figures to show what the whole thing is expected to cost. In 2011 – this much is already clear – the areas where we will have the largest expenditure – including for this service – particularly in the administration lines, are the areas where we have the least amount of leeway. Everything is accounted for, down to the last cent. I am therefore in favour of us taking an immediate look at the staff regulations for ways to make savings. I also have a suggestion in relation to special leave for officials and assistants working in the Member States, where travel to their home countries for special leave is based on travelling by rail. This rail journey basis should be scrapped, with the focus put on airline tickets and flying time instead.

I now turn to Parliament's budget. Anyone who works in this Parliament – and that, unfortunately, cannot be said of all the Members – needs staff. I would therefore like to ask specifically that we provide ourselves with appropriate means to enable us to work. However, I do not think that creating a connection with the buildings is appropriate, because we also have electoral districts and can conclude service contracts. The Bureau should be so kind as not to trouble the Members on this account.

I have one further request. The President of the European Council is not yet accounted for in the budget. It would be nice if we could acknowledge his existence in the budget, too.

Martin Ehrenhauser (NI). – (DE) Mr President, we need a different EU and we also need a different EU budget. I think we need the courage to make big decisions. We should certainly not get bogged down in minute technical details.

I would like to say three things about the EU budget. Firstly, we need transparency where the EU budget is concerned. How high is administrative expenditure, for example? The current EU budget does not provide any realistic information on this.

My second point is about savings. It is very easy to save billions in the EU budget without reducing the quality of the services provided by the EU institutions. For example, we could shut down a large number of the EU's

agencies. Then there is the second seat in Strasbourg. We should perhaps discuss the usefulness of the bodies that lack an area of competence, such as the Committee of the Regions or the Economic and Social Committee.

Thirdly, how is the money used? The money should be given, or given back, to where it comes from, namely the taxpayers. Of course, we should also use it to support sound projects – I am thinking, for example, of a genuine Erasmus programme for trainees. I think we need courage. We would all do well to take note of this.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE). – (PL) Following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Parliament has acquired significant additional competences. The time has come for decisions about spending money from EU coffers to be made jointly. However, time is also needed for this mechanism to begin to work. It is certain that this year and the next few years will be crucial for the establishment of the final form of the new budget procedure. Only with Parliament, the Council and the Commission working together as partners will it be possible to develop a procedure which will comply to the greatest degree with the provisions of the new treaty.

I would like to express support for the appeal to increase the Community budget in view of the new responsibilities facing Parliament following the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. There is no doubt that for Parliament to perform its duties effectively, it needs the appropriate means. The responsibility of Parliament is growing, which is why we, as Members, need more advice, expert opinions and support from a variety of professionals, and someone has to pay for this.

Another priority which is presented in the report, and which is deserving of full support, is the need for greater investment in youth, and so in education, which is the foundation of a modern and innovative society. Europe is still behind in the technology race with the USA, Japan and other new world powers. However, this can, certainly, be changed, but it requires significant outlays.

As part of the fight against poverty, we should finance programmes such as the free distribution of food among the poorest. We should develop programmes such as those which make milk and fruit available at schools. We must not tolerate undernourishment among children and young people, since we are saying so much about education and a knowledge-based economy.

Work is currently under way on the strategy for the economic growth of the Union over the next 10 years (Europe 2020). In relation to this, it is necessary to take account of expenses which will be incurred as a result of the strategy, and this needs to be done now, at the stage when we are working on the budget. For the strategy to be successful, greater outlays are needed on cohesion at regional and European level, promotion of employment and combating the effects of the crisis.

Finally, I would like to thank fellow Member, Mrs Jędrzejewska, for a very substantive and innovative preparation of the priorities of the budget for 2012.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE). – (PT) Young people, science and innovation are at the heart of the priorities of the next European Union budget. Investing in young people is investing in the future. Education, professional training and the transition from the educational system to the labour market are the central concerns of this budget.

Young people with degrees are increasingly affected by unemployment. That is why I consider the Erasmus first job mobility programme to be a strategic commitment to the future, because it establishes a clear link between the education system and the labour market. The proposal for the creation of the Erasmus first job programme, which I presented alongside Mr Fernandes, is based on the following principles: firstly, additional funding for existing programmes in the fields of education, science, training and innovation; and secondly, each case will have a training component and a component in which the trainee will have a contract with an innovative European company and will be cofunded by the European budget.

Of the other priorities of this budget, I would pick out the areas of scientific research, innovation and the digital agenda. This budget also concentrates efforts on supporting the development of green and innovative technologies, thus making an essential contribution to economic recovery and giving impetus to small and medium-sized enterprises. Commitment to young people, innovation and science is the key to making Europe a world leader once again.

Piotr Borys (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, Mr Lewandowski, Mrs Jędrzejewska, first of all, I would like to congratulate the rapporteur on a splendid report. Of course, the economic situation in the European Union is still not satisfactory, but the report does, in large measure, tell us how to create European added value.

I think giving particular attention to youth in mid- and long-term priorities is an excellent idea for helping to solve our problems. I think maintaining trends related to innovation and the emphasis on digital technology are good examples of the rapid development of the European Union. The support for small and medium-sized enterprises, mainly in the weakest regions, is also interesting.

However, it is also worth emphasising that, on the question of mobility, the policy of investment in the Trans-European Transport Network, and so questions of transport, will arise. I think investing in youth is crucial, and so I would like to express my thanks, and also the thanks of the Committee on Culture and Education, for all efforts whose objective is to support measures relating to investment in young people.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) The 2011 budget must take into account the European Union's new powers, as well as the consequences of the economic and financial crisis. Our priority must be to preserve existing jobs and create new ones.

I believe that the European Union must invest in an intelligent and ambitious industrial policy. It is not acceptable that in 2010, industry accounts for only 14% of GDP in prominent Member States.

This is why the 2011 budget must consider redefining budget priorities, a task which Member States can only carry out in 2010 during the mid-term review of the 2007-2013 financial outlook.

These priorities must focus on transport infrastructure, energy efficiency, industrial policy and research, agriculture, education and health. We are expecting the Commission to put forward this year a firm proposal for setting up a European fund specifically for developing the transport infrastructure, and the EU's contribution to this will also feature in the 2011 budget.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL). – (PT) The economic and social situation in the EU calls for a substantial change to be made in 2011 to the priorities that have guided previous budgets, including the current budget for 2010. The budget needs to be at the service of policies that are distinct from those that led to 23 million people losing their jobs and put 85 million at the risk of poverty.

The objectives of the multiannual financial framework which reduced the structural funds to 0.37% of the EU gross national income need to be reviewed, as these meant cuts in social and environmental programmes and in the fields of research, education and culture.

Future budgets must be instruments at the service of economic and social cohesion, rather than mere padding in the treaties. They must be at the service of full employment with rights, investment in public services, protection of the environment, cooperation and peace. They should not be an instrument at the service of the commercialisation of more and more aspects of social life, freedoms, lack of job security, structural unemployment, external interventionism and war. The thrust of the amendments that we have tabled to the report is in showing that there is an alternative, and one that is not only possible, but also necessary.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, I would like to refer to heading 5 and to the buildings strategy in particular. A medium and long-term successful buildings strategy is important. It needs to be environmentally friendly, energy efficient and particularly cost effective. We also need to have an open discussion about how sensible it is to have three working sites for the European Parliament. The horrendous expenditure for the different sites can hardly be justified to EU citizens and taxpayers, particularly during the economic crisis. It is time we had a detailed and thorough cost analysis carried out and made it available to every EU citizen.

The European Parliament should therefore concentrate on one seat, and, personally, I would prefer Strasbourg on account of its historic and socio-cultural bridging role and, in particular, on account of the fact that Brussels is sinking into crime, parts of the city are descending into anarchy and the police have given up. Even municipal politicians like the Mayor, Freddy Thielemans, admit this.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). – (RO) I urge the European Union's 2011 budget to provide a better reflection of, and support for, youth policy. Young people must be supported both at EU and national level.

In this regard, one of the projects which the Romanian Government is using to support young people is the construction of 100 000 homes for them in the next three years.

At the same time, I welcome the European Commission's target of awarding 3 million Erasmus grants to students by 2012. However, it is also vitally important to increase the funding for Erasmus Mundus grants.

This will allow even more students and researchers from third countries – and in this case, I am thinking specifically of the Republic of Moldova as well – to study in the European Union.

As a young MEP, I support the Erasmus initiative, which is the first workplace providing young people with access to the labour market.

Finally, I would like to thank the European Commission for its promptness in approving the funding for the four energy projects which Romania is also involved in.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D). – (LT) Taking into account the complicated economic situation in the Member States, next year's budget should be planned very thoroughly. Job retention and creation should receive most attention. Support for and the promotion of small and medium-sized enterprises would be of service here, since these companies employ a large proportion of European Union citizens. Financial support measures must be provided in a more flexible manner and must be more accessible if newly established companies or those that have experienced financial difficulties are to survive. We also should not forget areas providing added value, not just to individual Member States, but to the Community as a whole. Amongst these areas, we could mention transport, the priority of which should be the creation of a sustainable and safe transport system and the development of trans-European networks. Suitable funding for energy link projects, ensuring energy independence, must also remain one of the priorities of the 2011 budget.

Janusz Lewandowski, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I should like to thank Members for their comments, which have deepened and enriched my understanding of Parliament's priorities for 2011. What was clear to me when listening – and I am in a listening mood this evening – was that many speakers stressed that we are shaping the budget for 2011 in the extraordinary environment of post-crisis Europe, with many countries struggling with real fiscal challenges. This is putting a real pressure on the budgetary figures and is also putting pressure on sound management, on transparency in the budget – that was clear from Mr Van Orden, Mr Berman, Mr Fernandes, Mr Haglund – but, if resources are scarce, what is really needed is to set priorities properly.

My feeling after the debate, is that youth, i.e. heading 3b – upgraded by the rapporteur – has the support of younger and older members of this room so it seems that this priority for 2011 is rightly placed, according to a majority here in the Parliament. What is also needed is quality and good implementation and we immediately – for example, Mr Godmanis and Mr Surján – think about cohesion. Yes, that was low-level in 2009-2010. It should go at cruising speed by 2011, as should anti-crisis delivery. But we also have underspending on research and that deserves much more user-friendly financial regulation. We should be disclosing it at the end of May-June this year.

What was also clear to me, when listening to your debate, is that Parliament is conscious of room for manoeuvre in the budget being very limited. Mr Salvador Garriga Polledo, Mr Färm and others stressed the very limited room for manoeuvre, but the conclusion could be more flexibility in the shaping and implementation of the budget. I can only share this conclusion.

As usual, Ingeborg Grässle is right in saying that no budget has been included as yet for the External Action Service, but to draw up a budget you need figures. We do not have the figures as yet and without figures, it is very difficult to establish the budget. But, of course, this should come this year if the External Action Service is to be operational.

I am really looking forward to tomorrow's discussions in the informal trialogue and then to launching the real debate. Let us hope also for a fruitful conciliation of the 2011 figures.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS DURANT

Vice-President

Sidonia Elżbieta Jędrzejewska, rapporteur. – (PL) Madam President, Mr Lewandowski, ladies and gentlemen, I have listened with great interest to your speeches, and would like, most of all, to say I am very pleased that the priority related to the main change to the budget for 2010, the priority related to youth, which I proposed and which the Committee on Budgets adopted, has also met with your support and interest. I am very pleased and motivated by this.

I would, of course, like to stress once again what you rightly noticed in the discussion, that we have little room for manoeuvre. This means there is all the more reason for the appeal to the European Commission to show ambition, imagination and courage in starting a review and possible revision of the Multiannual

Financial Framework. As you know, the year 2011 is the fifth year of the Multiannual Financial Framework. Surely it is time we learned something from those four years. The fifth ought to be decidedly better.

Of course, it is clear we are fighting a financial and economic crisis which, and this is obvious, is different in different countries. Some countries are showing signs of coming out of the crisis, but this does not alter the fact that we should be ambitious, especially because, if we are looking at the budget of the European Community, funds designated for innovation, research, youth, realisation of the common market and realisation of the freedoms of the common market, are, in fact, a small part of the European Community budget. So, any savings made should not, in my opinion, affect this part of the European Union budget.

Many of you said something which I agree with – that young people are the European Union's future. However, I would like to add that they are not only the future, because the young people are alive here, now, today. They are in education today and they are looking for work today. Young people are not only our future, they are our today. Investing in young people is an investment not only in what will happen one day, but is about what is happening here and now. We should keep reminding ourselves of this.

I would also like to say a few words on this extended thinking about the European Union budget. It is not only about youth, but is also about a wider understanding, which includes, too, issues related to young people, as well as, in a broader perspective, issues related to education and training. I think that, here, the European dimension, the European dimension of added value, is very clear. We should not forget, however, that we are operating in a united Europe, where mobility of thought and the mobility of people is, in fact, one of our more important values, and we should look after it continually.

I would also like to say a few words to summarise the debate on the European Parliament budget. It is true I am standing in, today, for the rapporteur, but I will permit myself to say a few words and to emphasise something which is already contained in the report of the Committee on Budgets. That is, of course, that it is important to think about savings all the time, and always to think about whether those expenses which do take place are justified, if they are the best possible. That process of reflection is continuous, and should concern us all. This reflection is certainly to be seen in the report on the European Parliament.

I hope very much that this debate, which has taken place at such a late hour, has not been a waste of time for any of us. I very much hope that Mr Lewandowski will listen to everything which has been said, here, and that he has not forgotten that not long ago, he was a Member of this Chamber, and I very much hope that this debate will be reflected in the draft budget which the European Commission has promised to present on 27 April. I will, of course, gladly repeat this all again, and again, and again, throughout the spring and until the autumn, but, nevertheless, I would be very happy if some of the proposals which have already been raised, here, were now included in the draft from the European Commission, so that it will, after all, be necessary to repeat less. Once again, I would like to thank you for your attention.

President. – The joint debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Edit Herczog (S&D), in writing. – First of all, I wish to recall that, although the EU was able to react collectively to the financial and economic crisis by adopting a European Economic Recovery Plan, the overall economic situation in the EU is still not satisfactory. It is inevitable that the following priorities for the budget guidelines 2011 have to be taken into account: the implementation of FP7, which will have reached its maturity in 2011, should be closely monitored; the development of the newly established European space policy and the promotion of scientific and technological advance, supporting innovative technologies and sustainable development; the challenges relating to sustainable energy and the fight against climate change must be reflected in the EU budget priorities; these priorities will require additional budgetary resources, particularly for funding the ITER and the European Strategic Energy Technology Plan and promoting energy efficiency; the importance of the Galileo project, of the GMES programme and of the European Institute of Innovation and Technology; the proper implementation and evaluation of ongoing pilot projects and preparatory actions should be the priority.

I trust that these key issues will be taken into account in an appropriate way during the forthcoming 2011 budget procedure.

Cătălin Sorin Ivan (S&D), in writing. – (RO) This year, the budgetary procedure will undergo the biggest reform since the introduction of the Multiannual Financial Frameworks in 1988. While the budgetary

procedure reform is going on, strictly speaking, the whole budgetary framework will have to be adapted to the new institutional realities introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, primarily to the European External Action Service. However, I believe that the main objective of the future budget will be to support the policies from the new Europe 2020 agenda. This project will only have a chance of success if we provide the necessary funding for it. Otherwise, this agenda will end up just like the one before it too, the Lisbon Strategy, wide of the mark in terms of achieving any of the objectives set. In this respect, I wish to share the sentiments of the rapporteur and emphasise how important the policies on young people, education, research and innovation are. In my view, they provide the cornerstones on which we will have to build both the 2011 budget and our vision for the future.

Jarosław Kalinowski (PPE), in writing. – (PL) The European Union budget for 2011 should give clear support to the main trends in the Community's strategy for the next decade. This includes technological innovation, sustainable development, combating climate change and care for biodiversity.

Support for the development of educational systems, with the assistance of interdisciplinary investment, is also strongly justified. The money must be invested in enterprises which guarantee that graduates will find employment. If we do not give our backing to youth, today, we will face the bleak prospect of a slowdown in economic growth, and perhaps even another crisis.

We do not need to be reminded of the need for intensive development of the information technology sector and that we must ensure that our citizens have access to digital technology. This will facilitate education in the area of information technology, as well as making it easier to obtain information, especially for people who live in rural areas.

Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE), in writing. – (RO) I would like to add my comments to those made by the rapporteur and fellow Members during the debates on the priorities for the 2011 budget. As was also announced by the European Commission in January, ambitious plans are in the pipeline for the Galileo project. The first services offered by this system will be launched in early 2014: the open service, regulated public service and the search and save services. Testing will also start in 2014 on the Safety-of-Life service and commercial service. Let me remind you that Galileo is crucial to the future of high-tech industry in Europe. It will create new markets and enable Europe to become a global competitor in the field of technology. The TEN-T policy has supported the preparation of this major European project until now, and once it becomes operational, it will be possible to use the transport infrastructure much more efficiently. In conclusion, I believe that Galileo must receive sufficient funds from the European Union budget in the future so that this ambitious project can become a reality.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The circumstances in which the 2010 and 2011 budgets will be adopted are exceptional and pose a particular challenge. For these reasons, the ideal solution must be found for successfully implementing the Treaty of Lisbon, which is itself a major financial challenge. Solutions also need to be found aimed at mitigating the effects of the financial crisis which are still being felt in many Member States. Parliament must engage in an open discussion about the expenditure ceiling in heading 5 for 2011. We must find a balance between providing funding for all the requirements and maintaining budgetary discipline, even if it means restricting expenditure, in order to comply with the Multiannual Financial Framework. Firstly, we need to standardise administrative expenditure by including it entirely under this heading and carry out a suitable, realistic review of the expenditure ceiling. Above all, it is vital that interinstitutional cooperation is established to promote the exchange of good practices and to continue to explore the opportunities for making them more efficient. In addition, particular importance must be attached to monitoring and analysing sets of areas with direct budgetary implications, and every way of distributing and saving resources must be identified.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE), in writing. – (PL) Work on the 2011 budget is under way. One subject of discussion is that Parliament could make amendments to the financial perspective 2007-2013 in areas such as 'competitiveness and cohesion for growth and employment'. In addition, we are in the course of work on the Europe 2020 strategy, which should concentrate on promoting innovation, supporting enterprise and investing in science, new technologies and regional development. I would like to draw particular attention to the question of economic, social and territorial cohesion, which is the key to ensuring lasting economic growth in the EU and full integration of Member States. Article 174 of the Treaty of Lisbon mentions policy with regard to mountain regions as a particular type of regional policy, alongside island and cross-border regions. In order to promote its harmonious development, the Union shall pursue actions leading to the strengthening of its economic, social and territorial cohesion. In particular, emphasis must be placed on reducing disparities in levels of development of regions which are characterised by specific natural and

geographic conditions. Mountainous and sub-mountainous areas make up almost 40% of the territory of the EU and are inhabited by nearly 20% of the EU's citizens. The specific economic and spatial problems of mountainous regions require supra-national legal regulations to be put in place governing the objectives and principles of pursuing specific mountain policy in Member States and, more importantly, they require that a suitable level of financing be ensured for projects and programmes for those regions in particular. I think financial support for mountain regions should be included in the new financial perspective and the Europe 2020 strategy.

Iuliu Winkler (PPE), *in writing*. – (HU) Next year will be the first year in the implementation of the Europe 2020 strategy, which can represent a new phase in the development of the European Union. As a result, the 2011 budget year will be extremely important from the perspective of financial planning for subsequent years. The budgetary priorities must contain the European Union's response to the challenges of the global crisis. The Europe 2020 strategy is, from this point of view, a very important factor. The priorities contained in the proposed budget for 2011 cannot, however, lead to a modification of the EU's basic policies. In the future, close attention needs to be paid to the cohesion and structural policies, as well as to the agricultural policy, and also to the support given to SMEs, since the capacity of Europe to become a sustainable and competitive economy depends on the latter. We must not lose sight even for a moment of the fact that the policies mentioned are the expression of the solidarity that constitutes the fundamental value of European integration.

17. Request for the defence of parliamentary immunity: see Minutes

18. Agricultural product quality policy: what strategy to follow? (debate)

President. – The next item is the report (A7-0029/2010) by Mr Scottà, on behalf of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, on Agricultural product quality policy: what strategy to follow? (2009/2105(INI))

Giancarlo Scottà, *rapporteur*. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, with market globalisation and the severe crisis now affecting Europe, including in the agricultural sector, one possible response on the part of the agricultural market is to place emphasis on product quality.

I believe that a good EU quality policy can enhance competitiveness and create added value for Europe's regional economies, since, for many rural areas where production alternatives are few, it is often the one and only opportunity for development. By supporting niche agriculture in these disadvantaged areas, we will create an economy and jobs there.

Furthermore, a future quality policy must also be linked to the major potentialities of agriculture which, as in the European case, is modern, dynamic, rich and diversified and can offer not only high quality food products but also services of great value to a constantly evolving society.

In my report, I emphasised the importance of keeping the three systems for registration of geographical indications separate, since they represent the link with European regions, representing their traditions, history, taste and unique knowledge handed down over time.

I therefore believe that, by keeping the two PDO and PGI systems separate, they take account of the specific differences in the nature and strength of the links between the products and their geographical area of production. Consumers often confuse the geographical indication of where a food product was processed with the place of origin of the agricultural product as such, and are often not aware of how the food chain operates.

I therefore consider that only the compulsory indication of the place of production of the primary products can provide consumers with full information on the quality of the products they are buying, since products are subject to a production cycle which exerts considerable influence on their characteristics in terms of quality and food safety. Let us remember that it is our duty to protect what our fellow citizens, who voted for us, produce and eat.

Another two issues that I considered important to include in my report are as follows: the importance of an intensive campaign of consumer education and information, which the European Union should undertake concerning the various European labels and the guarantees they represent, and the inclusion in international

registries and international recognition through the WTO system of geographical indications. This last point is vitally important if we want to protect against the counterfeiting of our high quality products.

I would like to thank Commissioner Ciolos for his attendance and remind him of the importance of sufficiently protecting quality systems, which are our future, and remind him too that the economy of disadvantaged rural areas can be boosted by agricultural sector aid, to safeguard all those niche products that are typical of these areas and that keep the people connected to the locality, which would otherwise be abandoned. This would support respect for the environment and for the landscape and would create, where possible, a tourist and oenogastronomy economy linked to the various regional, cultural and historical differences in the European Union.

I would like to thank my colleagues for the support they gave me in the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and I hope that the European Parliament will also give its support during the vote tomorrow.

Dacian Ciolos, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Madam President, Mr Scottà, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that the key element that gives stature to the European agricultural and agri-food model at international level is precisely its policy of quality and diversity. That is why quality policy in the agri-food sector will be one of the priorities of my mandate, one of my main priorities straight after the common agricultural policy post-2013 reform.

Agri-food quality policy is not only proof that European farmers are responsive to the expectations of European consumers, but it may also pave the way for the European agri-food sector to assert itself on the international market.

If quality policy is to achieve its objective, we need a framework that is clear, comprehensible, well structured, easily identifiable by consumers and, as far as possible, comprehensive and sufficient. My aim is to be able to structure the content of quality policy and to make it more accessible both to farmers, who must be the beneficiaries of it, and to consumers, but without sacrificing its substance or emptying it of all content.

Quality policy represents a guarantee for consumers, but it also represents added value for farmers; I am in full agreement with Mr Scottà on that. It can help to maintain the diversity of our agriculture, and can do so in a competitive way, because farms that can sell their produce are competitive. If they can make a living from what they produce, they are competitive, and, if they can sell high-value-added products, they are even more competitive, even if, at times, they are small in size.

I therefore believe that, in some regions, quality policy can also help to make our farms more competitive. In this way, quality policy and the development of local markets, the reduction in food miles, and direct and closer contact between consumers and producers can achieve good results precisely in order to increase the competitiveness of certain types of farming that currently have a relatively small share of the market. European farmers are already making efforts to supply safe products, using techniques that respect the environment and animal welfare.

The debate on how to make this more evident by means of the labelling system is useful and welcome, and the report contributes certain elements and certain ideas along these lines. I believe that these links between the standards maintained by farmers and labelling quality policy should also be the subject of debates that we are going to hold on the common agricultural policy post-2013. That is my intention, in any case.

I believe that we need to develop and evolve our instruments in relation to communication policy, communication both with European farmers and with European consumers, and, above all, at international level. It is my belief that our quality system can be a good ambassador for our agri-food model, and even for our common agricultural policy.

Having said all that, I would like to conclude with the fact that Mr Scottà's report comes at just the right time. As you know, the Commission intends to present a legislative package on quality policy by the end of 2010. The report that Mr Scottà is presenting today and which will be debated includes certain questions, ideas and proposals along these lines, and I shall strive as far as possible to take account of these ideas when I come to present the legislative proposals to you.

I wish to congratulate the rapporteur and the members of the parliamentary committees who have worked on this report, and I shall be very happy to hear your views and your proposals.

Esther Herranz García, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety*. – (ES) Madam President, to be honest, the first thing I wanted to do this evening is to thank Mr Scottà

for his excellent skill in negotiating this report. It has been a real pleasure working with him and with the other spokespeople for the parliamentary groups.

We are proud of the position that will be demonstrated tomorrow in the vote in Parliament and on a report such as this, which defends quality and which commits to the development and enhancement of rural areas, not only as mere evidence of a traditional European culture, but as true wealth- and job-creation agents. These are jobs that we currently need so much at this time of economic crisis and such a dramatic situation in terms of levels of employment in some Member States.

In addition, we are pleased with the protection maintained by Parliament and the position already maintained by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, as it has made clear, in committing to quality of the highest standard. With regard to that highest standard, moreover, we naturally commit to maintaining that differentiation between Protected Designation of Origin and Protected Geographical Indication. Of course, we reject ideas of levelling quality downwards and we want EU production to receive attention and be valued.

I am delighted at what Mr Ciolos had to say. It was, of course, pleasing to hear him speak about commitment to the future of the European farming environment. We naturally hope he will listen to Parliament's voice, which will be reflected tomorrow in the vote.

Finally, I would like to say let us hope that it never happens again that the European Commission gets ahead of Parliament by prohibiting things such as, for example, marketing standards for fruit and vegetables, that have caused such damage to European free competition.

We want the imbalances in the market corrected and we also want to commit to quality, variety, food safety and the right quantity of production.

In addition, we want EU production and the quality of that EU agricultural and food production to be defended in the World Trade Organisation. We are, of course, also relying on the work of Mr Ciolos for that, because neither our European producers nor our European consumers can go on being defenceless.

Giovanni La Via, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I too, on behalf of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), should like to thank the rapporteur, Mr Scottà, for the outstanding work that he has done, and I should like to emphasise how quality policies are not only of great external value because of what we are able to offer consumers; they are also of great importance because of what they are able to give producers.

As you have all observed, competition can take many forms on the markets. In a continent as large and as multifaceted as Europe, but which is characterised moreover by costs of production a good deal higher than those of the competition, it will be difficult to compete in terms of price, and we shall be able to compete only in terms of product differentiation.

It is exactly from the perspective of differentiation that we must view quality policy, which is capable of offering a product and of placing on the market a product that differs from that of the competition, a product that can also be sold without precise and specific reference to a price that is lower by comparison to the competition.

We are therefore in favour of continuing with the practice of Community marking, which is already under way, while emphasising the need to maintain the distinction between geographic indications and origin marking. However, we should also still stress that, internationally and at the level of international trade negotiations, the Union must play its part by defending origin marking and origin-marking policies so as to avoid an inevitable policy of exchange of markings, which would cause damage to our products.

Before concluding, I shall take the liberty of making one final point, which concerns labelling. We have already requested and shall request again tomorrow, via a specific amendment, that Parliament vote on the possibility of indicating the origin of raw materials, not only for fresh, non-processed products, but also for processed single-ingredient products; that is, those in which the characteristic element is substantially the raw material.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (HU) Commissioner, fellow Members, on behalf of the group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats, we consider the report drawn up by Mr Scottà to be extremely important, and fundamentally we agree with it. The report had four, or rather five points for debate. First, the joint European Union logo. Many people fail to understand that the joint EU logo is not

some sort of step towards federalism, but demonstrates to the consumer that a product fulfils the EU's specific food safety requirements, while at the same time differentiating it from the world beyond the EU boundaries. I therefore ask that we support the specific EU logo.

The second point is the question of the place of origin. It is a very good thing that the EU now has, in the person of Mr Dacian Cioloş, an agriculture commissioner who has understood and supports the importance of local markets, since this is the only way we can preserve local flavours, regional flavours, and the diversity of food in Europe, and it is also clear that a key role is played in this regard by food quality policy, the place and designation of origin. There was an argument with the Commission, and I very much hope that the new commissioner no longer supports the earlier position that we should combine all Protected Designations of Origin with Protected Geographical Indication. Occasionally, this causes concern, most recently in the case of Tokaj wine. I thank the Commissioner that these problems have, in part, been remedied, while some of them await remedy.

The fourth element: the organic logo. On this there is complete agreement. And finally, the fifth element: that some members of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development called for the reintroduction of the previous strict standards for vegetables and fruit. I would like to return to the original form of Mr Scottà's report. Let us not go back to the days of overregulation, when we determined what the curve of a cucumber should be.

George Lyon, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Madam President, can I, too, add my congratulations to Mr Scottà on his report.

There is much in it that is to be commended. Unfortunately, I and my ALDE colleagues cannot support it as it currently stands without seeing one or two changes made to it.

We cannot support paragraph 19, the so-called 'wonky fruit' paragraph. I believe it is nonsense for bureaucrats in Brussels to be telling consumers that they can buy only straight bananas or straight cucumbers.

Surely it is up to consumers to make these decisions as to what they want to buy, so I hope that Parliament will use its common sense and back the joint amendment that has been submitted by the Greens and the ECR Group to throw out the straight banana rules and leave consumers free to choose whether they want to eat bent or twisted fruit and vegetables or whether they do not. It is surely a decision for consumers.

Marianne Fischer-Boel, the previous Commissioner, did decide to abolish the standards and I would hope that we would continue to support that decision.

I would also like to see some changes in paragraph 16. I understand the call for an EU logo but, unless it means something to consumers and adds value for farmers, in my view, it is a pointless exercise. It has to resonate with consumers and give some sort of return to the farming community. Otherwise, it is worthless. It is not worth pursuing it and I see no evidence to suggest that European consumers are looking for an EU logo.

Finally, in paragraph 62, there is some criticism here of private certification systems which, in Scotland, have been very successful. It seems to me a good thing for farmers on a voluntary basis to add value to their produce through quality assurance schemes, and we should be supporting them, not discouraging them.

I hope we can see some changes to this report in the votes tomorrow, and if so, we will be able to support it with the changes voted through tomorrow.

Alyn Smith, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Madam President, I would echo many of the comments of my Scottish colleague – albeit not Group colleague – George Lyon. There is much in this report to admire and a couple of things where I think we could do a little better. We have brought forward a number of points and I will focus on two of them only.

I and others believe that our consumers want to know where their food comes from. We believe that the provision of that information should be compulsory, so Amendment 4, on precisely that point, replaces some rather weak wording with a much stronger requirement that, where we can actually have information on 'place of farming' labelling, it should be compulsory, because that is what our consumers want to see.

I would also pick up on Amendment 3 – as my colleague did – which deletes the attempt to reintroduce cumbersome and unworkable rules on the direct sale of fruit and vegetables to the consumer. We agreed only last year to repeal those rules and, while the consumers have not noticed much of a difference, our

producers have noticed and still notice. Any attempt to bring those rules back would essentially be another stick for the processors, the multiples and the supermarkets to beat the producers with, and the consumers would not benefit directly.

So there is much in this report to like. I would echo Mr Lyon's comments on the EU logo. I think that is more to do with the ambitions of this building rather than what our consumers want. If it does not resonate with the consumers, we should not do it and we should replace it with a compulsory origin labelling scheme, which is what our consumers want.

The amendments are constructive; I hope they will be successful and that colleagues will support them tomorrow.

James Nicholson, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Madam President, can I also express my appreciation to the rapporteur for a very good report.

I think there are very many good ideas in this report and I agree entirely with the rapporteur, Mr Scottà, when he talks about how important it is for European producers to add value and maximise the potential of their products. We must always strive to achieve the maximum potential of Europe's agri-food industry. This will ultimately serve to increase our competitiveness and strengthen the economy in rural areas.

In this regard, I am happy to see that Mr Scottà dealt with the future of the PGI and PDO systems. These instruments have proven popular with consumers and producers alike. However, I agree with the rapporteur that their management and application must be simplified. Also, if we are serious about their value abroad, we must ensure more protection from third countries.

I would like to see more products from my own regions applying for a PGI and hopefully, the Commission will take on board some of the suggestions to simplify the application procedure so we will see more applications from my own region of Northern Ireland.

However, I must point out that there are some elements of this report which I do not support. I am against the introduction of an EU quality logo. What I support is country of origin labelling. In effect, I feel an EU logo would be meaningless, a waste of time and money and I feel the same way about the EU logo for organic produce.

Another concern for me are the amendments which were passed in the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development calling for the reintroduction of the marketing standards of fruit and vegetables, which some MEPs are desperately trying to get back on the table. The fact is these rules were dismantled by the Commission last year. I wholeheartedly supported this move and now we can let the market set its own standards. In this regard, I would urge colleagues to support the plenary amendments tabled by my own group and other groups, which are very clear and simple, and to delete these elements.

Lorenzo Fontana, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, Commissioner Ciolos, thank you for the encouraging words you have just spoken, and thank you to Mr Scottà for the sensitive work that he has done on this important report.

I consider that with the report that will be put to the vote tomorrow, the intention is to protect and to enhance the value of the crops and the produce characteristic of every region and Member State of the European Union. Suffice it to say that I come from a country, Italy, that has 4 500 characteristic products, and these are assets from our land that we wish wholeheartedly to preserve.

We fully understand that the road to excellence is still a long one, but the message that we must convey is that it is only through the quality of European produce that our farmers will have the chance to compete meaningfully on the world market. Bearing in mind also the widespread crisis that we are unfortunately experiencing, we can do nothing other than to sustain the quality, traceability and transparency of information associated with agricultural produce.

It is important to know what kind of processing is used for each crop, and where the crop originates. It is important, because it is right that consumers know whether they are eating an apple grown, for example, in my region – Verona or in the Veneto – and that EU rules have therefore been observed throughout the entire production chain, or whether they are instead eating an apple produced in China, where the only thing that we do know is that, on many occasions, China has not even come close to observing the regulations and good practice observed by European farmers.

Diane Dodds (NI). – Madam President, thank you for the opportunity to speak on this very important point.

Consumers are, quite rightly, demanding that the food they purchase is safe, traceable and produced to a high standard. I would support a country of origin labelling system which promotes such standards and I believe that this will be widely acceptable to most consumers and to most within the industry. Obviously, promotion and marketing will be the hallmark of the success or failure of such a policy. We must take firm action against the potential counterfeiting of products which are wrongly labelled.

I – like many colleagues in this Chamber – would be against an EU logo. I feel it would be largely meaningless and would not be helpful to consumers. Country of origin labelling, and even geographical indicators, are important because they promote locality, local heritage and conservation of local techniques, and they protect areas which rely on the production of a particular product.

I come from Northern Ireland, a net exporter of agricultural products. Therefore, I want any labelling system to create a level playing field. Anything that impacts on the export of products from countries like my own would have a detrimental impact on the industry. Like other colleagues, I would support the quality assurance schemes that are available and encourage those as part of the general local indicator.

Elisabeth Köstinger (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the production of high quality produce is fundamental to European farmers. I am in no doubt that there has to be a link between the quality of the product and the origin of the raw materials. I therefore consider mandatory quality labelling to be an important opportunity for our farmers. Quality is a key issue for the entire food chain and an essential asset in supporting the competitiveness of European food producers. The production of high quality foods has a long tradition and is often the only employment and sales opportunity in many rural areas with limited production alternatives.

In order to guarantee this high quality standard, controls and objective criteria are certainly needed. However, the fact is that financial considerations on the part of the consumer also have an effect. Quality costs, and farmers need a fair income. Nevertheless, consumers have the freedom to opt for an attractively priced product, although they often decide on a product that is not of such high quality. One thing must be clear, however, and that is that consumers must have this freedom and they must genuinely be able to make a decision on the basis of objective and transparent criteria.

We also need to raise the general awareness of consumers in this regard. We need protected geographical indications and designations of origin. We need the introduction of a regulated and protected designation for products from mountain areas and from GMO-free areas. However, we also need the 'Traditional Speciality Guaranteed' and 'Organic Farming' indications. Whatever happens, these must be retained.

Paolo De Castro (S&D). – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, a new phase of reflection has opened in Europe today on the issue of quality, which is intended not only as a guarantee for consumers but, above all, as a stimulus for our producers to be more competitive in a market that is far larger and far more competitive.

Our businesses need to gain market recognition of the distinctive and quality-related aspects associated with their products. In this sense, as Mr Scottà's report intends – and I, too, thank him for my part – we are making progress in guaranteeing, first of all, more information on the origin, composition and characteristics of production processes.

At the same time, Commissioner, it is fundamental that European regulations allow organisations designated for the protection and promotion of quality products to plan their product supply and to adapt their production potential to market needs on the basis of fair and non-discriminatory principles.

We hope that the approval of this report will signal the definitive establishment of quality as the lynchpin of the European strategy for the agri-food sector, and that the Commission will seriously consider our committee's proposals, so that one of the principal strong points of European agriculture can be transformed into a precious competitive advantage.

John Stuart Agnew (EFD). – Madam President, first, may I declare an interest? I am an egg producer.

Regulations must be honestly implemented to a common standard. That is essential. An EU-inspired crisis will shortly hit the UK egg industry. From 1 January 2012, the production of eggs in battery cages is banned. The ban does not apply to eggs from Romania or Bulgaria, and perhaps others, who have a temporary immunity under their accession treaties.

As long as they are processed, these countries may legally export battery-cage eggs produced after the ban to the UK.

UK egg producers who have invested very heavily in alternative systems will be expected to compete at a disadvantage against imported products which can be produced far more cheaply.

I must insist first that these imported products are clearly labelled and secondly, and most importantly, that we introduce with immediate effect an additional number 'four', for eggs produced using colony systems. Only then can consumers make an informed choice.

Michel Dantin (PPE). – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, Mr Scottà, I find it truly symbolic, Commissioner, that your first speech before this House should be on the very subject of quality policy.

I believe that we take the same approach to these quality products. Yes, they represent an opportunity for our most fragile regions. Yes, they are a means by which to make the operators of a region and, in particular, farmers, more dynamic. Yes, they represent a strong signal sent out to European consumers, but also to consumers throughout the world, with regard to our agricultural model. Burgundy wine, Parma ham, certain Spanish meats – they have meaning far beyond the borders of each of our countries, far beyond the borders of Europe.

The resolution that we shall no doubt adopt tomorrow offers you, Commissioner, a greater degree of ambition with regard to this policy of quality products, of products identified by different signs. European policy must be clearer; it must stop producers from being taken over by certain large industrial or distribution groups, which would clearly like to deprive producers of the benefit of the added value that these products give them.

During the hearing, I drew your attention to the need to give organisations that bear, in particular, designations of origin overall responsibility for managing their products. Management of production rights is a fundamental part of quality production policy. Moreover, almost all of our committee voted in favour of an amendment along these lines.

I should like to respond to our UK fellow Members with regard to paragraph 19 on the fruit and vegetables sector. Yes, ladies and gentlemen, we must not go backwards, but neither must we allow the huge vacuum in fruit and vegetable policy that means that, today, distributors are the only ones calling the shots. Let us together interpret this amendment as a call to find a new middle way.

Commissioner, you can very quickly convince us of your enthusiasm for this specific policy, which gives consumers a different image of agriculture. Now present us with a good text. Do so quickly; we have faith in you.

Iratxe García Pérez (S&D). – (ES) Madam President, Commissioner, the quality of agricultural production is a crucial factor in the food chain and represents a vital asset for supporting the competitiveness of European producers. All this is reflected in the Scottà report, in which other considerations are also highlighted which the Commission will need to take into account when implementing this policy.

The EU quality logo, as an expression of the agreement of our producers on production requirements within the Union, must be reserved exclusively for agricultural products produced in the European Union.

It must grant greater protection to Protected Geographical Indications, both in the World Trade Organisation and in the bilateral agreement negotiations. European legislation on integrated production must also be drawn up that affords visibility to this more sustainable method of production and harmonises the existing criteria in each Member State.

Finally, we must take into account the imbalances produced in the marketing chain, the importance of relying on sectoral marketing standards and the need to draw up EU guidelines for best practice for the operation of the systems related to agricultural product quality and their mutual recognition.

I refer, in particular, to the control of private certification systems which are often used as a requirement for accessing large-scale distribution outlets.

Timo Soini (EFD). – (FI) Madam President, it is very important to go to the heart of this matter and say that agriculture based on farming families is local in nature, provides employment, strengthens regions, is humane and also takes account of animal protection issues. The individual product resulting from this and the quality of the goods are what succeed in Europe and the world at large.

Where a product comes from is important. Local specialities are of immeasurable value. The region that I come from in Finland produces a delicious goat's milk cheese. I can recommend it to you all. There are special products like this all over Europe. We have to ensure that they find their way onto the market.

As we have a new Commissioner here, I would like to say to him that it must be possible to practise agriculture everywhere in Europe. If we remember this, we will have an excellent future, with safe and pure food originating here.

Peter Jahr (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, many thanks once again to the rapporteur for his excellent report. High quality agricultural products provide European agriculture with a major location advantage, allowing it to hold its own in the face of international competition. As a result, they play an important part in the development of rural areas within the European Union. The European Union's agricultural products already meet high quality standards. European standards have a global reputation for being very high. Unfortunately, not all consumers are aware of this. It is therefore important for the European Union to improve its quality policy and, at the same time, improve its information policy. This will be an incentive for producers to focus more on quality and food safety.

Consumers have a right to enjoy agricultural products in the EU without concern and without compunction. Voluntary 'Made in the European Union' labelling and mandatory regional labelling, as well as mandatory proof of origin, are not mutually exclusive.

On the other hand, when it comes to packaging sizes and the geometric shape of agricultural products, we need to take a sensible approach. The purpose of the European Union is not to be concerned about the curvature of cucumbers. The same applies to the size of pizzas. I would seriously warn against overregulation here. If we want regional economic cycles, we need to focus on quality and not on degrees of curvature. If the industry wants uniform cucumbers in uniform jars of uniform weight, that is up to the industry and not the European Union or the European Parliament. Therefore, let us focus on quality and not packaging units.

In this regard, I trust in the common sense and wisdom of the European Parliament and of our new Commissioner for Agriculture, Mr Cioloş.

Vasîlica Viorica Dăncilă (S&D). – (RO) Let me begin by congratulating the rapporteur for tackling this issue of agricultural product quality.

The demands of the market are diverse and are increasing all the time. In the European Union, the majority of aspects relate to food hygiene and safety, health and nutritional value, as well as certain social requirements.

In addition, consumers are becoming increasingly more aware of the contribution made by agriculture to sustainability, climate change, food safety, biodiversity, animal welfare and the water shortage.

Faced with these new commercial challenges, the European farmer's main asset is quality. The European Union offers the benefit of quality, which is attributable to an extremely high level of safety, guaranteed by current legislation, throughout the entire food chain which not only farmers but producers, too, have contributed to.

However, there are a few aspects capable of enhancing quality. I believe that it is the European Union's duty to promote good quality products, along with taking action to protect them globally. In this context, I think that tighter control must be exercised with regard to those organic products originating from third countries, thereby guaranteeing fair competition between organic products produced in Europe and those from third countries.

Spyros Danellis (S&D). – (EL) Madam President, Commissioner, the quality of agricultural products constitutes a priority for consumers by increasing competitiveness for producers and by strengthening the area in which they are produced. That is why efforts are being made to safeguard them, including with labelling.

Today, however, Community legislation restricts compulsory labelling of the place of production to just certain products, thereby vouchsafing them special treatment and leaving out agricultural products of major nutritional value and priority for consumers. We therefore call on Parliament to adopt a more consistent and logical stand, in order to defend consumer interests by favouring compulsory labelling of the place of production for all agricultural products, including processed products containing just one ingredient, such as milk.

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE). – (RO) The agricultural product quality policy may provide a solution for many farmers. The focus on quality rather than quantity may entail long-term benefits for many households. This is why the European Union needs coherent policies in this area, which, at the same time, will offer European farmers the opportunity to be competitive on the global market. Against this backdrop, the Scottà report is welcome, as is the package announced by Commissioner Ciołos.

At the same time, we will also need something else to enable us to achieve the quality objectives, namely, a strong common agricultural policy in the future, along with a consistent budget. An agricultural product quality policy and a reduction in the European agriculture budget are two incompatible ideas.

We also need to make sufficient instruments available to farmers so that they can develop their own quality policy and, last but not least, we need farmers from Member States in the West and East to enjoy equal opportunities.

Britta Reimers (ALDE). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, when discussing quality logos and mandatory designations of origin for food, we must not forget that our political decisions need to be implementable in practice. I cannot see how Amendments 4 and 5 can be implemented in practice and I will therefore be rejecting them.

Quality logos should, in principle, be viewed as beneficial if they are voluntary. They give producers and processors of goods the opportunity to be successful in niche markets. However, we need to take account of the fact that, through the market dominance of a few chain stores, many voluntary private logos are interpreted as quasi standards. This robs producers and processors of their entrepreneurial freedom and also narrows the choice for consumers.

There is a similar situation with regard to the mandatory indication of the place of origin for agricultural products, such as milk. Implementing this requirement in agriculture and in the processing industry would scarcely be possible from a technical point of view. We need to be careful that good intentions do not descend into excessive bureaucracy.

Janusz Wojciechowski (ECR). – (PL) Madam President, I would like to call attention to the pertinence of item 9 of the Scottà report, which emphasises that, in the WTO negotiations, the Commission must seek to secure an agreement on the 'non-trade concerns' which will ensure that imported agricultural products meet the same requirements, in the areas of food safety, animal welfare and environmental protection, that are imposed on agricultural products produced inside the European Union.

The problem is that this is probably the 150th time the European Parliament has said that the same requirements should be applied to importers as those applied to producers within the European Union. There has been no response, and we are still dealing with a situation in which our producers, farmers and manufacturers are having to comply with high, expensive standards, while importers do not meet these standards. This leads to unfair competition. As was rightly emphasised in the report, this has to change.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Madam President, the control of foodstuffs is a utopian fantasy. The pressure for control and the consequences are, too, it seems. We are thus in a right old stew! In the case of health risks, authorities should put out warnings, but they are not obliged to. We have seen the result of this recently in the listeria-contaminated cheese scandal. Food inspectors often have to battle with deficient labelling – and it is not only the inspectors; consumers have the same problem. They are completely overwhelmed by the labelling jungle. For example, 'farmer' can be stated on the packaging, even though the product has been industrially processed, or it might say 'of Austrian origin' even though the ingredients come from all over the place.

Quality-conscious customers are prepared to pay more for high quality foods. The question is for how long, if rogue traders are also operating in this area. If control systems are geared to small holdings and hardly any attention is paid to what large eco-holdings are doing, then something is wrong with the entire system.

Herbert Dorfmann (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, you said today that products with a designation of origin are a spearhead for our industry. You are right about that. It is particularly true of products that are produced under difficult circumstances, for example, in mountainous areas, and which require higher margins. The designation 'mountain produce' is therefore particularly important.

I would like to address two points. I think that, with regard to these products, we should give farmers the opportunity to organise themselves into inter-professional committees and support consortia where they can also take market decisions. That would not contravene competition law and, if it did, it would, in any

case, be a much smaller contravention than the concentration of chain stores we have seen over the last few years.

With regard to quality standards, about which much has already been said, I am aware of the discussion in the press and also the talk about curved cucumbers. However, producers want and need these rules. We should take that into account in our debate and also in the vote tomorrow.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Certification mechanisms could constitute a contribution to increasing the value of farmers' work, improving their income and promoting quality and food safety. However, since the current certification procedures are complex, time-consuming and, above all, expensive, their results have been negative, especially for small and medium-sized farms. Increased production costs and the distribution of income throughout the value chain becomes even more unfavourable to the producer with the inclusion of yet another business agent in that chain.

Given this, and as an effective guarantee of transparency, quality and security for customers, certification must be carried out by public bodies and must not incur a higher cost for producers.

Above all, however, if there is to be a good policy, there needs to be another agricultural policy, a profound reform of the common agricultural policy which supports local protection, the right to produce and the right to food sovereignty, which will protect farmers and consumers from the consequences of the deregulation of world trade and the unchecked liberalisation of the markets, locking them either within the framework of bilateral agreements or within that of the World Trade Organisation.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D). – (LT) The European Union's agricultural produce is well known in the international marketplace and valued for its high quality. In terms of the future prospects of the common agricultural policy, I am convinced that product quality must remain the essential goal in the future. High quality agricultural products are not simply our business card on a global scale; they are also a very important part of the economic and social life of the EU's region. Policies on quality should be developed by providing more clarity with product certification and labelling that can be understood by all European Union consumers. In order to safeguard the production of quality agricultural products, we must lay down clear rules for labelling products that may contain genetically modified organisms. This problem has become particularly relevant since the Commission's decision to allow the use of genetically modified potatoes for animal feed. Until we lay down labelling and certification standards for such products, there is a threat to future EU food quality policy and the health of us all.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE). – (PL) Madam President, thanks to the instruments of the common agricultural policy, the agricultural market in the European Union is characterised by the supply of agricultural and food items of high quality. High standards, suitable food quality and sufficient supply are components of food security, something which is so important.

It is important that information on the quality of goods reaches the consumer. We know that every product allowed on to the market must meet minimum standards. Special quality which exceeds minimum standards must be detailed on the product to improve its competitiveness by drawing attention to its additional qualities, for which the consumer must pay.

Other important information which should also be on food products is the place of origin and processing of the raw product. Consumers must know what they are buying and for what they are paying. The absence of this information weakens the competitiveness of agricultural and food items produced and processed in Europe in comparison to imported goods produced without regard to animal welfare, environmental requirements or the social standards of employees.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Madam President, Mr Scottà's successful report is very much in the interests of consumer protection. The safety, including from the point of view of health, of agricultural products really must be a top priority. I would like to point out the key importance of improving designations of origin for foods. Every agricultural product in the EU must be clearly labelled with the origin of the raw materials. Consumers must not be duped by fraudulent labelling. Take China, for example. Imported seeds arrive in Austria and then the so-called 'pressed seed oil' is sold there. Worse still, fattened animals are transported across Europe under deplorable conditions in order to produce so-called 'Tyrolean bacon', for example. We therefore need to focus on regional supplies, and, in the interests of our consumers and our farmers, we need to support local farmers and small butchers.

Mariya Nedelcheva (PPE). – (BG) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I congratulate Mr Scottà on this report which clearly signals the European Parliament's desire and determination to participate actively in the forthcoming debate on the future of the CAP. I welcome the suggestion about creating a logo which clearly shows that a particular product is produced and processed solely within Europe. I believe that this will provide another show of support and an original guarantee of the high quality of our products.

In my view, a protected designation of origin and geographical indication system must be implemented. This will allow us to retain the distinctive nature of the regions and their character and make people feel that what they have produced is identifiable and valued on the market. This is why I believe that we must retain the Traditional Speciality Guaranteed instrument and consider it as a good example of our diversity in unity. There is nothing wrong in knowing that we are eating feta from Greece, white brined cheese from Bulgaria or mozzarella from Italy. Food quality and safety are among the main challenges that we must resolve in the future. Let us preserve the quality of our products and their competitiveness and let us guarantee a decent income and living for our producers and farmers.

Thank you for your attention.

Dacian Cioloș, Member of the Commission. – (FR) Madam President, I do not propose to go over all the issues raised here, especially since there is going to be a vote tomorrow, but I would nonetheless like to highlight certain points that have been made repeatedly in the speeches.

With regard to the merging of the various geographical indication systems, I fully understand the concern of certain Members. I can assure you that it is not my intention to destroy something that works, that functions, something to which consumers are attached. We just need to make the quality protection system clearer and more consistent, all the more so given that we are trying, by way of international negotiations, to gain recognition for these systems.

Therefore, it is important that these systems already be clear and easy for our partners to understand so that they can be recognised. It is therefore not my intention to merge for the sake of it. The end result will be a system by which we can make simplifications, without touching things that are already easily identifiable by consumers.

As regards the European quality logo, we must also discuss and decide in this Chamber which objectives we want it to achieve. Is the aim simply to reflect compliance with the basic standards that all European farmers meet and that imported goods also meet? Indeed – I wish to point this out – all imported agri-food products must meet minimum food hygiene and safety standards which are met by our own products.

We therefore have to see which is the best way to successfully differentiate our products from the others. Do we need a European Union logo, or should we instead indicate the places of origin, the locations of production? The best mechanism needs to be identified, and we shall, in any case, give consideration to this.

With regard to geographical indications at international level, rest assured that my concern is to ensure that this system is recognised by our partners. We are trying to ensure this in negotiations conducted by the International Labour Organisation, but also whenever we have an opportunity to do so when negotiating bilateral agreements.

We are therefore going to pursue this approach and, moreover, in my mandate, I want to be able to strengthen the policy for communicating and promoting these quality signs internationally, since quality is an asset and, as such, it can give us a greater presence on the international stage.

With regard to the reserved terms 'mountain', 'island' and so forth, we are looking into the possibility of introducing these kinds of systems. Here too, we need to decide how to proceed so as to ensure that they do not represent an additional cost for those farmers who want to introduce them.

As regards interprofessional organisations and their role in the management of protected designations of origin, or PDOs, it is our intention, particularly as regards milk – since the majority of PDOs and protected geographical indications (PGIs) are concentrated in that sector – to carry out a study to see what impact the ending of quotas will have on the smooth functioning of these quality protection systems, and I hope that, on the basis of this report, we shall see which measures will have to be taken should the need arise.

Giancarlo Scottà, rapporteur. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you, Commissioner Cioloș. I should like to begin by talking very briefly about the land.

The land is that from which we harvest our products and which we must preserve for the future and for those who will have to do the same. That is why, taking this simple thought as a starting point, I should like to move on to producers, to those who work the land, who must be recognised also by those who subsequently enjoy the commercial produce they find in the supermarket or some other shop. It is therefore only right that we respect first the land, which yields the produce, then the processor, if any, but above all the consumer.

I should like to make a proposal for the benefit of consumers, and I am not sure whether it will be welcomed or not: why not ask consumers what they want to know? In this way, we will know which potential label consumers are able to read and to understand, and thus perhaps make it much simpler than the complicated labels we have today. Why must consumers not know that they have the choice of drinking a litre of milk from Europe or a litre of milk from Brazil? It will be for them to choose whether a litre of Brazilian milk is better than a litre of milk produced in the European Union.

Be that as it may, I consider and I hope that this report will be useful for Commissioner Ciolos by providing further details to help grow that thread I referred to earlier: the land, the producer, the processor, if any, the consumer, safety and, above all on the issue of safety, quality. We have all spoken about quality, and I believe that we are all in favour of raising the quality of our produce even more if it means eating well and eating healthily.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Paolo Bartolozzi (PPE), in writing. – (IT) The issue of an agricultural product quality policy has found an authoritative and unanimous response from the European Parliament's Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, thereby making the existing legislation more complete. European agricultural producers have finally gained recognition in European legislation on the quality of their produce linked to the region of production. This represents a guarantee for sheltering them from market globalisation and for ensuring that the 'informed' consumer can reject produce that does not bear the obligatory geographic indication of origin, that is not certified clearly, and that does not comply with marketing and anti-counterfeiting rules. Consumers will be able to make their purchasing choices in full knowledge of the rules relating to their desired product. The European Parliament will continue to fight for the protection of both farmers and consumers. The health of the latter depends on the quality of the produce of the former. An amendment of mine on the protection of product characteristics, which the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development has approved, recognises that the regions have an essential role as producer partners, in particular, of the producers of traditional and organic products, and calls for regions to be involved in the recognition and promotion of products with a geographical indication, traditional products and organic products. I am pleased to note the recognition of this indication.

Sergio Berlato (PPE), in writing. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the subject of the quality of agricultural produce is of fundamental importance when it comes to informing the purchaser and the consumer of the characteristics of products and as regards continuing to guarantee that purchasing products from the European Union is synonymous with high quality derived from the various regional traditions within the Union. Over the years, agricultural product quality policy has evolved in a fragmented way, characterised by a succession of sectoral instruments. Market globalisation and the economic and financial crisis that has struck Europe have not spared the agricultural sector. To emerge from this, we need to focus on the quality and safety of our produce. The continuing search for quality must form an essential component of the strategy pursued by the EU's agri-food sector on the world market. I believe, furthermore, that serious consideration must be given to the Commission's proposal to introduce a European quality logo for products originating and processed wholly within Europe. This logo would, in fact, represent formal recognition of the efforts made by European farmers to maintain high standards of production. Finally, it is definitely a good idea to simplify legislation in order to reduce the bureaucratic burden on businesses while, at the same time, guaranteeing that the quality standards achieved by European producers are maintained.

Robert Dušek (S&D), in writing. – (CS) The agricultural product quality policy is not a static policy, separate from the other policies connected with agriculture. On the contrary, the reform of the common agricultural policy should also include policies dealing with adaptation to climate change, the preservation of biological diversity, secure supplies of energy or water, ensuring decent living conditions for animals, and European fisheries. The product quality policy can help to increase the competitiveness of European farmers and to maintain economic profits in rural areas in a time of crisis precisely by targeting the quality of agricultural

products and high quality foodstuffs. It must continue to apply without exception that purchasing products from the EU means purchasing high quality products, which are produced on the basis of various European regional traditions while following the highest production standards in terms of food safety. I support the Commission proposal for introducing a European quality logo, which would be used for products coming from and also exclusively processed in the EU. Consumers confuse the designation of the place where food is processed with the place of origin of the agricultural product. It is necessary to emphasise that the production process itself can dramatically influence the quality and characteristics of a product in a negative way. I also welcome the retention of the systems of registering geographical indications and traditional specialities, as these indications are significant for European agriculture not only from an economic perspective, but also from an environmental and social perspective.

19. G20 labour and employment ministers meeting (Washington, 20/21 April) (debate)

President. – The next item is the Commission statement on the G20 labour and employment ministers meeting (Washington, 20/21 April).

László Andor, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, the latest projections from the ILO and the OECD show that unemployment rates in the industrialised countries are still rising and will not reach their climax before 2011.

In turn, more than 200 million workers in developing and emerging countries are at risk of being pushed into extreme poverty. This would result in nearly 1.5 billion working poor worldwide. These figures speak for themselves. Indeed, the current crisis highlighted the most painful weaknesses of our increasingly interconnected global economy. There is now a clear consensus on the need for global actions to solve global problems.

Last year in Pittsburgh, leaders of the G20 pledged to ensure that when growth returns, jobs do too. Accordingly, the G20 leaders agreed to build an employment-oriented framework for future economic growth.

This is all very welcome. The Commission lends full support to any framework for actions that put quality jobs at the heart of recovery and help people back to work worldwide. This approach reflects the unmistakable reality that employment is the bottom line in the current global economic crisis, and that a jobless recovery is not an option.

In Pittsburgh, the leaders invited the US Labour Secretary to convene a meeting of G20 labour and employment ministers. Their mandate will be to assess the global employment situation and discuss the impact of policy responses to the crisis as well as the possible necessity of any further measures. Moreover, ministers are to consider medium-term employment and skills development policies, social protection programmes and best practices to ensure workers can benefit from advances in science and technology. This unprecedented meeting will take place in Washington DC on 20 and 21 April. The Commission and the Spanish Presidency will also participate.

The Commission is working closely with the ILO on the preparations for the meeting which will offer us, in particular, an opportunity to promote decent work worldwide on behalf of the European Union. The application of the ILO's internationally recognised core labour standards and efforts to achieve the objective of a basic social security floor are crucial here. Moreover, the G20 mandate includes the development by the ILO and other international organisations of a medium-term global training strategy.

The Commission is making a significant contribution to these efforts through the New Skills for New Jobs initiative. This is part of the Europe 2020 flagship initiative on an agenda for new skills and jobs. The key challenge here is to move forward with a strategy to reskill and upgrade the global workforce and facilitate transitions between jobs, and from education to work, for young people.

Social partners' involvement can bring tremendous added value. We all know here how effective the European Social Dialogue can be when it comes to improving the design of various measures in the employment field. The Commission is ready to share this experience with the European Union's international partners. The Commission will keep Parliament informed about the progress made at the Washington DC meeting.

The G20 Labour Ministers' meeting will be an opportunity for us to develop new measures which will shape the post-crisis policy framework. These new measures and policies can contribute to a balanced exit from the crisis in putting jobs at the heart of the recovery and can overcome the legacy of the crisis. The aim is to give the necessary input and orientation to the G20 leaders' summits in Canada and in Korea later this year.

Elisabeth Morin-Chartier, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, against the backdrop of the current economic and financial crisis, this G20 summit forces us to conclude that the first objective that we must achieve is that of making workers more employable.

This is a necessity, because there can be no social integration without integration via the workplace. Therefore, today, as we prepare for this G20, the only motto and the only objective that we can share is that of combating unemployment.

As you said just now, Commissioner, unemployment has risen significantly in the European Union and the world, but it is quite clear that inequalities are increasing and that they are increasing even more sharply among young people, temporary workers, migrants and women.

Thus, when we see today that 21.4% of young people are unemployed, compared with the 14.7% – an already substantial percentage – that were unemployed two years ago, the speed of the increase is very worrying.

We therefore need to build together, within European and globally – since the response can only be global – convergence and integration strategies that explicitly recognise the fact that dynamic social and cohesion policies are the foundations for the development of our society.

I would also like to remind you of the World Trade Organisation's Global Jobs Pact, which offers an appropriate series of strategic options to enable us to emerge from the crisis.

Where do we stand with regard to the European Commission's proposal to base the framework of the new post-2010 strategy on the social market economy, integration and transparency?

I hope that our European ministers for labour and employment do not forget, during this summit, that they will have to account for the rise in unemployment to all the millions of people who, one after another, have lost their jobs in recent months.

Commissioner Andor, the European Union therefore expects you to act so that we can reassure our fellow citizens and get them back into work.

Alejandro Cercas, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (ES) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I, too, am very glad that we are able to have an opportunity to have this debate this afternoon, in preparation for the summit that will bring you all together in Washington on 20 and 21 April.

This meeting we are having today owes much to the Chair of the Committee on Employment, Mrs Berès. An act of God prevents her from being here today.

I am going to speak on behalf of us both. I shall speak in her language, French, using the papers she had prepared, because I am sure you will be very interested in hearing her own words:

(FR) That is why, Commissioner, at a time when the unemployment rate in Europe is going to exceed the 10% mark, when there are more than one and a half billion poor workers in the world and when the crisis is hitting a further 200 million poor workers, it is time for the leaders to focus on the social consequences of the crisis and to give priority to employment.

We commend the preparatory work that you have carried out in close cooperation and in a spirit of dialogue with the social partners.

The meeting sought by the Heads of State or Government gathered together in Pittsburgh has the virtue of finally reconciling macro-economic issues with the social dimension. In order to avoid a repeat of the mistakes that led to the crisis, we absolutely must ensure that the crisis does not further increase the social inequalities within our countries, between EU Member States and at international level.

We must ensure that a hasty strategy to end the crisis does not result in the dismantling of our social model, for the origins of this crisis – which we have been going through for three years now – are well and truly social. It is not enough to regulate financial products; we must get to the very bottom of the wrongdoing.

Unfortunately, we fear that, in spite of numerous reports by organisations such as the International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) highlighting the worsening social inequalities, there is still a lack of political will where the social dimension is concerned. Proof of this is the very poor visibility of social issues, which are not even mentioned on the G20's official website. Similarly, the recent decision by the ECOFIN Council to put a stop to the exceptional employment support measures designed to restore public finances quickly is unacceptable.

A dangerous game is being played between ministers for finance and ministers for employment and social affairs.

Commissioner, we are counting on you and on the Spanish Presidency to go against this short-term approach and to place social issues at the heart of European and international action.

Marian Harkin, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – Madam President, it is absolutely crucial that the G20 employment and labour ministers put quality jobs at the heart of their economic recovery plans.

For many workers – as you are aware, Commissioner – the picture is a dismal one, with unemployment increasing, working hours reduced, substantial pay cuts, the working poor you spoke of, and inadequate or non-existent training opportunities. At the same time, workers see the banks being recapitalised, while small and medium-sized businesses – the drivers of economic growth – are being starved of funds and jobs are being lost.

Fiscal discipline and retrenchment must not take the place of a job stimulus plan, yet that is happening in many countries, including my own, Ireland. The Commission praises our fiscal discipline but we are haemorrhaging jobs. We are balancing the books but our workers are paying the price. The G20 ministers have to make a firm commitment to supporting decent work and prioritising job growth, alongside minimum income, social protection and training or re-training for those who do not have work.

Finally, I agree with you that they must commit to implementing policies consistent with ILO fundamental principles and rights and they must not allow the current economic crisis to be used as an excuse to weaken or disregard internationally recognised labour standards.

Ilda Figueiredo, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (PT) It is high time that the leaders of the European Union recognised the part that they, too, played in the serious social crisis that is happening all over Europe and the world. This is a consequence of the financial and economic crisis which they facilitated by deregulating financial and trade markets, and pushing through free trade agreements with third countries, without heeding the interests of workers or the public.

The rise in unemployment and precarious and poorly paid work increases poverty and is a direct consequence of neoliberal policies and the crisis of capitalism. The International Labour Organisation (ILO) and the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development believe that unemployment has not yet reached its peak in industrialised countries, and that soon, more than 200 million workers could be thrown into extreme poverty. This means that the number of poor workers could reach 1.5 billion, with women and young people worst affected.

It is time to put an end to the regression of social and labour rights that we are seeing. Quality jobs with rights need to become a priority and made to comply, at the very least, with the ILO conventions. Without the creation of new jobs with rights, there can be no way out of this crisis.

Kinga Göncz (S&D). – (HU) I think we are all pleased that ministers for employment and social affairs now meet in the G20 gathering, and that they have thus become equal in rank to the finance ministers, which had hitherto not been the case. It seems that it took an economic crisis for it to be possible to speak of global economic measures, not only with regard to the economy and finance, but also with regard to social and employment issues. This is especially important now, when it seems that the economic pressures of the crisis are receding, while unemployment and poverty continue to grow. We know that this will have long-term social as well as political consequences. Around the world, this goes hand in hand with extremism, which poses a long-term threat as well.

It is important for ministers for employment and social affairs to develop sectoral policies that can remedy the employment situation and reduce poverty. Let me give a concrete example, which was mentioned at the G20 summit, that of the instrument of micro-finance, which not only increases social cohesion, but also self-sufficiency, and can be important for this reason as well. It is regrettable, however, that Parliament cannot

adopt a position and submit it to the G20 meeting, but can only send our verbal messages. However, I believe that even this is more than anything we have done in the past.

Elizabeth Lynne (ALDE). – Madam President, as we are all saying, the financial crisis has hit ordinary people very hard.

That is why we have to make sure there are positive outcomes from the G20 Employment Ministers' meeting, the first to be called, as has just been mentioned. I just hope we do have those positive outcomes. I am glad they are not going to concentrate just on the financial sector but will look at the social impact on people as well.

We know there is record unemployment in many countries across the world. We have got to look at the real way of getting people into work – into real jobs. Training programmes, for instance, have to be adequate to actually cover the needs at the moment. We ought to be looking at identifying best practice from countries that have already brought in various measures, and trying to roll that out to other countries, to try to help the most marginalised in society. Work has been done in those other countries, so why are we not learning from them?

We must make sure the core ILO conventions are actually implemented. We must make sure the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities is implemented. We must make sure that those who are not protected at the moment are protected in the future.

Thomas Händel (GUE/NGL). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the G20 summit in Pittsburgh provided a good model. It demanded economic recovery plans in order to promote decent work, which will contribute to security and the creation of jobs, and it made the growth of employment a priority.

I therefore call on Europe's labour ministers to press the G20 members, firstly, not to go back on their economic recovery packages, but to work harder and to a greater extent to create jobs; secondly, to work to provide financially secure short-time work to prevent the loss of jobs; thirdly, to promote public investment for the creation of jobs and sustainable ecological growth and, fourthly, to strengthen and extend social security measures to enable access to these measures. That will also safeguard purchasing power within the internal market as well as employment and will help to combat poverty. Cooperation with the social partners is apparently very important to Europe's labour ministers in order to strengthen the social dialogue to an even greater extent than desired by the Commissioner.

Sylvana Rapti (S&D). – (EL) Madam President, Commission, there will be a premiere in Washington on 20 April: for the first time, the Ministers for Employment of the 20 wealthiest areas on earth are to hold a conference. The voice of Europe needs to be heard loud and strong there. Four-and-a-half million jobs are in danger of being lost in Europe over the next three years and this will impact on growth, damage social cohesion and cause social unrest.

Creating jobs must be a priority for Europe. Realistic, specific, quantifiable targets, both long-term and immediate, urgently need to be set. We urgently need to be able to safeguard decent work for the citizens of Europe. We urgently need to be able to safeguard the employment and pension rights of workers.

We are close to forgetting the obvious: that work is a lever for growth. I think that we ultimately need to understand that we cannot talk of economic policy without keeping the employment parameter constantly in mind.

I should like to close by saying that, otherwise, instead of talking about a Council of Ministers for Employment, we shall be talking about a Council of Ministers for Unemployment.

Patrick Le Hyaric (GUE/NGL). – (FR) Madam President, in my view, there will be no lasting solution to unemployment and underemployment unless we reverse the current approach, which prioritises capital over labour, and unless we introduce a new form of wealth distribution that includes an increase in pay, in social protection levels and in minimum benefits. This is what will create the conditions for a sustainable recovery that provides a wealth of jobs. Social progress is a prerequisite for ending the economic crisis, not the other way around.

The G20 should act as an incentive to mobilise the international banking sector in favour of selective credit that would help employment, job-creating investment and promoters of a new, environmentally friendly economy.

At the same time, speculative capital flows should be taxed so that they can be redirected to the fight against poverty.

I propose that we examine and trial a vocational and training-related social security system for the jobs of the future, at the same time as developing public research, which is crucial to a new lasting and sustainable economy.

IN THE CHAIR: MR WIELAND

Vice-President

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) The G20 leaders established in Pittsburgh in September 2009 that the main priority in the economic recovery plans must be to preserve existing jobs and create new ones.

In spite of the International Monetary Fund's forecasts for 3% economic growth, the OECD and ILO forecasts indicate that the unemployment rate will continue to rise rapidly right until the first half of 2011.

The economic and financial crisis has hit European companies hard, not to mention, by implication, Member States' budgets.

The G20 labour and social welfare ministers should ask for the support granted to companies in difficulty, as a result of the economic crisis, to be extended until when the unemployment rate starts to fall again.

In addition, I believe that these ministers must find measures to support both civil servants and employees paid from public funds, such as teachers and doctors, who are losing jobs as a result of the reduction in the budgets allocated to public institutions.

Zigmantas Balčytis (S&D). – (LT) We must welcome the fact that for the first time, labour and employment ministers are meeting at the G20. At the 2009 G20 leaders' summit in Pittsburgh, the countries' leaders agreed that the emphasis in national economic recovery plans should be on the retention and creation of jobs. However, since this summit, the situation has worsened, both in the European Union and on a global scale. In some Member States, the number of unemployed that grows daily has reached a critical level and some national governments' crisis management plans are making people's situation significantly worse, since pensions and other important social guarantees are being reduced. Small and medium-sized enterprises are shutting down en masse. I think that the main emphasis of the G20 summit should be agreement on concrete measures to stabilise the unemployment level, since the disillusionment and fear of the people will not contribute to the speedy economic recovery of our countries.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D). – (LT) First of all, I really welcome the fact that for the first time at the G20, ministers of the world's most powerful countries, labour and employment ministers, will meet to discuss the most important problems, in other words, how to overcome unemployment and increase employment. In fact, this meeting will take place in a very difficult environment, as in the European Union alone, around 5.5 million young people are out of work. The number of long-term unemployed is also growing constantly. This week, in my country, Lithuania, 300 000 people were registered unemployed. My country has never experienced this before in the 20 years since it became independent. Therefore, it is very important that, once they come together, the ministers of the most powerful countries set out concrete measures that should be taken so that people in EU countries do not just have any work, but suitable work, quality work, decently paid work, from which they make a living and not live in poverty. Therefore, I hope that such concrete decisions are taken at this meeting.

László Andor, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I am glad this discussion on the labour and employment ministers' meeting in Washington DC took place today because it is not going to be the only summit where the voice of the Members of Parliament will be heard on such an important subject. There is another summit coming soon that should also get to hear what you said today: I have in mind the summit tomorrow in Brussels, which has the opportunity to support the Europe 2020 agenda with a strong inclusive pillar and flagship initiatives to boost employment and reduce poverty and with serious targets included in this strategy.

It has to be appreciated how serious a crisis the world economy has faced in the last two years and it is not only about deteriorating statistics. I fully agree with Mrs Göncz that we also have to appreciate the political risk, the risk this crisis poses for European civilisation.

And I hope that the leaders who meet tomorrow will understand this and draw very responsible conclusions from this situation. Without that, it would be very difficult to represent European values worldwide; it would be very difficult to represent with credibility the commitment to addressing unemployment and poverty in the G20 context.

It is a major step forward that labour ministers are meeting in the G20 context. Whether we are emancipated to include finance ministers is still to be seen but it is very important that this step has been made and there is the opportunity to exchange experience and exchange views.

It is true that the financial crisis has been first addressed by the governments and the fiscal power of the state has been directed to the stabilisation of the banking sectors. The banks have been recapitalised and financial stability has enjoyed priority.

Now we have to prioritise job creation. We have to prioritise an exit strategy that does not harm existing jobs and does not undermine the capacity to invest. Therefore, we first have to make a decision to create financial order, to restore stability and to eliminate the pressure on Member State governments to make unreasonable cuts that affect the social sector and employment.

I fully agree that the ILO is the cornerstone in producing ILO standards and making reference to them in the international discussion is of key importance. This is a sound standard for us in moving forward on employment and social relations.

The G20 context is a great opportunity to link up with discussions in the outside world and they are connecting us not only to discussions on labour relations, but also on financial regulation and on issues such as transaction tax that are more boldly discussed in other corners of the world and sometimes deserve more serious attention inside the European Union.

So I am grateful for the comments I have heard and for the messages I can convey to other partners in the G20 group.

President. – The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Ádám Kósa (PPE), in writing. – (HU) In my view, it is essential to recognise that the decision makers of today are not keeping pace with developments in the world, the economy and technology: soon, even an energy company will be able to plan farther ahead than international political actors. Unfortunately, a failure to recognise this reality is evident in the current EU 2020 strategy. The European Union should look farther and should also be willing to make sacrifices in the interest of a more sustainable society. We need to concentrate increasingly on infrastructure and on job creation rather than on a growing consumption that relies on imports. Unconditional free trade dishonourably takes away jobs, ruins the environment, endangers consumer health and increases obstacles to accessibility, solely in order to guarantee the price of a product or service. We cannot go back to the extremes of the days of rampant capitalism – the world of *Oliver Twists*! Otherwise, the EU 2020 strategy, just like the Lisbon Strategy, will end in failure.

20. Fight against tuberculosis (debate)

President. – The next item is the statement from the Commission on the fight against tuberculosis.

John Dalli, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I welcome this opportunity on World Tuberculosis Day to underline the Commission's commitment to addressing the challenges caused by this disease.

We had believed that our successes in past decades had eliminated the threats related to this serious public health concern. However, for too long, we have mistakenly lowered the guard against tuberculosis. In 2008, the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control reported around 83 000 cases and close to 6 000 deaths due to tuberculosis in the European Union and EFTA countries. This amounts to about 16 deaths a day. This is simply unacceptable and requires action by all concerned sectors and stakeholders. It is unacceptable because tuberculosis is a preventable and curable disease that should not lead to such dramatic consequences.

Tuberculosis is a cross-sector issue and it is linked to many of the public health challenges we face in the European Union, including the spread of anti-microbial resistance, the lack of new effective tools to diagnose

and treat tuberculosis, the steep rise of co-infections such as with HIV, and the inequalities, with tuberculosis disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable groups.

The Commission has launched a number of initiatives over the past years to strengthen capacities to tackle tuberculosis. In 2000, tuberculosis was included in the list of priority diseases under EU-wide surveillance. In this context, the Commission supported several projects that have helped coordinate the surveillance of tuberculosis in the 53 countries of the WHO European Region. This has improved our shared knowledge and monitoring of the epidemiological situation. In addition, through its research framework programmes, the Commission supports the development of new treatments, vaccines, drugs and diagnostic tools against tuberculosis. Since 2002, more than EUR 124 million has been allocated to these efforts. But, as tuberculosis is not constrained by borders, we have to support countries beyond the European Union.

The Commission supports developing countries in their tuberculosis control programmes through the European Programme for Action to Confront HIV/AIDS, Malaria and Tuberculosis through External Action (2007-2011). The main channel for financing this support is the Global Fund to fight AIDS, tuberculosis and malaria, to which the Commission has contributed EUR 870 million since 2002, with an annual contribution that amounts to EUR 100 million since 2008. In addition, it supports clinical trials and capacity building in sub-Saharan Africa through the European and Developing Countries Clinical Trials Partnership (EDCTP). Finally, the setting up of the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control has enabled us to raise our efforts against tuberculosis to a new level.

In March 2007, following a request from the Commission, the Centre developed an action plan to fight tuberculosis in the EU. This addresses the key cross-sectoral challenges we are facing today in tuberculosis prevention and control and strengthening epidemiological surveillance: ensuring prompt and quality TB care for all, developing new tools for diagnosis and treatment, decreasing the burden of tuberculosis and HIV co-infection, and addressing the threat of multi-drug resistance.

However, the Commission cannot succeed in this challenge alone. The contribution from civil society to reach out to the most vulnerable, and the Member States' commitment are key towards achieving our objective to support the global fight against this disease.

Elena Oana Antonescu, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (RO) 'The cause of death in the age of antibiotics' is what a group of researchers called tuberculosis, a word which many of us thought had disappeared from everyday usage, but a disease which still kills a huge number of people.

Tuberculosis is the seventh most common cause of death in the world. Unfortunately, the current situation is highlighted by the rise in the number of cases involving a strain of tuberculosis resistant to standard drug therapy.

Globally, there were 9.4 million new cases of tuberculosis in 2008 and 1.8 million deaths. A person is infected by tuberculosis somewhere in the world every second.

We need to hear these figures stated as clearly as possible in an important forum of the European Union so that we can all realise as much as possible that this disease is still ravaging our societies and killing a large number of European citizens.

I come from a country which, unfortunately, features among the top places in the European Union in the dismal ratings for tuberculosis cases.

Although we can talk about a slightly downward trend in recent years and an increase in the percentage of people cured of chemo-resistant tuberculosis, the absolute figures remain alarming and they reflect a tragic reality.

We need to wage a consistent, integrated battle, based on the best possible planning, in order to keep this scourge under control. We have to continue at European Union level the work we have done so far to ensure that in all Member States, we raise the level of detection of diseases, the level of access to adequate treatment, the quality of treatment monitoring and the quality of medical care given to patients.

We also need all governments to realise the importance of this battle and to work alongside social partners as effectively as possible in order to reduce the number of Europeans suffering from this disease which we thought had been banished in previous centuries.

Above all, we need to wage this battle together, as a family, without considering the differences between us, but helping each other to overcome this problem.

Ultimately, we are the European Union and our strength lies in unity.

Åsa Westlund, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – Mr President, in this day and age, no one should be dying from TB.

(SV) That is what Ban Ki Moon said today, on World Tuberculosis Day.

He is right, of course. Nevertheless, very many people around the world are still dying of tuberculosis today, particularly the young and the poor. We therefore need to increase our aid to the global fund that is responsible for a very large proportion of the work to combat tuberculosis, malaria and HIV in the poorer areas of the world.

However, as the Commission pointed out, people in Europe are also dying of tuberculosis. We need to increase our cooperation to stop the spread of multi-resistant TB and to find effective treatments which reach all of the vulnerable groups in society.

The European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control, based in Solna in Sweden, has a very important role to play here and I am pleased that the Commission has made it a priority to come here and hold a debate on this important subject today.

Charles Goerens, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, medical progress has not yet overcome tuberculosis. Consequently, it is wrongly considered to be a disease that affects only poor countries. This underestimates the way in which it is spreading, especially in Central and Eastern Europe.

In truth, no country is safe from this dreadful disease, which has been around for many thousands of years. Furthermore, the multiple-resistant strains offer little hope of an end to this scourge in the short term. The need to fight on several fronts by means of prevention, medical supervision, research and the dissemination of precautionary and hygiene measures encourages us to act in a coordinated and determined manner. In short, we must be able to rely at all times on the best possible strategies in this area.

When it comes to financing the measures, it is advisable to distinguish between two scenarios. Firstly, the social security systems in our countries should, in principle, be able to guarantee sufficient medical cover. However, patients in developing countries still rely on solidarity which, since 2002, has materialised in an exemplary fashion under the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

If the aim is indeed to halve the number of cases of tuberculosis between 2000 and 2015, one of the three scenarios put forward by the President of the Global Fund, Michel Kazatchkine, will have to be endorsed.

I should like to ask the Commission which of the three scenarios it is using as a basis for making proposals to our Member States regarding the future financing of the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE). – (PT) World Tuberculosis Day, which takes place today, is an occasion to call for the strengthening of political dialogue and the involvement of governments and civil society in this cause.

The number of cases of tuberculosis has been decreasing within the EU. There has also been a marked reduction in Portugal, but the incidence rate is still above the EU average. This reduction is linked to the success of the National Plan to Fight Tuberculosis. In some countries, however, it has recently been shown that the disease is resurgent.

The various action plans promoted by the European Commission are steps in the right direction. I would like to highlight the partnership between Europe and developing countries in carrying out clinical trials. The support of the Framework Programme for Research and Technological Development is also important in the field of life science. Strengthening the role of clinical and scientific research is vital in the fight against tuberculosis. This makes it crucial that work continues to discover new and better instruments to combat tuberculosis and which promote innovative diagnostic technologies, along with medicines and vaccines.

I therefore call upon the Commission and the Member States to join forces and ramp up the fight against tuberculosis in order to succeed in controlling and eradicating this disease.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D). – (LT) We must combat tuberculosis, since every year, many people in the world die from this disease and almost one in three inhabitants of the world are infected by it. I would like to draw attention to the fact that tuberculosis is the most widespread infectious disease in the world, which

is closely linked to social and economic problems, in other words, poverty, unemployment, alcoholism, drug addiction and HIV/AIDS, as well as the inadequate state of health care systems in poor countries and delayed diagnosis. In order to overcome these factors causing tuberculosis, the European Commission and the European Union Member States must take concrete and swift action with the aim of establishing joint measures to combat this terrible disease, find joint political dialogue on financial support and adopt a joint action plan to combat the disease.

In spite of the fact that tuberculosis is included in the list of priority diseases, the fight against tuberculosis still receives insufficient funding and therefore, we must review the European Union budget allocations in this action programme. I also call on you to encourage greater investment in scientific research in the fight against tuberculosis.

Olga Sehnalová (S&D). – (CS) Today is World Tuberculosis Day and it provides an opportunity to mention that, despite the successes achieved so far in the battle against this disease, tuberculosis remains a serious global problem. More than 2 billion people are infected with the tuberculosis bacillus and one in ten of these people fall ill with the active form.

The incidence of tuberculosis and, in particular, the varying levels in the treatment and monitoring of the disease, are connected with the varying socio-economic conditions in different regions and also in different social groups. The early diagnosis of tuberculosis and the thorough and fully-monitored treatment of the disease, in other words, treatment that is uninterrupted and of sufficient duration, are the basic pre-conditions for reducing the risk of extensive treatment resistance and multi-resistant forms of TBC developing, the treatment of which is extremely expensive and difficult to obtain in many countries. Of similar importance is the adaptation of health systems and everyday practice, including monitoring the disease in high-risk groups and providing qualified health workers and adequate supplies of equipment.

WHO estimates talk of the need to spend USD 44.3 billion at the national level over the next 10 years on the fight against tuberculosis, yet barely half of the resources required will be available. The EU's task is therefore to join forces with the WHO and individual countries, together with their national health systems, and to make the battle against tuberculosis one of the priorities of development aid to third countries.

John Dalli, Member of the Commission. – (MT) I took great pleasure and interest in listening to the speeches of the honourable Members. I would like to assure them that the Commission is treating this disease very seriously and also gives significant weight to what has been said today. We are determined to achieve our targets in order to control the tuberculosis disease. These kinds of discussions are of particular importance in order to concentrate all attention and focus on this disease. Parliament's contribution and support is essential in contributing to our endeavours in fighting this disease within the European Union as well as in other countries.

President. – The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Nessa Childers (S&D), in writing. – While tuberculosis is viewed by many in the past tense and seen as a 19th century affliction, it continues to have a serious impact, both directly and indirectly, on the lives of hundreds of thousands of farmers across the EU each year. Though TB in its human form has been contained in most EU countries since the middle of the 20th century, it continues to spread aggressively among livestock and affects 5% of cattle herds in my Ireland East constituency each year.

I recently received correspondence from a dairy farmer in County Westmeath, whose herd of prized dairy cows has been all but obliterated since he first discovered TB on his farm less than a year ago. The badger-spread disease was first discovered on the day he was due to leave on a two-week holiday last June, and he has since lost 64 of his 82-strong herd.

Though TB in humans has been rightly tackled with full force by the EU in recent times, the bovine form of the disease, which results in millions of euro of lost revenue each year, should be seriously considered as we draft TB legislation for the future.

21. The effects of the global financial and economic crisis on developing countries and on development cooperation (short presentation)

President. – The next item is a short presentation of the report (A7-0034/2010) by Enrique Guerrero Salom, on behalf of the Committee on Development, on the effects of the global financial and economic crisis on developing countries and on development cooperation (COM(2009)0160 – 2009/2150(INI))

Enrique Guerrero Salom, rapporteur. – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, the financial and economic crisis is producing the bitterest, severest effects on emerging and developing countries, especially on the lower income ones. This crisis has slowed down the sustained growth that has been occurring in many of these countries over the last decade: economic growth that was creating jobs, helping to straighten out their public accounts, making it possible to bring down their foreign debt, encouraging the expansion of their business activity and, in addition, helping them to obtain more official development aid.

These countries had already been suffering in the years prior to the crisis, however: firstly, the food crisis, which endangered the survival of hundreds of millions of people; then, the energy crisis, which used up many of the resources of those that did not produce oil or gas; finally, the climate crisis, the effects of which on harvests and infrastructure harm the poorest countries most of all.

The financial crisis added to this fragile situation in which these countries found themselves. As the European Commission itself points out, having affected the developing countries and emerging countries, the third wave of the financial crisis damaged the poorest countries, turning this crisis, in theory an economic one, into a development, social and humanitarian crisis.

In fact, all areas of activity in these countries have been damaged. Economic growth, which will be much lower in 2009 than in previous years, has been damaged. Trade has decreased, which will weaken these countries' current account balances. There is less foreign investment and little access by these countries to international funding, and we are seeing a growing protectionist reaction from the developed countries.

At the same time, emigrant remittances have fallen and Official Development Assistance has also been reduced. As a result, hundreds of millions of people have been added to the list of the poorest and hundreds of thousands of children will die at an earlier age on continents such as Africa.

In the face of this reality, the European voice must make itself heard by requiring us to uphold the Official Development Assistance undertakings made; by requiring new sources of additional resources to help these countries; by requiring charges and taxes on emigrants to be lightened; by requiring that attempts at protectionism should be resisted and support for a Doha Development Round to be held; by requiring action against tax havens and tax evasion; and also by working for a debt moratorium or debt cancellation for the poorest countries.

As rapporteur for this report, I wanted to obtain the greatest possible consensus and I agreed, in negotiation, to amendments by all the parliamentary groups, but I am still willing to submit an oral amendment to Section 34 of this report tomorrow, with the aim of adding further votes. This would be further authority for something I believe to be vital: that the European voice should be united and strong as regards aid to developing countries.

John Dalli, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I would like first of all to congratulate the rapporteur for this very comprehensive report.

As rightly emphasised in this report, developing countries have been affected by the crisis much harder than initially expected. In fact, they have been hit through several transmission channels, such as volatile commodity prices, declining export revenues and tourism earnings, as well as falling capital flows and remittances. One common feature is the increase in the financing needs of many countries.

Many developing countries were often obliged to cut social expenditure (notably in nutrition, health and education), entailing severe social and political consequences and threatening not only the achievement of the MDGs by 2015, but also undermining past progress observed in recent years. Despite some first signs of global recovery, developing countries, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, will certainly lag behind.

The EU has shown leadership and unity through a joint EU response to the crisis framed within the global response, namely within the United Nations, the G20 and G8. We have acted quickly and efficiently to translate pledges into concrete commitments to help developing countries cope with the crisis.

Last spring, the EU adopted a set of comprehensive, timely, targeted and coordinated measures to cushion the human impact of the crisis, boost economic growth in developing countries and protect the most vulnerable.

The EU response comprises not only the Community response but also the EU Member States' response (their respective bilateral responses as well as their contributions to the resources of the international financial institutions as called upon by the G20). Moreover, close collaboration with the World Bank and the IMF has enabled us to ensure the consistency of our respective analyses and the complementarity of our assistance.

As highlighted in the report, the Commission has set up and is currently implementing a very concrete and short-term ad hoc mechanism, named the Vulnerability FLEX, to support the most vulnerable countries with poor resilience capacity, with a view to enabling them to maintain priority spending, notably in the social sectors.

Other measures include reallocations following ad hoc country reviews and the advanced Mid-Term Review of the 10th European Development Fund, which is currently ongoing, support under the traditional FLEX instrument, frontloading of aid where feasible, etc.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) has played, and will continue to play, a critical role in supporting our partners' efforts in coping with the crisis. In this context, the Commission welcomes your support in urging Member States to stay committed to achieving by 2015 the 0.7% ODA/GNI target. Other donors should take similar ambitious targets for ODA increases, and we must call upon the entire donor community to live up to their commitments in terms of aid volumes and effectiveness.

On 21 April, the Commission will publish its yearly spring development package of proposals to Member States. This year, the focus will be on the actions that remain necessary to achieve the MDGs. The package will adopt a comprehensive approach and define an action plan for accelerated progress towards the MDGs. It will also provide an opportunity to make an ambitious EU contribution to the forthcoming UN High-Level MDG Review in September. In doing so, the EU will remain credible about its commitments and continue to play a leading role in international development.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). – (RO) The economic and financial crisis has also hit Moldova, a developing country, very hard. This country's economy declined by 9% last year according to IMF estimates, and the unemployment rate has passed the 6% mark. Direct investment needs to be encouraged.

I should point out that Moldova has employed for a period of one year nine senior European advisers who will provide assistance to the main ministries in Chişinău.

Bearing in mind that we speak the same language, our neighbours from across the River Prut can benefit from Romania's expertise in absolutely every area.

The cost of money transfers made by emigrants from the countries they work in must be reduced. The commitment made by the G8 leaders to cut these costs from 10% to 5% in the next five years is a first step in this direction.

I would like to welcome today the record financial support amounting to USD 2.6 billion which has been granted to Moldova for the 2011-2013 period. The agreement was reached today by Prime Minister Vlad Filat during the Donor conference.

Antolín Sánchez Presedo (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, although the epicentre of the crisis is not located in the developing countries, they are the ones that have been seriously and deeply affected by its huge wave.

The credit crunch, the uncertainty produced by the depression and the fall in international trade, investment flows and remittances from emigrant workers have been the main channels for the spread of a crisis preceded by a great deal of volatility in the prices of basic products and foodstuffs, and generated in circumstances of massive global imbalances.

A concerted response to the crisis must take the developing countries into account and their agenda must form an essential component of global economic cooperation.

Through the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, we have asked that the International Monetary Fund consider the burden that the crisis has produced on the public finances of the developing countries in the report it is to prepare for the forthcoming G20 meeting, and that the Commission issue a communication

in which an assessment is made as to how a tax on financial transactions might help to achieve the Millennium Development Goals, correct the global imbalances and promote sustainable development.

I am glad that Mr Guerrero has taken up these proposals and I congratulate him on his splendid report.

Olle Schmidt (ALDE). – (SV) Mr President, I would like to thank the rapporteur for his important report.

I am convinced that the best way to counter the crisis is with more free trade and globalisation, not with protectionism. Europe must therefore keep its markets open in order to combat the recession, stimulate growth, both in Europe and worldwide and, in so doing, combat poverty.

In a few days' time, the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly will meet in Tenerife. My colleagues from the ACP countries always tend to point out the problems that the EU's subsidised agricultural products create on their markets. They need trade, but our policy counteracts the establishment of healthy markets for agricultural products in developing countries.

The EU has shown leadership says the Commissioner, but we can do much better. It is a matter of fair trade, Commissioner.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL). – (PT) The food, energy, climate, financial, economic and social crises referred to in the report are nothing more than different incarnations of the same structural crisis that has been dragging on for decades. In some regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, wealth per capita has been continuously diverging from that of other regions in the world over decades. Despite the disparities that exist at present, developing countries tend to have certain characteristics in common: dependence on exports of a few raw materials, a lack of economic diversification, a strong focus on agriculture, the energy and extractive industries or tourism, and a strong field of foreign capital.

A progressive export and liberalisation model for trade has been pushed on these countries, if necessary, by resorting to blackmail. As shown by the negotiation process for economic partnership agreements, this leads to the exacerbation of the dependency of these countries, thwarting any possible indigenous development. Yet it is foreign debt that continues to be the principal drain on the resources of developing countries. It is paid many times over, yet as it is always growing, the debt has reached a colossal amount and self-perpetuates the overexploitation of these countries, thus maintaining the tenor of their relationship with the countries of the northern hemisphere. Cancelling the debt is simply a matter of justice.

President. – Keeping to the speaking time, too, is a matter of fairness.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) The biggest financial and economic crisis since the 1930s has, as we know, not only hit Europe hard. The developing countries are suffering particularly badly from the effects of the crisis, and they are least able to do anything about it. Irresponsible speculation, greed for quick profits which are completely unrelated to the real economy, particularly in the Anglo-Saxon countries, and a financial system that is coming apart at the seams have brought the world to the brink of a financial abyss.

Another cause of the crisis is a globalisation concept that has made complete deregulation its highest priority. The countries of Europe are getting themselves ever deeper into debt in order to restart their economies. However, in many cases, it is not possible for developing countries to do this because of their poor financial situation. Therefore, they must be given the opportunity to protect their own national economies more effectively against imported goods which are sold at dumping prices and which destroy local markets and local people's livelihoods.

We must give the developing countries the chance to emerge from the crisis under their own steam. Traditional development aid can probably be considered to have largely failed in its purpose. Ultimately, we have to tackle the root of the problem and impose strict regulations on the financial markets, prohibit speculative practices and quickly introduce a tax on financial transactions.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 25 March 2010.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), in writing. – (LT) The EU has a duty to help developing countries overcome difficulties linked to the global economic crisis and poverty, which came about through no fault of their own.

It is very important that the European Commission determinedly strives for the implementation of international development cooperation reform and that together with the Council, it improves the coordination of bilateral and multilateral development cooperation, since gaps in this area are the main reason why the effectiveness of aid for development may suffer.

Developing countries need aid to reduce poverty and isolation, measures that contribute to development and measures necessary to exit the crisis, especially in this difficult period.

We will be able to implement the broad commitments adopted by generally having better coordination and action that is administered more effectively and transparently, striving for broad agreement between the main aid providers, partner countries, financial institutions and civil society.

By implementing these actions, the European Union must be the leader and act more resolutely. To that end, all European Union institutions must make greater commitments and on this matter, Parliament has undoubtedly made its opinion very clear.

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The developing countries have ended up the main victims of the financial crisis, in spite of the initial predictions which maintained that the developed countries would be hit hardest. The theory suggesting that developing countries are not tied in strongly enough to the global economy to be seriously affected by the crisis on the financial markets has been disproved by reality. We are seeing the crisis deepening in many developing countries, with unprecedented unemployment rates and exponential growth in government debt and budget deficits. While all this is going on, developed countries which have not felt the impact of the crisis very strongly or have had available effective instruments for mitigating its impact have experienced economic growth, albeit tentative. The economic crisis is already affecting the population directly, while unemployment is on the rise in developing countries. The efforts being made to bring about economic recovery by the states which continue to feel the effects of the crisis could affect whole social groups, as the recovery measures can only have a painful impact. EU funding programmes are the most comprehensive and inclusive among the financial aid schemes available globally. The Member States affected must benefit as appropriately as possible from the money allocated for tackling situations which restrict economic activity and have social ramifications.

Proinsias De Rossa (S&D), in writing. – The global financial and economic crisis has hit the developed world so deeply that we are now struggling with a social and unemployment crisis. But in the least developed countries, such problems, for which they are not responsible, are compounded by the consequences of food and climate crises, with dramatic implications for a sixth of the world's population who suffer from hunger. As the largest combined aid donors, the EU Member States must fulfil their Official Development Assistance (ODA) commitments, improve aid effectiveness and coordination and strengthen their efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals by 2015. The extent of the damage caused by speculation in the financial sector highlights the importance of preventive measures such as taxation of financial transactions and warrants considering compensation from the sector for the costs of the crisis. As tax havens and off-shores deprive developing countries of multiples of the amounts raised through ODA, inaction in this field is unacceptable.

Siiri Oviir (ALDE), in writing. – (ET) Although today we can already speak of an improvement in the economic and financial crisis in some EU Member States, we should recognise that for the developing countries, this crisis, with all its cruel effects, is still in full swing. Without a doubt, we should consider economic development to be the key phrase for resolving the current global crisis. However, while undertaking the revitalisation of our own economy, we should not forget that the continuation of the crisis in the developing countries also hinders global economic growth very significantly, and therefore also hinders our own development. I think that the Member States of the European Union must continue to give aid to reduce poverty and exclusion in the developing countries, continually adapting this to new circumstances and conditions. Considering the severe effects of the global crisis on the developing countries in particular, I support those who say that, despite the crisis, all the EU Member States could increase their collective development aid by 0.7% of their GNI by 2015. It is important to take measures to promote development and to get us out of the crisis today – in 2010. Therefore, I support those who say that, in the current situation, highly-developed countries both within and outside the EU should take steps to reform international development cooperation. We cannot allow a lack of intervention on our part to cancel out previous achievements in the areas of poverty and exclusion, and we cannot allow a situation to arise in which, instead of the current hundred million people living in extreme poverty, we have a billion people in such a position.

22. Agenda of the next sitting: see Minutes

23. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting was closed at 23.15)