

# MONDAY, 14 SEPTEMBER 2009

IN THE CHAIR: MR BUZEK

*President*

*(The sitting was opened at 17.00)*

## 1. Resumption of the session

**President.** – I declare resumed the session of the European Parliament adjourned on Thursday 16 July 2009.

## 2. Statements by the President

**President.** – Just over a fortnight ago, I took part in the ceremonies at Westerplatte to commemorate the seventieth anniversary of the outbreak of the Second World War. That war plunged Europe into terror, claimed millions of victims and divided our continent for nearly half a century. We should never forget that war and violence could once again return to this Europe of ours.

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I must refer to another act of violence that took place this summer. Two officers of the Spanish Civil Guard were killed by ETA whilst performing their duties.

I am sorry to have to inform Parliament of the death of Mr Ernest Gline, a former Belgian Member of this House, who passed away on 10 August at the age of 78. Mr Gline was a Member of the European Parliament between 1968 and 1994. He also served as Chairman of the Socialist Group between 1979 and 1984.

I regret to have to inform you also of the death of Sir Christopher Prout, a former British Member of this House, who passed away on 12 July at the age of 67. Sir Christopher Prout, who subsequently became Lord Kingsland, was a Member of the European Parliament between 1979 and 1994. He also served as Chairman of the Group of European Democrats between 1987 and 1994.

Before we move on to our discussions, I invite you to join with me in honouring the memory of those who laid down their lives in the defence of Europe, and of those others who devoted their lives to its service, working to transform it into what it now is.

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

## 3. Composition of Parliament: see Minutes

## 4. Composition of political groups: see Minutes

## 5. Composition of committees: see Minutes

## 6. Request for the waiver of parliamentary immunity: see Minutes

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

## 8. Corrigendum (Rule 216): see Minutes

## 9. Documents received: see Minutes

## 10. Oral questions (tabling): see Minutes

## 11. Transfers of appropriations: see Minutes

## 12. Petitions: see Minutes

## 13. Texts of agreements forwarded by the Council: see Minutes

## 14. Implementing measures (Rule 88): see Minutes

## 15. Order of business

**President.** – The final draft agenda drawn up on Thursday 10 September 2009 by the Conference of Presidents pursuant to Rule 137 of the Rules of Procedure has been distributed.

*Monday and Tuesday*

No changes.

**Bruno Gollnisch (NI).** – (FR) Mr President, I shall be extremely brief.

I should like in fact to invoke the Rules of Procedure relating to the Conference of Presidents which, as you pointed out, Mr President, sets the agenda.

Our Rules of Procedure stipulate that the Conference of Presidents shall consist of yourself, obviously, of the group chairmen, and also of a representative of the non-attached Members.

To date, the representative of the non-attached Members has still not been appointed. A number of non-attached Members have written to you on this issue and are more than willing to meet with you.

It would be good, Mr President, if you could convene a meeting of all the non-attached Members so that, in accordance with the Rules of Procedure, they can elect their delegate to the Conference of Presidents and the Conference can take its decisions with a full complement of members.

**President.** – Thank you for your comment. I shall contact you and other Members during this sitting in order to make the necessary arrangements.

*Wednesday*

I have received a motion by the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance for Wednesday.

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.** – (FR) Ladies and gentlemen, the Conference of Presidents has voted to place the election – the appointment – of the President of the Commission on Wednesday's agenda.

On Tuesday afternoon we will hold a debate on the President of the Commission's proposals. We propose postponing the vote on his appointment, for the simple reason that the referendum in Ireland is due to be held in 22 days' time. This referendum is crucial to the acceptance, or rejection, of the Treaty of Lisbon. An opinion poll published today tells us that 62% of Irish people are ready to vote in favour.

I believe that we must respect the people of Ireland's vote, whether we are for or against the Treaty of Lisbon. However, it seems absurd to us, for the sake of 21 days, to bring forward a vote and appoint a president under the Treaty of Nice, when we – at least, those who are for the Treaty of Lisbon – have the possibility of having a Commission and its President appointed under the Treaty of Lisbon.

In October, we will know what we are bound by. The Polish President has solemnly declared that he will sign the Treaty of Lisbon after the Irish referendum.

The Czech Constitutional Court has solemnly declared that it will speed up decision making on the two complaints against the Treaty of Lisbon since, last time, it was unanimous in saying that the Treaty of Lisbon was constitutional.

There is therefore no option for the Czech President to say 'No' once the Treaty has been ratified in Poland and Ireland.

I have nearly finished, but this is very important, Mr President. It is Parliament's identity that is at stake on this issue, and if we do not have two minutes to reflect on it then we have not done our job as MEPs. That is

an important point. That is why I am asking you not to vote for or against Mr Barroso, but to vote after the people of Ireland and to postpone the vote today and to vote next month if necessary.

**Martin Schulz**, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr Cohn-Bendit discussed a motion put forward by my group in the Conference of Presidents last week. We put forward the motion in question as we believe that it is not really the issue of the Irish referendum, nor the issue of the Constitutional Court in Prague, but the issue of the lack of cohesion in the opinions of the Council that is responsible for the confusion currently prevalent. It is abundantly clear that a community based on law – and the European Union claims to be just that – must act in accordance with applicable law. The applicable law is the Treaty of Nice. There is therefore no alternative to working with the Treaty of Nice, and that means working with the President of the Commission and all the Commissioners.

The Council wants to elect the President on the basis of the Treaty of Nice but to then do what Mr Cohn-Bendit referred to, namely to apply the Treaty of Lisbon to Commissioners, which would mean that we would have a President of the Commission elected on a different legal basis than his Commissioners – which, by the way, is something the President of the Commission himself thinks is very regrettable. That is why he is going around talking of the Lisbon majority that he needs but will not get.

That, on its own, shows the confusion that the Council has given rise to, something that is in no way beneficial to the EU or to the President of the Commission himself. For this reason, we were of the opinion that the vote should be delayed until the Council has managed to agree what it wants. We therefore support this ...

*(The President cut off the speaker)*

We believe that this postponement is necessary for reasons that differ little from those enunciated by Mr Cohn-Bendit, and for the reasons we have mentioned, we support the motion.

**President**. – I should now like a Member to speak against the motion. Mr Daul has asked for the floor. You have the floor, Mr Daul.

**Joseph Daul**, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, I always keep to my speaking time, as you know.

Firstly, I do not understand Mr Cohn-Bendit: he should have already asked for the election of the European Parliament to be postponed until such time as we had the Treaty of Lisbon.

Since, today, we have the Treaty of Nice in the European Parliament, we call for that Treaty to be applied until the Treaty of Lisbon comes into force. I would also ask that, until we are able to vote again on Mr Barroso, we abide by the rules to the very end. Parliament must be ready to function under the Treaty of Lisbon and, then, we will be able to vote on Mr Barroso and the Treaty of Lisbon, Mr Cohn-Bendit. Otherwise, we will not be consistent. That is what I wished to say to you.

In order to have a Commission – and I am going to request this tomorrow – I would ask that, after the referendum of 2 October, we put in place a Commission on the basis of the Treaty that exists, that is, Nice. We will debate the Treaty of Lisbon when the time comes, when Mr Cohn-Bendit has convinced Mr Klaus to sign – and as he is willing to do so, he will do so very quickly. We will place Parliament under the Treaty of Lisbon, and then we will elect our President of the Commission under the Treaty of Lisbon, because, if we want to be consistent, we have to be so from start to finish. What we need now is a Commission that functions in the recession, a Commission that functions under Copenhagen. However, as you know, there is still a long way to go before all of the commissioners and the Commission are up and running.

That is why I, together with my equally competent group members, ask that we vote on Wednesday for the President of the Commission.

*(Applause)*

*(Parliament rejected the motion)*

Thursday

No changes.

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*(The order of business was adopted)*

## IN THE CHAIR: MR PITTELLA

*Vice-President*

### 16. Voting time

#### 16.1. Numerical strength of interparliamentary delegations (vote)

#### 16.2. Approval of the nomination of Mr Algirdas Šemeta as member of the European Commission (B7-0037/2009)

#### 16.3. Approval of the nomination of Paweł Samecki as member of the European Commission (B7-0035/2009)

#### 16.4. Approval of the nomination of Mr Karel De Gucht as member of the European Commission (B7-0036/2009)

### 17. Explanations of vote

Written explanations of vote

#### - Approval of the appointment of Mr Algirdas Šemeta as a Member of the Commission (B7-0037/2009)

**Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE)**, *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of the European Parliament resolution approving the nomination of Mr Algirdas Šemeta as a member of the European Commission. I question, however, the legal aspects of this decision. Indeed, pursuant to Article 215(3) of the Treaty establishing the European Community, which lays down the rules in the event of a commissioner resigning, it is the Council which, acting by qualified majority, appoints the substitute commissioner. As I see it, the European Parliament does not have any power in this particular case, and its Rules of Procedure, paragraph 2(2) of Annex XVII of which stipulates a vote by secret ballot, are not in line with the Treaty. This stipulation of the Rules of Procedure is certainly imperative for the European Parliament, but not for a properly appointed commissioner. Article 214(2) of the EC Treaty, curiously mentioned as the legal basis of the resolution, concerns not the nomination of a commissioner in the event of a resignation, but the vote to approve the entire Commission as a college. It is also strange to see this resolution adopted on the basis of Rule 106(4) of the Rules of Procedure, which concerns the election of the entire Commission and not the replacement of a commissioner.

**Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE)**, *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of Mr Šemeta, whom I would like to congratulate on the appointment he has been given, and I wish him every success. However, I cannot but express my concern – yet again, because I have also done this in the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development – about the suggestion made by him that part of the funds required to finance the European economic recovery plan should be obtained through reducing the funds earmarked for direct aid to the agricultural sector. I hope that this was just a simple misunderstanding and that such a measure, which would be impossible to accept, will not be implemented.

#### - Approval of the appointment of Mr Paweł Samecki as a Member of the Commission (B7-0035/2009)

**Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE)**, *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of the European Parliament resolution approving the nomination of Mr Paweł Samecki as a member of the European Commission. I question, however, the legal aspects of this decision. Indeed, pursuant to Article 215(3) of the Treaty establishing the European Community, which lays down the rules in the event of a commissioner resigning, it is the Council which, acting by qualified majority, appoints the substitute commissioner. As I see it, the European Parliament does not have any power in this particular case, and its Rules of Procedure, paragraph 2(2) of Annex XVII of which stipulates a vote by secret ballot, are not in line with the Treaty. This stipulation of the Rules of Procedure is certainly imperative for the European Parliament, but not for a properly appointed commissioner. Article 214(2) of the EC Treaty, curiously mentioned as the legal basis of the resolution, concerns not the nomination of a commissioner in the event of a resignation, but the vote to approve the entire Commission as a college. It is also strange to see this resolution adopted on the basis of Rule 106(4) of the Rules of Procedure, which concerns the election of the entire Commission and not the replacement of a commissioner.

## - Approval of the appointment of Mr Karel De Gucht as a Member of the Commission (B7-0036/2009)

**Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE)**, *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of the European Parliament resolution approving the nomination of Mr Karel De Gucht as a member of the European Commission. I question, however, the legal aspects of this decision. Indeed, pursuant to Article 215(3) of the Treaty establishing the European Community, which lays down the rules in the event of a commissioner resigning, it is the Council which, acting by qualified majority, appoints the substitute commissioner. As I see it, the European Parliament does not have any power in this particular case, and its Rules of Procedure, paragraph 2(2) of Annex XVII of which stipulates a vote by secret ballot, are not in line with the Treaty. This stipulation of the Rules of Procedure is certainly imperative for the European Parliament, but not for a properly appointed commissioner. Article 214(2) of the EC Treaty, curiously mentioned as the legal basis of the resolution, concerns not the nomination of a commissioner in the event of a resignation, but the vote to approve the entire Commission as a college. It is also strange to see this resolution adopted on the basis of Rule 106(4) of the Rules of Procedure, which concerns the election of the entire Commission and not the replacement of a commissioner.

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

## 19. One-minute speeches on matters of political importance

**President**. – We shall now proceed to the speeches, which must not last longer than one minute. There is a very long list of requests. This shows a great desire to participate, which is to the credit of this House. However, I will be unable to give the floor to all those who wish to speak, because 100 requests would take an hour and a half, whereas we have only 30 minutes available.

**Seán Kelly (PPE)**. – (GA) Mr President, since this is my first opportunity to speak in Parliament, I would like to begin in my native language. As you know, the campaign for the Lisbon referendum is well underway in Ireland at the moment, and we are hopeful that there will be a positive result on 2 October. One of the things that is making a big difference this time round is the guarantees the European Union gave to the Irish Government in relation to tax, abortion and defence. The new capacity for sports included in the Treaty of Lisbon, something which was not mentioned at all last time round, is also very important.

As one who has been involved in sport all my life at different levels of playing and administration, I believe that the possibility under Lisbon of the EU taking sports seriously and supporting both indigenous and international sports has struck a chord with the Irish sporting public. For that reason, and for the other more obvious reasons such as the health, social and physical benefits of sport, it is imperative that substantial funding is provided post-Lisbon to ...

*(The President cut off the speaker)*

**Vasîlica Viorica Dăncilă (S&D)**. – (RO) Mr President, I believe that there are certain disparities within Romania's agriculture sector in terms of structural problems, compared with other Member States. I must emphasise that the European Union should use the political and economic leverage it has to focus more attention on the management of the funds allocated for agriculture to those Member States who have joined later.

I wish to express my view that supporting a sustainable agricultural sector with an appropriate budget after 2013 as well would solve this problem, offering farmers medium and long-term prospects, along with sufficient funds so that Romanian agriculture can come into line with European standards and create an opportunity for a united Europe.

**Sergej Kozlík (ALDE)**. – (SK) Ladies and gentlemen, Hungary and the Hungarian minorities are constantly bringing up the issue of national minorities. Through recourse to half-truths and sometimes even lies, they try to manipulate European public opinion in their favour. What is the truth?

Over the past eighty years, national minorities in Hungary have been all but wiped out, while Europe looked on in silence. The Slovak minority has also been cut down from 300 000 to 10 000 members. The size of the Hungarian minorities in surrounding countries, including Slovakia, has remained constant.

Over the past two years, six Roma citizens have been murdered in Hungary and dozens have been seriously wounded. There are fears of attacks against Jews, while other forms of extremism are on the increase and

are spilling across Hungary's borders. This aggression is not being handled properly in Hungary and it must be condemned. European institutions should take a stronger approach to these manifestations of extremism.

**João Ferreira (GUE/NGL).** – (PT) The coup that took place in Honduras on 28 June was an outrage against the Honduran people's freedom of political expression and most basic democratic rights.

Since then, the *de facto* government has adopted repressive measures against the grassroots movement that has been demonstrating in the streets and has introduced a regime of media blackout, restriction of freedoms, persecution, illegal detentions, disappearances and even murders of members of the organised resistance to the coup.

We were able to witness all that during the recent visit of a delegation from the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left to Honduras and Nicaragua, where we met the legitimate president of the country, Manuel Zelaya. The European institutions' reaction to these circumstances is ambiguous to say the least. While some are unacceptably silent, others are appealing to both sides to do everything in their power to reach a political solution as swiftly as possible, treating things that are different as if they were the same and ignoring who is to blame, as if there were not a democratically elected president on one side and an illegal government on the other, which detained him and expelled him from the country when it unlawfully seized power.

The most basic respect for democracy requires the European institutions to issue a firm and forceful condemnation of the coup and to implement measures at an international level to increase pressure on the illegal government in power and isolate it. They must also not recognise or support any elections that are held before democratic legality is restored in the country.

**John Bufton (EFD).** – Mr President, as a new Member of this Parliament, I believe that one of the major issues facing farmers in Wales and the rest of the UK is the proposed electronic identification of sheep, which will come into effect on 1 January 2010. The fact is that the scanning equipment to be used is not accurate. My understanding is that it is only 79% accurate, which will cause major problems for farmers throughout the UK.

I urge the Commission to rethink this policy and only bring it in on a voluntary basis. My fear is that many farmers will be penalised due to inaccurate equipment and that their single farm payments will be reduced. In the worst case scenarios, the reduction could be 100%. The concessions that have already been made are helpful but are not enough.

I find it quite astonishing that the Commission wants to bring in electronic identification (EID) with such huge flaws in the equipment. The sensible way forward would be for EID to be introduced only on a voluntary basis from next January. I urge Members of this Parliament to support me on this vital issue for the farming industry throughout Europe.

**Krisztina Morvai (NI).** – Mr President, I would like to call on this Parliament to take immediate and effective steps to save the small and family farmers in new Member States, especially eastern and central European Member States, and, in particular, my own country, Hungary.

What has happened to these farmers? As a result of joining the European Union we had to 'offer', so to speak, 100% of our markets and, in exchange, we received 25% of subsidies. This is not just unfair and unjust, but also illegal: this was a clear violation of the Treaty of Rome. Now, as these farmers have been trying to compete in these unjust and illegal circumstances, they had to take loans – huge loans – to be competitive. Now they have become bankrupt, and they have to sell their lands under circumstances of colonisation where we have to open our lands for countries that have 10 times more GDP than we do. I call for immediate reconsideration of the Copenhagen Agreement.

*(The President cut off the speaker)*

**Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE).** – (RO) Mr President, just like other fellow Members, I would have liked to raise a problem from the agricultural sector. However, a recent article published in the *Wall Street Journal* attracted my attention in particular, and this is why I am making it a duty of honour to present this article to Parliament and to put forward the requests made by its authors.

The title of the article, which I feel is sufficient to be able to understand what it is about, was: 'Mr Barroso, Take Down Small Business Walls'. This article is nothing other than an appeal to the future European Commission to focus, at the heart of its actions, on supporting small and medium-sized enterprises, which

are very vulnerable during a crisis, and not to compromise in any way on implementing the 2008 *Small Business Act*. The European Parliament has a duty to ensure that these measures are implemented properly and efficiently because they are needed by the 20 million plus small and medium-sized enterprises in the European Union.

**Evgeni Kirilov (S&D).** – (BG) Mr President, in early August, an incredible drama unfolded in the Republic of Macedonia which shocked Bulgarian public opinion. Spaska Mitrova, a 23-year-old Macedonian citizen and mother of a small child still being breast-fed, was forcibly taken to a police station and then transferred to the infamous Idrizovo prison, while her child was taken away from her. The police had to drag her by the hair from the top to the bottom floor of the building because she did not want to be separated from her child. She was sentenced to three months' imprisonment because she was unable to provide her ex-husband with a bed in their child's bedroom. You can imagine the implications of this. Mrs Mitrova was also given Bulgarian citizenship early this year. This seems to be the main reason for her inhumane treatment, and hers is not an isolated case. About two years ago, I asked the present Macedonian Foreign Minister: 'Why is so much hatred shown towards Macedonians who have taken Bulgarian citizenship?', to which he replied: 'They are vestiges of the past'. As the efforts made by the Bulgarian President and Government have not yielded any result, I appeal to Commissioner Olli Rehn to familiarise himself personally with this blatant case of injustice in a country wishing to start accession negotiations.

**Jelko Kacin (ALDE).** – (SL) Italy wishes to impose an onshore gas terminal on the border with Slovenia without consultation. However, the European Union was founded on mutual trust and good neighbourly relations. The supply of environmentally-harmful energy sources requires special conservation of the environment but, in essence, it also requires basic honesty.

By seeking to conceal from Slovenia the harmful consequences which its actions will have on the cross-border environment, Italy is harming everyone concerned, including itself but, above all, the people who live in the vicinity of the disputed installation. The Slovenian public and the Slovenian Government are firmly opposed to this terminal.

Lying to the cameras may well be Mr Berlusconi's means of political survival in Italy. However, such behaviour cannot and should not be tolerated as a deliberate practice within the European Union. This is unacceptable.

This is a flagrant breach of the principles of the European Union and Italy is being manipulative to the detriment of human life and the environment. It is using international deception to attempt to build an onshore terminal at Žavljje (Aquilinia) in the Gulf of Trieste, which is already extremely narrow. It is degrading the environment, destroying the prospect of communal coexistence on the border and setting a very poor example to future Member States.

**Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL).** – (PT) Mr President, what is happening to the former German footwear factory, Rhode, in Santa Maria da Feira, now called Sociedade Luso-Alemã de Calçado, is very worrying.

This company once employed some 3 000 workers but, after the problems in Germany, it shed jobs and currently has roughly 1 000 workers. The majority of them are women, most of whom have had their hours and wages cut. It is now feared that when the elections in Portugal are over, the company may close.

Unemployment in this municipality is continuing to rise and now affects many thousands of workers, particularly in the footwear and cork processing industries. In view of that, we appeal for special emergency intervention measures so as to prevent yet another serious blow to production and jobs in an area that has been so badly blighted by unemployment.

**Nicole Sinclaire (EFD).** – Mr President, I do not accept the validity of this Parliament or any other EU institution to make laws for the United Kingdom.

My electors have sent me here to tell you that they do not want GBP 45 million of their money every single day spent in the European Union. We want that money spent in the UK on our schools, on our hospitals and our infrastructure, not wasted on corruption with your accounts in auditing for 14 years.

Simply, I have this message from the people who elected me to the Commission: go back to your bureaucracy and prepare for the UK's withdrawal from the corrupt and doomed mess that is the European Union.

**Diane Dodds (NI).** – Mr President, this Parliament has united in recent times in the face of a global terrorist threat. In my constituency of Northern Ireland, we know the pain of terrorism. Yes, we have witnessed a transformation in Northern Ireland in recent years, but there are still those who would seek to cause bloodshed.

Last week, in the latest of a series of incidents, a 600 lb bomb was planted by dissident republicans and was discovered in South Armagh. Had it not been discovered, multiple loss of life would have occurred. In Northern Ireland, we have not forgotten the victims of our past and of terrorism and that is why I would ask this Parliament to back the campaign for compensation from Libya. Libya supplied weapons to the IRA. Those weapons took many lives and left others destroyed. For this they must be held accountable.

**Eduard Kukan (PPE).** – (SK) At the start of a new term in office, we should bear in mind our joint responsibility for the peaceful development of the continent of Europe in such a way as to ensure a peaceful and prosperous life for our citizens. We must also show our citizens that we are here for them, that we are here to serve them.

We must constantly bear this in mind, even when there are problems between two members of our family. The European way of sorting things out is through proper partnership dialogue aimed at a sensible solution, not through ignoring the other side and presenting issues directly to European institutions such as this one.

Rational mutual dialogue on a constant basis is also the way to deny sustenance to extremists on both sides of the border and thereby nip in the bud or severely restrict potentially dangerous activities they might undertake in the future.

**Rovana Plumb (S&D).** – (RO) The fight against racism is being waged through strong European policies, but in less than a week, German and British politicians have been engaged in mudslinging at Romanian workers, whether out of ignorance or because they are motivated by winning sympathy and votes from the population. Grim statements such as *'Romanians would stick a knife in you as quick as look at you'*, made during a public meeting in the UK, or comments made by a German politician stating that Romanians do not come to work for 07.00 and they do not know what they have to do, are a major sign of concern. We are devising European policies to combat racism. This is our common objective. However, what do we do when these statements are made by fellow politicians from large European Union Member States?

**Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (ALDE).** – (ES) Mr President, last week, three Basque tuna boats from Bermeo were threatened once again by Somalian pirates. We are concerned about the repeated attacks on fishing boats in the area, the fact that the victims feel unsafe and that the Spanish Government is failing to act. These attacks could get worse with the arrival of the monsoons, as the fishermen are saying.

Therefore, before it is too late, I want to say to the House that we urgently need armed military escorts on these boats. There are European governments such as France and Italy that have done this, and it has succeeded.

The Commission should therefore recommend that all Member States take immediate, effective measures such as this. We urgently need to extend the protection criteria that have been established for merchant navy routes to fishing areas.

This House has a problem, which it stated in the Resolution on piracy on 23 October last year.

Finally, I would like to reiterate our conviction that Europe needs a common foreign and security policy that makes the European institutions more effective and credible in response to this type of crisis.

**Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL).** – (EL) Mr President, the deadly attacks by the German troops which form part of the occupying army in Afghanistan, together with the United States of America, the European Union and NATO, during the attack in the region of Kunduz on 4 September 2009, turned into a massacre, with victims numbering over 135 civilians dead and dozens injured, including many children, and are war crimes against the Afghan people.

This attack was not, of course, against the Taliban; it was against 500 civilians. The daily bloodbath, the organisation of violent and corrupt elections to put puppets of the Afghan occupation in place and the poverty and misery which are the scourge of the Afghan people reveal that the imperialist attacks by the United States of America, the European Union and NATO in this occupied country – and in a series of other countries – on the pretext of combating terrorism have disastrous consequences for the people.

Both the statements made by the new NATO Secretary General, Anders Fogh Rasmussen, and those made by European Union foreign ministers have just one objective: to continue the interventions against the people. The people in each country and in each Member State of the European Union must demand and insist that the troops leave their countries and return to their own country.



**Gerard Batten (EFD).** – Mr President, on 2 October, the Irish will have a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty. The Lisbon Treaty is almost identical to the European Constitution, which was rejected outright by the French and the Dutch. The Lisbon Treaty has already been rejected by the Irish once, but 'no' is always the wrong answer, as far as the European Union is concerned, when it comes to further political integration. And so the Irish are forced to have yet another referendum so they can deliver the only answer that is acceptable to the European Union – which is 'yes'.

The European Union is destroying democracy in its Member States. The EU is founded on misrepresentation, deceit and lies. The British are denied a referendum by our contemptible government and political class precisely because they know that the result would be a resounding 'no'. But whatever the result in Ireland, Britain will one day leave the European Union and restore its national independence. I am proud to use my position of office to campaign for Britain's unconditional withdrawal from the European Union.

**President.** – Thank you, Mr Batten. I gave you an extra 14 seconds even though you said something incorrect, namely that the Treaty of Lisbon is the same thing as the Constitution.

**George Becali (NI).** – (RO) Mr President, I would like to talk to you today about a European project, 'Voices of Youth', of which I have the honour of being asked to be a patron. The goal of this project, which young people from every Member State participate in, is for them to identify and offer solutions to social problems they face. I ask not only you, Mr President, but also the President of the European Commission, to ensure that we pay more attention to the suggestions they make to us. It is our responsibility during these difficult times to guarantee Europe and, above all, young European citizens, a clear opportunity. My generation has been fortunate enough to be involved in the reconstruction of a united Europe. Young people have the right, representing the Europe of today, but particularly the Europe of tomorrow, to turn it into how they imagine it will be. Thank you and may God's help be with us.

**President.** – Thank you, and thank you also for being concise.

**Csaba Sógor (PPE).** – (HU) The spectre of extreme left-wing and extreme right-wing ideology, reflecting the two dictatorships that dominated Europe in the 20th century, is returning to haunt the European Union in the 21st century. We have an EU citizen being banned from travelling to another country. This person's freedom of movement is being restricted. A state would lock up 15 citizens, accuse them of treason and ban them from leaving the country because they are going to discuss minority-related concerns with like-minded compatriots at the Forum of Hungarian MPs from the Carpathian Basin. In the country in question, people are punished for not speaking the official language properly in hospitals, at police stations, in homes for the elderly and maternity units. Not even immigrants are treated like this within the European Union, let alone people who have lived on this territory for a thousand years, where a new state has been formed for only 17 years. This is why it is important to implement within the European Union a single law for the protection of minorities which is binding on every country.

**Arlene McCarthy (S&D).** – Mr President, I wish to inform Parliament that last week, the UK Justice Minister gave Michael Shields, my constituent, a pardon, and he was freed from prison having served four and a half years for a crime he did not commit.

Michael was given a pardon on the basis of evidence clearly showing that he was morally and technically innocent of the crime. He was arrested, charged and convicted of a brutal attack on Martin Georgiev, a Bulgarian waiter, in 2005 in less than eight weeks, despite the lack of forensic evidence, a flawed identification process and a signed confession to the attack by another man, Graham Sankey.

Today I want to thank Presidents Borrell and Pöttering and Parliament's Committee on Petitions for supporting Michael's campaign for justice. But this is not the end of the process, and I ask the President and the Committee on Petitions to continue to support Michael's campaign for justice and to intervene with the Bulgarian authorities immediately to review the dossier of evidence. This is vital if we are to give every one of our citizens trust and confidence in judicial and police cooperation in Europe.

**Siiri Oviir (ALDE).** – (ET) Banking requires supervision. That is the position of the European Council and the European Commission. The European Commission consumer protection study published in February revealed several negative trends in banking. As an elected representative from Estonia, I would like to present some examples from Estonia concerning two Swedish banks that are operating in Estonia. The problem is that these banks treat consumers in Estonia differently from consumers in their home country. Both the prices of banking services and interest rates are considerably higher for Estonian consumers. Interest rates, for instance, vary from 0.21% in Sweden to 12.2% in Estonia – that is a 600-fold difference.

Using the financial crisis as a justification for unequal treatment is not in keeping with European Union values. And I would like to ask Sweden, which currently holds the presidency of the European Union, what it has to say about this, and how long this situation with their banks will continue in Estonia.

**Hans-Peter Martin (NI).** – (DE) Mr President, we need a democratic revolution, I said, and now we face a situation that represents an untenable state of affairs for all those of us who, of our own free will, are not represented in a political group in this Parliament.

I would like to ask the Bureau to find an amicable solution to the issue of coordinators. In this respect, we are discriminated against, as we are not permitted to take part in coordinators' meetings in various committees and be duly active. I would be glad to help avoid a situation where proceedings before the European Court of Justice – as previously in the wake of the discrimination case from 2001 – resulted in a finding that all the coordination decisions made thus far are unlawful. That would not only harm Parliament tremendously, but it is also unnecessary from a political point of view.

I therefore ask the Bureau, in urgent terms, to put in place appropriate measures to end this discrimination against non-attached Members and return to the sound working methods of the last ten years.

**Carlos Iturgaiz Angulo (PPE).** – (ES) Mr President, this summer, the terrorist group ETA murdered three people in Spain, three people who defended law and freedom: an officer of the national police and two officers of the civil guard. I would like to express our solidarity, support and care to their families.

ETA is a criminal group that has no place in Europe, because in the European Union there is no room for radicalism, totalitarianism or terrorist murders.

The European Parliament and all the European institutions should therefore continue to condemn the ETA terrorists and continue to work to remove and eradicate the cancer of terrorist attacks by ETA and its accomplices from our continent

I therefore want my first speech in this first ordinary plenary sitting of the European Parliament of this legislature to remember and pay tribute to all the victims of ETA terrorism, to condemn the terrorist organisation ETA in this House and to ask that, as Europeans, we all work together, with the law on our side, to smoke out ETA and its supporters, for the good of the Basque Country, Spain and Europe.

**Ioan Mircea Paşcu (S&D).** – Mr President, personally I think that the time has come to make a shift in our approach to energy problems, namely by gradually shifting the emphasis from 'energy security' – that is, trying to secure our current deliveries from volatile suppliers – to 'secure energy', meaning the full exploitation of the energy sources firmly under EU control.

Of course, this will require parallel action in both directions for some time until the scales tip in the direction of the latter because, indeed, if Europe really wants to become a truly credible international actor as such, it should first achieve control over its energy supply. Otherwise, it will continue to be a collection of national actors, each pursuing its own national interests, and thus vulnerable to the divide-and-control tactics of ruthless external suppliers.

**Chris Davies (ALDE).** – Mr President, six months ago the world was shocked by the death and destruction visited by Israel upon Gaza. Now the cameras have gone away, yet the economic siege continues. Less than one quarter of the materials and supplies needed by the people there are getting through the checkpoints – just 18 items in all. Nothing for reconstruction, nothing for business, nothing that creates jobs or offers hope. Israel is, in effect, keeping one and a half million people in a form of prison camp, surrounded by walls, patrolled by armed guards.

Mr President, I ask you to convey to the President that he should visit Gaza at the earliest opportunity to judge the situation for himself. If he believes that such collective punishment cannot be acceptable, he should speak out on behalf of the innocent.

**Elisabeth Köstinger (PPE).** – (DE) Mr President, the economic crisis has hit agricultural production hard. The situation in dairy farming, in particular, has deteriorated drastically over the last 20 months. With prices below EUR 0.21, farmers have to sell their milk at a price that is less than their production costs. The survival of many family-run farms in the EU is in grave danger, and at present many of them are only able to survive by relying on their personal savings, something that is clearly not sustainable.

The Commission's figures provide a dramatic picture of the fall in prices for milk and milk products. The support measures for dairy farming are vital in order to prevent a collapse in agriculture. Quality has a price, but this principle no longer seems to apply in the agricultural sector. At present, the producer price bears no relation to the consumer price.

Our family-run farms urgently need market support measures. This is about ensuring the security of Europe's food supply. Above all, we must not forget that hundreds of thousands of jobs in Europe depend on agriculture functioning.

**Joanna Senyszyn (S&D).** – (PL) Mr President, tomorrow, Mr Barroso is going to seek our support in his bid to secure a second term in office. I would like to remind the House that Polish shipyard workers appealed repeatedly to the Commission, calling for a decision that would save their workplaces. No help was forthcoming, because under Mr Barroso's leadership, the Commission has demonstrated a total lack of concern for the problems affecting working people. Thousands of Polish shipyard workers are still suffering the painful consequences of the Commission's antisocial policy for their communities. We would do well to remember that we have been elected to this House to represent the citizens, yet this is neither the kind of policy nor the kind of Union our constituents expect.

If we support Mr Barroso, nothing will change. The Commission's activities and its legislative initiatives will become further and further removed from Europe's needs. We need to appoint a President and Commissioners who will ensure that social aims take precedence over economic ones. We need to opt for a social Europe in which the fate of working people is deemed to be just as important as profit. Ladies and gentlemen, we must not allow ourselves to be seduced by sweet talk used as a smokescreen to conceal ruthless and inhumane right-wing policies.

**Bill Newton Dunn (ALDE).** – Mr President, I want to raise the case of Mr John Zafiropoulos, who is in prison in Greece. His family, who are my constituents, are convinced of his innocence. At the beginning of this year, I wrote to the Minister of Justice in Athens raising the case. I did not get a reply, so in a one-minute speech here in May in this Hemicycle I raised the question. Immediately after I had spoken, the Greek Permanent Representation rushed to my office and promised me an immediate reply from the Minister in person. Four months later: nothing.

If the Greek Permanent Representation is listening to us now in the Hemicycle, I would like to express my surprise and dismay that nothing has happened. Would they please get me a reply from the Minister and look at the case of Mr John Zafiropoulos again?

**Ioannis Kasoulides (PPE).** – Mr President, during the Turkish invasion of Cyprus in 1974, a Turkish journalist photographed 14 Cypriot soldiers surrendering to the Turkish army. This photograph became the symbol of the search for the fate of the missing persons. The soldiers' bodies were identified through DNA a few weeks ago after they were killed 35 years ago and thrown down a well in the occupied northern part of the island. This demonstrates the blatant violation of the Geneva Convention by the Turkish Army, who were responsible for prisoners who surrendered to them.

I urge this Parliament to call on Turkey to cooperate with the UN Committee on Missing Persons by providing its records and by opening two recently designated plots in Lapithos, called 'restricted military areas', where another 800 prisoners are believed to be buried.

**Derek Vaughan (S&D).** – Mr President, this Parliament will have many important discussions, and decisions to make, on budget matters. Currently we are, of course, looking at the 2010 budget, and there are still a lot of issues to be resolved before we can agree that. This Parliament will also soon start discussing the new financial perspective for the period post 2013.

But there is also the mid-term budget review, and it seems to me we have almost forgotten about that. We should not forget about it, because this will give us great opportunities in the future. It will give us the opportunity to look again at what our priorities are. It will give us the opportunity, for example, to put more funds into a new economic regeneration plan for Europe. It will also, perhaps, give us the opportunity to put extra funding into the measures which come out of Copenhagen at the end of this year.

I believe that this Parliament should not take its eye off the ball. This Parliament should continue to press the Council and the Commission to make sure it looks again at that mid-term review and to give us the opportunity to put forward our priorities.

**Pál Schmitt (PPE).** – (HU) Freedom of speech, Mr President, including the freedom to choose the language you wish to speak, is a fundamental human right. A language is a symbol of paramount importance to the people who speak it, the basis for their self-identity. Anyone who thinks this of their own language must respect the language of every other community. However, one of the EU's official languages, Hungarian, has recently come under attack in Slovakia, in a way which goes completely against the European mindset. Its language law blatantly discriminates against the right of the half a million-strong Hungarian community to use its own language. In some cases, a fine of EUR 5 000 may also be imposed.

The European Union is committed to cultural and linguistic diversity, and a commissioner for multilingualism was even appointed with this in mind. The European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, which has also been ratified by Slovakia, guarantees the right of citizens to use their mother tongue at every education level, for administrative matters, in public institutions and official documents. The only mainstay of the EU institutions cannot allow one of the Member States to blatantly contravene fundamental EU norms and launch an attack against minority rights without speaking out.

**Bogusław Liberadzki (S&D).** – (PL) The House debated the situation of the Polish shipbuilding industry a few months ago. Agreement was reached. Mr Schulz, the chairman of our political group, confirmed on behalf of the group that Parliament did not consent to doing away with tens of thousands of jobs in shipyards and at the undertakings supplying them. Mr Schulz confirmed that the House did not agree with closing down this industry in Poland, or with the consequent reduction in Europe's industrial capacity.

Six months have elapsed and the situation is as follows. The government has been unable to privatise the shipyards, the Commission has taken no account whatsoever of Parliament's position, the yards are not producing, the future is uncertain, people have lost their jobs and have been left in limbo. We must surely all agree that this Commission lacks any concept of a European industrial policy, and has failed to understand that ships were needed in the past, that they are needed now and that they will continue to be needed in the years to come.

**Tunne Kelam (PPE).** – Mr President, 23 August 2009 marked the 70th anniversary of the infamous Nazi-Soviet Pact which divided Europe. I think that this is a shocking example of how close seemingly opposite political extremes can become. Both Moscow and Berlin then agreed that the first task was to bring down the democratic political order in Europe; both Moscow and Berlin sought to achieve the domination of the world. Therefore, we should never forget that it took two dictators to launch World War Two.

Stalin, four days before signing this pact, explained the point of it to his comrades: 'It is in the interests of the Soviet Union that war breaks out between the Reich and the capitalist Anglo-French bloc. Everything must be done so that the war lasts as long as possible in order that both sides become exhausted. Then we would have a large arena to develop the world revolution.'

I would like to remind Members of the European Parliament resolution of last April to mark 23 August as a joint day of commemoration for victims of all totalitarian regimes.

**Boris Zala (S&D).** – (SK) Both in the last session of parliament and in the current one, we have heard speeches by many Hungarian MEPs criticising the Slovak language law. I would like to mention at the same time that you have all been sent documents containing various arguments, the majority of which, to put it plainly, amount to misinterpretations, fabrications and even deliberate lies.

The Slovak language law fully complies with all the human rights issues and with the rights protecting minority languages. In my opinion, the Hungarian MEPs are pursuing a very dangerous policy of pointedly and directly provoking extremism, both in Hungary and in its neighbouring states. In my opinion, they ought to realise that this is a highly dangerous policy and, as we have heard today, they should call a halt to these fabrications.

**Alojz Peterle (PPE).** – (SL) I have received requests from a large number of Slovenian and Italian citizens asking me to draw this House's attention to Italy's intention to build a gas terminal in the Gulf of Trieste.

I share the concern of Slovenian and Italian environmental organisations that this gas terminal could place a major burden on what is already a very environmentally vulnerable area. I refer here to the seas of the Gulf of Trieste and its large urban hinterland. These organisations have also expressed doubts as to the accuracy of the documents used in the environmental impact assessment.

I also call on the governments of Italy and Slovenia to work together on this project in the spirit of the memorandum they signed in September last year. In other words, I call on them to work together on

environmental impact assessments in the northern Adriatic, and the Gulf of Trieste respectively. I also expect that, as a result of carrying out such an assessment, the governments will be able to agree on a more appropriate site for this gas terminal than the Gulf of Trieste.

**Liisa Jaakonsaari (S&D).** – (FI) Mr President, I agree with my Estonian colleague, Mrs Oviir, that the economic crisis is far from over. A peculiar kind of optimism is emerging everywhere in Europe, even though unemployment is on the increase, national economies are running into debt, the population is ageing, and a sort of triple guillotine is hanging over Europe, and despite all that, the recession has been declared over. An exit strategy is being planned, as is how we need not bother to continue with the recovery strategy. Europe began the recovery strategy and dealing with the economic crisis very well and in an exemplary fashion, to the extent that the United States of America learned a lesson from Europe and followed its example, but after that, Europe slowed down completely. Furthermore, this false optimism is also leading to the wrong solutions. The economic crisis has not been beaten.

**Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE).** – (RO) The formation of the Alliance for European Integration, in the wake of the early elections held in July 2009, reconfirms the pro-European commitment of the Republic of Moldova's citizens. An extremely important step has been taken, which Moldova and the European Union cannot afford to mishandle.

The political situation is still fragile. This is why the success of the alliance and, by implication, of a democratic Moldova, depends hugely on the support of its European partners. Moldova has assumed the responsibility of committing to a pro-European course. The European Union's responsibility is to facilitate its course on this path.

The Moldovan people's choice of the European option is now also shown at a political level. This is why we must give our unconditional support to the Alliance for European Integration in the Republic of Moldova, as it represents the only chance for integrating it gradually, yet quickly, into the European family. I call on the European Commission to negotiate the signing of a new agreement with the Republic of Moldova as a matter of urgency and to use all the necessary resources to help this republic emerge from the difficult financial situation it is in.

**Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (S&D).** – (HU) The European Union's credibility is completely undermined if it only speaks out in the case of human rights violations happening outside the EU, but makes no protest in the case of a serious human rights violation like the one which has just taken place in Slovakia as a consequence of the national language law and has also triggered unparalleled tension in relations between the majority and minority communities.

The minority language has been subordinated to the majority language, as Mr Vollebaek, the OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities, also put it. I would like to point out to my colleague, Boris Zala, that we would be very happy not to have to raise the issue here in the European Parliament. I have done so only as a consequence of the fact that a law has come into force in Slovakia which severely restricts the use of minority languages and discriminates against the Hungarian community living there. This is why it will be the responsibility of the next Commission and Mr Barroso to set up forums where these cases can be examined, as Leonard Orban has also stated in his letter. Slovakia must honour its international commitments, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages.

**Piotr Borys (PPE).** – (PL) Mr President, I asked for the floor in order to refer to the mission to Afghanistan. This subject is fraught with difficulties for all concerned. NATO and the European Union are both affected. In particular, I wanted to highlight the need to place greater emphasis on the requirement for humanitarian, social and economic aid for the Afghan people, who have unfortunately been subjected to the effects of war for 30 years. I raise this matter against the background of an escalation of actions involving attacks on soldiers in the context of the presidential election. As we are all aware, these attacks have become increasingly frequent and violent in the run up to the election. Such aid is particularly important in the context of developing trust and reconstructing the country.

Captain Daniel Ambroziński of the Polish Armed Forces lost his life recently in Afghanistan. It appears that his death was due essentially to the weakness of the Afghan Army and police, who succumbed to bribery. It is well known that the Afghan Army and police force are in a difficult financial situation. According to the media, Afghan soldiers are lucky if they earn USD 20. It is important for the military effort to be accompanied by social, humanitarian and economic aid.

**President.** – Twenty seconds for Mr Kelly, for a very brief rejoinder.

**Seán Kelly (PPE).** – Mr President, I just want to say very briefly that an erroneous and somewhat condescending statement was made this evening about the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland by a British colleague. Ireland has not been forced by anybody to vote a second time on Lisbon. It was a decision taken independently by the Irish Parliament and will be carried out independently by the Irish people. In fact, we have not been forced to do anything since we gained our independence from Britain in 1922.

**President.** – Ladies and gentlemen, we have had 39 speeches in 45 minutes. I believe that is a fine performance – this has been a good debate – and I offer my best wishes above all to all those who have made their first speech. I would like to stress, in particular, the need for the Commission to take account of the comments that were made in the debate, or else our Parliament will just be a place to let off steam. The Commission has been attentive. I noted that our Commissioners were very attentive, and so they will doubtless follow up the comments made by all of our fellow Members.

## **20. Restructuring of the European car industry, in particular the Opel case (debate)**

**President.** – The next item is the Commission statement on the restructuring of the European car industry, in particular the Opel case.

**Vladimír Špidla, Member of the Commission.** – (DE) Mr President, honourable Members, I am very grateful that you have given me the opportunity today to comment on the situation in the European car industry in order to inform you of a number of aspects of our European response to the crisis and of the developments in relation to the General Motors Group. In so doing, I will comment on the industrial policy and social aspects, while my fellow Commissioner, Neelie Kroes, will take over when it comes to State aid law.

Twelve million workers have a job that is directly or indirectly dependent on Europe's car makers. That is why, back in October 2008, the Commission met with all the parties involved – including both the Member States and the social partners – as part of the CARS-21 process, to discuss a common way to manage the crisis. The scrapping premiums and additional financial aid from the European Investment Bank (EIB) were discussed at the meeting, so as to prevent this important sector, from an employment policy point of view, from foundering in the maelstrom of the crisis.

We also need to act in order to ensure that the crisis does not jeopardise the achievement of our statutory requirements to reduce CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from passenger cars by 2012. I will come back to this later on. Out of concern about developments relating to General Motors, the Commission called a political meeting of all the Member States back in January this year in order to provide transparency and to guarantee compliance with European legislation. Three such meetings have since taken place. Joint political arrangements were reached amongst the 27 Member States at these meetings, and these were also made public.

The first policy agreed was that a trusteeship solution coordinated by Germany was the right way to go in order to protect General Motors Europe from the insolvency of the US-based parent company. We are now in a position to say that this trusteeship solution prevented GM's European car factories from being dragged into insolvency with the parent company.

The next point agreed was that the trusteeship solution did not mean any prejudging of which bidder was to take over the company. As concerns the range of bidders, the Commission declared from the very start that it would be neutral as it would otherwise be unable to fulfil its role as guardian of the Treaties.

It was also agreed that all national protective measures would have to be fully in compliance with the provisions of the EC Treaty on State aid and the internal market. Furthermore, State aid must not be made contingent upon political conditions such as the site of investment. The EU Treaty leaves no room for economic nationalism. Public money may only be used on an exceptional basis and only where future-oriented economic structures with future-safeguarded jobs result. All decisions must follow economic logic alone but, as I said earlier, when it comes to issues of State aid, Commissioner Kroes will go into detail later on.

The fact that GM will retain 35% of the shares is a clear indication that it is counting on the economic comeback of its former European subsidiary. I also welcome the fact that 10% of the shares will remain in the hands of the employees. The Commission has been talking to all those involved, both at the working level and the political level, since January 2009. All the Member States – and today the Flemish Minister-President, too – welcome and support the Commission's position on the future of General Motors

Europe. The Commission has all the tools to ensure that all the agreements are observed. I will stress one more time that we will not allow taxpayers' money to be used according to short-term political considerations rather than the long-term interests of sites and jobs. In times of crisis, it is natural that many people would say that charity begins at home. As the Commissioner responsible for social affairs, I do hope, however, that Magna, along with GM and New Opel, will find a European solution.

The debate about the future of General Motors Europe must not prevent us from seeing that the situation facing the European car market overall is a drastic one. Even before the crisis, there were overcapacities. This situation has been exacerbated by the crisis. In the last quarter of 2008, the number of registrations fell by nearly 20%, and we are expecting a fall of 11% for 2009 as a whole. The scrapping premium, which 12 Member States have adopted, has ended the freefall, but only on the passenger car market.

We pointed out the extremely difficult situation in the entire goods vehicle sector back in January 2009. The sales figures are catastrophic. There are no figures in sight showing a recovery. There are serious consequences for the entire supply industry. The primary responsibility for managing the crisis obviously lies with the automotive industry itself. In order to protect the workers affected, the EIB, Member States and the Commission have provided financial means so as to soften the social consequences in the sector.

The European Globalisation Fund adopted by the Commission two years before the crisis has received seven applications from six countries from the automotive sector over the last two years. With around EUR 40 million, we are helping around 7 000 workers back into the labour market. We have also provided a forum to discuss the necessary next restructuring steps, which must be implemented in a socially responsible manner. We welcome the fact that many car makers have been able to prevent dramatic job cuts by implementing short-time working and other forms of flexible working – mostly agreed between the social partners.

There is agreement between all those involved about the long-term prospects of the European car industry – namely that we must build the most advanced vehicles in the world in Europe, in other words, the cleanest, the most energy-efficient and the safest. This strategy means that it is necessary to take a leap forward in terms of automotive technology. We are helping bring this about through the EIB and the Seventh Framework Programme for Research. The Commission will also continue to do all it can to provide reliable basic conditions for this key European industry and those employed in it.

**Neelie Kroes**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, the public financing of Opel/Vauxhall by one or more European governments is the issue that I will address.

As you know, last Thursday, the Opel Trust, in which General Motors (GM) and the German authorities have equal representation, announced that it has approved the sale by GM of a majority stake in its European Opel/Vauxhall operations to the consortium of Magna International and Sberbank. This decision by the owners of Opel has been supported by the German Government. The German Government promised to grant public funds of up to EUR 4.5 billion to the new Opel, with the possible participation of other European governments.

Mr President, the Commission has kept in touch with all the Member States concerned throughout the process which led to this transaction and the Commission is also aware of the controversies regarding the respective merits of the restructuring plans presented by different bidders, including the doubt publicly expressed by certain members of the Opel Trust.

Concerning the public financing of the GM/Magna transaction, we have been informed that the German Government intends to avail itself of a pre-existing approved scheme under the Commission's temporary framework for State aid measures to support access to finance in the current financial and economic crisis.

Mr President, I intend to verify carefully whether this scheme can be used in this case and you will certainly understand that I cannot take a position at this stage since the deal is not yet finalised and, by the way, a number of aspects are still being negotiated. However, at this moment, it is quite important that I should outline to you the most relevant considerations. In particular, I have to underline that State aid granted under the temporary framework cannot be subject, *de jure* or *de facto*, to additional conditions concerning location of investments or the geographic distribution of restructuring efforts. Such conditions would create – and I am quite clear on this – unacceptable distortions in the internal markets and could trigger a subsidy race which would significantly damage the European economy at the present, very delicate moment. Moreover, if the restructuring of a European company was determined by non-commercial conditions attached to public financing, there would be a risk that a company would not be able to restore its long-term viability,

and that risk to viability is all the greater due to the current weakened state of the entire European car industry. The European car industry, as we are all aware, suffers from considerable overcapacity. So a failed restructuring would result in great damage for the company and for its workers, in negative spillovers for the whole sector, and in a waste of taxpayer's money. And those principles will be my guidance in my assessment in the Opel case.

I will verify whether non-commercial protectionist conditions are attached to public funding, *de jure* or *de facto*, and the Commission will examine not only the legal conditions that may be attached to a final aid package, but also the entire context in which the aid is granted. And I will be particularly interested to find out whether the German authorities have effectively linked the provision of aid to a single bidder and, if so, to find out why they regarded that bidder's business plan as preferable from an industrial and commercial point of view.

In the short term, it is a sad fact that, because of the current state of overcapacity in the car industry, any plan to restore the profitability of Opel/Vauxhall will require job losses across the company as a whole and planned closures; all the plans to save Opel/Vauxhall presented by different potential investors have foreseen both plant closures and job cuts. However, a social restructuring is the only way to ensure viable and stable jobs for the future, and the Commission cannot, and should not, try to dictate where such cuts will fall, nor can it try to prevent them. We will, however, be scrutinising the process very carefully to ensure that it is based on commercial considerations designed to sustain viable jobs and not protectionist motives.

**Werner Langen**, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, we in the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) very warmly welcome the fact that Commissioner Špidla has confirmed that the European authorities were involved in three areas of this long, drawn-out change of ownership process of a car company.

As a second point, I agree with Commissioner Kroes that there is a need to check carefully whether there are any non-commercial considerations. I would ask the Commission, however, to proceed with the necessary speed. It need not necessarily be as quick as in the take-over of Dutch and Belgian banks within 24 hours, while the same process requires 24 months for German banks, but I would still ask that this checking process be carried out rapidly and purposefully.

My third point is that it is true that there are overcapacities in the market, and indeed that these are on a stupendous scale. In 2007, 58 million cars were sold worldwide, while capacities were 72 million. That means that the restructuring of the industry – including with regard to environmentally-friendly vehicles – is in full swing and the parties most affected are the manufacturers of large vehicles.

Opel is clearly not a manufacturer of large vehicles, but of energy-efficient vehicles. Opel has had problems. It has made losses. Its vehicles perform well, they are technologically sophisticated and I am sure that this company – even if it will not enjoy the market presence of the giants in the marketplace as an independent company – has a chance of surviving if it can succeed in implementing this restructuring plan.

As far as restructuring is concerned, I have read in the press that only one site would be affected. According to my information ...

*(The President cut off the speaker)*

**President**. – Mr Langen, I am sorry but Mr Méndez de Vigo would like to take advantage of the Blue Card procedure to put a question to you, to challenge you. If you agree we can give the floor to Mr Méndez de Vigo, otherwise you may continue.

Obviously your speaking time will be made up. You will have an extra 30 seconds.

**Íñigo Méndez de Vigo (PPE)**. – (ES) Mr President, Mr Langen said that the Commission study on Opel should be completed within a reasonable time. Mr Langen, what do you consider to be a reasonable time?

**Werner Langen**, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (DE) As I said, the process must be allowed to go ahead. It must not be obstructed. That is, ultimately, the question. When I look at examples from the banking sector, where this process has taken years, then a shorter period than we had in some cases in Germany would certainly be appropriate.

I would, however, like to conclude by saying the following: in total, the plan – if my information is correct – envisages 10 500 out of the total of 50 000 jobs being lost, 4 500 of which would be in Germany, with



the remainder across Opel's other sites. I believe it is justified to ask the Commission to check whether this is accurate and that it does not take place according to political criteria and, in that regard, we look forward, along with the workers, to what will hopefully be a bright future.

**President.** – I would like to thank Mr Langen and Mr Méndez de Vigo because I believe that this was the first test, the first trial of this procedure. It is a good thing; it livens up our debates, which have been a little dull at times. With interruptions such as this, however, the debate becomes more interesting.

**Udo Bullmann, on behalf of the S&D Group.** – (DE) Mr President, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, in this situation, where, after a struggle that has gone on for months, the way is finally open to a solution in which, of the in excess of 50 000 directly-affected jobs, probably – at least according to what the new investors are telling us – around 40 000 can be saved, not counting the many jobs amongst suppliers and in dependent local businesses, it is now time to address the workforce of General Motors in Europe. It was their dispute, they – Klaus Franz as the Chairman of the Full Works Council and all the others – became the face of Opel Europe, from a new technology group that has earned its opportunity, and in such a situation, our policy must help.

What is it that we are discussing? We are discussing how General Motors in the US staggered on for months. It came within a whisker – and we know this for certain, ladies and gentlemen – of failing. What, then, could have been more reasonable than to have seized the initiative, moved forwards and said, 'OK then. We have to jump in here and give people a chance. We must give not just the production sites, but also the future technologies, a chance so that Europe can remain a good place to produce cars.'

I can fully identify with the outlook that Commissioner Špidla set out for the European car industry. Let us make it real! Let us create an industrial policy framework with world-leading environmental standards so that employees and car makers in Europe can develop within them right here. We managed it before with coal and steel. Why should we not also now succeed in doing it for the industry of mobility and the future? Grab the ball! The Commission has a lot of room to act here, and it can launch a lot of initiatives.

Commissioner Kroes, according to my information, of the 4.5 billion that form part of the deal that has to be reached, you have already approved 1.5 billion so that the wheels keep turning. Naturally, you must check the law and the legislation – what is the alternative? Of course, all necessary steps must be taken to bring about a fair distribution of burdens in the future negotiations. I implore you, however, to conduct your checks quickly, to consistently come to a conclusion but, given what is at stake, it is absolutely vital that this opportunity not be destroyed. It must not fail on trivialities. Instead, we must also note the significance of the situation and we must achieve a European solution, in the public interest, that benefits everyone.

**Guy Verhofstadt, on behalf of the ALDE Group.** – (NL) Mr President, first of all, I should like to thank the two Commissioners and the Commission for their statements today. It was not self-evident. On 3 August, I wrote a letter, as the announcement that has now been made was already in the offing then, and received a reply from the President of the Commission. It contained nothing new. Today, I have at least heard some clear words from the Commission, through Commissioner Kroes, who states that, no matter what, an in-depth investigation is to be carried out into all the details of this matter.

Commissioner Kroes, I should also like to request that this investigation be carried out on the basis not only of State aid but also on the basis of the rules on competition and of mergers and acquisitions. After all, we are dealing here not only with State aid by the German Government – to the tune of EUR 4.5 billion – but also something that is both merger and acquisition. In this field, the rules on competition are stricter than those on State aid. Since you mainly talked about State aid in your speech, I would ask you to cover both elements in your investigation. After all, with mergers and acquisitions, internal competition between the various plants of the company concerned also plays an extremely important role, of course, whilst State aid mainly concerns the competitive conditions between companies.

I must say, Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, that a dossier involving EUR 4.5 billion in State aid and a private contribution of just EUR 500 million is indeed an eye-opener. Is this still a rescue operation, or is it what I would almost call a nationalisation operation? Be that as it may, there are indications – and it would be good to gather the information on this as quickly as possible – that not only economic but also political motives were decisive in the plan drawn up by Magna together with the German Government. In any case, this should emerge clearly from the investigation. Commissioner Kroes, I would also ask that, at all events, this investigation start quickly – I agree wholeheartedly with Mr Langen on this – and that the information not originate solely from the acquiring party, as a dossier submitted by Magna to the Commission is likely to demonstrate what Magna wants it to demonstrate. It is hard to imagine such a dossier laying bare, as it

were, that the competition rules have been breached. Therefore, I think that the Commission must use its competences to obtain information itself from the various Member States concerned – the United Kingdom, Spain, Poland, Belgium, and of course Germany – so as to enable an objective investigation. I also believe that the investigation now to be carried out is exceptionally important, as it will set a precedent for the great many other restructuring operations that will be seen in the coming years during this economic and financial crisis and will have to be made subject to the same conditions. That was my first point.

My second point is that, in my personal opinion, the Commission failed to act properly by not immediately taking ownership of the dossier. I think this should actually have happened months ago – incidentally, the first Commission communication dates from February. Where transnational restructuring is concerned, I think that the Commission can take direct action and that it was not such a good idea to leave it to a single country. European solutions are not developed by a single Member State; they must be developed by Community institutions. Therefore, I think that, in the field of industrial policy, the Commission should have played its role better and more quickly.

Thirdly, I think that it must lose no time in presenting an overall restructuring plan for the car industry, as 35% overcapacity cannot simply be eliminated unless we adopt an overall European approach.

**Rebecca Harms**, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioners Špidla and Kroes, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, we should try to keep in mind, once again, that we in the European Parliament, even if we are arguing in the Opel case at the moment and this perhaps represents a wider disagreement about the future of the European car industry, are actually all united by our concern for the future of jobs in this sector in the European Union.

Germany's actions should not be attacked so strongly at this point – much as they need to be examined. Instead, the governments of the other Member States of the European Union whose production sites are affected by the GM crisis – in other words, the governments of Poland, Spain, Belgium, the United Kingdom and so on – should get together and consider, along with the Germans, how to make something out of this worst of situations and how it is possible to secure the future of the jobs of the affected people in the factories. I think that would be a better approach to take.

As I say, I believe that we are all united by anxiety concerning the future of jobs in the car industry and I have to say that Commissioner Špidla is absolutely right to say that, despite months of discussions in Brussels and again and again here in Strasbourg and back home in the Member States, the debate is still not where it needs to be. We talk, repeatedly, about how we have major structural overcapacities in the industry, yet we do not truly have the heart to actually set the course and put our backing behind how we want to lead this sector politically away from these structural overcapacities. We have beginnings, which is a very good thing, I think.

In many contexts, including in the context of State interventions, we talk about future-ready cars, which is to say, cars that should be climate-friendly and efficient and which should have different, future-ready engines. If I am honest, however, I do not believe, in view of the trends in the market, that this will be enough to secure as many jobs in the car industry in the future as we have in the industry today. For that reason, the future must at least be discussed in terms of the future of the mobility sector and we must be bold enough to actually now, in these times of crisis, discuss transformations and also act more consistently.

It is very much right to point out, however, that there really has been no thought put into making the sector future-ready as part of the support scheme for Opel in Germany. In theory, that means modern, future-ready cars. What about the public transport sector, though? How do we get to a position where, in future, we have better, climate-friendly public transport systems? Who will build better buses, better trains and better lorries in future? Who will ensure that there is a conceptual link between this sector and the information technologies and renewable energies sector? These issues have been raised again and again, but never thought through to the end, let alone moulded into political concepts.

I would like to use this debate, right now, as the new Parliament begins its work, as the occasion to say that we really must tackle this. We really must dare to do much more in this regard, or else we will make ourselves jointly responsible for unparalleled job losses that we will be completely unable to repair with public funds later on.

Brussels cannot just criticise Germany or other governments. We have to have the courage at this point to appraise our own investment policies. At least EUR 4.4 billion has flowed into the car industry over recent months via favourable loans from the European Investment Bank (EIB). Not a single euro that has been

pumped into the car industry from this pot, Commissioner Špidla, was linked to requirements for such a transformation of the car industry or the mobility sector to make them future-ready.

### IN THE CHAIR: MRS KOCH-MEHRIN

*Vice-President*

**Evžen Tošenovský**, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (CS) Madam President, Commissioner Kroes, Commissioner Špidla, in my speech here in the European Parliament, I would like, as a member of the ECR group, to talk very briefly about the current situation in the car industry, particularly from the perspective of the future competitiveness of European producers. I would also like to thank Commissioner Kroes for her approach to the highly complex issue we are debating today, which will create an enormously complex environment for solving such economic situations in the future. The global economic crisis has affected many areas of the economy. Car production is among the areas worst affected. This may be due to the fact that the car industry is a point of convergence for many different areas, exerting huge demands for quality and incredible competitive pressures, together with pressure for technological progress and innovation. Anyone who cannot manage the dizzying pace of modern technology is in serious trouble and that is precisely what we are seeing today. US car makers are a case in point.

I would go so far as to say that the crisis has clearly identified those that failed to predict how cars would develop as well as those that invested wisely in the development of new competitive models when times were good. I remain fundamentally opposed to targeted government intervention, which can only solve the short-term financial problems of individual domestic producers. I understand politicians' fears regarding rising unemployment levels in certain areas but I am sure that it would be very unwise to rely solely on injections of funding into a single sector, as this simply postpones the day of reckoning, often at the expense of those that are operating in a sensible way. The global crisis can also be a major stimulus for the creation of new technologies and the use of new fuels such as compressed natural gas, hydrogen or, for example, electricity. If the EU wants to stimulate and support European producers, it should therefore support research and simplify innovation procedures which – we must acknowledge – really are very lengthy in Europe.

I am delighted that EU Member States have headed off protectionist tendencies for now. Financial protectionism on its own would simply extend the life of uncompetitive activities. Just as catastrophic floods on the Nile brought fertility in ancient Egypt, the global crisis should be an impulse for the development of new European cars that are more environmentally-friendly and highly competitive on world markets. I am truly delighted that Commissioner Kroes has taken such a serious approach to this issue, as it will have a very serious impact on all of us in the future.

**Thomas Händel**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I share much of what the Commission has put forward here on the causes and the prospects for the car industry – overcapacities, the need to change strategy, new technologies. However, I would like to point out that there are a number of things that we do not share. Opel will probably not be the last case in the car industry, where there is 30% overcapacity across the globe.

We are not only talking about the approximately 12 million people who directly or indirectly live off this industry but the roughly 30 million people throughout Europe who are involved in this industry's economic output. In this situation, the Commission shares responsibility for ensuring that the European car industry is able to master this challenge. The Commission also shares responsibility for ensuring that Opel does not now become the sacrificial pawn of a free-market clean-up of the crisis. The necessary re-alignment of the management of free market forces in this Union will not automatically balance the anticipated job losses with new jobs. On the contrary, indeed, those in jobs and European national economies will pay the price.

The general prevention of State aid will lead to the advent not only of distortions of competition but also social distortions. These will then take a much bigger toll on the coffers of the affected countries than they can afford and, above all, much more than those coffers would be burdened by the aid currently being offered, when you include the dismantlement of social services.

The restructuring of the European car industry needs strong initiatives from the Commission, but also from the relevant national governments. We therefore propose a European industry council on the future of mobility involving politicians, businesses, trade unions and academics. It would have to develop possible courses of action for the necessary technical changes and define political measures and the associated funding. Overcapacities must be converted into new work methodically and with an equal division of burdens. That

applied years ago to the steel industry, and it must now apply to Opel and to the car industry in Europe as a whole.

State aid can and, in my view, must also be linked to achieving an institutionalised employee participation with extended rights of codecision. All affected employees in Europe need security for their sites, they need new work and new, secure future prospects across Europe.

**Frank Vanhecke (NI).** – (NL) Madam President, this afternoon – a couple of hours ago – a Magna senior executive reaffirmed what we had already feared, or known: that the Antwerp plant is to be closed down permanently. It is true that there is talk of a quest for alternatives, for alternative employment, for a different future for the plant, but no one knows what that actually means. It is idle chatter, in a way, and it seems to be a tactic to appease the workers and the many others concerned in Antwerp for the time being: to keep them quiet and compliant.

I think that, for this whole dossier, the European Commission must not do what it has announced its intention to do, which is to wait a bit more, to spectate and count the blows a bit longer. I think that the time for action is now, and that the Commission must state now, more clearly than it has just done, that its approval of this acquisition dossier will be conditional upon the acquiring party applying only objective economic criteria as and when reorganisation operations are required. There must also be complete clarity and complete openness as to the competitiveness reports that may or may not exist for the various plants, and as to whether or not the Commission had access to such reports.

After all, it is common knowledge that the Antwerp plant is very competitive, and it would be unacceptable, in my view, for what may well be the most competitive of the plants to be hit as a result of the massive aid from the German Government. With this dossier, the fate of very many thousands of workers in my country is at stake, as is, once again, I fear, the credibility of the European Commission – and I am not optimistic in this regard. After all, often enough it is the same old story. As Commissioner Špidla pointed out, European professions of faith are many and loud but, when it comes to the crunch, political leaders look after their own country's interests first. This was the case in the recent banking crisis and, I fear, is also the case now in the Opel crisis, with German authorities serving German interests first.

**Ivo Belet (PPE).** – (NL) Madam President, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, the announcement by Magna, Opel's new owner, that it is most probably going to close the Antwerp plant is odd, to say the least. After all, we now know that this Opel plant is one of the most profitable, one of the most efficient plants within the General Motors group – and yet they want to close it. There is a good deal to indicate, therefore, that this decision was not based solely on purely economic criteria. Therefore, Commissioners Špidla and Kroes, we have two requests of you today. The first is that you might still use your rock solid competence in the field of competition to ascertain whether the massive State aid promised by some Member States is really compatible with the European rules. Commissioner Kroes, you have rightly promised an investigation. I hope you are given chance both to carry it out thoroughly and, in the short term, to ensure that we are not soon to be presented with a *fait accompli*. I do not believe it is an exaggeration to say that the credibility of the European Commission is at stake here. Economic nationalism and protectionism have no place in 21st century Europe, and this is a very good dossier to demonstrate that.

Commissioner Kroes, you have a reputation as a woman of steel. We are counting on you to live up to your reputation in this dossier, too, and ensure that the authority of the European Commission is not undermined. I say this entirely without irony.

Secondly, it is essential that Europe comes up with a new industrial project for the automobile sector. We must not look back or focus on missed opportunities, but rather look ahead and focus on the new technology of the new electric car. It is not yet too late. By doing this now, we can ensure that this new electric car is produced using European technology and that we are not all driving Chinese-made electric cars in the future. That is a scenario which it is still perfectly possible to avert.

**Jutta Steinruck (S&D).** – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, this is actually about finding a common European solution, rather than about national egotism.

Opel Europe has a significant role to play in industrial policy in Europe and this is not only about jobs at Opel, but also about jobs in many automotive supply companies in a number of European countries. The decision in favour of Magna – and the European Works Council has confirmed this for me – achieved a consensus in the European Works Council, too, and its members are working flat out on European solutions.

The workers are ready to make sacrifices for this cause, and we expect the same from all the decision makers. Everyone needs to work together, and to do so quickly. Previous speakers have already talked about this.

In the interests of the workers, it also makes sense, of course, for thousands of jobs truly to be temporarily stabilised with State aid. We will not grant validity to any competition arguments that have been put forward. We are dealing with people and with jobs, but also with whole regions. The path that we were put on under Germany's auspices must now lead to the best possible result for all European workers, across all European sites.

**Jorgo Chatzimarkakis (ALDE).** – (DE) Madam President, I'm delighted to be given the opportunity of taking the floor in the first meeting to be chaired by you. I am very pleased, in fact! Most of all, however, I would like to thank Commissioner Špidla for having spoken German, and I would like to express my heartfelt congratulations to Commissioner Kroes. Many people believe that the Opel-Vauxhall case is a German issue. It is not – it is a European issue! It relates to jobs all across Europe, and special treatment here for Germany would not be right. I am therefore particularly pleased to see that the Commission is willing to examine this case. The issues at hand are questions under European law in relation to competition law and State aid.

We do want to save every job, but at what price? As counsel for the citizens and taxpayers, it is unclear in the Opel-Magna deal what long-term commitments will be laid at taxpayers' doors. The Opel case is also questionable from an industrial policy point of view. It is always only the biggest who receive help. The smallest and those in the middle are left to look after themselves, yet they are the backbone of the economy. The fixation on one investor was clearly a wrong move. Better and more favourable offers were turned down early on – and by politicians, in fact.

The Opel case has more to do with electioneering than with economic and industrial policy that is pure and above board from the point of view of EU law. To restate the point, it is important the Commission now plays an active role, even if the German Government does not approve. The Opel deal is a sham. That is becoming ever more obvious. It could mark the most expensive election campaign in the history of Germany.

We want Opel to survive, we want it to be healthy and we want to fight for every job, but we do not want there to be costs involved, nor do we want a solution at the expense of our European partners, on whom Germany, as the biggest exporter in the world, is also dependent.

**Bart Staes (Verts/ALE).** – (NL) Madam President, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, today I am somewhat seized by the emotions of satisfaction and fear. Satisfaction with the statements by Commissioners Špidla and Kroes, which provide a little reassurance, but also fear, as the statements by the acquiring party, Magna, are not really conducive to any real peace of mind. I should like to discuss a number of things that have been said in this debate.

Commissioner Kroes, Commissioner Špidla, I entreat you: do be men and women of steel, do ensure that all the rules are properly observed. Indeed, on the subject of State aid, I must agree with Mr Verhofstadt when he says that the investigation must be extended to all aspects of competition law, to the whole body of law on mergers and acquisitions. I think he is right about that. I also agree with Mr Langen when he states most emphatically that this must happen quickly. What could be done quickly for the banks must also be done quickly in the matter of this acquisition dossier, a dossier that is so important for many thousands of workers.

I should just like to take up what Commissioner Špidla said about there being overcapacity in the sector – which is true of course. He said that a number of methods have been used to set this to rights. He mentioned the Globalisation Fund, to which there have been seven applications. We should also be aware, however, that this Globalisation Fund is not working very well. Tomorrow, we shall be discussing a dossier, a report by Mr Böge, which clearly shows that, of the EUR 500 million that was at our disposal for 2009, barely EUR 8 million has been used. We should use such resources to help these workers, therefore, in the form of training, reorganisation and real development towards a new, green economy, one that is low-carbon and relies less heavily on fossil fuels.

**Derk Jan Eppink (ECR).** – (NL) Madam President, your party leader, Mr Westerwelle, said that one of the intentions with this aid package to Opel was that it form part of the election campaign. I hope this is not the case, of course, and I hope that the restructuring of Opel is subjected to normal rules of business conduct and that we do not end up in a situation where everyone puts their own car plant first. I have complete confidence in Commissioner Kroes, who is going to examine every aspect of this deal. She is known for her ability to stand firm, which she has proved time and again in the Netherlands, and she will not be afraid to make clear statements.

I do have a question for her concerning the role of Sberbank, the Russian savings bank. I am wondering what kind of role this is and whether it will ultimately lead to the relocation of some of Opel's production activities to the Russian Federation, since Sberbank is actually an extension of the government's economic policy by other means.

Finally, I should like to point out to Mr Staes that he is surprised that this company is under threat, whilst advocating a vehemently anti-car policy. Cars are becoming safer and cleaner but are still blamed for everything. Cars are the bogeyman, and drivers are squeezed dry as taxpayers – often as a result of policies championed in this House. Ladies and gentlemen, cars represent freedom. For many people of modest means, Opel represents an affordable brand. It is an unfortunate fact that, at present, these people are finding it increasingly difficult to afford a car such as an Opel, and the result is the collapse of car manufacturing. This is why I do not think we can express surprise at these developments whilst conducting an anti-car policy in this House. My party is in favour of cars, as Mr Verhofstadt, too, is aware.

**Angelika Niebler (PPE).** – (DE) Madam President, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, I have three points to make.

The first is that the car industry is a key industry for Europe and – this has already been said – when you include all the upstream and downstream businesses and the whole supply industry, 12 million jobs depend on it. I just want to emphasise this one more time as Mr Chatzimarkakis is sitting there in front of me, having just said that the German Government's efforts were electioneering bluster. I can only refute this definitively. It is a mocking affront to the workers employed in this sector across numerous European countries who have to fear for their jobs day in and day out.

Secondly, rescuing Opel is in the common interests of Europe as a whole. I think it is particularly important to stress this, irrespective of the debate today. There are sites in the UK, Belgium, Poland, Spain, Germany and other European countries. If Opel is rescued by the fact that there is an investor, namely Magna, that there are bridging loans, for which the German Government fought, it is not only in Germany's interests but those of Europe as a whole. We must all take steps to retain jobs in our home countries. I am pleased. Where would we be today if we had not taken steps to bring about the trusteeship solution? There would not be any need for further debate today in that case, as the debate would have been done and dusted in any case when General Motors drew GM Europe along with it into the mess surrounding its insolvency.

My third point is that there are strict rules for State aid. I am confident that the Commission will examine this matter in a proper manner doing justice to the interests involved. The crucial question will be whether Opel Europe can be profitable again in the medium term. I am confident that the solution that has now been produced and on which Magna, too, is working, and which involves many other European States, can be implemented. I ask the Commission to also provide the relevant authorisation and I would like to conclude by re-stating that, in this case, we have achieved something positive for the car industry in Europe as a whole!

**Kathleen Van Brempt (S&D).** – (NL) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, thank you to the Commission for its statement. Unfortunately, I do not share the optimism of many of my fellow Members – and this goes for the Commission statement, too. It is true that we have had some more bad news about the Antwerp plant today, and the fact that a highly productive plant, with a particularly good workforce, is the one earmarked for closure must raise many questions – hopefully also within the Commission. Ladies and gentlemen, could it have anything to do with the fact that this plant is situated in one of the smaller Member States and in a region that, though economically strong, is particularly small?

The Commission is now congratulating itself on the work it has done over recent months. Unfortunately, I disagree. You, the Commission, play a role – a necessary role, and one I support – a very formalistic role as protector of the interests of the European Union in terms of its treaties and its rules on competition and State aid. I emphasise the necessity of this, and reiterate my support for you in the investigation you must carry out in this regard, as it will be a crucial one. Yet why did you not do more? Why did you not assume a strong political role – for example, by also cooperating on ideas relating to restructuring during the talks you held with the Member States? The European trade unions, for example, have been working on, and still support, restructuring, which also incorporates the concept of solidarity, namely ensuring that the suffering is shared among the various plants.

For the time being, I wish to ask – and this is my most important question to the Commission – what are you going to do right now, following the worst possible news about Opel Antwerp: what steps will you be taking to ensure that the people, the workers in Antwerp, also have a future?

**Chris Davies (ALDE).** – Mr President, all of us with car factories in our countries or regions want to see their success, but that should not blind us to the problems and the reality of overcapacity that curbs profits and investment. I am hugely impressed by the engineering excellence I see at plants in my region – at Ellesmere Port and at Halewood – and on that basis alone they should prosper, but I am deeply depressed by the attitude of the car industry as a whole over the 10 years that I have seen it work while I have been in this Parliament.

Judged against the potential for environmental improvement, its record has been shameful. Of course, there are positive stories to be told. We see examples of innovation in our newspapers each day, but the industry as a whole fought against the introduction of catalytic converters, wildly exaggerating their cost. It made an agreement with us to reduce its CO<sub>2</sub> emissions and then reneged on it. Currently it is trying to wriggle out of legal requirements that it uses air-conditioning coolants with a much lower global warming potential than those used at present, and already it is lobbying to try and weaken the Commission's proposals on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from vans and light commercial vehicles.

Huge sums of money have been put into propping up this industry. I think we, the public, deserve a bit better. We hear from the component manufacturers that the car assemblers are too low in their ambitions. What we need is for the industry now to take a new attitude, and the industry's representatives – ACEA – in particular. We need the industry to recognise that it has obligations to society as a whole and that its future is inextricably linked to environmental improvement.

**Frieda Brepoels (Verts/ALE).** – (NL) Madam President, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, I think it is clear that even the European car industry cannot escape reality and must be reorganised as a matter of urgency to eliminate overcapacity. Yet, of course, the question arises about the credibility of Opel's economy drive if it has pledged to retain its most expensive plant – the German one – whilst an economically well performing plant such as Opel Antwerp is to close. Sure enough, this scenario was formally confirmed this afternoon by Magna co-CEO, Siegfried Wolf, at the Frankfurt Motor Show. As various speakers have already stated, there are serious indications that, in exchange for State aid, Magna has made concessions to the German authorities that are not exactly in the interests of the industrial plan. I think that the European Commission must put a stop to this before it is too late. Commissioner Kroes has already expressed her concern, but I think that more is needed. In particular, the Commission must lose no time in stating how it intends to ensure that Germany, too, respects the European competition rules in this dossier. As I see it, failure by the Commission to do this would set a bad precedent for all future cross-border restructuring operations, with the smaller Member States repeatedly being driven out. Why is the Commission itself not also at the helm of the negotiations with GM and Magna instead of just Germany? I have also heard that, tomorrow, the German Government is to sit down at the table with the other European countries to work out how to coordinate the State aid. This does look very cynical as far as Flanders is concerned and clearly comes too late in the day, and I should like to ask whether the Commission is also involved.

**Inés Ayala Sender (S&D).** – (ES) Madam President, first of all, I would like to express, on behalf of the European Parliament, our solidarity and support for all the workers in all the Opel plants across Europe, especially for those at the Figueruelas plant, the workers and their families and those that are dependent on them in the auxiliary companies. I would like to assure them that we are with them in this new adventure that is beginning with the creation of an independent European producer, GM Europe.

However, in order for this adventure, which stemmed from the bad news of the collapse of GM in the United States, to be an opportunity to build a solvent, modern, competitive business with a clear future from a company, economic and technological point of view, the Commission and the Commissioners themselves need to take the lead again in the current negotiations in order to ensure that we achieve a truly European solution with all possible guarantees.

We have been criticising the absence of the Commission in the preliminary negotiations and the way that it gave in to bilateral negotiations when every Member State with Opel plants was calling for unilateral solutions. In this respect, it should be pointed out that there have even been regional governments, such as my government in Aragon, which was pioneering a year ago when it proposed a guarantee for the Figueruelas plant.

However, this shift, due to the Commission surrendering its responsibilities, has resulted in the current situation of confusion and a serious risk that election outcomes, which have no bearing on the criteria for industrial viability, will lead the new European company down a dead end in which competitiveness criteria are not a priority and a high cost in terms of jobs is inevitable. In order to prevent this from happening, we need the solution to be a European one that is economically viable now, and in the medium and long term,

in which employment is prioritised in the form of the competitiveness and productivity of emblematic plants such as Figueruelas.

We will not allow the Commission to remain neutral for another second longer. It needs to act and ensure both employment and the future of GM Europe. Parliament is going to demand this on behalf of all the workers of Opel Europe.

**Izaskun Bilbao Barandica (ALDE).** – (ES) Madam President, I thank the Commissioners for their explanations.

Throughout this entire debate, I have been concerned about the link that is being made between the elections in Germany and the situation of this company, which is affecting many plants in Europe.

I am going to focus on three of the aspects mentioned by the Commissioner. I believe that this situation requires complete and absolute transparency in all the negotiations that are being conducted. I agree that there needs to be monitoring of all the aspects, both from a legal point of view and from the point of view of aid. However, the Commissioner said that she sees restructuring as inevitable, along with job losses and the closure of plants.

In response to this, which I believe is due to the business model that has been put forward so far and the level of greed that we have in Europe, I think that with this future in mind, we need to put people first. We and the Commission need to consider and apply innovative policies, to protect people and ensure they can live with dignity and are given standard training across all European countries, in order to adapt to the future labour market and to the requirements of the new companies.

Secondly, with regard to aid to businesses, I would like to say that it needs to be aid that makes the remaining plants viable. There also needs to be a definite commitment to innovation, especially, as other Members have mentioned, to hybrid technologies, so that motoring does not depend solely on fossil fuels.

This is therefore what we require of the Commission for the future.

**Philippe Lamberts (Verts/ALE).** – (FR) Madam President, I should like to make a number of comments.

The first is that, until now, State aid for the car industry and the action taken by the Member States and the Commission have been marked, on the one hand, by what I would call a defensive approach and, on the other, by a short-term approach. I believe, for example, that the huge scrapping premiums that we have seen have in fact anticipated and artificially inflated demand, and I believe that it is now that these premiums are coming to an end, or are going to come to an end, that we will see just how much of a false impression they create. Demand cannot keep up with supply.

That is why we would like to encourage the Commission to be far more ambitious in its way of working. Where State aid in particular is concerned, I believe that we need to prioritise two areas of action.

The first is that implementing sustainable mobility solutions in Europe requires the talents and skills of workers – from engineers to manual workers – from the car industry. Thus, a first area of action is obviously to help maintain and develop these skills, in the car industry or in related industries.

Moreover, I believe that far greater conditions should be attached to State aid than is currently the case. In other words, it is not enough to say, ‘we are going to continue in the same way as before’. I believe that State aid should be made subject to the speeding up of change within the industry. In this respect, I fully agree with what Mr Davies said.

I should like to conclude by responding to Mr Eppink, who is obviously claiming that we are against freedom. What is, in fact, happening on the market is that fewer and fewer of our fellow citizens are falling into the ‘my car equals my freedom’ bracket. One need only go for a drive on the roads of Belgium or the Netherlands to realise that the system has reached its limits.

**Veronica Lope Fontagné (PPE).** – (ES) Madam President, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, when it was proposed that we have a debate in plenary on the future of Opel Europe, we were not yet aware of the purchase of the company by Magna and its Russian partner, Sberbank, on Thursday.

After months of uncertainty, a new phase is beginning for Opel Europe which, for some, is grounds for hope, while for others, grounds for concern. We want the conditions of the final contract, which will be signed in the next few months, to be positive for the future of the company, and I hope that the German Government is right in thinking that this is the most reliable offer for the survival of the company.



However, as a Member of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs and as someone from Aragon, where the Figueruelas factory, which is currently one of the most productive plants, is located, I must express my concern regarding the fate of the workers. There is talk that in its restructuring plan, Magna is considering making 10 560 workers redundant – currently 1 700 at the Aragon plant – to which many indirect redundancies will have to be added.

We are aware that in order to save the company, there needs to be major restructuring, and that this will affect our workers, but we hope that the plan will be made using economic and productivity criteria, seeking to arrive at the best solution for everyone.

We trust that, in the coming months, the governments of the affected countries will get involved along with Europe. This will mean that together, using economic criteria, we can support the viability of Opel with the lowest possible cost to the workers at all its European plants.

**President.** – Mr Luhan, you had a question for Mrs Lope Fontagné. That is why you were holding up your blue card, is it not?

**Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE).** – (DE) Madam President, I think it is very important that we discuss this issue. What has not been addressed so far, however, is dealing with this subject in the context of European and regional development.

*(The President cut off the speaker)*

**President.** – That is not a question for Mrs Lope Fontagné. If you want to speak under the catch-the-eye procedure, you will have that opportunity at the end of the debate.

**Mario Pirillo (S&D).** – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the recent events concerning Opel make me think of something more than just the acquisition of an historic European car manufacturer. I wonder: what kind of industrial policy do we want for Europe? I would have preferred a European group to have acquired Opel; it would have demonstrated cooperation and solidarity among industries in the sector, as well as a strong sense of belonging to the European Union.

At the 'Etats Généraux de l'Automobile' conference in January 2009, the European Commissioner for Industry, Mr Verheugen, said that the automotive sector was crucial to the economy, society, employment and research. I am worried about the possible repercussions in employment terms that this deal could have and I hope that there will be no cuts. I am even more worried about State aid, which must not distort competition in the car market. The Commission will have to ensure that the aid is not linked to site closures.

It is a shame that the proposal made by Fiat was not accepted by either the German Government or the directors of Opel. Nowadays, Fiat is the most technically advanced vehicle manufacturer – just look at what it has done to reduce the CO<sub>2</sub> emissions of its cars.

**Dirk Sterckx (ALDE).** – (NL) Madam President, Commissioner Kroes, we are actually looking to you as an arbitrator in this case. If I have understood correctly, Antwerp is soon to lose its Opel plant. There may still be a plant that is rented out to one brand or another as a subcontractor, but of course, that is a particularly uncertain future.

As a citizen of Antwerp, what I find especially hard to take is that we have been convinced for months that the choice would be based not merely on economic arguments but on the ability of Germany, the German Government, to put a very large amount of taxpayers' money on the table. Therefore, we are looking to you as an arbitrator to see whether this is true, and to work out whether merely economic and commercial arguments were indeed used in this instance or whether it was a case of the survival of the economically or politically fittest.

When your investigation is complete, we should be obliged if you would set forth your findings in this House. After all, we have yet to hear much, or at least anything clear, from the companies involved. That is why we are counting on you to enlighten us on the arguments that were used by those involved. I should like you to tell me why Antwerp – my city – has been hit hardest, as very many people back home will see this as a symbol of the confidence they can have in the European Commission and in the European Union itself.

**Marianne Thyssen (PPE).** – (NL) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I share the great concern of many in this House about the fate of Opel and the people who work there or make a living in that area. A decision in principle has now been taken on the acquisition of Opel, but in recent days and even

hours, statements have been made that have caused a great deal of confusion on several points. This is draining for the workers and also the people in the supply sector, and clarity is needed without delay – clarity, but, above all, a serious, honest approach.

What worries me about this dossier in a European context is Magna's announcement that only the Antwerp plant is to be closed, whilst studies have been published showing that this particular plant holds trump cards in terms of business economics. Therefore, I cannot shake off the impression that multinationals are playing Member States off against one another, or the other way round: that Member States are using State aid to influence the selection of plants to be closed or saved, in such a way as to distort competition. If this should be the case, on top of the economic crisis and its distressing social consequences, we shall find ourselves dealing with a crisis of the institutions – the credibility of the institutions – which will leave people without any point of reference.

For this reason, I ask with urgency something I have asked before, in a written question in February, which is that the Commission really make use of all the means at its disposal: the means to ensure the victims of Opel's trials and tribulations are not left to their fate, and the means to really set up a formal investigation into the use of State aid. This is in the interests of objective, transparent treatment of each and every plant and the people who depend on it. After all, people must be able to rely on the European Union carrying out its core tasks even under difficult circumstances such as we are seeing at present, on it taking matters seriously, and on there being no place in Europe for double standards. This is really the litmus test for the credibility of the institutions, Commissioners, and we are counting on you.

**Arlene McCarthy (S&D).** – Madam President, I believe we all share the same objective – to ensure the long-term viability and competitiveness of the EU car industry and to maintain jobs in the sector.

In July, I wrote to Commissioner Verheugen and I was encouraged by receiving his commitment to ensure a level playing field in any restructuring plan for the European arm of GM. In my region, the Vauxhall plant in Ellesmere Port is the linchpin of the local economy, employing some 2 200 direct jobs. The site has undergone radical restructuring and is considered a lean, efficient and competitive operation, as indeed is the Luton site in the south-east of England.

Nobody wants job losses, but any decision must be based on the viability and efficiency of plants. It must be based on fairness, not favouritism, not because one Member State has pledged more finance than any others. And I am pleased that Commissioner Kroes recognises that there is no place for political fixes, political strings or conditions in awarding State aid.

I urge the Commission to be vigilant and to ensure that any financial support is based on State aid rules and the ability of the European operations to be commercially viable and economically fit for the future. Maintaining a strong European car industry means taking a pan-European approach to maintaining vital and efficient infrastructure in all Member States and all regions.

**Bogusław Sonik (PPE).** – (PL) The question has arisen as to whether the provision of EUR 4.5 million by the German Government to restructure Opel, which was hailed as a success, was a political act or an economic one. The best answer to this question was provided by representatives of the German Government when it came to choosing Magna as the entity to take over Opel. One representative did not take part in the decisive vote, and another, Mr Wennemer, voted against, because he considered that it was a political decision.

The European Commission ought to assess the nature of the State aid granted to Opel and inform the House as to whether this was not perhaps a case of protecting the local market at the expense of factories and jobs in other European Union Member States. I was particularly affected by the severity of the European Commission's assessments, because the shipyard workers in Szczecin and Gdynia were not granted any opportunity to continue producing ships. Will Commissioner Kroes' assessment of this case of State aid be as severe and as reliable as it was in the case of the Polish shipyards? The citizens of Europe suspect that double standards are being applied in this area.

Finally, I should like to point out that the global financial crisis is now one year old. In these difficult times, the European Commission ought to be ready to assist, assess, advise and to propose solutions that are not tainted by suspicions of being driven by the political or protectionist interests of individual Member States. Unfortunately, it is my impression that the Commission has adopted a passive attitude in this case.

**Olle Ludvigsson (S&D).** – (SV) Madam President, we can only conclude that the crisis that we find ourselves in is unprecedented. It is therefore necessary for us to have a cohesive and active policy – not only to save

the jobs that it is possible to save, but also to help those who become unemployed to get back into the labour market. Training will be hugely important.

The car industry is the engine of the European economy and it is important for decisions to be taken on the basis of long-term goals for developing a sustainable European car industry. Differing ideas have been put forward about how job losses and notice will be distributed. If it is the case that every fifth job in the Opel group will disappear, then there will be an unbelievable strain on both the people and the societies affected, irrespective of the country concerned. I hope, therefore, that the process has been carried out correctly and that multinational undertakings have not had to play off country against country in the bidding process and so play off the workers against each other as well. European efforts to counter the crisis must be coordinated and balanced.

It is also important for trade unions to be involved and for them to be able to participate in the process in an active and constructive manner. Furthermore, it is important for the Commission and Parliament to follow the developments closely. Research and development will be crucial to the future of the car industry and that applies not only to Opel, but to all vehicle manufactures throughout Europe.

**Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE).** – (DE) Madam President, I greatly appreciate a subject as important as this being debated here in the European Parliament. Personally, I worked for more than three years in the automotive supply sector. In my home country, we give top priority to foreign investment in the automotive sector. I therefore think that the car industry has an important role to play in connection with regional development.

As well as supporting innovation, we should also create incentives for automotive suppliers and car makers throughout Europe to restructure and expand, as one of the most important objectives of the European Commission and the European Parliament is to ensure a high degree of economic cohesion. The Commission should do more, including with regard to awarding grants to the car industry. For the time being, this should be regarded as a measure aimed at combating the financial and economic crisis, although it should also be seen as one of the building blocks of innovation in the car industry.

In this context, Opel is only one example of how this sector is currently on the rocks, but, of course, many car makers are in the same situation. That is why we want the Commission to treat this sector and this area as priorities.

**Matthias Groote (S&D).** – (DE) Madam President, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, this is, of course, not the first time that we have debated the subject of Opel and the car industry. I am pleased that the rescue succeeded. There were other proposals on the table, such as a structured insolvency. In the supply industry – and I have just come from Bavaria, where I visited a supply company – people are very urgently dependent on orders. Things have got out of control. If Opel, too, had been driven to insolvency, things would have been very, very bad and the consequences would have been devastating.

We have just heard the Commission's conclusions. There was a car industry summit, in which the Commission took part, but we actually heard nothing after the summit. Today we have heard where the problem may lie, what is not possible. That must change in future – we need to hear from the Commission what is possible, so as to forestall nationalistic debates. The Commission needs to mediate more effectively so that we pursue a common European industrial policy. That is also what I hope for from the next Commission.

**Hans-Peter Martin (NI).** – (DE) Madam President, first of all, I feel I must state that I am speaking from a doubly biased position. My wife works in the management of a car company in Germany, and in Austria people are pleased that Opel appears to have been rescued in this way. When we look at the events more closely, however, I have great doubts about whether we are not doing exactly what we in Austria have already experienced in connection with the apparent rescue of the nationalised industry and what already happened in Germany in relation to the Holzmann company before a pivotal election. I do not know whether there are Members in the House from Germany who would be prepared to enter into a wager with me about whether presumptive German taxpayers would be supporting Opel in this way if such an important election were not taking place in ten days' time.

I would like the Commission to consider the *sine ira et studio*, to really think over whether this is reasonable. If we are going to constantly talk of competition, then that is what we should have and it should not result in a downward spiral which takes with it those who have actually kept house better, financially speaking, than Opel!

**Theodor Stolojan (PPE).** – (RO) Madam President, we are actually talking about signs of recovery in Europe, but, unfortunately, the situation in the car industry is still alarming. This is why I think that we need to send a clear signal to European countries, encouraging them to continue their programmes for replacing old cars heavy on fuel with new cars, while maintaining the incentive programmes from the budgets of the relevant countries. Obviously, we must also be able to attach to these programmes certain restructuring conditions with a view to saving energy.

**Saïd El Khadraoui (S&D).** – (NL) Madam President, the provisional solution to the Opel dossier contains good news for some people but, above all, a great deal of bad news for the thousands of people who are to lose their jobs, and I understand from this afternoon's announcement that these will also be from Antwerp. This is not to mention the supply chain, where large numbers of jobs will also be lost. These are all social tragedies, and I believe that three things are important in this regard.

Firstly, the Commission must now use all its competences to guarantee that the negative consequences of the announced restructuring take an honest, objective course. This is essential to preserve Europe's credibility and to prevent people from getting the feeling that all workers are not equal.

Secondly, starting now, the Commission must put all its energy into helping to offer a new future in those places where jobs are being lost.

Thirdly – and this, I think, is the main lesson to be learnt – we need a more proactive Commission, we need a European industrial policy, a perspective on the challenges, the opportunities and the way problems are tackled from a European point of view – and this for transnational industrial sectors such as the car industry.

**Krisztina Morvai (NI).** – Madam President, I apologise for my ignorance. I am a human rights lawyer with very little expertise on economic issues, so I have two very basic questions.

The first is: is there not a fundamental problem with an economic system in which profit is privatised and the costs and the damages are nationalised and paid by taxpayers, most of whom are poor people – or a lot of them are poor people – who have to pay for the bad decisions of a narrow, rich corporate elite? Is there not something fundamentally wrong with this system, and should we not look at the root causes of all that we are talking about today?

The second question is – we were talking about discrimination in providing public funds geographically or between nations and states – how about sectors? Is it fair that these big corporations get public funds out of taxpayers' money while small and family entrepreneurs do not? Is this not a fundamental violation of the principle of equal opportunities between economic players in the European Union?

**Richard Howitt (S&D).** – Madam President, as the MEP that represents Luton in the East of England, I would like to join my British colleague, Arlene McCarthy, in expressing our real desire to Mr Špidla and to the Commission that they scrutinise this GM/Opel deal line by line to make sure that a deal which is about a European sell-off is a good deal for Europe as a whole.

I would also like to appeal to him to look in particular at the issues around van production, which is the production within Luton. Firstly, because Magna's partner is a Russian truck company, and there are fears that that company will benefit at the expense of the existing production. Secondly, because it is expected that there must be a new model in that van market by 2012, and unless Magna give assurances that that new model will be brought on, it does bring concerns about the future of the plant. And finally, there are concerns that the deal will not be compatible with the joint production venture between General Motors and Renault, which is half of the production at Luton. I ask him to do everything possible to secure that production and the jobs that are associated with it at the same time.

**Vladimír Špidla, Member of the Commission.** – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, the debate has clearly shown that the automobile industry is one of the most important areas of the economy in the European Union. In my opinion, it has also clearly shown that for the automobile industry – just as for Opel – there can only be a European solution and that it is impossible to find a long-term solution within the framework of individual countries which will stand the test of time in economic and social terms. There was also a clear emphasis, in my opinion, on the importance of the Commission ensuring that all of the rules are applied completely consistently and in an entirely impartial manner. There was much debate over the rules of economic competition, but I would like to stress that Europe is also equipped with a number of very substantial directives focusing on social issues and the regulation of restructuring, as well as the informing of employees and a whole range of issues which we must take into consideration as a matter of principle because every economic

operation is essentially a relationship between people and we must take full account of the social consequences of all decisions. I would like to emphasise that the Opel case clearly demonstrates all of the important components for the automobile industry in itself and, in my opinion, we can also tell what sort of future the European automobile industry will have from the way that the various European levels cooperate in solving this problem.

Ladies and gentlemen, it was suggested rather indirectly in the debate that the Commission has not been sufficiently active. I have to say that during the course of the crisis, and particularly when it was first erupting, there were very clear manifestations of protectionist tendencies and economic nationalism. Several months later, this was no longer an urgent topic. In my opinion, we should acknowledge the enormous efforts made by the Commission over this issue, which brought definite results. As far as the issue itself is concerned, my colleague, Mr Verheugen, organised two meetings to address the issue at which he brought individual Member States together and one outcome of which was that the Member States shared information, which has not always been the case in previous restructuring exercises. In my view, the debate also clearly showed that the European automobile industry is going through a long-term restructuring process, and that this fact must be taken into consideration. Future progress has been a central theme and I am delighted to be able to emphasise once again that support is going into innovation in the automobile industry via the European Investment Bank, in order to ensure that the crisis situation does not weaken the industry's capacity for innovation.

Ladies and gentlemen, although the decision that was taken is very significant for the issue we have been discussing, we are nonetheless in the middle of a process and there can be no doubt that the Commission has mobilised all of its powers and resources to ensure that the process has been conducted correctly and with close attention to the social dimension.

**Neelie Kroes**, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, I am grateful for nearly all the remarks that have been made, for many reasons. This is an excellent opportunity to find out where the role of the Commission is limited and where it is challenged, and what the clear purposes of the Commission's policy are. I also want to touch upon the time schedule. Mr Langen was quite clear in his approach on that as well as on the role of the Commission.

We are all aware that we are living on a continent – and not just on the continent – that is not only populated with angels. The temptation to use State aid in different situations is there, and we are all aware of that. That is exactly why judgments on State aid lie in the hands of the Commission – a decision backed by all the Member States. By the way, I am still impressed that the founders of Europe in the 1950s were already aware of the pitfalls of using State aid in the wrong way. They were quite clear and that statement is still in the Treaty of Rome.

Having said that, the Commission's role is to verify that no protectionist conditions are attached to State funding and that is exactly where our challenge lies. Some of you ask why we cannot speed up, but we are doing our utmost. By the way, nationality was never an issue in cooperation with banks. We do have examples in the German banking world where the delivery was quite quick with Sachsen LB, but it depends – and in this case too – on the players. We need the facts and figures. The need to speed up goes without saying: there is no need even to mention it as we are aware of that. We will go as fast as the provision of information allows us. Having said that, we were also getting your clear line to be very careful and precise and to enter into an investigation to find proof and come back to Parliament. I am always willing – and hopefully able – to come back to explain our results, but we have to verify what we find. We need to be sure and be in a position to deliver this.

If Mr Verhofstadt wants us to go even further – not only State aid but taking in merger rules too – then, if Magna/Sberbank is notifiable to the Commission under the EU Merger Regulation, we will assess it carefully. I am aware that is also what the honourable Member wants.

We need to be very careful about replacing an unhealthy but highly competitive industry with a cartel based on market-sharing and price-fixing, as what we try to rescue will end up in a worse situation. We take the points about speed and being very careful but precise and going into great depth. It is very important to ensure that State aid leads to a proper restructuring. That is fundamental and what the Commission is absolutely engaged in. The size of the Member State does not make any difference, nor does nationality or the size of the company's dossier. We are objective.

I assure you that I am looking forward to coming up with a proposal where we can say that we did our job, we did it in a proper way and we can assure you that it is viable and that there are stable jobs for the future. That is one of the main things we owe to the people who are currently living in uncertainty.

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

## 21. Forest fires in the summer of 2009 (debate)

**President.** – The next item is the statement from the Commission on the forest fires in the summer of 2009.

**Stavros Dimas, Member of the Commission.** – (EL) Madam President, I should like first of all to express my support for those who were affected by the recent forest fires.

This summer, the Community made an important contribution towards putting out the many difficult forest fires which broke out in various Member States. The pilot programme of the EU forest fire tactical reserve played an important role and provided assistance to the Member States affected by the forest fires.

I should like to extend my special thanks to the European Parliament for approving funding for this pilot programme. I must also say that this pilot programme is a small part, a partial implementation of proposals and ideas from the report by Michel Barnier, to whom I also express my thanks.

This pilot programme substantially reinforced the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection and, by extension, the facility to assist countries hit by natural disasters.

The European Community Mechanism for Civil Protection was used by France, Italy, Spain and other Member States of the European Union to provide aerial fire-fighting resources in Greece, Italy, Portugal and other countries. In fact, for the first time, two Community fire-fighting aircraft were involved together with Greek, Portuguese and French aerial resources in fire-fighting efforts under a pilot programme to create an independent Community fire brigade.

On the occasion of these recent fires, many voices were again raised by politicians, scientists, journalists and simple citizens, calling for the creation at European level of a specialist fire-fighting force able to intervene directly and effectively when national fire-fighting resources are insufficient.

Huge efforts have been made in this direction to create an independent intervention force to fight forest fires and, as I said, the support of the European Parliament was a decisive factor. It allowed us to secure funds to charter fire-fighting aircraft and, for the first time this summer, over the period from 1 June to 30 September, we set up and commissioned an airborne fire-fighting force under the supervision of the European Commission, the EU forest fire tactical reserve, whose aircraft were involved in fire-fighting operations in various countries. To be precise it was mobilised in six of the nine incidents in which the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection was called upon for assistance.

In fact, the national airborne resources, be they Greek, Portuguese or Italian, and those that came from other countries, were joined by the purely Community fire-fighting aircraft, which fly under the flag of the European Union, not under the flag of a Member State.

The aim of this pilot programme was to fill gaps in the aerial capacity of the Member States, not to replace available national resources. The reserve aircraft chartered were used this year, as I said, in Portugal, in the south of France and Corsica, in Italy and in Greece, in the area of Attica, where we had major fires. They are based on the island of Corsica, which is equidistant for the purpose of intervention from either side of the Mediterranean.

I consider that there is now an urgent need to create an independent capacity to deal with natural disasters at Community level. We hope that this pilot programme will form the core of a future European rapid response force to fight forest fires and other natural or man-made disasters.

Of course, there are certain differing points of view here on the question of forest fires, with some people citing the principle of subsidiarity in the forest resource management and protection sector. However, there are also reservations about handing over more power to the Commission in the civil protection sector. Also, there are arguments that the existence of a European fire-fighting force would give a false sense of security to many national authorities, which might neglect the necessary investment required in human resources, in fire-fighting resources and, more importantly, in the prevention of fires and other natural disasters.

Apart from these reactions, there are a number of practical problems, problems of coordination, especially on the question of forest fires. For example, what criteria and what priorities will be used to determine how European airborne fire-fighting units are to be used where fires break out in several countries at once, for example, in Portugal and Greece at the same time.

In any event, all these issues will be analysed in a report submitted by the European Commission for debate by the Council of Ministers and the European Parliament on the operation of the pilot programme this summer.

The Council, the European Parliament and the Commission will all need to be persuaded and to cooperate in the creation of this mechanism. Of course, in the meantime, Member States must not neglect in any way whatsoever their obligations in the information, education and prevention sectors.

I shall say a few more words about the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection, which was set up in 2001, and which made few interventions in the initial years. Since 2005, interventions both inside and outside the European Union, with approximately 50% inside the European Union and 50% outside it, have increased fivefold and we have seriously improved coordination and the assistance which we provide via the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection.

Everyone knows how important intervention was both in the case of the tsunami and during hurricane Katrina. In fact, we were the first to send specialists to the disaster zones in both these cases. However, as I said earlier, we have a great deal to do and anyone who reads the Barnier report will see how much we can advance civil protection for the benefit of European citizens and, of course, environmental protection.

**Theodoros Skylakakis**, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (EL) Madam President, every year, 400 000 hectares of forest are destroyed in southern Europe. This is a systemic disaster of massive proportions and will worsen over the next few decades. For 30 to 40 years at least, we shall live, whatever we do from the point of view of reducing greenhouse gases, with a worsening climate which, especially in the south of Europe, where forests are vulnerable, will be a negative experience. We will have to face bigger fires and more serious dangers in the future.

Under normal circumstances, fire fighting is the responsibility and obligation of the Member States and the Member States in southern Europe successfully deal with tens of thousands of fires a year. However, every year, under exceptional circumstances, there are hugely destructive fires for which external assistance and solidarity are needed.

The decision proposed by the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) is based on these findings and illustrates, among other things, the urgent need for an effective European rapid response force, as mentioned by Commissioner Dimas and proposed in the Barnier report.

It illustrates the need for flexible and immediate mobilisation of the resources of the European Solidarity Fund, the need to deal with forest fires in southern Europe as a priority under the EU action plan currently being processed in order to adapt to climate change, and the need for the Commission proposal on a European policy to deal with natural disasters to be submitted as quickly as possible.

For my country, and especially for the citizens affected, it is important that this decision be approved by the European Parliament. It is important for this House to demonstrate its awareness of this crucial issue to southern Europe.

**Anni Podimata**, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (EL) Madam President, Commissioner, this year, yet again, the history of forest fires has repeated itself for the worse and every autumn we arrive after the break to debate restoration of the areas affected and relief for the victims.

Again this year in Greece, we are lamenting the hundreds of thousands of hectares burnt and an incalculable ecological and economic disaster, while Spain, Portugal, Italy and France have suffered disasters on a similar scale.

Commissioner, one thing is clear, and you hinted at it: we appear to be unable to learn from recent past mistakes. For at least six years, we have been talking about a common European civil protection force. This has been a constant request by the European Parliament, the importance of which, however, has been devalued by mistakes on the part of certain national governments. Mistakes in the design and application of pre-emptive mechanisms and preventative measures, an inability or unwillingness to impose strict legislation making

reforestation of destroyed areas compulsory and a failure to make use of all of the available Community resources in order to compensate victims.

At Community level, over and above the civil protection force, direct activation of Solidarity Fund resources and, more importantly, freeing them from bureaucratic mechanisms, must be the Commission's basic priorities.

Finally, Commissioner, you know, better than all of us, that we face a new generation of fires, so-called high-intensity fires, which are directly linked to climate change and mainly affect forests in the Mediterranean and southern Europe. We therefore need forest protection at national and Community level to be redesigned immediately by adapting fire prevention and fire fighting to the new circumstances and integrating these policies into the framework of measures to be set in motion so that Member States can meet the challenge of climate change.

**Izaskun Bilbao Barandica**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (ES) Madam President, Commissioner, thank you very much for your explanations.

Indeed, I think that there needs to be a Community policy, firstly to prevent the fires that are occurring, and we have seen that this has happened throughout the summer.

I would also like to say that I wanted to begin my speech by remembering the four firemen who died in June in Horta de Sant Joan, Tarragona, and paying my respects to their families and colleagues.

We need a policy of prevention, but also a policy of coordination. We should not forget that there is suspicion surrounding many of the fires that have occurred that they are the result of a speculative policy and development intentions. I therefore think that we need to work in Europe as well to promote security by investigating and standardising penalties for environmental crimes. We should also consider the possibility of pursuing them using a European arrest warrant.

The professionals need to be given the necessary resources to be able to develop innovative mechanisms for measuring the weather, winds and temperatures so that they can work under the necessary conditions, because ultimately they are protecting us all.

**Michail Tremopoulos**, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (EL) Madam President, how interesting that it is mainly the Greeks who are speaking on this highly important issue of concern to the whole of southern Europe, given that huge forest fires regularly destroy massive areas and affect the quality of life, biodiversity, regional development and citizens' futures.

Often forest fires, as was recently the case in Greece, are due to poorly designed and conflicting forestry and housing policies, which encourage arson and illegal action to obtain forest land. Unfortunately, both the main parties have tried to mitigate and reduce the constitutional protection of forests.

The constant pressure for changes to land use, the expansion of residential areas and, of course, the uncontrolled rubbish dumps which are burned or which combust spontaneously, in conjunction with climate change, and which, for some people, are simple alibis, are now increasing the potential for more natural disasters.

It is therefore important that we focus more on prevention, protection and on prompt risk management, at European level, through coordinated cooperation. Within this framework, we must safeguard the application of a sustainable common European forest policy and ensure that funds from the Cohesion Fund, the Regional Development Fund and the Solidarity Fund which are earmarked for risk prevention and management and for the restoration of affected areas are, in fact, used in a rational and sustainable manner.

The funds disbursed in order to restore affected areas must be used on the basis of rational reforestation measures and scientific studies and we would emphasise that they must be refunded by the Member States where it is ascertained that the forest areas affected have been reclassified for residential or tourist development.

In the past, even two years ago, Parliament passed resolutions containing recommendations for the prevention of, and prompt action on, natural risks which, unfortunately, have not been implemented effectively. We believe that long-term protection of forests and biodiversity is only feasible if viable risk prevention and management policies are applied at national, regional and local level, by actively involving local communities, by keeping people in the countryside, by creating new 'green' professions, through lifelong learning and training, and by strengthening forestry services with the emphasis on voluntary forest fire-fighting brigades.



Finally, we need to step up efforts to develop more effective rapid response mechanisms to natural disasters by strengthening the permanent civil protection force which Mr Dimas referred to and by making greater use of the conclusions in the Barnier report. Within this framework, we are tabling a resolution today before the European Parliament, in the hope that we shall make headway, in terms of joint action and cooperation by the Member States, towards real prevention and management of natural disasters and more effective use of European Union funds for this purpose. We owe it to our children.

**Nikolaos Chountis**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (EL) Madam President, my country, Greece, has seen massive areas destroyed by fire for the third year running. The fires in 2007, which were one of the worst tragedies of their kind, and the fires this year in northeast Attica, illustrate just how scant the fire safety and environmental protection system is.

I would remind the House that Athens is the European capital with the smallest ratio of green spaces to inhabitants and with the highest atmospheric pollution, and that the fires in 2007 and 2009 have exacerbated the environmental problem.

Climate change can be used to explain the disasters which have occurred in southern Europe to a degree. However, there are also shortcomings in national policies and in the policy of the European Union, inasmuch as climate change has not been properly integrated into the environmental strategy.

Greek governments allow burned areas to be developed and for national land to be appropriated and EU funds are inelastic. This being so, Commissioner, I should like to ask you if the European Commission intends to contribute towards the institutional safeguarding of the forests in the country by immediately mobilising the procedure for drafting and ratifying forest maps which, had they existed, might perhaps have prevented this arson?

Does it intend to directly cofinance anti-flood and anti-erosion works to avoid new disasters in the areas affected? Does it intend to finance appropriate reforestation, because there is too little reforestation to replace the damage? Finally, does the European Commission intend to discuss with whichever new government is returned in the next elections in Greece the creation of a city park at the old Hellenikon Airport, which would bring a breath of fresh air to Attica?

Thank you very much, and many happy returns to the Commissioner on his name day, as we say in Greece.

**Niki Tzavela**, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (EL) Madam President, Commissioner, I was very pleased to see you here and hear you speak. I consider that what you said also answers the letter which we sent to you on the second day of the fires in which we set out a proposal for common action in southern Europe to prevent and fight fires, together with certain other detailed proposals.

I should also like to add that I am delighted to see that all the MEPs from the Greek parties and the Spanish party have responded to our call for a joint presence in the European Parliament and joint efforts to plan a European strategy to deal with natural disasters.

Commissioner, it would appear that climate change results in fires and floods and is now a major structural phenomenon, because the fires and floods we are witnessing are a structural phenomenon.

We must not think along medium-term and short-term lines. We need to lay the foundations for a long-term strategy. That is why the governments of the Mediterranean states should unite in efforts to convince our northern partners of the need for the mechanism you referred to, both within the framework of subsidiarity and within the framework of solidarity.

I understand, Commissioner, that you are having problems from northern Europe as far as subsidiarity is concerned. I hope that the phenomenon of natural disasters will only affect southern Europe, but I greatly fear that climate change is proceeding at such a pace that we may have natural disasters – of a different kind – in northern Europe. So you were quite right to propose that we plan this strategy to prevent and deal with natural disasters.

For the time being, we have this small unit based in Corsica. It worked well this summer. The Commissioner for the Environment urgently needs to develop and support this unit in his recommendation on this matter, both to the Commission and to the Council. I would call on MEPs from the southern countries to cooperate with their governments and to support the recommendations made by Mr Dimas to both the Commission and the Council, as this is to the advantage of all the countries in the south.

I have seen the motion for a resolution by the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and I agree with it. I am delighted that they have moved this resolution. I would add something else to this motion for a resolution by the PPE. With climate change as the beginning and fires and floods as the result, the Commission should place particular emphasis at the Copenhagen conference on preparing a strategy to prevent and deal with natural disasters, determine the budget needed to cover the prevention and avoidance of natural disasters and therefore strengthen this exemplary EU forest fire tactical reserve unit.

We expect to see the European strategy to prevent and deal with natural disasters, as a top priority, very high up on the agenda for the Copenhagen conference.

**Franz Obermayr (NI).** – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, what took place in Greece this summer should never be allowed to repeat itself in Europe again. A total of 75 fires rampaged through Greece alone, six of them completely out of control, the worst of them, as we have heard today, north of Athens, close to the capital. It is only thanks to the courageous and selfless efforts of the primarily voluntary fire brigades and other voluntary organisations that the fires in many regions were not able to blaze in an uncontrolled manner and that human tragedies were kept to a minimum.

I therefore have a very high regard for my comrades, the voluntary fire brigades, whose equipment – put politely – was often not exactly state of the art, as we have heard. When I use the words 'colleagues' or 'comrades', I do so because I myself have been a member of a voluntary fire-fighting organisation in Austria for decades and so absolutely do feel sympathy and empathy for the efforts made.

Let me move on to the Commission's observations. I think it is tremendous that European action forces should help where local fire fighters cannot manage alone. I am, however, also convinced that the old saying 'Help yourself, and God will help you' is an important axiom, and for that reason, I also think it is very important that civil protection mechanisms be built up. All I can do in this regard is recommend and urge that use be made of the know-how that exists, especially in central Europe, in Germany and in Austria, which is to say, the nationwide voluntary systems, voluntary fire brigades that have been tried and tested for over a century.

As a fireman myself, I would also be happy to create contacts with the regional and national voluntary fire authorities. In such cases, it is also interesting to do something yourself and if this is seen as desirable, I can offer to carry out a pilot project with our Greek friends on the establishment of a voluntary fire brigade in a selected region or municipality. I would also be more than happy to actively help and be involved in such a project together with my colleagues in the Upper Austrian provincial fire-fighting association.

**Michel Barnier (PPE).** – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I should, of course, like to thank Commissioner Dimas for his presence and his answers and for the attention that he continues to pay to all these disasters.

We did a great deal of work together when President Barroso asked me to draft a report, which he also mentioned, on the creation of a European civil protection force.

I presented this report on 9 May 2006. When I re-read it, and I see all the disasters that have happened, I realise that it is still topical.

Mrs Tzavela, obviously, it is not just Greece. Every country is affected, and I would add that there are not only natural disasters, there are also human disasters, caused by mankind. I am thinking of maritime disasters – *Erika* and countless others – and of Chernobyl-type industrial accidents. There are natural disasters other than fires. I am thinking of the tsunami. One day we can expect a tsunami in the Mediterranean such as the one at the start of the 20th century that totally destroyed the city of Messina.

Frankly, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the tools we are using are not up to these disasters, which are going to increase under the twin effect of global warming and transport. Hence the reason why I think we should be more ambitious.

I am grateful to the Commission, to Commissioner Dimas and to all his teams from the Directorate-General that are putting the civil protection mechanism into operation. I believe that we must go further. It is conceivable to have enhanced cooperation with those Member States that want it. If there are not 27 of us to make up this civil protection force, let us start with 12 or 15 of us. Then you will see that this affects everyone.

When I compile the list of disasters, I can say that everyone is affected: the floods that hit Germany in 2002, the major pandemics and also terrorism. That, Commissioner, is why I would like the Commission to take the initiative to go further, to propose that the Member States go further. Our Parliament, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, and the Subcommittee on Security and Defence, will support you in these proactive initiatives.

**Edite Estrela (S&D).** – (PT) Madam President, Commissioner, here we are yet again talking about fires, because every year fires destroy part of Europe's forests. With climate change and global warming, the future does not look any brighter.

Natural disasters cannot be avoided, but they should be prevented. We can do so straight away by reducing our greenhouse gas emissions and drawing up a suitable forestry policy that recognises the multiple environmental services performed by forests, particularly as carbon sinks.

To be fair, the European civil protection mechanism is working better, and several Member States have made great efforts and invested heavily in fire prevention and rapid response fire fighting. For example, in my country, Portugal, a plan has been approved that includes the rezoning of the country, the creation of a specific budget for fire fighting, revision of the legislation, and a programme for the recovery of burnt areas. Even so, we still have fires.

All the Member States affected by fires have to do more and do it better, and the European Commission must also adopt the proposals that the European Parliament has submitted in a number of resolutions. There are several documents that point to solutions. The Barnier document and others submitted by Parliament have already been mentioned here. I myself was the rapporteur for a report on natural disasters in the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, and I have also tabled some proposals.

Those Member States that blame financial reasons for not being particularly swift in perfecting the mechanism need to be told that prevention works out cheaper than a cure. It is also crucial that an international agreement to fight climate change – an ambitious agreement – be reached at the Copenhagen conference and, Commissioner, we are still waiting for a directive on fires, similar to the one that has been produced on flooding.

**François Alfonsi (Verts/ALE).** – (FR) Madam President, this summer, Corsica also fell victim to some very serious fires, just like Sardinia, Catalonia, Greece, the Canaries and so many other regions of Europe.

Regarding the stricken populations, first of all, our group would ask that European solidarity be guaranteed through implementation of the Solidarity Fund.

What is the Commission going to do in this regard? That is the first question that I would like to put to the commissioner.

On 23 July, in Corsica, the heat was exceptional: 44 degrees, very dry air and a very strong sirocco wind. In conditions such as that, which will become ever more frequent as a result of global warming, the local resources were stretched to the limit, despite the fact that, in previous years, the weather was milder and Corsica had been spared.

For me, the lesson is simple: when weather conditions such as that occur, conditions that can be predicted, that can be forecast, we must be able to rely on the backup of a European civil protection force such as the one recommended by the Barnier report, and which will make it possible, in particular, to fight incipient fires before they get out of hand, because afterwards it is too late. When fire enters a forest, it stops only when the entire forest has burned down.

Therefore, for us it is important to go much further than the pilot project that you mentioned, Commissioner. What does the Commission plan to do to implement as quickly as possible this civil protection force that will actually rise to the major challenge facing all Europeans of protecting the environment and, in particular, of fighting fires in the Mediterranean region?

Is it right that the 2010 budget provides nothing for this force?

We have tabled an amendment along these lines. Let us hope that the large groups, and Mr Barnier's Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) in particular, will agree to help us secure the adoption of this amendment.

**Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL).** – (EL) Madam President, the fires are a deeply political problem which appears in a very acute form in countries such as Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Greece, with painful consequences for both the people and the environment.

As far as our experience in Greece is concerned, the fires which raged across north-east Attica, Kithairona, Evia and other areas in Greece, causing incalculable damage, are the result of the arson policy of the EU and the alternating governments in our country, who desire the land, the forests and the mountain massifs as commodities of the capitalist economy.

This extremely dangerous policy puts weapons in the hands of the arsonists who, if the outbreaks and complaints by inhabitants of the areas affected by the fires are anything to go by, again acted in a concerted manner. Let us be clear about one thing: unless the basic problem of the commercialisation and change in the use of land is addressed, no mechanism, however well equipped with the most up-to-date resources, will be able to stop this serious problem, which is destroying the environment and putting a price on the future of the planet in general.

The first tragic consequences of this policy were seen in Evia on 12 September 2009 – just a few days ago – with the catastrophic floods which swept through fire-ravaged Evia. The inadequate anti-flooding works and the unsound soil as a result of the fires, in conjunction with the intensity of the rain, caused one death and massive damage to villages, roads, bridges and other infrastructure. The sudden rainfall does not explain this level of destruction. It is no accident that, every time there is a natural disaster, it is the workers who mourn lives and see their wretched lives and the environment destroyed.

There is an urgent need for financing for direct measures to record the damage and compensate the working-class families and arable and livestock farmers affected, without any change in land use, and for the burned areas to be reforested. Ownership of large private estates in mountains and forests should also pass to the government and the forests and the forestry commissions should be restructured and improved...

*(The President cut off the speaker)*

**Mario Mauro (PPE).** – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, there is no doubt that the budget instrument with which the European Union has equipped itself to tackle such an important issue as this is useful – I am referring to the Solidarity Fund – but it is also true that we have been stressing the issue of flexibility ever since 2007, when we felt it was right to criticise the approach used with this budget instrument.

It is important that the management of this instrument be as flexible as possible, so that it can address problems that change from one day to the next. For instance, it is only right that the Member States be asked to provide documentation relating to the events within a short timescale – 10 weeks and no longer – but why, then, is the same timescale not stipulated for responding to them?

At the same time, we realise that, although, in some ways, the extent of the damage is important, it must be considered in proportion to what each individual territory is having to cope with, so that we can understand and work out what the different populations need. For precisely this reason, Parliament, together with the Committee on Budgets and other committees, has long been making comments which are, in fact, filed for the attention of the Council, but which the Council pretends not to see. If the flexibility aspect can be reviewed, it means that the Solidarity Fund as an instrument can be improved and made even more effective, thus enabling it to resolve the huge problems that we will increasingly have to face.

The request, then, Commissioner, is for full account to be taken of paragraphs 3 and 11 of this resolution, so that the flexibility aspect is seen not as a request by the Member States to be able to do whatever they like to be more certain of receiving a response, but as a request that reads changes intelligently, thereby ensuring that this instrument really is totally effective.

**Andres Perello Rodriguez (S&D).** – (ES) Madam President, Commissioner, indeed there is no doubt that progress has been made in recent times, but despite all the progress that has been made, the southern part of the European Union is burning more and more. Therefore, the resolution that Parliament has adopted cannot be one more resolution that serves to demonstrate our grave concern regarding disasters elsewhere.

Forest fires happen for a variety of reasons, but no one can deny that they are fuelled by climate change. Irrespective of the responsibilities that may exist in some Member States or in some autonomous regions, it is certain that Parliament must clearly call on the Commission to act swiftly and make available all the resources at its disposal, which are not insignificant. The victims, the damage suffered and the need for reforestation do not have any understanding of bureaucracy or of budget shortages.

We need to prioritise and we need to act which, in this case, means changing strategies, mobilising resources, increasing them and optimising the preventive policies. We need to demand that Member States take responsibility if this is not the case, but assume that this is not the problem of a few Member States in southern Europe and that climate change does not only affect some Member States, it affects them all and it is a common cause.

Therefore, one of the main tasks that Parliament has is to ensure that the European Union achieves clear, firm commitments at the Copenhagen Summit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions as much as possible, because they are obviously behind the fires, behind their causes, and, in turn, behind the causes of further climate change.

Therefore, having adopted this resolution, this is undoubtedly the challenge for Parliament. However, this challenge for the Commission needs to be met if the Commissioner truly wants to prevent the southern part of the Union, which does indeed exist, from continuing to burn.

**Veronica Lope Fontagné (PPE).** – (ES) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, unfortunately, in this first plenary sitting of the legislature, we have to deal with this sad and now customary issue: natural disasters and, in particular, fires.

Once again we are lamenting the proliferation of fires during the summer of 2009, which have caused human losses. Twenty lives have been lost, all in my country. Therefore, my first thought and my utmost sympathy is for the human suffering caused by these catastrophes.

I would like to stress the disastrous impact that this type of disaster has on the lives of the populations that are affected, on their economies, employment, natural and cultural heritage, the environment and tourism. In my region, 22 000 hectares burned this summer, half of which were in areas that are protected due to their environmental importance.

We must respond to these problems without hesitation, the people are demanding it. The European institutions cannot be incapable once more of finding an adequate solution for those who are affected. We need to be able to help the victims and to pave the way for restoring the affected areas. We need to continue to work hard on prevention and to proceed further with developing the European civil protection service.

I would like to make two calls: firstly, I would like to call on the European Commission to analyse the situation and adopt the appropriate measures to compensate for the social costs inherent in the loss of jobs and sources of income for the inhabitants of the affected regions. Secondly, I would like to call on the Spanish Government, which will hold the Presidency of the Council from January 2010. The Spanish Government must be capable of passing on its feeling and concern to its counterparts. I consider it essential that it makes it a priority in its programme to unblock the reform of the European Solidarity Fund.

The Spanish Presidency must also make a clear commitment to developing a common European strategy. It must also review prevention measures and the forestry management models that encourage large fires.

**Francesca Balzani (S&D).** – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, as a member of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament who, even in the last few days, has watched with great sadness as one fire after another has devastated vast areas around the city of Genoa, in the Liguria region of Italy, I feel there is a truly urgent need for Europe to pay attention and to intervene in order to prevent these sadly recurring disasters.

There should be no recurring disasters. We should work every day to ensure that there are no more cyclical disasters. This is why I believe that Europe alone can and must intervene effectively with binding acts to preserve these precious areas which, each year, are in danger of going up in smoke and which really are the heritage of us all, because it is true that fires are breaking out more and more frequently in southern Europe, and even when it is only a tiny part of this southern Europe that is burning, in reality, it is the whole of Europe that is going up in flames.

We need to intervene with prevention policies and with suitable forestry policies – and by prevention I also mean intervening by means of a precise, thorough and targeted campaign against all forms of speculation directly or indirectly linked to these disasters – but I think that we also need to ensure broader, easier and quicker access to essential resources in order, at least, to mitigate the devastating effects of these disasters. I am referring first and foremost to the Solidarity Fund, an instrument that should undoubtedly be employed more quickly for the areas affected.

**Françoise Grossetête (PPE).** – (FR) Madam President, it was in 2001 that we called for a European civil protection mechanism, in the wake of the 11 September disaster.

Subsequently, we set up a fund. Then there was the Barnier report, which stressed the need to show solidarity. Today, this solidarity works, but it has to be more effective and we have to be able to move up a gear.

Two points must be developed. Firstly, responsiveness. All those people who have unfortunately been affected by these fires deplore the fact that the procedures are often too lengthy and that implementing them takes far too long even though, in reality, when we are confronted with fires, we have to move very fast. We certainly need to be more flexible, to have more flexibility to implement these procedures, because time is precious in this case.

And then, there is prevention. We do not talk enough about prevention, because it involves the principle of subsidiarity. We are told that it is the Member States that must decide. Yet, when these fires harm biodiversity and the environment, when they affect the things most precious to humans, that is, their property, their possessions and their homes, and when they sadly cause the loss of human lives, we have no right not to make provision for such prevention. That is a criminal act.

This must stop, and to stop it we also need financial resources. It is absolutely imperative, then, to provide ourselves with the best possible budgets, so that we are far more effective within the context of this European civil protection mechanism. Let us therefore ensure that the budget – our budget – genuinely takes account of this problem. All of this also demands that we take a specific approach to our agricultural and forestry policies, and this is something we do not talk about enough.

Prevention, responsiveness and resources: in short, everything needs to be done to ensure that southern Europe will no longer inevitably be like a cat on hot bricks.

**Kriton Arsenis (S&D).** – (EL) Madam President, Commissioner, yet again this year, southern Europe was impossibly hard hit by destructive fires, and fires of similar proportions also broke out in the USA and in other countries in the developed and developing world.

There can be no doubt that climate change is threatening the forests of the Mediterranean and other key areas of the planet. However, the destruction of forests in the Mediterranean is destroying the ability of natural ecosystems to act as natural carbon dioxide sinks. European policies to prevent and deal with forest fires are needed, as is financial support from the European Union for the countries, such as Greece, that face the worst repercussions this year.

There can be no doubt that, in certain countries, there were massive shortcomings in coordination between the forest protection and civil protection mechanisms, and in taking preventive measures, and this must never be repeated. It would also appear that forests within three hours of large towns or tourist areas are often threatened by fire. A lot of people feel that they can derive personal gain from destroying forests. They can 'plant' houses and other buildings more quickly than Member States and natural ecosystems can plant trees on burned land.

There are often national laws which cultivate such attitudes and send out the wrong messages. A European policy on the protection of forests, on the restoration of burned land, on the forestation of areas, within the framework of European assistance in combating climate change, is absolutely necessary, as is coordinated European action to prevent and fight fires, restore forests and establish new forest areas.

We need to set this in motion immediately, especially in the run-up to the negotiations at the Copenhagen conference, which will be decisive for the future of our planet. We shall be asking developing countries to protect the rainforests; we shall address the key issue of how the destruction of forests accounts for 20% of emissions of greenhouse gases. We must therefore be the ones who set an example, by ensuring there is absolute protection for forests under threat, for our forests under threat in Europe, which are the Mediterranean forests.

**Markus Pieper (PPE).** – (DE) Madam President, the scale of the forest fires actually exceeds the capabilities of the smaller Member States, especially in those regions particularly affected by drought. That, of course, is why Parliament supports the European Solidarity Fund. We call on the Council to finally release these funds without obstacles. The regions need the money urgently for reconstruction and for prevention. The Solidarity Fund, in conjunction with existing environmental and agricultural programmes, could help on a truly lasting basis.

Apart from that, however, fire fighting is primarily a national competence. Harsher punishments for those who start fires, development freezes that last for something like 30 years where arson is proven, training of fire brigades – more can and simply must be done in this regard. Europe, too, must do more, however, above all, in terms of better coordination. The know-how of European fire brigades must be transferred to regions with high levels of susceptibility to disasters, and we need better rules for the running of cross-border operations. We await proposals from the Commission in this regard, but these should not interfere with the competences of the Member States. That point – not interfering in the competences of the Member States – is something that I believe is extraordinarily important. It is definitely possible to think of European fire brigades and European aircraft, but only once all national capabilities have been optimised and financial assistance for the affected regions has finally been effectively achieved.

I think it is too early to be discussing disaster prevention as a European competence. Let us take the first step before the second. Let us do the most important things first, and that means measures ranging from European help to self-help, including by means of the Solidarity Fund, with training and improved European coordination.

### IN THE CHAIR: MR ROUČEK

*Vice-President*

**Inés Ayala Sender (S&D).** – (ES) Mr President, firstly I would also like to express our sympathy and care for the victims and their families, because it is true that every summer we have to lament this situation.

This is why it is increasingly important that Europe finally equips itself with an efficient instrument. We think, perhaps because I belong to the transport sector and I am an expert in road safety, that perhaps, Commissioner, we should consider something similar to the Action Plan on Road Safety. A European action plan with objectives, with strategies, in which the improvement of fast intervention within the necessary time window, as is done in road safety, could perhaps help us and also improve working conditions and training for professionals. I also think raising awareness and fostering a culture of prevention are fundamental. We are gradually achieving this in road safety. Why can we not do so in relation to offering protection against fires?

We do, of course, welcome the fact that coordination has improved along with solidarity. I think that by sending the necessary planes, the Spanish Government has been part of the process of raising awareness among the countries of the south, but this should also be the case between the north and the south.

We also welcome the fact that the pilot project of tactically reserving fire-fighting planes could, in future, really become an intervention body, which I do think is important.

However, we still have legislation blocked in the Council, such as the legislation on the Solidarity Fund, and also the legislation on land protection, which we think would be extremely useful.

**Gaston Franco (PPE).** – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, this summer, once again, the Mediterranean forest was engulfed in flames: in Marseille and in southern Corsica, but also in Italy, in Spain and, on a larger scale, in Greece. More than 400 000 hectares of forest and field went up in smoke, causing considerable material damage, irreparable damage to biodiversity, and the tragic loss of human lives.

Dismayed as I am by this assessment made repeatedly, year after year, and mindful as I am of the multiplier effect of global warming on fires, I call for European awareness of the need for more coordinated efforts and for the pooling of fire-fighting resources.

I should like to see a huge Euro-Mediterranean cooperation project to combat forest fires take shape under the Union for the Mediterranean. I welcome the existing initiatives and, in particular, the European Forest Fire Information System – the pilot project.

Nevertheless, I call for a reform of the European Union Solidarity Fund so that it will become an effective tool for responding to crises. I also call for the strengthening of the European protection force and of the 'EuropeAid' facility devised by Mr Barnier in 2006 for intervention on the territory of the 27 Member States, as well as abroad.

I believe that one of the keys to the problem of forest fires has to do with information sharing and best practice as regards prevention, and I should like to point out the pioneering role played by the forest fire fighters in my own department. I can, of course, provide Europe with this example, which may be of use.

**Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE).** – (FI) Mr President, the past year has been one of the most tragic for forest fires. We have lost hundreds and thousands of hectares of forest, especially in the Mediterranean region. Conjecture as to the causes of forest fires leads to heated rows as, unfortunately, everyone is aware of their consequences. It has been proposed that climate change is responsible for the increase in the number of forest fires and that in Europe, too, we should prepare for longer forest fire seasons than just June to September, which has been the norm until now. Summers are beginning earlier and they are warmer and drier, especially in the south, and the risk of fires is therefore growing. It is true that, exceptionally, this year there were severe forest fires in northwest Spain and in Portugal as early as March, and that conditions for forest fires are therefore favourable, but the problem itself lies not in any progressive change to natural conditions, but elsewhere.

Environmental researchers have discovered that forest fires in the EU, Australia and California are mainly explained by socio-economic factors. They can find no direct link to climate change as yet. The key factors in the start of forest fires are construction and the pressures associated with the need for more housing, farming, certain species of plants and trees that have been grown, a lack of knowledge and foresight, and negligence on the part of the authorities. For example, insufficient numbers of fire-fighting teams and the inability to solve and prevent crimes that might result in fires are behind the tragedies this summer.

With climate change, natural conditions will change; that is a fact. It does not, however, explain environmental disasters, especially if the same phenomena recur every few years, and that is why we might need to be better prepared. It is time the Member States of the Union took a look in the mirror, because in the future, whether or not forest fires occur will depend on us. It is one thing to adapt to the changing environment; it is quite another to accept rigid bad practices and be unprepared.

(Applause)

**Sari Essayah (PPE).** – (FI) Mr President, I agree with those here who have said that it is always cheaper to prevent damage than deal with its consequences. Most of this financing should go to the prevention of fires and floods in southern Europe. In addition to satellite monitoring, we need the same kind of forest fire alarm and prevention system which has worked successfully for many years now in Finland, for example. Furthermore, at national level, we need to ensure that the equipment that fire brigades use is up to standard, so that fires can be brought under control as early on as possible.

The increase in flooding is largely due to climate change, and the best way to prevent it, therefore, is to establish a proper agreement at the Copenhagen conference. It is also possible, however, to take action at national level to deal with the prevention of floods. We need to practise the right sort of forest policy, forests in mountain ranges need to be protected, and forests with the right species of tree should be planted, so that their root systems can absorb water, ensuring that it does not drain away too quickly. Embankments and reservoirs should also be built near water bodies and waterways should be dredged for more effective drainage in times of flooding. We need to recognise that these matters are very much the responsibility of every Member State. The EU cannot take responsibility for matters that are subject to national decisions or for any negligence that occurs. The European Union Solidarity Fund is principally a source of emergency aid, and I hope that the various Member States will be prepared to invest in a long-term forest policy, fire prevention and protection from floods.

**Gabriel Mato Adrover (PPE).** – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, a fire is always a tragedy, a tragedy for people, a tragedy for the environment, an economic and social tragedy.

I had the misfortune to live very close to this tragedy, to the fire that took place this summer on the island of La Palma in the Canaries. I therefore welcome this resolution and I am convinced that we are going to be able to adopt it unanimously. It is a complete resolution, which has received many contributions and which, above all, does something important. First of all, it remembers the victims, all the victims, and pays tribute to all those who work voluntarily to put the fires out.

However, it also includes some significant reflections on the importance of drought and desertification in the spread of the fires, and the resulting disappearance of hundreds of thousands of hectares per year.

There are also important reflections on the causes that aggravate the fires, such as the gradual abandonment of the countryside, deficient maintenance of the forests and inadequate punishment for arsonists. In this respect, we need to act and we need to act firmly.



The Commission needs to draw up a risk prevention strategy and an effective strategy for combating natural disasters, and a protocol for uniform action. However, aid is also important, for restoration, for re-establishing production potential and for compensating for the social costs and job losses.

As the Commissioner said, coordination is vital. However, there needs to be coordination between the different Community instruments: the Structural Funds, the Solidarity Fund – which clearly needs to be reformed – and their flexibility, and also instruments such as Aid Plus and, of course, the rapid response mechanism that we have already discussed.

We need to go further in solving these problems, and I sincerely believe that this resolution is the right way to do so.

**José Manuel Fernandes (PPE).** – (PT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, this is a time for us to show solidarity, but it is also an opportunity – I would even say an obligation – for us to work on improvements, changes and also adjustments. The adjustments needed straight away concern the European Union's Solidarity Fund, so that it can be used – and used promptly – to address these disasters, while the improvements and changes concern forestry policy.

We need a European policy on forests that seeks both to raise their profile and to prevent fires. In many Member States, as is the case of mine, Portugal, there is not yet even a register of all the land, and so we do not know who the landowners are. That causes problems in land development, reforestation and fire prevention policy.

With regard to this prevention policy, I have here a question that is also a suggestion: why not include forest fire prevention measures in the EU's economic recovery plan, the plan to revive the European economy? If we promoted measures to clean up our forests – and, for instance, the product of such measures could be used to produce energy through biomass power plants duly designed for the purpose – if we acted in that way, we would certainly be helping the environment by protecting it and, at the same time, we would be creating jobs which, at the current moment, is another of Europe's aims.

**Lambert van Nistelrooij (PPE).** – (NL) Mr President, it is good that on this, the first day of Parliament's session, we are discussing the disasters in southern Europe, and I also thank those fellow Members who have worked on these texts in particular. We have here a good resolution. First of all, of course, this is a matter of interpersonal involvement, or proximity to the people – as we have always said in the context of our elections – and of solidarity. This time it is fires in southern Europe but, who knows, this winter it may be flooding in other parts of Europe entirely. We in the Committee on Regional Development have discussed improvements in the Solidarity Fund several times. It is absolutely not our intention to ask for new instruments, but rather to improve the ones we already have, making them more efficient. Now, Commissioner Dimas, what is rather strange in all this? We have laid this down with overwhelming support here in Parliament and have spelt out where improvements could be made, but it has been blocked by the Council. The Council has now failed to do anything about this for two years. My question to you is whether there is still any chance of movement on this. You rightly report progress in connection with the pilot project and the aircraft that have been deployed, but about the underlying dossier Parliament has requested so emphatically we hear nothing at all. Is that still on the agenda? What is actually happening?

With regard to the civil protection force, I would say that, in itself, it is great that Europe is deploying its own instruments, but that the broad foundations lie in the Member States themselves. The exchange of expertise, deployment particularly in the wider region itself, should constitute these foundations.

Finally, the rehabilitation: damage repair, replanting and everything related to this. This is not a matter for centralised control, but must be decentralised to Member States. However, we also have these funds – the Structural Funds, the agricultural funds – so why do we not make a start? It can be an economic plan, as we have just heard, but equally a rehabilitation plan that is tackled in a comprehensive way and in which the decentralised instruments play a particularly prominent role. That is what this resolution requests, and that is why we shall be supporting it wholeheartedly tomorrow.

**Antonio Cancian (PPE).** – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, as accurate as the resolution entitled 'Natural disasters', tabled by the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats), is, I would nonetheless like to draw attention to some points that have been addressed this evening but which are not addressed in the resolution, and which are the subject of my proposed amendments.

Last summer, as well as the fires, there were other disasters, the most recent of which occurred only last weekend in the south of Italy. I myself come from a region of Italy, Veneto, which was hit in June and July by landslides and whirlwinds, and I would mention, by way of example, Vallà di Riese and Borca di Cadore.

In the resolution, we should mention the other natural disasters, too, not just the fires, because summer floods unfortunately are not a new phenomenon; this is one of the scenarios that we will have to face in future, as a consequence, sadly, of climate change due to global warming. We must therefore try to insist on prevention measures and on the construction of infrastructure that can prevent these events or at least contain the damage, or worse, when this infrastructure exacerbates them: I am thinking of reservoirs in mountain regions, green belt areas, rural and forest areas, and along watercourses.

Secondly, since, in the majority of cases, natural disasters are also caused by human acts, it is important to ascertain who is responsible for them, to pursue the culprits and to increase the penalties. Lastly, I would like to say that it is a good idea to set up this independent intervention force and the associated Solidarity Fund. It is important, however, to try to extend the intervention to other disasters also, to increase the allocation for these disasters by pooling various funds, to simplify the procedures and to ensure greater coordination and flexibility, as Mr Mauro mentioned.

**Mairead McGuinness (PPE).** – Mr President, I was listening to this debate in my office. Obviously and thankfully, in Ireland we do not experience the severity of the fires that our southern European colleagues do. Two thoughts struck me. One is that in this House, we tend to speak only on those issues that directly affect our own countries and, given that we are having a debate in Ireland on the Lisbon Treaty – where we are talking about solidarity across the European Union – I think it is a habit we should break. I think more of us should speak about issues of concern in other Member States that we know of, so that there is a sense in which there is greater solidarity among Members of this House regarding the concerns of their citizens. I would, for example, like other people to take up concerns that might arise in Ireland for my citizens. I think it would help us to promote the idea that Europe works for all and that we are not just looking after our own. That has been one of the failures of the European Union, and it is something we are grappling with in the debate on the Lisbon Treaty.

Let me support what you are doing here and express my solidarity for the problems in southern Europe. Deal with those who deliberately destroy. Look at prevention. Much more must be done by management and, lastly, the Solidarity Funds should be released to those who need them.

**Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S&D).** – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner Dimas, this is the first time I have been an MEP – I was elected on 7 June – but from the debate, it is clear that this matter comes back every September after the wave of devastating fires that particularly affect southern Europe: Italy, France, Greece and Spain.

Mention has already been made of the devastating fire on the island of La Palma, in the outermost region of the Canaries, a Spanish autonomous community where I was born and where I live. What is important however, is that we are aware that, although it is particularly intense on the southern borders of Europe, here we have an opportunity to increase the affection and connection that citizens have with what Europe means: added value in terms of the response.

This means European added value in prevention and European added value in the coordination of the institutions: the Commission, the Council and the European Parliament with the resolution, in cooperation with the Member States. However, there also needs to be European added value in the response.

This is why it is important that we move from debate to action, by making the Solidarity Fund more flexible in response to emergencies, and that we start up this European civil protection force, which is still pending, and which is what could really make a difference in the future when we are faced with these emergencies, which recur every summer as a result of climate change and global warming.

**Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL).** – (PT) Mr President, more than all the demonstrations of solidarity in the face of this scourge of forest fires which ravage our southern countries, including Greece, Italy, Spain and Portugal, every year, we urgently need to adopt the necessary measures to reverse this situation, since it is destroying our remaining forests, properties, livestock, biodiversity and, worse still, a number of human lives.

It is therefore time to tackle the causes of this scourge head on, and to take account of the serious, growing abandonment of rural areas. It is time to change the common agricultural policy so as to invest in prevention, which also means investing in multifunctional agriculture, including Mediterranean forestry, by supporting

family farming and by providing the conditions for small and medium-sized farmers and young people to remain in rural areas and, in that way, contribute to the measures to prevent this yearly scourge.

**Malika Benarab-Attou (Verts/ALE).** – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am satisfied by the response that Commissioner Dimas was able to give on this issue and, in particular, by his speaking of the importance of aid beyond the borders of our continent.

In addition to environmental protection of the Mediterranean Sea, might one formally propose, as part of the Union for the Mediterranean project, this emergency aid in the event of fire and the development of forestry expertise on this subject, to be shared and developed with the non-European countries of the Union for the Mediterranean?

**Petru Constantin Luhan (PPE).** – (RO) This summer, Portugal, Spain, France, Italy and Greece were faced with major forest fires. In Greece, the fires devastated an area of approximately 21 200 hectares, destroying around 2 million trees and at least 150 houses.

In a coordinated effort at European level, France, Spain and Cyprus sent Canadair planes to the Athens region to put out the fires. The EU's strategic backup for combating the forest fires proved, therefore, to be useful once again. The EU Solidarity Fund can also provide assistance in this kind of situation, bearing some of the costs of the emergency measures implemented in order to restore the infrastructure, provide temporary shelter and protect the natural heritage.

I want to draw attention to the fact that we need to reduce the bureaucracy involved with accessing this fund. Let me give you a specific example from my own country. Romania was hit by natural disasters in June of last year. Currently, in September 2009, the funds have still not been distributed to the Romanian Government. I also believe that we need in the future a sustainable forestry policy, as well as a strategy for preventing disasters of this kind.

**Stavros Dimas, Member of the Commission.** – (EL) Mr President, I should like to thank the honourable members of Parliament for their extremely constructive contributions to this evening's debate and for the excellent ideas they have proposed.

Emergencies often involve a high human, financial and environmental cost. In future, due to climate change, as many members emphasised, we shall probably have to deal with more and bigger disasters – not only forest fires, which will not be confined to southern Europe and will start to appear in central and even in northern Europe – and a different type of disaster, such as floods. We therefore need to constantly strengthen and improve European disaster management resources, which have now clearly proven their added value.

This has also been confirmed by the fires this summer, which reminded us that the Community needs to improve not only its capacity to respond to natural disasters, but also its ability to prevent them, as numerous speakers emphasised this evening. I should remind the House here that in February, the Commission presented a communication on the prevention of natural and man-made disasters in which it formulated certain proposals.

We are awaiting the European Parliament's and the Council's comments on this communication. I believe that the new Parliament will not delay its response, which we expect to receive in February. We believe that they will give us the political incentive, as will a resolution on this from the forthcoming conference, to proceed with the necessary work in this direction.

As numerous speakers, starting with Mrs Podimata, raised the issue, I should also highlight the issue of climate change and the need for adaptation and the proposed review of the Community strategy on forests, the aim of which is to address climate-related aspects. This, too, will provide an opportunity to examine issues relating to forest fires. I should add here that this Commission communication is very important, as is the communication we issued last week on financing for the agreement on climate change which we expect to emerge from Copenhagen, with a large sum being made available for financing adaptation to climate change in developing countries. Funds will be directed to the works needed so that the countries which suffer the repercussions of climate change without having contributed to the greenhouse effect will be able to deal with those repercussions.

In fact, I have proposed that we should not simply wait for 2013 to start this action, but should start it at once, in 2010. I hope that the European Council will agree, either on 17 September or in October, that money should be provided to start works immediately, so that these countries can see that the European Union and the developed countries really mean what they propose and what they say.

A lot of other, very important points were made – and may I say that they were all right – about the role of Community financing. The Community mechanism for rural development and the European Regional Development Fund offer the facility to support national prevention measures. The Commission will use the facilities provided by the Community Solidarity Fund to support restoration efforts in the Member States.

Having heard that intervention by the Commission should be immediate, I should clarify the following here: there are two issues and it was not clear which of the two was being referred to. One is mobilisation of the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection and the other is activation of the Solidarity Fund. As far as mobilisation of the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection is concerned, I can tell you that mobilisation is immediate, in real time. I would cite the recent example of the fires which broke out in Greece: within an hour of receiving an official request from the Greek Government, Italian aircraft had taken off in order to be on site ready for deployment the following day. Mobilisation is therefore immediate.

As I said in my first speech, we were the first to send specialists to the scene of the disaster in the cases of the tsunami and hurricane Katrina. We received a great deal of praise for the action taken through the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection and this confirms both the work achieved over recent years and the potential which it has, provided that it has the remit and the resources – especially the financial resources – to be able to extend its work for the benefit of the European Union, citizens, environmental protection and the property of European citizens.

As far as the Solidarity Fund is concerned, I have heard – and it is right – that it needs greater flexibility. In fact, it needs to be able to react as quickly as possible, because the precise philosophy of the Solidarity Fund is to cover emergencies or part of the emergencies caused by disasters.

It is therefore logical that the Commission should act immediately and that the Member States, through either their central or regional administrations, should take immediate action so that monies are disbursed. Moreover, there is also the clause in the European Solidarity Fund that works must be carried out within one year of disbursement. This is logical, but needs greater flexibility.

To close – and I am sorry that I do not have more time to reply to the very specific issues raised – I should just like to say before I forget, because a number of speakers referred to the economic recovery programmes, that they are indeed a very good idea, because there are numerous benefits from including projects to prevent disasters which we can more or less expect to happen next year as well – as previously said, we discuss these matters every year – both because they will generate economic activity and create more jobs and because they will prevent damage costing millions of euros in restoration works. They are therefore investments which will have a multiple return and will, of course, prevent the human cost of disasters.

Finally, I should like to point out that, while the risk of forest fires or other disasters, such as floods, earthquakes and even military intervention – because the Community Mechanism for Civil Protection has intervened for floods, earthquakes and forest fires and to move populations, such as after the conflict in Lebanon, and we have assisted here with great success – cannot be completely removed, it can nonetheless be reduced through our cooperation and a better collective response to such disasters. The Commission undertakes to strengthen the Community contribution to prevention, readiness, response and restoration of disasters, in order to protect citizens and the environment.

May I thank Parliament once again for its active support for the need to improve disaster management for the benefit of all European citizens.

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

The vote will take place on Wednesday, 16 September.

#### **Written statements (Rule 149)**

**Iosif Matula (PPE), in writing.** – (RO) I am quite concerned by the magnitude assumed by these disasters in recent years, which not only have natural but human causes as well, with consequences for both the economic and social infrastructure. Our response to this phenomenon through the European Union's Solidarity Fund provides important support in the task of rebuilding the areas affected by disasters, along with reducing their potential cross-border effects. However, I want to highlight the need to simplify and improve the transparency of the criteria for deploying this Fund so that the affected areas can benefit from Community support as quickly as possible. We must also allow more regions to receive assistance by introducing a lower deployment ceiling. Furthermore, I support the drawing up of a European strategy for combating natural disasters and for strengthening a joint European force ready to respond in the event of a disaster, in any corner of the EU.

**Richard Seeber (PPE), in writing.** – (DE) This summer, again, there were devastating forest fires in some areas of Europe that not only caused considerable economic damage, but also claimed 11 lives. Europe needs to show solidarity in the face of such natural disasters. Pressing situations of this nature give the Community the opportunity to demonstrate its qualities and enable Europe's population to experience direct added value on the part of the European Union. In practical implementation, however, the rules of subsidiarity absolutely must be complied with. It is the Member States who are responsible for precautionary preparations for disasters and for drawing up emergency management plans and the EU must not meddle in this important competence on the part of the individual Member States. The Community's Solidarity Fund is a sound and valuable financial management tool. In the long term, the strategy to prevent fires of this nature in Europe must be improved and we must end the reliance on short-term crisis management.

**Dominique Vlasto (PPE), in writing.** – (FR) In the face of the tragic fires that have once again devastated southern Europe, we must react in order to successfully put a stop to these intolerable events. Firstly, by organising the means of intervention better: it is Mr Barnier's idea to have a European civil protection force capable of intervening in support of the national forces. In order to contain a fire, large-scale, fast intervention is required: European solidarity has to be more effective. Prevention remains vitally important, however: forests must be maintained and cleared. In the south of France, 75% of the forest is privately owned. It is therefore important to enlist the support of the owners and to encourage them to maintain their wooded areas. In particular, this will mean regenerating the Mediterranean forest, the economic returns from which are too low: Structural Fund-supported initiatives must encourage the regular sampling of biomass and its use for energy purposes, and the development of sustainable forestry and responsible ecotourism. I therefore call on the European Commission to recognise the characteristics of the Mediterranean forest and to propose an action plan designed to protect it and to make better use of its natural resources. That is the very least that can be done to reduce the risks of fire in the long term, and to preserve and restore the fragile ecosystems of southern Europe.

## 22. Free trade agreement with South Korea: impact on European industry (debate)

**President.** – The next item is the Commission statement on the free trade agreement with South Korea: impact on European industry.

**Catherine Ashton, Member of the Commission.** – Mr President, a large potential for new exporting opportunities lies in the Asian markets that have high growth rates but also, of course, high barriers to entry. Apart from the multilateral talks, an important way to overcome these barriers is through the leverage available to us in free trade agreement negotiations.

That is why Member States have asked the Commission to launch a new generation of trade agreements with key Asian economies. These free trade agreements should be ambitious in creating new exporting opportunities for many sectors.

With Korea, this is what we have achieved after two intensive years of negotiations. This is the most ambitious free trade agreement ever negotiated by the European Union.

There is consensus in that in two of the three main sectors of our economy, the benefits from the free trade agreement are overwhelmingly in our favour: first of all, our competitive service providers will gain massively from the agreement. For example, in areas such as telecoms, transport, construction and environmental services, doing business in Korea will be much easier in the future.

Secondly, for agricultural products, Korea will eliminate almost all of its particularly high tariffs – they average 35%! That will give a boost to farming exports of, amongst other things, pork, wine, whisky or dairy products. We will also secure the protection of European geographical indications, such as Parma ham, Rioja or Tokay.

But the free trade agreement will also bring major benefits to European manufacturing exporters. Overall, European manufacturing exporters will save some EUR 1.2 billion of tariffs annually, of which EUR 800 million are saved on day one. For example, exporters of machineries would save EUR 450 million annually on annual duty payments while exporters of chemicals would save over EUR 150 million on duties.

Duty elimination will also allow our exporters to strengthen their foothold in the Korean market, and thus expand sales. Korean customers buy some EUR 25 billion worth of EU goods every year. This makes Korea one of our most important export markets in Asia.

In addition, there was a special focus on rules. The agreement includes transparency on regulation, efficient enforcement of commitments, better protection of intellectual property rights and 'WTO-plus' rules on subsidies which will all be to the benefit of all manufacturers selling in Korea.

Moreover, ambitious disciplines have been established on industrial technical barriers to trade, notably for cars, electronics and pharmaceuticals based on the regulatory model of Europe and they respond to longstanding demands by European business in these sectors. Korea will need to change its domestic regulations to comply with these commitments, whereas no such change would be needed in Europe.

Concerning the car industry specifically, I want to signal first of all that we also have an interest in enhancing market access for European cars in Korea. Our car exporters are by far the strongest importers on the Korean market, with strong growth rates. They can develop this further since they will benefit from the combination of elimination of tariffs – EUR 2 000 saved on a car worth EUR 25 000 – and the removal of technical obstacles.

The agreement negotiated includes the most ambitious disciplines for non-tariff barriers ever negotiated with a third country. Korea will accept from day one that a car that conforms to international standards will be considered as complying with those Korean regulations that have been signalled by our industry as representing significant obstacles.

There are also provisions by which Korea accepts the equivalence between European and Korean environmental regulations. Indeed, even before the agreement enters into force, Korea has agreed to apply certain transitional derogations from the Korean environmental standards important for our exporters and we are monitoring very closely discussions in Korea about new regulations to limit CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in order to make them show that they are not an impediment to trade.

We are aware of the sensitivities of the car sector. We defended long transition periods for the liberalisation of our most sensitive car segment, namely small cars. Tariffs will only be eliminated in year five of the agreement, and that allows time for adjustment. We should remember the significant Korean investment in the car sector in Europe.

Moderately, we have changed the rules of origin by increasing the permissible limit of foreign value in Korean cars from 40% to 45%, and we agreed a bilateral safeguard clause which lets us put up tariffs in case of a surge of imports and a threat of injury to our industries.

On duty drawback, my final point, this is nothing new. Such policies are legitimate under the World Trade Organisation. Duty drawback also does not create a significant competitive disadvantage for our car producers since our tariffs on car parts are generally very low and will be further reduced. And we have negotiated a special clause that would enable us to limit duty drawback efficiently.

I underline the strength of support from European manufacturing sectors, as well as agriculture and service organisations, for this agreement. This is important, and it is a clear signal of our determination to pursue market access interest in key emerging Asian economies.

**Daniel Caspary, on behalf of the PPE Group.** – (DE) Mr President, South Korea is the EU's fourth largest external trading partner, with an export volume of around EUR 30 billion a year. Concluding the free trade agreement is thus very much in the interests of European employers and European workers.

Furthermore, Commissioner, I have no intention of congratulating you today, as the agreement has not yet been signed, but if you really do manage, in these times of crisis – at a time when export rates around the world have fallen apart as never before in history – to wrap up the free trade agreement, that would be a tremendous achievement which, from the bottom of my heart, I hope you could achieve.

Trade agreements are often highly controversial, but personally I would say that South Korea is a very worthy exception. I hear very positive feedback from nearly every area of European industry. I am thinking of mechanical engineering, pharmaceuticals, electrical engineering, chemicals and numerous service industries. I have never before come across an example where positive feedback about trade negotiations has been forthcoming from the agricultural sector. That is certainly a novelty – something that I think virtually none of us have encountered before.

The results are clearly positive, even if many sectors would have liked more to have been achieved. There is one exception, though, namely vehicle construction. Even here, however, it is not the whole industry but

just a few manufacturers who are critical of the agreement. Other manufacturers, and many suppliers in particular, are very positively disposed towards the agreement in its current form.

I think it would be good if we were to seize the opportunity to tackle some of the points of criticism in this industry and perhaps still iron out some of the detrimental consequences of the free trade agreement through details here or there. I am thinking, in this regard, of key areas such as the Capital Region Act Seoul, of standards for on-board diagnostics, of environmental standards, the duty drawback protection clause, etc. We should avoid misunderstandings here or, better still, clear them up completely and, above all, press the South Koreans so that the undertakings that they have given us really are realised. Clear monitoring of potential new non-tariff barriers to trade would certainly make sense.

I hope that the agreement enters into force very soon and that the consumers and workers of the European Union are able to benefit from it very quickly. Thank you very much, and I wish you much continued success in the home straight.

**Kader Arif**, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I am very pleased to hear a conservative and a liberal fellow Member agree with the Commission; it makes my job as a socialist easier.

I hope, in any case, that this evening's debate will make it possible at last to address the many concerns regarding the impact of this free trade agreement between the European Union and Korea and, in particular, on European industry.

You spoke of a consensus but, Commissioner, I would remind you that, for some months now, certain industrial sectors – including car manufacturers and workers' unions, which support them – have been warning you of the possible tragic consequences of this agreement. Today, the bulk of these issues have still not been addressed.

It may be the case, however, that you have chosen to sacrifice the European car industry for the benefit of services.

Indeed, why allow Korea to have duty drawback, which is a benefit that has never been granted before, not even to developing countries such as the countries of the Mediterranean? What is the logic behind flexible rules of origin, the impact of which is to be feared, not only for the car industry, but also for the European textile industry?

Why allow such distortions of competition and, above all, why set this precedent?

In the face of these risks, and, unfortunately, of others, which I cannot expand on here but the details of which you know – you have just mentioned them – the Commission has proposed a last resort, the inclusion of a safeguard clause. However, you know, Commissioner, that the safeguard clause is not automatic and that it will be very difficult to implement and impossible to activate for five years.

I will cite just one example to illustrate our fears. If the free trade agreement allows Korea to export 100 000 additional vehicles to Europe – it already exports 600 000 of them annually – 6 000 jobs will be lost. Conversely, Europe is terribly restricted, with each manufacturer being able to export just 1 000 vehicles to Korea, as part of a total European quota of 6 000 vehicles.

At this time of crisis, which is having a particular effect on car workers, how do you explain Europe's committing itself to such an agreement? Do you envisage a renegotiation of the controversial points that I have just mentioned? This is what a number of Member States and industrial sectors that I have just mentioned are calling for, anyway.

Will you commit yourself at last, Commissioner, to ensuring greater transparency and to involving us MEPs to a greater extent? We, and the Commission, created the conditions for a negative image of the Polish plumber; let us not create a negative image of the Korean coach builder.

**Michael Theurer**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, first of all, I would like to thank you, Commissioner Ashton, on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, for the information that you have given us this evening in the extraordinary committee meeting and here in plenary. Clearly, the free trade agreement with South Korea is close to being concluded. From a Liberal viewpoint, and particularly from the point of view of my own German Free Democratic Party, the objective of free and fair world trade is of great importance, particularly right now, as, in the course of the

economic and financial crisis, we see tendencies towards protectionism, tendencies which must be resolutely countered in the interests of prosperity and jobs in the European Union.

In this context, the question arises of what significance the Commission attaches to the free trade agreement with South Korea, as there has, for a long time, been a focus on progress in the Doha development round, without any agreement being reached so far. That is the reason behind my question, Commissioner Ashton: do you see concluding the free trade agreement with South Korea as a first step towards further bilateral free trade agreements, and does that, in your view, mean a move away from Doha? Or are such bilateral agreements merely a supplement to or expansion of the European Union's free trade policy?

As you know, furthermore, the clause on the refunding of duties is a cause of concern in a number of Member States and sectors of industry – in particular, in the car industry. This clause could lead to supporting business in low-cost countries such as India and China, thereby threatening European manufacturing. Can you see a way that these concerns on the part of a number of Member States in respect of such refunding of duties can still be addressed?

**Ilda Figueiredo, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.** – (PT) The Commissioner's statement makes it clear that there are economic and financial groups and sectors in the European Union that are going to gain from this agreement with South Korea. There is also the other side of the coin, however, which you have not considered here, Commissioner. I refer specifically to certain more sensitive sectors, such as textiles and clothing, and worker's jobs.

Therefore, as they concern industries and workers' organisations in our countries, it is worrying that the European Commission continues to ignore the serious difficulties facing the textile and clothing industries. I must highlight the situation in my country, Portugal, where unemployment has reached alarming levels, precisely in the regions where these industries predominate: in the north and certain parts of central Portugal.

That is why we stress the need for a consistent, concerted strategy to support industry in the European Union, particularly those sectors that depend on intensive labour, whether through urgent regulation of world markets or by means of public policies that support investment, innovation, differentiation, vocational training and the creation of jobs with rights.

**David Campbell Bannerman, on behalf of the EFD Group.** – Mr President, this is my first, or maiden, speech in this Parliament. As a UKIP MEP for the East of England, you will expect me to be a rebel and I will try not to disappoint you or my voters.

We are discussing today EU trade agreements and, in particular, that with South Korea, due to be signed this year. As we do not have much of the detail on this particular agreement, other than the fact, I believe, that two thirds of the benefits will accrue to South Korea and one third to the EU, I would like to make some more general points.

Many people are not aware that there are over a hundred separate bilateral EU trade agreements like this one; 116 is one estimate. There are trade agreements with countries such as the USA, Canada, Mexico, Brazil, India, China, Japan and South Africa. In Europe, there are trade agreements with Russia, Ukraine, Turkey and Liechtenstein.

There are also trade agreements with non-EU EEA and EFTA countries such as Switzerland and Norway. Norway's trade agreement religiously protects both its fishing and farming, and Norway is not a minnow. It is the EU's fourth largest import partner and sixth largest export market.

What should a trade agreement like South Korea's really contain, then? Switzerland, I believe, is a strong example. There are provisions abolishing customs duties and trade quotas on industrial and agricultural products. There are provisions to allow Swiss citizens the right to live and work in EU countries and for EU citizens to live and work in Switzerland. There are provisions for Switzerland to be part of the Schengen passport-free area. The Swiss can be in the European Environment Agency, if they wish, in the EU's film and education programmes, and they can apply for EU research grants. There is cooperation on airlines, asylum and judicial matters. In short, they have all the claimed benefits of EU membership, but without the cost.

It is true that Switzerland must pay CHF 600 million per year for access, but the Swiss Government reports savings for not being a member of the EU amounting to CHF 3.4 billion, a net saving of CHF 2.8 billion a year. Nor is Switzerland an insignificant trading partner either: 80% of Swiss exports go to the EU, and it is the EU's fourth largest trading partner.



My point is that trade agreements can achieve the benefits of EU trade without the burden of high regulatory costs, loss of sovereignty and of resources. Even the Commission website admits 'Switzerland can develop and retain its own regulations in other areas which deviate from EU rulings. It is in its own interests, such as in financial and in labour markets.' How Britain would love to deviate in a similar way over the Working Time Directive, Temporary Workers' Directive or the new Fund Managers' Directive!

So I conclude in asking, why not Britain? Why cannot Britain have a similar, friendly trade agreement with the EU like South Korea instead of full EU membership? Britain on its own is the largest single trading partner with the EU with a GBP 40 billion deficit a year. We, too, can have the kind of assurances the Swiss enjoy. We could, and I believe we should, be an independent free trading nation once again such as Norway, Switzerland and even South Korea.

**Peter Šťastný (PPE).** – Mr President, as one of the rapporteurs on the FTA with South Korea and a strong FTA protagonist, I am hoping for a balanced and level-playing-field agreement that benefits both sides – a true win-win situation.

One of our core industries is not really happy with the current status of negotiations, and they have many friends in their camp, including some Member States, industries and MEPs. They all see the playing field unfairly tilted to benefit South Korea in this agreement. The European Commission and the European Council should look hard into areas of friction, namely the DDB safeguard clause, non-tariff barriers and rules of origin. If some progress could be achieved to bring more satisfaction to the EU car industry, then employment levels, strong GDP and expected standards of living would really benefit and be preserved.

However, a level playing field will not be a disadvantage. A strong precedent may be established for other FTAs waiting in line and coming up soon in the near future. It is clear to me that this agreement overall brings other benefits to the EU and to some of the EU's different industries. In the small picture, there will always be some winners and losers: it is the nature of any bilateral agreement. In the big picture, we could be close to real balance. However, with such a crucial industry as the automobile industry in a fairly unhappy mode, there is a need to try for more. Only when achieving some additional progress can we speak of a truly balanced FTA that is acceptable and has a real and positive impact as a precedent for future FTAs.

**Gianluca Susta (S&D).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I have welcomed the work done during this period in which Mrs Ashton has been carrying out her role as Commissioner. I must say that we have had a better relationship with her than we had with her predecessor, despite their common political affiliation, which we too share, and their common nationality.

However, this time I do not share the Commissioner's enthusiasm on this issue, because too often in recent years, the Commission has taken the floor here and talked up certain initiatives, only to then pursue a different path. We are going through a particular moment in time, a major economic and financial crisis, which is also the result of a lack of reciprocity in the world, not only with developing countries – which has its own logic, its own explanation – but with the new global players and the traditional global players.

Too often I seem to sense a lack of awareness within the Commission, by its President and its Commissioners, of which initiatives should be implemented to aid the recovery of European industry, the recovery of the European manufacturing industry. It seems to me that this agreement – which, admittedly, is a positive agreement and has extremely positive content – has more of an academic value; it is almost a textbook treaty, but one that is not in touch with reality.

We export USD 30 billion to Korea, only USD 20 billion come back in the form of cars exported from Korea to Europe, and USD 1.5 billion will be the indirect aid that accrues to Korean cars in Europe, without mentioning the textile and other sectors. That is a definite imbalance, which I believe must be highlighted and must be corrected, before the green light is given to a free trade agreement that penalises European industry. Ours is a quality industry that has committed itself to the new requirements that innovation calls for, certainly not a bankrupt industry that cannot get to grips with the need for innovation that exists within the economy.

**Zuzana Roithová (PPE).** – (CS) Mr President, Commissioner, I too am not happy about the curious changes to the agreement, such as refunds of customs charges on imported components in the case of products for export to the Union and a reduction in the 60% threshold for determining the country of origin. This amounts to favouring Korean imports at the expense of the competitiveness of European industry and at the expense of unemployment. The lion's share in this respect already goes to imported goods from Asia, where labour costs are uncompetitively low, due to poor or non-existent social and environmental standards. The trade

talks should therefore have focused on raising these standards, rather than on the prosperity of Asian industry at the expense of Europe. The Commission has long owed this to the citizens of Europe.

Does the Commission have any awareness of the negative impact of the agreement on European competitiveness and on employment in the automobile and textile industries? Secondly, is it aware that the agreement sets an unfortunate precedent for future trade agreements? Thirdly, does the Commission intend to ignore the fundamental objections raised by European engineering unions? Fourthly, how is it that the Korean media are already celebrating a victory for their automobile industry when the agreement has not even been discussed by the College of the Commission? Or is the Commission prepared to revise the draft and to negotiate a balanced agreement? Does the Commission have the will to put pressure on Korea to adopt international obligations in respect of social and environmental standards and will it do so before Korea gains all of the benefits of free trade with the European Union? Thank you for your answer. I trust that common sense will prevail.

**David Martin (S&D).** – Mr President, I must say I am rather concerned about the tone of this debate. With the exception, perhaps, of Daniel Caspary's contribution, it has been rather negative.

I was Parliament's rapporteur on the Korean Free Trade Agreement. In advance of this debate, I looked back on what we had decided to ask for – what we asked the Commission to go into in these negotiations and achieve on our behalf – and I actually think the Commission has achieved what we asked them to achieve. I would like to pay tribute to the chief negotiator, who I see sitting next to Baroness Ashton, and to Baroness Ashton herself, for the way they have delivered this agreement.

Clearly, in any free trade agreement – by definition – and in any negotiation, there are winners and losers, but if you look at the global impact of this agreement, there are big winners in Europe and there are big winners in Korea. Therefore, there are big winners in keeping world trade moving. At this current time, in this present crisis, anything that sends a positive signal about two units as big as Korea and as big as the European Union that we want to keep trade moving and we want to keep trade open has to be a good thing.

I have to say that, if the European Parliament and the Council of Ministers cannot move this agreement to a final signed agreement between Korea and the EU, we might as well send a note to DG Trade to stop negotiating all other free trade agreements because, if we do not deliver on Korea, forget ASEAN, forget the Gulf States, forget the whole other raft of FTAs we are trying to negotiate, and, frankly, forget Doha. This is an important agreement, where Europe has achieved its strategic objectives. Let us send a positive signal to the rest of the world that Europe is open for business and that, in the teeth of this recession, we are keen to keep our markets as open as possible.

**Seán Kelly (PPE).** – Mr President, just very briefly, this is all new to me and I found the discussion very stimulating and educational. When Lady Ashton first spoke, I thought this was a fantastic deal for the European Union and I wondered if there were any benefits in it for Korea. Then speaker after speaker gave the opposite view, so I hope that the questions put and the points made by Mr Arif, Mr Theurer, Mr Campbell Bannerman and other speakers could be answered specifically by Lady Ashton when she replies and also she might tell us if there are any other negotiations going on right now with specific Asian countries for bilateral agreements and also how far they have progressed.

**Gerard Batten (EFD).** – Mr President, I would like to speak in support of the contention made by my colleague, Mr Campbell Bannerman. In 2006, the Swiss Federal Government commissioned a report on all aspects of existing and possible relationships with the European Union.

They concluded that full membership of the EU would cost them up to six times their current bilateral arrangements. The Swiss being the Swiss decided that they were better off by not joining or achieving full EU membership.

If that is true for the Swiss, it is certainly true for the British, and, if only our Government had as sensible and pragmatic a view of Britain's economy as the Swiss have of Switzerland's, then we would leave, just as the Swiss would not join.

**David Martin (S&D).** – Mr President, you are a very tolerant chair, but it is very clear in our rules that interventions under the 'catch the eye' procedure have to relate to the subject under discussion. That was nothing to do with Korea, and it was nothing to do with free trade agreements.

**Sari Essayah (PPE).** – (FI) Mr President, in his speech just now, Mr Martin said that it is extremely important to conclude agreements that will speed up economic growth and employment and remove trade barriers

generally, especially in this economic crisis. We have to remember, however, that today we have also just had a very serious discussion about the crisis in Europe's car industry, and this week we will also be dealing with problems in the textile industry and European Globalisation Adjustment Fund aid as compensation for the massive layoffs in that sector in Spain and Portugal. So, ladies and gentlemen, we have to take seriously the concern of Europeans regarding how we respond to this loss of jobs in Europe and examine what the Commission's cures actually are. Although free trade must be good for employment and economic growth at a general level, how do we prevent the loss of jobs in these traditional European industries?

**Catherine Ashton, Member of the Commission.** – Mr President, I would like to say that the debate did not, in a sense, at all surprise me, because the concerns that colleagues have raised have indeed been raised over the months.

I want to pay tribute to David Martin, just to begin with, for the work that he has done in the committee. It is very important that I recognise how much the Committee on International Trade has worked with me over the months that have proceeded it, and of course I am very well aware that colleagues have not had the benefit of seeing the detail of the agreement so far. So I will try and address the concerns. But, more importantly, we will make sure that we give you more and more detail, because it is important that you look at the facts rather than the assertions that will have been made.

Let me just make some general points about the approach on this deal first. This deal was put in play in order to achieve the best for European industry – including, I would say to colleagues from the UKIP, British industry. It is absolutely in the interests of Europe, in my view, to move forward with this deal – otherwise I would not be standing here suggesting that we move forward in the way that I have.

Now, in doing so, there was a clear *modus operandi*, a clear approach that the Commission took which, as has been said, was supported by Parliament, by the Commission and by the Council, and that is indeed the way we have gone forward. My colleague, Mr Arif, will not mind, I think, if I say that to suggest that I would sacrifice any industry, I find alarming or perhaps a little depressing, because that is certainly not the approach that I would take.

Do I think that if you want a serious trade deal you have to recognise that actually it is a deal where both sides benefit? Yes, I do. If you want to have trade agreements, if we do believe – which I think we do – that trade is the engine that will take us out of recession, then it means you have serious, tough negotiations with industries and with countries that we care about having a deal with. Otherwise, we can just do deals all day long with countries we do not much care about, and we can open markets because we are not really interested.

Korea is a serious market. It provides real opportunities for chemicals, pharmaceuticals, other industries. We need to recognise the value and importance of doing this if we want serious trade agreements. We are, in fact, an economic superpower. I could not disagree more with my colleagues from the United Kingdom when they talk about Switzerland and try and equate that, somehow, with the relationship that we are trying to form in Europe with Korea – or maybe I just missed the point.

This is about serious negotiations to get a serious outcome and, as the details of this unfold, I hope that colleagues will look at it in the spirit that we have tried to set it up.

The car industry gave us at the beginning a list of things that they wished us to achieve. They were genuinely very concerned to keep the market in Korea open, and we have achieved all that they asked at the beginning.

The textile industry: I am confident that there is little to worry about. The textile industry safeguards that we have will indeed make sure that we retain European jobs.

I am not interested in closing down jobs or industries in Europe at all, and this deal does not do that. And those of you who think that you have evidence to prove it, I ask you to supply it to me, because the rhetoric is one thing, the reality is a different thing, and we really have got to get beyond the rhetoric and into the reality of what this deal provides.

Indeed, I would argue that what we have got before us is very important for all the industrial sectors. The question about duty drawback is, for me, a very simple one. Duty drawback is designed so that our response to it will prevent a particular problem. The question is, is it the only way of solving a problem? If there are other ways that equally solve the problem but, in fact, invite us to get a better trade agreement, then I will explore them. But I still want to solve the same problem, and I believe the mechanisms we have in place in this agreement do precisely that. It is not some thing that we hold up as being for ever enshrined as the only

way of achieving what we want to achieve – to prevent, effectively, imports via the back door – and I believe we have resolved the problem in a different way.

So I am not going to make apologies – politically, economically or in any other way – to Parliament for having gone out and invested in negotiating this important trade deal. I make no apology for that, and I make no apology for putting forward to this Parliament what I believe is a serious, 21st century free trade agreement of enormous benefit across the economy of the European Union. I especially make no apology for doing it at a time of economic crisis because, if ever there was a time when my responsibility was to provide as much support for the businesses and the workers of Europe, I believe that time is now, and that is what this deal does.

I do urge colleagues, as I said earlier on, to look at the reality of the deal. You will be lobbied – I have been lobbied – but actually, when you look at what we have achieved, I believe it is a very concrete result that will hugely benefit the economy of Europe. That, in the end, is what we set out to do, and that, in the end, is what we have achieved.

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

#### **Written statements (Rule 149)**

**Tokia Saïfi (PPE), in writing.** – (FR) The free trade agreement (FTA) between the European Union and South Korea, which should be concluded by mid-October, raises a number of concerns among European industries. Regarded by the European Trade Commissioner as the most ambitious ever negotiated by the EU, this agreement seemed to car manufacturers, in particular, to be very unbalanced. These manufacturers fear a massive influx of Korean vehicles on the European market as a consequence of the tariff preferences granted by the European Commission. There is no doubt that maintaining certain customs clauses such as duty drawback would be unfair and would create a distortion of competition that would be very harmful to the European car industry. This is all the more true given that the European Union's generosity does not seem to have been paid back with a lowering of the non-tariff barriers put up by the Korean authorities (import quotas on European petrol engine vehicles). The Commission therefore has a duty, from today, to review the terms of this agreement so as to restore the conditions of fair and equitable competition and to ensure the long-term survival of our industry and our jobs in Europe.

### **23. The effects of the global financial and economic crisis on developing countries and on development cooperation (debate)**

**President.** – The next item is the debate on the oral question to the Commission (O-0088/2009 – B7-0209/2009) by Eva Joly, on behalf of the Committee on Development, on the effects of the global financial and economic crisis on developing countries and on development cooperation.

**Eva Joly, author.** – (FR) Mr President, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, while I have the pleasure of putting this oral question to you on behalf of the Committee on Development, sadly I do not have the pleasure of presenting you with the resolution on the same subject, adopted unanimously by this committee.

My colleagues from the Committee on Development and I worked tirelessly to ensure that the resolution was voted on and debated in plenary before the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh.

However, apart from my group, the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, and the Confederal Group of the European United Left – Nordic Green Left, no other political group supported our request to put this resolution on the agenda, and yet it is vital if we want the European Parliament to play more of a part in defining the European Union's external policy and to have real strength behind its proposals.

Ladies and gentlemen, of what benefit will it be to us to vote on this resolution, which was to put the European Parliament's requests and proposals to the members of the G20 and, more specifically, to those of our Member States who sit on it, as well as to the European Commission, at the October plenary session, that is, after the Pittsburgh Summit?

Besides the fact that this devalues the work accomplished, we cannot be content with this role of current affairs commentator either. That is not our job. Let us leave it to those whose job it is and who do it with professionalism: journalists.

Developing countries need us now more than ever. While our fellow citizens have not been spared, the global economic and financial crisis has had a far more lasting effect on the populations of developing countries. However, the financial institutions have not made these populations the main beneficiaries of the emergency loans, since very few of them satisfy the required conditions.

The countries of Africa have thus received only 1.6% of the loans granted by the IMF since the last G20 meeting in London and the increase in the IMF's resources. The rest has gone to developed countries, European ones in particular.

Maintaining the European economic system was imperative of course, but this must not make us forget the extreme poverty that is raging at our borders; extreme poverty made worse by a crisis for which we carry the burden of responsibility.

Public development aid must be increased as a matter of urgency. Already, most of the Member States do not meet the conditions required by the OECD since 1970, and we are facing new emergencies without having new funds. We must therefore find new sources of funding, not least by reforming the current system.

The Committee on Development is asking you to take action to eradicate tax haven abuses, tax evasion and the illegal flows of capital from developing countries.

According to a Norwegian report published in June, the figures of which have been verified, the illegal flows leaving developing countries are ten times the amount of our development aid. This shows just how much is at stake.

There is a need to implement a new binding financial agreement that will force transnational companies to declare the profits they make and the taxes they pay, on a country by country basis, in order to ensure transparency in respect of what they pay in each of the countries in which they operate.

Moreover, a radical reform of the system must take place involving, in particular, the introduction of new democratic and transparent regulations for trade and the international financial systems.

The responsibilities are huge, the challenges many, and the task arduous, but, now more than ever, the European Union must step up to the plate and lead these reforms.

**Karel De Gucht**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, the Commission in its role as the EU's representative in the G20, together with the Presidency, strongly advocates increased support to low-income countries, particularly the poorest, as one of the critical priorities of the G20 commitments.

In this regard, it is important that low income countries receive appropriate funding to meet the needs emerging especially from the backlash of the financial crisis. That is why we advocate the need to enhance access by poor and fragile countries, often without institutional administrative capacities, to the facilities and credits made available by the international financial institutions and other donors.

Personally, I will defend this approach at the November Development Affairs Council, and the global financial crisis will be at the centre of my political concerns during the weeks ahead. I hope I can count on your support throughout.

In this context our 'Vulnerability FLEX' instrument is of particular relevance. The Commission has worked with the World Bank and the IMF to identify the most crisis-vulnerable countries and to complement the loan-based assistance provided by these two institutions with timely and targeted grant aid under the Vulnerability FLEX.

Between 2009 and 2010, up to EUR 500 million will be spent on those ACP countries requesting assistance to ensure priority public spending, including in the social sectors. Let me reassure you that the frontloading of budget support through the Vulnerability FLEX mechanism will not lead to a funding gap insofar as the Commission is using non-earmarked reserves.

Countries not eligible under the Vulnerability FLEX will also benefit from other measures proposed by the Commission in its April communication, for example, reallocations following ad hoc country reviews and the advanced mid-term review, support under the traditional FLEX, frontloading where feasible, etc.

Concerning the targeting of the budget support, I am convinced that the flexibility inherent in this instrument already allows recipient countries to use the funds in the manner which they judge will best help them respond to economic and social problems.

In addition, the advanced mid-term review of the 10th EDF will provide a good opportunity to identify new needs and assess whether these would be better addressed through general or sectoral budget support.

The advanced medium-term review will also provide an additional opportunity to look again at budget support profiles in each ACP country and consider amendments, reallocation or additional funds from the reserve.

Concerning the reform of the Bretton Woods institutions, our role in promoting their reform is, of course, limited. The issue of voice and representation will be discussed at the IMF World Bank annual meetings in Istanbul, which Commissioner Almunia and I will attend this October. In this respect, we welcome the addition of a third seat for sub-Saharan African countries on the World Bank's Board of Governors, and are looking with interest at proposals on the table for further reforms.

Concerning illicit financial flows, I would like to reassure Mrs Joly that I have already given instructions to the Commission services to explore ways of improving fiscal and financial governance in developing countries in order to curb illicit financial flows. This crisis has also shown that we have to strengthen the mechanisms for delivering ODA.

The international aid effectiveness agenda embodied in the Paris Declaration and the Accra Agenda for Action is now more important than ever. In these difficult economic times, we have a particular responsibility towards the world's poor to make sure our development assistance is being channelled effectively.

In its 8 April communication, the Commission also underlined the useful contribution of innovative funding mechanisms as a complementary and mutually reinforcing instrument with ODA. We have urged Member States to use their full tool kit and to leverage non-ODA with ODA, for example, by building on ongoing voluntary solidarity levies such as the airline ticket taxes to finance health programmes. There will be high-level discussions on this subject, including a major conference in 2010 organised by the French, which will involve the Commission upstream.

**Enrique Guerrero Salom**, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, it was exactly a year ago today that we witnessed the collapse of the financial institution Lehman Brothers. Then, according to the experts, we were on the verge of a financial collapse, and we were on the threshold of another great depression.

The financial crisis intensified and extended to the real economy, and we have lived through a period in which we have had negative economic growth and job losses.

However, developed countries are beginning to come out of the crisis. France and Germany have done so, for example, and the Commission presented its economic forecasts today, which show that in the second half of the year, the European Union will come out of the recession.

However, the less developed countries are in the midst of the crisis and will continue to be there for a long time. They did not cause the crisis, but they are suffering the consequences of it more than anyone. They are suffering the consequences with less growth, faster growing unemployment, less direct investment, less foreign credit, less money sent back by emigrants, less official development aid and, of course, more trade restrictions.

We have lived through a period during which our stability has declined and our comfortable situation has declined in a limited time, but they are in danger of losing a decade in the fight against poverty, and a decade means that an entire generation is lost.

We can do a great deal for them on many aspects, and I would like to specifically focus on confronting protectionism. Last week, the Commission presented its fourth report on trade restriction measures, which shows that many countries are adopting new restrictive measures, which is disastrous for developing countries.

Also, many developed countries will not fulfil their commitments to official development aid at the very time when we need fresh resources more than ever to confront the seriousness of the crisis.

I therefore propose that we increase the coordination of this development aid with a broader agreement between donor countries, financial institutions and partners, and manage it more efficiently and transparently so that it does not generate costs and is not a bureaucratic burden.

I urge the Commission, I urge the Commissioner, to implement the plan that it has presented to us, which I am sure Commissioner Almunia will agree with.

**Louis Michel**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Mr De Gucht, Mrs Joly, I am, of course, very aware that, in this type of debate, we will inevitably hear a series of speeches all saying the same thing. That does not bother me, however. I believe that it is important to repeat again and again this strong consensus that the European Parliament has a duty to build and, moreover, this needs to be done along with the Commission. This is because, despite having claimed that developing countries would be scarcely affected by the financial crisis, all the experts are in agreement today that, on the contrary, the effects of this crisis will be disastrous for most developing countries.

All the social sectors of poor countries are going to find themselves faced with a sharp rise in social needs, in particular, and in needs for services, and with a very significant fall in growth. Moreover, from this perspective, I very much appreciated your alluding, Commissioner, to the importance of responding to these needs in a far more flexible way, and I think that you know that, where it was possible to be so – obviously in the context of sufficient monitoring – I have always been a great supporter of State aid and direct aid, whether direct or sectoral aid, but of budgetary aid, in any case. I believe that there is an appropriation effect and another, far greater effect, to do with respect, and that gives the Member States powers.

In spite of all that, I note that the G20 has not tackled the reform of the international financial institutions – I am referring to the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank – in order to give greater weight to the interests of the poor countries of the South.

As Mrs Joly said, 80% of the recent loans from the IMF went to European countries and only 1.6% of these new loans were granted, for example, to African countries. The resources pledged to developing countries in the G20 package will not be enough – we know this too – and will not be sufficiently focused on the weakest countries. Worse still, these resources will not arrive quickly enough.

The real challenge, as you have obviously realised, Commissioner, will be to force the Member States to honour their 2005 commitments. Nothing justifies a reduction in public development aid. However, as has already been said, several European countries have announced drastic cuts. I am thinking of Ireland (-10%), Italy (-50%) and Latvia (-100%). This attitude is clearly totally unacceptable. Moreover, it is irresponsible.

I should like to hear your opinion on a whole series of points. I heard your positive reaction regarding the vulnerability fund that the World Bank is proposing to create. You also responded in favour of combating tax havens. The countries of the South lose USD 1 000 billion each year in funds transferred illegally to the North, USD 350 billion of which pass through tax havens.

The issue of international governance has already been discussed.

Another issue that I believe should be highlighted is, of course, trade-related assistance. I am an enthusiastic supporter – unlike some, I know – of economic partnership agreements, provided, of course, that the specific situation is taken into account and transitional periods are introduced and, above all, provided that the Member States honour their commitment to provide this infamous EUR 1 billion sum each year to help trade. To my mind, this is obviously important, as others have said.

What is needed today is to denounce the dual messages from certain Member States that talk in glowing terms about developing countries and make huge promises but which, at the same time, are cynically reducing their public development aid.

**Gabriele Zimmer**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Mr President, the question tabled by Mrs Joly on behalf of the Committee on Development brings up the issue of what we, as development policy makers, are actually trying to achieve in this debate.

The promises of the last G8 and G20 summits ultimately never made it off the page. They are amongst the promises that are trotted out again and again but that have never led to adequate, tangible assistance. In this regard, I really cannot comprehend why we are not debating Parliament's resolution before Pittsburgh in order to apply appropriate political pressure. In light of the Commissioner's accurate analyses and of Mr Michel's observations, it seems clear to me that we know what is at hand here. Yet we are not in a position to apply political pressure in order to force the Member States to finally move away from this policy of 'charity begins at home'. Looking forward to Pittsburgh, that would seem to me to be the big danger. If we do not succeed in applying pressure and making it clear that we need new institutions specifically in order to support the poorest countries in the world, then we will still be sitting here after Pittsburgh pointing out that, ultimately, nothing has changed.

That is also my request to you, Commissioner. I ask you, here in Parliament right now, to comment again specifically on the results and to tell us what can actually be demanded with the support of which Member States and to what extent we have actually made progress here.

What we need is rapid and effective action because people are dying before our very eyes and they are doing so as a result of circumstances that we have helped bring about. I call on us all to act together!

**Corina Crețu (S&D).** – Mr President, emergency fund contributions, as you know, recorded a decrease of EUR 4.8 billion in the amount intended for the regulation of humanitarian crises in the poorest countries. This is the highest recorded historical gap between the funds needed and the funds collected from donor governments and, seeing these figures, we cannot help but think about the huge amount of money spent on bank bailouts.

Each government is responsible for solving its own country's problems but, at the same time, it is unfair and indecent to overlook the fact that the developing countries are hardest hit by the economic crisis, even though these countries are less responsible for that crisis.

The world around us teaches us not to expect too much from humanitarian appeals, especially during periods of recession. I would therefore like to draw your attention to the risk of neglecting the developing countries and of accelerating the growth in poverty and obtaining a boomerang effect in the shape of increased internal tension, bloody conflicts, humanitarian tragedies and massive migration, yet again debated by developed countries. Considering these circumstances, I believe that efforts are required in one direction to assume our responsibilities. This requires boosting international aid and the need for more efficient development aid.

I also believe we should focus on decreasing dependence on humanitarian aid for some of the beneficiaries. I would also like to ask the Commissioner – taking into account what former Commissioner Michel previously said about the need to step up the involvement of the World Bank and the IMF – whether he intends to come up with a proposal for this Istanbul Summit.

I do not want to close this speech without stating my appreciation for the start of your Commission mandate. I have in mind the US-South Africa Summit, your visit to Zimbabwe at the end of this week, and the emergency assistance provided in recent days for the 100 000 victims of the floods in West Africa. At the same time, I wish to point out that not only Burkina Faso faces natural disasters, but Niger also needs international support. Human lives are not just threatened by floods, but also by the insidious and permanent threat of drought. I also appreciate that you allocated EUR 53 million last week to respond to the drought in sub-Saharan countries. These are encouraging indicators which I hope will influence the talks at the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh and the Copenhagen conference, as these meetings are critical nowadays with the millennium development goals facing a major risk of failure.

**Zuzana Roithová (PPE).** – (CS) Commissioner, I too would like to say how disappointed I am that the promises of the G20 concerning assistance for the poorest countries during the economic crisis were clearly not meant seriously. The reality is that IMF assistance has so far been negligible. I would also like to call for a reform of the decision-making process so that the poorest countries can have a greater say in decision making, particularly within the Bretton Woods system. At the same time, I would like to ask you, Commissioner, whether it has been possible to maintain, in particular, health assistance and education in ACP countries at least at pre-crisis levels? I am asking mainly because there has been a drastic reduction in financial aid from many countries, including European ones. That said, Commissioner, I wish you success in your new role.

**Anna Záborská (PPE).** – (SK) Commissioner, the issue we are discussing is highly important and topical, not only because the EU needs to have a clear idea about development policy at the moment but also because we need to explain it clearly and intelligibly to our fellow citizens. More than ever before, the level of development aid can now influence illegal immigration, public order, epidemics and also – as the IMF has pointed out – the increase in private sector debt in developing countries.

I would like to emphasise the regular control of finances both by donors and recipients of funding. We live in our various countries and we hear criticisms of the EU's development policy. The consensus in the European Parliament which Mr Michel spoke of is not always so evident in the countries of the EU. It is only through the effectiveness and transparency of development aid that we can convince people that it is justified and limit any cut-backs.



**Sari Essayah (PPE).** – (FI) Mr President, it is extremely important that, at this stage, Europe shows moral leadership, and Member States must honour all their commitments as well as the Millennium Development Goals. Of course, we are suffering from relative poverty during this present economic downturn, but we need to remember that in the developing countries, they are suffering from absolute poverty, and people are dying of hunger and disease. More than 10 Member States in the Union, however, have said they will cut their development cooperation contributions or slow down the rate at which they are set to increase. Obviously, we should remember that, important as it is to increase payments, it is equally important to ensure that they are used more effectively. There are various tools in place for this coordination of aid. One is the Official Development Assistance computer program, which has been trialled very successfully in Mozambique, and I hope that there will be investment in time and effort in this type of coordination in particular. That way, it will be very easy for us to improve our success in such a situation as this, where the amount of aid available is falling.

**Karel De Gucht, Member of the Commission.** – Mr President, yes, a crisis has hit the poorest countries the hardest and there is in fact not much that we can do about it. We can only talk about the remedies to get them back on track, and obviously this will take more time than it will take in the developed world because the mechanisms to produce new economic growth are much less developed in those countries.

One of the remarks that have been made by several members is about the fact that a lot of Member States are in fact backtracking on their Official Development Assistance (ODA) engagements. The EU Member States agreed in 2005 individual minimum aid targets of 0.51% for EU-15 and 0.17% for EU-12, for the new Member States to be reached by 2010 and respectively 0.7% and 0.33% by 2015.

The countries that had already achieved aid levels higher than these targets promised to maintain. Based on these confirmations and higher national pledges of some Member States, the EU should collectively reach 0.56% of ODA by 2010.

I believe that the crisis should not be an excuse to water down donors' aid promises, and I will insist on remaining committed to delivering the promised aid levels, both for EU Member States as well as other donors.

In 2008, the EU ODA has increased by around EUR 4 billion to a level of 0.40% of ODA and the collective EU ODA is forecast to continue increasing.

On the basis of the information gathered from Member States, we foresee the EU collective ODA increasing to EUR 53.4 billion in 2009, which represents 0.44%, and EUR 58.7 billion, representing 0.48%, in 2010.

This also means that, without additional steps by Member States to fulfil their individual targets, the collective targets for 2010 will not be achieved. The forecasted trend of a continuing increase in EU ODA relies on those Member States that are trying to respect their commitments, but efforts are required by all Member States, and I will continue to insist on that with the respective Member States. It is their responsibility. This is an engagement that they have taken up, and the crisis should not be an excuse to water down their engagements. I would even say, to the contrary.

Several Members have also insisted on the reform of the international financial institutions. This is a target that I can fully subscribe to. The G20 has set out a precise timetable for governance reforms of the Bretton Woods institutions urging them to accelerate the implementation of their own plans for reform which predate the London Summit. Some deliverables are expected as early as April next year and I am confident that solutions can be found on outstanding issues.

Given the current momentum in IMF reform created by the G20, the Commission underlines the importance of advancing the second phase of reform at the World Bank with a view to concluding it by spring 2010.

The London Summit of 2 April 2009 will go down in the history of the G20 as one where development issues were handled in their own right and in the presence of developing countries' representatives. In preparation for the next G20, these last months have seen intense activity by the institution tasked with following up.

In August, the IMF Board of Governors approved a USD 250 billion general allocation of IMF special drawing rights, of which USD 18 billion will go to low income countries, and the IMF will be called to account in Pittsburgh on other measures for low income countries. So this is, I think, a positive evolution.

Louis Michel, my predecessor, has also insisted on the flexibility, claiming that the budgetary support mechanism is the most flexible we have, and this is obviously true but, of course, this also means that we need a counterpart with the developing countries and we need to be in a position to have political dialogue with them and also monitoring mechanisms, so it presupposes a minimum cooperation on their behalf, but, once that is in place, I also believe that, especially, sectoral budgetary support is a very adequate procedure.

I do not quite understand why this resolution that has been introduced by the Committee on Development and refers to the G20 meeting of Pittsburgh is not being voted on before the G20 meeting. I do not grasp that. There will probably be one or another technical explanation for that but I think it gives the wrong signal from this newly elected Parliament that we are going to debate such a resolution after the G20 meeting in Pittsburgh, which is due to happen, if I remember correctly, from 22 to 24 September, before our next meeting in Strasbourg in October.

This is not within my discretion but I must say that, together with Members who have advocated this, I very much deplore that we have not been able to vote upon this resolution during this part-session.

**President.** – Let me just mention that the decision to vote during the first October part-session was taken by the Conference of Presidents because, during that part-session, there will also be a debate on the G20 meeting. That is my explanation to your question.

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

#### **24. Parliamentary immunity: see Minutes**

#### **25. Agenda for next sitting: see Minutes**

#### **26. Closure of the sitting**

*(The sitting was closed at 22.55)*