

MONDAY, 12 JANUARY 2009

IN THE CHAIR: MR PÖTTERING

President

(The sitting was opened at 5.05 p.m.)

1. Resumption of the session

President. – I declare resumed the session of the European Parliament adjourned on Thursday 18 December 2008.

I would like to wish you all, ladies and gentlemen, a Happy New Year and a successful 2009 which will hopefully bring us nearer to European unity. May we be successful in promoting peace in the world. I would now like to make a statement.

2. Statement by the President

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, the Conference of Presidents has asked me to make a statement on the events in the Middle East. The debate will take place on Wednesday afternoon in the presence of the Chairman of the Council of Foreign Ministers, Czech Foreign Minister Schwarzenberg. I mention this because it was not quite clear. We have put a lot of effort in and found him very willing to be with us, although he will have to travel to South Africa on the same day, if only for a limited time I would like to take this opportunity to thank the Czech Presidency most sincerely for this.

Ladies and gentlemen, whilst we are holding a plenary session at the start of the New Year here, people are once again dying in the Middle East.

Personally, and I am sure the same goes for most of us, I find I have a painful sense of *déjà vu* when I see the pictures on the television.

In the name of the European Parliament, I would like to express my deepest regret on the escalation of the Gaza conflict between Israel and Hamas.

I say quite categorically: it is not acceptable for people to suffer, for violence to continue and for United Nations employees to come under fire. How far must the spiral of violence go until sense and reason prevail?

The violence must cease immediately on both sides. The firing of rockets on Israeli towns and cities by Hamas is completely unacceptable and deserves the harshest criticism and we must not forget that it was Hamas who ended the ceasefire. Yet the proportionality of the means employed in the response must not be disregarded.

All people in the Middle East have the same worth. The inalienable right of a state to protect itself does not justify violent actions, the primary consequence of which is the suffering of the civilian population.

The people in the Gaza Strip must be given urgent help. A Palestinian is worth the same as an Israeli or a European or an American – all people on this earth are equal. We must not allow a worsening of the humanitarian situation!

As responsible politicians, we must be prepared to decisively contribute to finding a permanent way out of this spiral of violence in the short term.

Attempting to reduce security to purely military aspects is doomed to failure, in my opinion. Therefore, there can be no exclusively military solution to the problem in the Middle East. A political solution must be reached in the end. Above all, this means learning lessons from the failure of the previous approach. Therefore, it is a matter of taking measures that are not only viable but also, and above all, sustainable.

Over the past few days I have been in contact by telephone with the Israeli President, Shimon Peres, the President of the Palestinian Authority, Salam Fayyad, the Speaker of the Knesset, Dalia Itzik, and of course with the EU High Representative for the Common Foreign and Security Policy, Javier Solana, who has been in the region for quite some time now.

I have also been in contact with the Vice President of the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly because I am currently Chairman of that Assembly, the President of the Jordanian Parliament, Abdel Hadi Al-Majali, the President of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Gianfranco Fini and the President of the Moroccan Parliament, Mustapha Mansouri

I have always made it clear in all these conversations that the European Parliament is fully behind the demands formulated by the Council of Ministers on behalf of the European Union and confirmed by the resolution of the Security Council of the United Nations on 8 January 2009.

It is depressing that this legally binding resolution of the Security Council, from which the Americans abstained so that it could be carried, is disregarded by both sides in the conflict, which is to say both Israel and Hamas.

An immediate and permanent ceasefire must come into force. This ceasefire must be achieved with the mediation of Egypt and the involvement of all players. Immediate and unhindered access to humanitarian aid must be ensured and the United Nations Work and Relief Agency (UNRWA) enabled to continue its humanitarian activities unhindered. And I would also like to say: not just for three hours a day!

When even the humanitarian organisations and the United Nations have to stop their work because the warring parties do not observe their neutrality, we have reached an unacceptable low point with regard to international law and humanity.

The third requirement is to intensify the peace process. The only viable basis for permanent peace is, and remains, a two-state solution with Israel and Palestine as sovereign states within secure borders.

The European Union, together with the members of the Quartet on the Middle East, with moderate Arab partners and with all participants in the conflict, must bring about a rapid resumption of the peace negotiations under the umbrella of the United Nations. However, a comprehensive solution also clearly requires reconciliation and, in particular, a reconciliation between the Palestinian factions.

Today we must question the method we have used so far in what we have called the 'peace process'. We could still assume until a few weeks ago that we were on the right track with the negotiations despite the well-known difficult environment and barely discernible progress. The international community and, first and foremost, we, as the European Union, have supported these negotiations through our strong commitment and we have given financial aid to create the basic conditions for establishing a Palestinian state.

But was this commitment politically strong enough? We must ask ourselves this question. In the meantime, we are again in the process of escalation. It is understandable that, in times of crisis management, we tend to think in the short term. We actually need an immediate ceasefire right now and a complete withdrawal of Israeli forces, as required by the UN Security Council.

Experience over recent decades has taught us that peace in the Middle East cannot come from the region alone. However, it is also true that it will not be possible without reconciliation between the hostile parties in the conflict.

Therefore, the international community must be prepared to promote peace in the Middle East more than ever before so that the bitter events of past decades do not remain bitter experiences for decades to come.

International forces can and must help to secure a ceasefire. Therefore, we must all make efforts to ensure that the Egyptian-French plan to institute an international mechanism to secure Gaza's borders will be a success and it must, of course, be dependent as a priority upon a cessation of the smuggling of arms and rockets into the Gaza area. The European Union had already announced in its action strategy paper at the start of the Annapolis process that it is prepared to become involved in this way.

But let me highlight one thing in particular: deployment of European and international security forces may not guarantee a ceasefire in the short term. It must pursue a clear political objective of creating the required trust for the conclusion of peace talks by guaranteeing security for Israelis and Palestinians alike. This means that by the deployment of some troops, which is only viable with a solid mandate, political influence will be increased on all sides in order to find a peaceful solution.

We need not only the repeated commitment to peace which we have so often formulated as our goal in the past. What we need is the willingness not only to aim for peace but to achieve it, and in fact before the hatred built up over decades escalates further and unleashes a conflagration.

In closing, I would like to remind you that 2008 was the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue. I would also like to remind you how much we as the European Parliament have done to make this year a year of hope and we are setting political priorities that emphasise that the clash of cultures is not the law of nature.

Worldwide reactions to the war in Gaza show how quickly attempts at intercultural dialogue can be destroyed when they are overtaken by the reality of the images that we see daily on the news. Worse still is the fact that this reality plays into the hands of extremists and fundamentalists whose goal is not peace but to continue the spiral of confrontation.

Violence breeds more violence. This concept cannot be repeated often enough. Dialogue and negotiations are the only way out of this crisis. Both are not ends in themselves but must be conducted bravely with the aim that the people of Israel and Palestine can live in real security, in peace and with respect for their dignity.

(Applause)

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

4. Composition of Parliament: see Minutes

5. Composition of committees and delegations: see Minutes

6. Data protection (appointment of the European supervisor and the assistant supervisor): see Minutes

7. Signature of acts adopted under codecision: see Minutes

8. Documents received: see Minutes

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

10. Petitions: see Minutes

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

12. Order of business

President. – The final draft of the agenda for this sitting, as agreed by the Conference of Presidents at their meeting on Thursday 8 January 2009, in accordance with Rules 130 and 131 of the Rules of Procedure, has been circulated. It has been requested that this draft be amended as follows.

Monday:

As Mrs Andrikienė cannot be present this evening to present her report on the development of the UN Human Rights Council and the role of the EU, there will be a vote on this report on Wednesday, as scheduled, without a general discussion.

Tuesday: No amendments.

Wednesday:

The Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance has moved to conclude the general discussion on the situation in Gaza with the submission of motions for a resolution. Mr Cohn-Bendit will speak to justify the motion.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, everyone is aware of the situation in Gaza. That we should discuss it here in Parliament is perfectly natural. However, we are calling for the Security Council to take a stand, we are calling for the bodies to take a stand, and for the European Union to take a stand, but we, in Parliament, we debate matters but we do not want to take a

stand. I do however believe that, faced with the urgency of the situation in Gaza, it is extremely important for this House to give its opinion and say exactly what it wants, in order to end the massacres currently taking place in the Middle East. I find it unacceptable that this House should not have the courage or the lucidity to vote in favour of a resolution after our debate. That is why our group is calling for the Conference of Presidents' decision to be reviewed and for the debate that we must hold on the Gaza situation to end in a resolution, one that demonstrates the clear and firm position of this House, of a majority, so that the massacres in Gaza stop. We want a resolution; we must be aware that we have a political responsibility faced with the current situation, and this political responsibility must not be a mere debate, but a resolution, a resolution that clearly states what we want and what we denounce!

Hannes Swoboda, on behalf of the PSE Group. – (DE) Mr President, we have, of course, given this matter a great deal of thought. Perhaps Mr Cohn-Bendit overestimates the significance of a resolution, but with the Security Council's resolution we have a basis which we should support and, as the President of Parliament has already said, we should require both sides to seek peace, to lay down their arms and to comply with the Security Council's resolution. I would, however, just like to add that this must be the gist of our resolution. If this is so, we can support it. In this context we would cooperate and in this context we would support Mr Cohn-Bendit's motion.

Elmar Brok, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the recommendation of the Conference of Presidents is based on great wisdom. We have, today, heard a statement by the President of Parliament who, if I am correct, was supported by all sides of the House. This is an important basic principle and an important statement by Parliament. We will receive a great deal of information over the next few days: through sittings held by the Committee on Foreign Affairs and by delegations and through communications received from the Presidency of the Council and from the Commission. Therefore, we are not in a position to effect a resolution today, which will actually correspond in detail to how things stood on Thursday.

I spent two days last week on the Gaza Strip border and observed a great deal of the suffering of the people on both sides. I believe that a ceasefire alone will not be enough. The ceasefire must be linked to a cessation of weapons smuggling into Gaza in the future. The details of the negotiations taking place in Egypt today, in particular, are of crucial importance. We should not destroy this by a resolution perhaps shaped by emotions. Therefore, I am in favour of the retention of the resolution from the Conference of Presidents.

President. – (Parliament adopted the motion)

The deadlines are set as follows: Motions for resolutions 8 p.m. this evening, amendments and joint motions for resolutions Wednesday 10 a.m.

Thursday: no amendments.

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, I had another comment to make on the debate to follow on the gas dispute between the Ukraine and the Soviet Union and on the crisis... Russia!

(FR) I apologise for bringing up the past, Francis; I did not mean to do so.

(DE) As far as this discussion is concerned: we would just like to establish and hope that all groups can agree that this debate should include a discussion on the fact that Slovakia wishes to illegally reopen a nuclear power station. I only wanted to ...

(Heckling)

You are the right man for the job. You can keep quiet, lad. Quiet. It is you. I only wanted to be sure. We are in Parliament, lad.

President. – Would Mr Cohn-Bendit and Mr Ferber please stop their argument now. You can continue it later. Anything connected with these debates can be addressed in these debates.

Giorgos Dimitrakopoulos (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, as the question of Slovakia and Bulgaria is a serious matter, I too should like to request that you ask the European Commission, which is after all the guardian of the Treaties and the Treaty of Accession, to tell us exactly what is happening and why these two countries took this decision.

President. – The Commission has certainly taken note, so this will be taken into consideration.

(The order of business was adopted)

13. One-minute speeches on matters of political importance

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

Georgios Papastamkos (PPE-DE). - (EL) Mr President, allow me to inform the House about Turkey's offensive behaviour towards Greece.

The constant infringements and violations of Greek airspace, the fighter planes flying low over inhabited Greek islands, the obstruction of safe shipping in Greek territorial waters and the interference in search and rescue operations in the Aegean, for which Greece alone is responsible, and the extensive assistance provided to illegal immigrants by Turkey augur badly for the stability of the area as a whole.

We need to condemn this offensive behaviour and the continuing strategic challenge to the sovereign rights of a Member State of the European Union, namely Greece, on the part of Turkey and send a clear message that its behaviour is jeopardising its European prospects.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE). – (HU) After the discriminatory measures which were introduced in 2004 relating to employees from the new Member States working in the European institutions, and which were ruled unlawful by a decision of the European Court of Justice in 2008, I wish to draw your attention to a new discriminatory decision.

Four and a half years have passed, and yet the nationals of the new Member States still feel like second-class citizens. What has happened, Mr President, is that a competition was announced last year for the post of head of unit of the Hungarian interpreters working at the European Parliament, a post to which the citizen of any Member State was eligible to apply. The head of unit in the interpretation service is responsible not only for administrative tasks but also for overseeing the transposition of European Union terminology into Hungarian.

Mr President, it is appalling that of two eligible candidates, one Hungarian and one British, the British candidate was selected. Could you imagine a post in the French-language service being filled by an English or a Spanish person? Mr President, this is unacceptable discrimination, and is causing serious damage with regard to the translation of European Union documents. On behalf of every new Member State, I wish to register my protest.

President. – You will, of course, receive an answer on this point.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). - Mr President, this afternoon we have listened to yourself and others make statements on the terrible situation in Gaza and on the need for an immediate ceasefire and the withdrawal of Israeli armed forces from Gaza. I must say that, in this context, I agree with Mr Cohn-Bendit that Parliament should take a position – we cannot sit on the fence.

However, in a way it is a bit mundane to speak about bread-and-butter issues, having listened to all that has been said, but of course bread-and-butter issues concern all our citizens. Last weekend in Ireland the announcement by Dell, that it was relocating 2 000 jobs, came as a body-blow to the community in the Mid-West and West of Ireland. At a time when we are experiencing a global financial downturn, this is especially difficult for workers directly employed by Dell and for its suppliers etc.

In this context, the European Globalisation Fund could prove to be especially important to help retrain and reskill workers and to assist in the promotion of entrepreneurship for self-employment. It is crucial that the Irish Government makes an immediate application to the Globalisation Fund, so that workers can have some faith in the future and see that the EU is working to assist all workers and, in this case, those in the West and Mid-West of Ireland.

Ryszard Czarnecki (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, we have just reached an agreement pursuant to which the flow of Russian gas will eventually be restored to several Member States of the Union whose supplies had been cut off. It is worth highlighting the solidarity between the Member States on this matter, although sadly this was not evident from the very outset. The various countries held very different opinions on this issue. Fortunately, however, we made an effort to present a united front at the end.

As we are to debate the subject in two days' time, I should like to highlight two points. Firstly, this issue makes it quite clear that Russia deals with wholly economic issues as if they were purely political instruments. Secondly, this issue also makes it clear that we must develop a common energy policy as a Union. That is what we need, rather than individual energy policies for the largest countries, such as those building pipelines under the Baltic Sea on their own initiative.

László Tőkés (Verts/ALE). – (HU) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in a global era of the unhealthy dominance of Coke and crisps, I wish to raise my voice in defence of Hungarian grape and wine growing in the Carpathian basin, which is of international significance. As a result of incorrectly interpreted EU directives, European funds nowadays go to supporting those who grub up their vineyards, and it is not unusual for those who plant new elite grape varieties to be punished.

The Carpathian basin, within the territory of historical Hungary, was at one time the site of one of the largest grape-growing areas in Europe, extending over some 600 000 hectares. In 1948 there were still 260 000 hectares of wine grapes in Hungary, but today that territory has shrunk to 40 000 hectares. How much longer will the Carpathian basin's wineries, vintners and the natural environment continue to be destroyed in this way?

Wine, wheat, peace! I wish to invoke this Hungarian folk greeting to wish you a blessed new year.

Mary Lou McDonald (GUE/NGL). - Mr President, I rise on the issue of Palestine. I note that in your earlier remarks you have been somewhat coy in your positioning on Israel: 900 Palestinians dead, a third of whom are children, and yet we cannot find it in ourselves in this Chamber to utterly condemn Israeli brutality.

This onslaught is not alone disproportionate; it is entirely unjustified. It is not driven by Israeli security needs; in fact, it is a cynical and clinical attack not on Hamas, but on the Palestinian population. I think that Member States now have a moral obligation to flex the full extent of their diplomatic and political muscle with Israel to end this violence.

Tiptoeing around the Israeli administration will not work; it has never worked. Israel must now understand that there are indeed consequences for its actions. Therefore I call on all MEPs to demand the immediate suspension of the Euro-Med Agreement and indeed all preferential trade arrangements between the EU and Israel. Equally, we must resist any attempt to upgrade relations between the EU and the State of Israel which lays siege on Gaza and brutalises the Palestinian people.

The rhetoric of human rights, which so often echoed this Chamber, must now be honoured in word and deed. That is the only prospect for a successful peace process in the Middle East.

President. – The complexity of this issue can be seen just from the length of time you took for your speech. You exceeded your speaking time by 50%. The debate will take place on Wednesday afternoon.

Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM). - Mr President, my constituency last week was devastated by the announcement, as Mrs Harkin has said, of the loss of almost 2 000 jobs in the Dell factory. This also means the loss of probably 2 000 more jobs that depend on Dell production in Ireland. Dell is moving production to Łódź in Poland with the help of almost EUR 52 million in state aid.

Can the Commission assure me that the state aid, which Poland is using, is within the competition rules of the EU, and can it assure me that sufficient aid from the European Globalisation Fund will be available to prepare the dismissed workforce for new employment?

Dimitar Stoyanov (NI). – (BG) Ladies and gentlemen, two days ago four schools in the city of Burgas found their walls daubed with racist slogans. They had sprayed on their walls things like: 'Turn Bulgarians into soap' and 'Death to the giaours'. 'Giaour' is a derogatory Turkish expression used during the time of the Ottoman Empire to refer to non-Muslim subjects and those of non-Turkish origin. In the Turkish mind a giaour is considered to be subhuman, which makes it the most offensive racist insult in the Turkish language. 'Giaours' is the same word used by the former minister of agriculture Nihat Kabil and the Turkish administrators in the Ministry of Agriculture to refer to the Bulgarians who had joined the department, following which they gave preferential treatment to the Turks.

Ladies and gentlemen, let this incident be a warning to you about what the Turkish mentality is like in the 21st century. This example alone shows that Turkey has no place in the European Union because it is a racist, xenophobic country which supports and promotes racism and xenophobia in neighbouring countries. This

case shows that Bulgarians are not only not the source of hatred, but that they are victims of hatred and ethnic intolerance.

The European Parliament has always taken a vigorous stance against racism and ethnic intolerance. I appeal to you, as Members of this House, to do it once again and support our written declaration condemning Turkish racism against Bulgarians.

Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE). - Thank you Mr President. I commend the efforts of the Czech presidency to handle the present gas crisis but just mediating one crisis after another is not the solution. The EU cannot remain in a babysitter role; that of an *enfant terrible*. One conclusion is clear: counting on a mutually beneficial strategic alliance with Russia as a reliable provider of energy is a strategic miscalculation. The root cause of the current crisis is not Ukraine, but the crisis within Gazprom itself, which has failed to live up to its own commitments.

For eight consecutive years, gas production by Gazprom has been stagnating at the same level. This is the typical result of political state control over production. Not being able to deliver gas at the same time to Russian customers and meet commitments abroad has probably brought Mr Putin to initiate the political crisis and point to Ukraine as a scapegoat. This makes it all the more important for us to concentrate upon finding new energy sources.

Magda Kósáné Kovács (PSE). – (HU) Mr President, fellow Members, the economic crisis that many people initially took to be scare tactics on the part of the media has now reached Europe; it afflicts countries, regions, local communities, enterprises and with them families and workers. Two of our fellow Members have already spoken of this. The consequences of the recession do not affect all of us equally, as the Commission reminds us in its Communication. The negative impact is multiplied exponentially on the fringes of Europe and society.

In order to prevent the present situation from turning the principle of decent work into empty words and to help us avoid an explosion of poverty, we must focus our efforts on our resources. This is why I welcome the Commission's Communication, as well as Commissioner Špidla's dedication to raising awareness and his urging Europe to make efforts to protect the most vulnerable social groups at this time of declining economic activity.

The Commission's differentiated approach gives reason to hope that a unified Europe will not mean enforced uniformity, especially not during a period of crisis. I hope and expect that it will receive the support of the European Parliament in this regard.

Magor Imre Csibi (ALDE). - Mr President, nowadays we are faced with a paradox. Although a majority of European consumers have repeatedly stated that they are against GMOs, surveys show that they do buy GM foods when they are available in supermarkets.

Many consumers are just not aware that GM food is sold in Europe or simply fall into the trap of illegible labels and end up not knowing what they buy.

A possible solution would be to allow the absence of GMO in foods to be mentioned on the label. But currently there are no common provisions on GM-free labelling, leaving the Member States the freedom of choice. This leads to confusion of consumers and distortion of the internal market since, while some countries have already introduced non-GM labelling provisions, others refuse to allow this kind of information to be given.

People want to make food choices based on their own values and not according to safety assessment studies. If we care about consumers' concerns, then we should be transparent all the way and give them a real choice. Therefore I call on the Commission to provide the legal framework for voluntary GM-free labelling at European level.

Bogusław Rogalski (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, I should like to take this opportunity of appealing to the Council to take appropriate action, pursuant to Article 13 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, in order to combat discrimination on the grounds of ethnic origin in Lithuania.

Three politicians from the Polish minority were elected in the recent Lithuanian parliamentary elections. The Lithuanian authorities subsequently tried to deprive them of their parliamentary seats. The reason given is that these persons hold the *Karta Polaka*. This is a document confirming that the holder belongs to the wider Polish nation. It is intended to help preserve Polish culture and national identity amongst persons of Polish origin the world over. The Lithuanian authorities, however, consider that it involves loyalty to a foreign country. This is obviously ridiculous and outrageous. In addition, it amounts to discrimination for reasons

of ethnic origin, and also involves violating the rights of a national minority, which is behaviour unworthy of a Member State of the European Union. I trust the Lithuanian authorities will reflect on the matter.

Daniel Strož (GUE/NGL). – (CS) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Bernd Posselt, who represents the Bavarian CSU party here in Parliament and who also leads the Sudeten German Society has proposed that the Czech Republic abolish the so-called Benes Decrees during the course of its presidency. This is an outrageous demand and one that cannot be fulfilled by the Czech Republic. We surely know that the Decrees came into being after the Second World War in accordance with the views of the victorious powers and they replaced legal standards until a proper parliament was elected. It is therefore not a question of some sort of cancerous growth on European parliamentary order, as he has claimed. In my opinion Mr Posselt's organisation resembles a cancerous growth as it acts in direct opposition to the aims of modern European integration pursued by the EU. While Mr Posselt is attacking the Czech Republic, there are thousands of German citizens living and working there happily and there are large numbers of former Sudeten Germans who have retired there. I am myself an example of the fact that in today's Czech Republic there is no anti-German aggression since I was elected as a German citizen to represent the Czech Republic in this Parliament.

Nicodim Bulzesc (PPE-DE). - Mr President, the gas crisis has left hundreds of thousands of households across 17 European countries without heating during freezing temperatures. Eastern and central Europe have been affected the most by the dispute, which has shut down factories and schools.

Even if Kiev and Moscow sign the EU-brokered deal after hours of talks with EU officials, Gazprom says that the deal to restart gas supplies to Europe via Ukraine will be delayed as it has not received a copy of the agreement.

The team of technical experts sent by the European Commission will check flows into Ukrainian pipelines from Russia and, even if the gas starts to flow in Ukraine, it may take about 36 hours to reach EU Member States. As a result, Europe needs a single policy on energy security in order to avoid future conflicts and it needs to diversify its sources of energy supplies.

I welcome the intervention of Parliament in the dispute and hope that an agreement will be reached as soon as possible in order to avoid a deepening conflict.

Aurelio Juri (PSE). - (SL) Last year we celebrated the 40th anniversary of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty, and the year before that in this House we adopted a resolution which called upon the Bureau, the Council and the Commission to strengthen their efforts towards more effective multilateralism and more stringent implementation of this treaty, which we know has curbed the proliferation of nuclear arsenals, but, unfortunately, failed to bring about a reduction in their numbers. The resolution also called on the United States of America to withdraw their nuclear warheads from European territory and on the United Kingdom and France to halt their nuclear missile programmes.

As I only entered this esteemed House in November last year, may I ask to what extent and in what way these calls have been answered or, rather, how successful these efforts have been, given the fact that a new project for the deployment of a US anti-missile shield in the Czech Republic and Poland is being revived and that this very project is, as anticipated, generating new tensions between the West and Russia, as well as images and threats of a renewed and dangerous nuclear arms race?

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE-DE). – (RO) The debate about the gas crisis has been passionate, including this evening's session.

Every speaker is saying how serious and dangerous the European Union's level of energy dependency is. Everyone is saying the same thing: that the solution is to continue to reduce our dependency on single sources of energy.

We must not forget however about another necessity: to save energy.

It is difficult to say at the moment what the level of energy wastage is in the European Union. Some analysts even mention a figure of a third of total consumption. This means, as an example, that if Romania imports around 14 million tonnes of oil equivalent in Russian gas annually, almost one million tonnes of oil equivalent are wasted annually due to defective insulation in blocks of flats.

Unfortunately, Community legislation is not suitable for supporting the resolution of this problem because it limits incomprehensibly the European funds which can be allocated to projects for renovating heating systems.

I think we should ask ourselves the following question every day: What is simpler? Looking for new sources of energy and new transit routes or remembering that we can use simple methods to save a good part of the energy that is being wasted?

Miloš Koterec (PSE). - (SK) This year we celebrate the 10th anniversary of the euro and on 1 January 2009 Slovakia became the 16th member of the euro area.

My country has surrendered a part of its identity, but it has done so with pride. Just as we treasured our own currency, we have started using the euro and the majority of the Slovak population is quickly beginning to regard it as its own, too. We adopted the euro after only five years of membership in the EU and as Prime Minister Fico said on New Year's Day, we could see the euro as a lucky talisman bringing us stability and the potential for Slovakia to develop even more vigorously in this time of economic crisis. I would like to praise everyone who contributed to the adoption of the euro in Slovakia and to acknowledge the positive attitude of the Slovak public to the new currency.

I wish all Slovaks good luck with the euro as the symbol of an integrated and prosperous Europe.

Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou (PPE-DE). - (EL) Mr President, as no debate is to be held on it in Parliament, I should like to highlight the importance to the European Union of the proposal for a Council directive implementing the Agreement concluded by the European Community Shipowners' Associations and the European Transport Workers' Federation.

This directive, which concerns the work of seamen under the Maritime Labour Convention, will allow seamen in the European Union to secure decent working conditions.

This sector needs to be promoted, because it contributes towards development and productivity. The seas that wash the shores of the European Union are very important to international trade and young people should see a future in seafaring professions and come to the assistance of shipping.

Jörg Leichtfried (PSE). - (DE) Mr President, the background to my speech is the illegal transportation of puppies discovered in Austria at the beginning of October 2008. Since the beginning of October 2008 I have been trying to get speaking time in the one-minute contributions and I am pleased that I have finally succeeded. It is interesting that Mr Rogalski has been allowed to speak three times in the meantime.

However, now to the matter in hand. The Austrian police stopped a truck containing 137 puppies. The vehicle manifested serious defects and the animals' passports were forgeries, as the dogs had not reached the legally required age for transport. The journey started in Slovakia and was due to end in Spain. This case is not unique and it brings to our notice once more that profit-orientated organisations are constantly evading current animal protection provisions in Europe in a criminal fashion. In Europe we really need comprehensive inspections of animal transportation and corresponding threats of fines in the event of non-compliance. The EU must jointly adopt European minimum standards in animal protection, which must be implemented and monitored by all governments. This would also compel those countries, which have been completely inactive in the field of animal protection to date, to introduce specific standards.

Jelko Kacin (ALDE). - (SL) The bloody and relentless massacre of Palestinians in Gaza is a symbol of human powerlessness and double standards and an injustice which cries to heaven. Does the Palestinian death toll really have to reach four figures before international factors use the mediation mechanisms which have been at their disposal from day one of the conflict?

The European Union imagines itself to be an active force in international relations and a global political player. But is it really? Can we actually call ourselves an active force, when the Israeli army, in spite of all its sophisticated intelligence support, attacks a school, which is funded by the European Union, packed with civilians? Can international humanitarian law be said to exist, when the Israeli army forcibly moves Palestinians to a house which it shells intensely the next day?

I have been to Israel many times, including to Sderot, I know a lot about what is going on there, but this Israeli action is disproportionate, excessive and inhumane. This action is immoral, perverted and bizarre, because it essentially constitutes a pre-election campaign. This is a bloody pre-election campaign.

Liam Aylward (UEN). - Mr President, may I take this opportunity to back the case for European Union funding to support the European Special Olympics Games, which are being held in Warsaw in 2010, and the Special Olympics World Games, which are being held in Athens in 2011.

The Commission allocated EUR 5 million in support of the Special Olympics World Games when they were held in Ireland in 2003, which was such a wonderful occasion and a pleasure for so many of us who were present. We in the European Union must be to the forefront in supporting volunteerism in sport.

Let me add that there is a written declaration on this issue that MEPs can sign this week outside the Chamber, and I would urge all colleagues to sign this declaration in support of EU funding for these very important Special Olympics Games.

Jaromír Kohlíček (GUE/NGL). – (CS) Happy New Year, Mr President. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to express my frank amazement over the irony of fate that the Czech government, which is well-known for its specific approach to the question of negotiations with Russia, has not yet torn asunder its veil and heaped ashes upon its head. It has even postponed negotiations with Russia over energy security. I am yet more shocked by the position of the European Commission. It is threatening Slovakia and Bulgaria with sanctions and we have even heard that Mr Cohn-Bendit also recommends sanctions if the decommissioned nuclear power station blocks are brought back into operation. I would like to recommend to the Commissioners and spokesmen of the European Commission that they get some warm clothing, switch off the heating at home and explain to their families that they are acting out of solidarity with the Slovaks and Bulgarians. Or perhaps this was just a bad New Year's joke?

Emmanouíl Angelas (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, I too should like to comment on the question of natural gas, given that we have become witness over the last ten days to the conflict surrounding this issue, a conflict in which many of the Member States of the European Union who are dependent on natural gas for their energy have been caught up, causing problems for citizens, businesses and industry.

Through discussions between the two opposing sides, which have been fraught with suspicion, mistrust and conflicting announcements, and the intervention of the European Presidency and the Commission, it would appear that some sort of a solution has been found.

It is clear that, regardless of intentions and apportionments, the problem may arise again unless measures are taken. We therefore need to examine the question of reformulating the European Union's energy doctrine by adding other sources of energy.

The European Parliament should also send a clear message that the European Union will not be held to ransom and should participate in the debate to plan alternative routes for a safe and continuous supply of natural gas. The objective of reducing energy requirements by 20% by 2020 will not be achieved under unstable and insecure circumstances.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE). – (RO) The European Union must make it a priority to draw up a common energy strategy and an action plan aimed at improving the Union's energy security.

Ukraine's action in cutting off the supply of natural gas to EU Member States has highlighted the EU's dependency on its traditional suppliers. Furthermore, the low temperatures this winter have caused serious operational problems to electrical power suppliers who have registered record consumption levels.

The EU needs to devise a European strategy for modernising its energy grid, boosting energy efficiency and diversifying its energy supply sources. The implementation of the Nabucco project, the construction of liquefied gas terminals in European ports, investments in safer nuclear power stations, boosting energy efficiency and increasing the use of renewable energy must feature among the joint priority actions aimed at increasing the EU's energy security.

The European Commission, along with the European Investment Bank and governments of the Member States, must identify and guarantee the financing of these priority projects.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS KRATSA-TSAGAROPOULOU

Vice-President

Gay Mitchell (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I wish to raise the issue of Zimbabwe. It seems to me that if Zimbabwe is not on our television screens, then we do not really concern ourselves with some of the issues that arise there. Recently we had the case of Jestina Mukoko, Executive Director of the Zimbabwe Peace Project and a board member of the Zimbabwe Human Rights NGO Forum, who was abducted and held incommunicado for 21 days before reappearing at Harare Magistrates Court bearing signs, it might be said, of torture and ill treatment – all for the crime of being a human rights campaigner.

Ms Mukoko is currently being held in solitary confinement at the maximum security prison, and her future, like that of so many campaigners, aid workers and ordinary citizens before her, remains in jeopardy at the hands of the Mugabe regime.

Many words of concern and condemnation have been spoken in this Chamber and in other, national parliaments, yet the nightmare for ordinary Zimbabweans continues unabated. I believe that it is time we reasserted our interest in this and demand from the Council and Commission that action be taken once and for all to bring to an end the criminal activity against people who are campaigning for human rights in Zimbabwe.

Proinsias De Rossa (PSE). - Madam President, I welcome the statement by the President this evening on Gaza and, indeed, the decision of Parliament to have a resolution on the issue to urge an immediate, unilateral ceasefire by all sides in the Gaza conflict. With over 900 now dead, the futility of politics-by-war is painfully evident. You must insist that Israel stop the killing. Gaza is the largest prison in the world, with 1.5 million prisoners; it is now also a slaughterhouse, unfortunately, with men, women and children dying simply because they are Palestinian.

What possible crimes could the Palestinian children, who are dying in this conflict, be guilty of? What possible excuses have we Europeans to continue to do business with Israel while it callously continues to slaughter innocent people? The European Council must stop making excuses, stop the bickering and unite in concerted action which will bring this slaughter to an end. There can be no question of upgrading Europe's relations with Israel so long as it fails to engage in constructive dialogue with all the representatives of the Palestinian people.

Hanna Foltyn-Kubicka (UEN). – (PL) As an organisation of countries bound together by common values, the European Union should use all the resources at its disposal to prevent the spread of hatred. The French operator Eutelsat, however, has seen fit to broadcast a programme from the Al-Aqsa TV station, which has links with Hamas and openly calls for attacks on the civilian population of Israel.

By so doing, Eutelsat has once again demonstrated that ethical business is a concept quite foreign to those responsible for the management of that company, especially if we bear in mind that the independent Chinese television company NTD TV has been prevented from broadcasting for months. Despite appeals from many quarters, the Eutelsat management remains unwilling to revoke its decision, which was in any case taken under pressure from the Chinese Government. The surprising and totally amoral choices made by the management of Eutelsat raise concerns as to whether the intentions of those in charge are purely business-orientated.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). – (PT) Madam President, Israel's attack on Gaza is a war crime and a crime against humanity. What is happening is a tragedy: 900 Palestinians, including large numbers of children, have died, and thousands have been injured.

We have to demand an end to the attack on Gaza. We have to demand an end to Israel's blockade, which is turning Gaza into a concentration camp. That is why we join all those people from every country and every continent who demonstrate against the massacres: all those people from every country and every continent who are angry and go out to the streets and say 'No more crimes!' It is crucial for the European Parliament and other responsible European Union bodies to demand an immediate end to the attack on Gaza and an immediate end to Israel's blockade.

Jaroslav Zvěřina (PPE-DE). – (CS) Thank you, Madam President. I have recently been struck by the way that several Czech insurance companies have discontinued the provision of bonuses paid to women who take out compulsory car insurance policies. This step was justified with reference to the new anti-discrimination law coming into force. We see again and again how some politicians and non-governmental organisations adopt a rather exaggerated position over the question of gender equality. One such exaggeration constitutes a denial of actuarial mathematics which proves day in and day out that men and women behave differently in various aspects of their lives and therefore carry different levels of insurance and other risks. To deny such differences is not to fight for equal rights but rather to fight for the conformity and sameness of both sexes. Such a fight would be both futile and ridiculous. Men and women vary from each other precisely because the two sexes complement each other in a useful and beneficial way in everyday life, in partnerships and in society.

Gerard Batten (IND/DEM). - Madam President, a new opinion poll commissioned by the Campaign for an Independent Britain has just been published. Most of those surveyed said that the European Union is out of

touch, corrupt and is poor value for money; 83% of those polled want UK law to be paramount and, therefore, to revoke the supremacy of EU law; and 71% want a referendum on continued British membership. Unfortunately, there is not much chance of that, given that the Labour Government will not even give them a referendum on the Lisbon Treaty, which it promised in its election manifesto.

The British people want free trade, friendship and cooperation with Europe and the world, not to be governed by the European Union. If there were a genuinely fair referendum that asked the British people if they want ever-closer political and economic integration with the EU or to leave, an overwhelming majority would vote to leave.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). - Madam President, I would like to raise my concerns about the ever-increasing lack of scientific rigour in the draft proposals presented to this Parliament by the Commission and, indeed, in some of the reports and amendments for which we as parliamentarians are responsible. Good science gives way more and more to populist and emotive responses, often dressed up as the precautionary principle.

Take the issue of the plant protection products. We have abandoned the scientific principle of risk assessment. There is no detailed EU impact assessment and there is a lack of scientific definition of endocrine disrupters and an inconsistency of treatment between it and the REACH Directive.

We are bringing EU legislation into international disrepute and undermining its credibility by this growing lack of scientific rigour and lack of good science.

Slavi Binev (NI). - (BG) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the gas crisis which Europe finds itself in at the start of 2009 is quickly assuming the proportions of a disaster for Bulgaria, which does not have an alternative to relief gas supplies. I will not discuss the disgraceful, short-sighted decision taken by the Bulgarian Government that has made my country a hostage in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine, as this is obvious to everyone.

What is more important now is for us to decide what measures to take to overcome the crisis. In this case, this may mean that Bulgaria has to find an alternative so that it can break its external dependence. This is why I believe that it is essential for Europe and Balkan countries, like Bulgaria, to follow the example of Slovakia and make the decision to restart blocks I, II, III and IV at the Kozloduy nuclear power plant. At the moment, this is the only option Bulgaria has, enabling it to gain a modicum of independence and reduce both the direct damage and the damage that will be caused by using fuel oil at the moment as a substitute for gas.

Maria Petre (PPE-DE). - (RO) Given that this year, 2009, has barely started, I would like to tell you all that, in my view, it is not any ordinary year.

2009 marks two decades since the end of the Cold War and since all the walls were knocked down that divided countries and Europe itself into east and west, with freedom and democracy on the one side and totalitarian regimes on the other.

As a Romanian MEP, but also a Romanian citizen who has known what dictatorship is, I believe that these two decades have marked a transition for some of us and acceptance for the rest.

I equally believe that, in spite of the current climate, 2009 should be the year when our actions as well as the European Commission's actions should be targeted at a single Europe for all Europeans. A Europe in which each of its 500 million citizens feels that their rights are guaranteed, that there is a real sense of solidarity, that no one can ever be discriminated against again, that no one needs to ever feel like an outsider or tolerated in a united Europe, that we are all European citizens who feel the same way, no matter where each of us was before 1989.

Mieczysław Edmund Janowski (UEN). - (PL) Madam President, the European Parliament has dealt with matters relating to the environment on many occasions. I should like to highlight an issue brought to my notice by schoolchildren concerned about the natural environment. The rates paid for scrap metal, paper and bottles made of synthetic materials are falling dramatically. It is becoming unprofitable to collect such material. In addition, many cities have done away with the containers into which it can be sorted, or have ceased emptying them.

Recycling paper has been much in the news recently. The current situation in Poland in this regard may be summarised as follows. Those engaged in collecting scrap paper maintain that the prices are too low and that it does not pay to handle it. On the other hand, those who produce paper using recycled paper claim

that the latter is too expensive for them and that the current prices mean it is not worth their while investing in equipment for processing it. I therefore appeal for environmentally conscious action to resolve this problem. As things stand at present, children are collecting scrap paper because the activity has educational value, but the paper is then being dumped on communal tips.

President. - Ladies and gentlemen, I have done my utmost to ensure that as many speakers as possible take the floor.

This item is closed.

14. Framework for Community action to achieve a sustainable use of pesticides - Placing of plant protection products on the market (debate)

President. - The next item is the joint debate on the following reports:

– A6-0443/2008 by Christa Klass, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, on the framework directive to achieve a sustainable use of pesticides (06124/5/2008 – C6-0323/2008 – 2006/0132(COD));

– A6-0444/2008 by Hiltrud Breyer, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, on the placing of plant protection products on the market (11119/8/2008 – C6-0326/2008 – 2006/0136(COD)).

Christa Klaß, rapporteur. – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner Vassiliou, Commissioner Dimas, ladies and gentlemen, today we have the result of many discussions and negotiations, which were, at times, conducted with great emotion, and we will have the opportunity to vote on this tomorrow. We have not made it easy for ourselves. We have struggled to find the right solutions in our negotiations with the Council and with the Commission. We have established that science does not always point us in the right direction with clear findings. Further scientific support will be necessary in order to analyse the effects of this new legislation. First of all, therefore, sincere thanks to all those who contributed to this positive result with constructive proposals, my fellow members here in Parliament, the European Commission, the French Presidency of the Council – it is a pity that the Czech Presidency of the Council is not here this evening – but thanks also to the staff.

With the current Directive on the Sustainable Use of Plant Protection Products we are taking a giant step towards more commonality in European environmental and consumer protection. Sustainability as the overall concept for European agriculture will guarantee healthy food and a healthy environment. For the first time, the handling of plant protection products will be harmonised at European level. The basic principle ‘as much as necessary, as little as possible’ assumes comprehensive, sound knowledge. Plant protection products are, in fact, medicine for plants. They must be used correctly in order to be effective – the right product and the right dosage at the right time. This also includes the consideration as to whether chemical plant protection is necessary or whether mechanical measures would be better. The selection of the best technology and tested application equipment will protect the environment and the user and contribute to the success of the operation through good harvests. The Member States will establish measures in their national action plans to reduce the use of plant protection products.

Risk reduction is the primary objective. The use of the general basic principles of integrated plant protection will become mandatory for the entire European Union from 2014. Compliance with the stipulations of the Water Framework Directive is top priority. The Member States will establish buffer zones adjacent to bodies of water, which must be adapted to the conditions of the soil properties and geographical circumstances. The use of plant protection products by local authorities and in protected areas will be minimised or stopped, if necessary. There are regulations for checking equipment and regular maintenance intervals will be set. Risk reduction means that professional users must obtain sound and ongoing training in the use of plant protection products. Private users, who have no specific training and can cause damage in private gardens through incorrect usage, must be informed by well-trained salespersons on the use and risks when purchasing plant protection products.

This directive will mean that previously differing regulations in the individual Member States will be adjusted to a high, common level. The proposed measures will benefit the environment, consumers and users. Identical conditions throughout the European Union will guarantee identical safety standards and identical production conditions. Substances that are proven to be detrimental to health will not be licensed, on that we are in

agreement. However, a ban must be based on scientifically sound findings and not on political dogmas. Exposure must also be taken into consideration because with pesticides, like many things in life, it is the dosage that creates the poison hazard. A headache tablet is a blessing, but if you take 20 it becomes dangerous, even life-threatening.

We have reached a good compromise. It will harmonise the environment and economic policy and I hope that we can emphasise our requirements in a unanimous vote tomorrow.

I will allow myself just one more technical point, which is to say that an error has crept into Article 14 Paragraph 4. Reference is made to the Internet portal mentioned in Article 4 Paragraph 3; but there is no Paragraph 3 in Article 4. This should be rectified.

Hiltrud Breyer, rapporteur. – (DE) Madam President, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, this agreement represents a milestone, a milestone for European health protection and consumer protection but also for the environment and the economy. First of all, sincere thanks to the shadow rapporteurs for their excellent collaboration. Many thanks also to the staff involved and to the Commission, to you, shadow rapporteur and Mr Dimas, and also the French Presidency of the Council, but also thanks to fellow members who were not intimidated by the completely exaggerated figures from industry.

We have adopted 200 amendments at first reading in the European Parliament and attempted to decisively improve the common position with this agreement. We will end this unscientific, never-ending game of numbers, this hocus-pocus surrounding limit-setting, with the clear cut-off criteria. Nobody can quantify the risk. Therefore, safety can only be achieved with an outright ban. Pesticides and other substances that are carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic for reproduction have no business, no business at all in foodstuffs. We will ensure successful environmental protection with the cut-off for persistent, bioaccumulative toxic (PBT) substances. I am particularly pleased that we have succeeded in implementing and anchoring initial clear criteria for endocrinal substances, and I have confidence in the Commission's responsibility to come up with more criteria in the next four years.

However, I am also particularly pleased that the European Parliament has succeeded in anchoring bee protection as a licensing criterion for the first time. Leading scientists in France and Germany have estimated the economic value of pollinators at EUR 150 billion per annum and the damage at up to EUR 310 billion if we lost bees as pollinators. Therefore, I ask you quite particularly to reject, tomorrow, any amendments that have been submitted. They would dilute this compromise. This is a compromise to which the Council has already given its approval. It used to be common practice not to attempt to attack a joint compromise again. However, I am pleased that we have jointly achieved an improvement for immunotoxic and neurotoxic substances because, in a Europe that purports to be a knowledge-based society, we cannot afford to allow the development of a child's brain to be impaired primarily through neurotoxic substances in the long term. We can say quite clearly yes to harmonisation, however, without restricting the laws of the Member States and we will allow them flexibility with regard to procedures in the matter of licensing.

The triple legal basis also shows the high value we place on health and we have formulated exemptions from the ban with many restrictions, linked to a substitution plan, for example, so that the exception does not become the rule but vice versa. I am also pleased that we have succeeded in including animal protection in this regulation and that we were able to establish more transparency, although I would have expected more courage from the Commission. I hope that we will have more access to the application protocols and be able to introduce an electronic field pass. It is not only a milestone for environmental and consumer protection in Europe, I think it is also a magic moment for Europe. It is a magic moment for Europe because this decision to phase out highly toxic pesticides is unprecedented and it is unique worldwide, and we can thus put the European Union in the fast lane for ground-breaking health protection and Europe will be the trailblazer worldwide.

This regulation will also create added value for citizens who know that the European Union is primarily on the side of consumers and health and has not bowed down to industry. Furthermore, it is also a win-win situation for the industry, which will receive innovation incentives to produce better and safe products in the future.

Stavros Dimas, Member of the Commission. – (EL) Madam President, first of all I should like to thank and congratulate the rapporteur, Mrs Klass, the rapporteur, Mrs Breyer, and the parliamentary Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety on their excellent work on the proposals on the framework directive on a sustainable use of pesticides and to revise and improve the regulation.

The fact that agreement was achieved at second reading is particularly gratifying. This agreement safeguards the environmental integrity of the Commission's initial proposal and sets even more ambitious environmental targets for certain important points.

We are aware of the fact that the use of pesticides is a matter of particular concern to citizens. That is why we needed, firstly, to make the current legislative framework stricter by amending the 1991 Directive on the placing of specific products on the market and, secondly, to plug the gaps at Community level in the use of these products.

In achieving agreement on the directive, the European Union has proven that it has the political will to take effective measures to protect public health and the environment.

Parliament helped to make the directive more ambitious than the Council's common position on certain important points. Now the Member States will be obliged to prepare national action plans with quantitative targets both to limit the risks inherent in the use of pesticides and to reduce the use of certain products.

This was not easy, as the rapporteur had to persuade the Member States that, under certain circumstances, the best way of limiting the risk is to limit the use of specific pesticides, which she did with success. The agreement reached represents significant progress in the protection of public health and the environment in the European Union.

The European Commission is therefore in a position to accept the compromise package of amendments in order to reach agreement on the directive at second reading.

Androulla Vassiliou, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, first of all, I wish to thank the rapporteurs Mrs Klass and Mrs Breyer, the shadow rapporteurs for their constructive approach to the proposal, the French presidency, and all of you who have contributed to the successful conclusion of the second reading of the Commission's proposal.

Plant protection products play an important role in agriculture, horticulture, forestry and gardening. However, they can also have an impact on human health, animal health and the environment. We therefore need to ensure they are regulated in an effective and balanced way.

In the preparation of the initial proposal, the Commission held extensive consultations of stakeholders from all sectors concerned and it carried out a comprehensive impact assessment. The top priority was – and still is – to achieve the highest possible level of protection for human and animal health, and the environment. I am pleased to see that this is also reflected in the outcome of the discussions between the EU institutions.

The draft compromise before us today would strengthen this high level of protection through several provisions. Clear and strict criteria would be set for the approval of active substances. Producers, suppliers and professional users would have to keep records to be made available upon request to third parties, such as neighbours, other residents or the water industry. Member State authorities would have to tighten controls on marketing and use, and the Commission would audit Member States' controls. Duplicative testing on animals would be completely avoided. To promote sustainability in agriculture, safer alternatives would substitute the more hazardous products.

In order to ensure comprehensive information, the Commission may also look into the issue of availability of existing alternative products to substances being known as endocrine disruptors. This would happen, of course, without prejudging the safety requirements of the Regulation.

As part of the overall compromise, I would like to propose the following text in relation to the risk assessment to bees: 'When revising the data requirements for active substances and plant protection products, as referred to in Article 8(1) (b) and (c), the Commission will pay particular attention to study protocols allowing a risk assessment which takes into account the real exposure of bees to these products, in particular through nectar and pollen.'

The draft compromise would create an even safer framework for the use of plant protection products in the European Union, and would strengthen our environmental safeguards, and the protection of our citizens' health. It also reflects the Lisbon Strategy, as it would reduce red tape. For example, the approval procedure would become shorter and more efficient. Furthermore, Member States would no longer work in isolation since mutual recognition of authorisations would become the norm rather than the exception. This should reduce fragmentation of the internal market and create wider availability of pesticides for farmers.

Finally, I would like to emphasise that it is fully compatible with, and complementary to, the proposal for a directive on the sustainable use of pesticides, which falls under the responsibility of my colleague, Commissioner Dimas.

Erna Hennicot-Schoepges, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioners, firstly I should like to thank the rapporteurs, the Commission and the institutions, especially the French Presidency. They have worked hard to reach this compromise, which strikes a balance between human health and agricultural production.

As far as farmers are concerned, harmonising the systems of the three zones will make it easier to access the products, and a fund for minor uses, as envisaged and guaranteed by the Commission, will mean that we have products placed on the market that are designed for minor cultivation and gardening purposes. We therefore have a guarantee that, by 2020, all substances with a proven harmful effect, such as CMRs and endocrine disruptors, will no longer be authorised to be placed on the market.

It follows that this proposal should significantly reduce the diseases and the many types of cancers for which a link to pesticides has already been scientifically proven, together with the degenerative diseases whose effects have also been proven.

One very important aspect that should be pointed out is that every effort will now be made to ensure better compliance with bee protection measures. The Commission has just made a declaration on this point. I should like to know, however, whether the Commission will reconsider Directive 2007/52 under the aspects it has just listed. Emphasis will also be placed on biological control methods and, in this field, this research, which has been supported and financed by the Commission, still needs to be marketed effectively. Moreover I am confident that this text will serve as a welcome and necessary incentive to stimulate research and innovation among the major producers of conventional chemical pesticides.

With regard to the Commission, the report provides for interim reports, meaning that we have a guarantee that monitoring will take place. I hope that the national bodies will also do their best to prove that this is a valid text.

Dan Jørgensen, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DA) Madam President, when the proposal from the Commission was published it prompted a headline in a major Danish newspaper. The front page of the newspaper read 'EU threatens Danish groundwater'. In Denmark, we are very proud of the fact that we have a huge amount of clean groundwater that we can drink completely untreated. Thus, the water that comes out of the tap is groundwater and we can drink it without having to treat it first. If the Commission's proposal were to have been implemented as it was originally presented, it would have meant that in Denmark we would have roughly doubled the number of pesticides on the market. This would very likely have also resulted in many of them seeping down into the groundwater – pesticides that we have currently declined to use because they would seep into the groundwater, with the effect that we would be unable to drink the water before it had been treated. Clearly, it would have been a disaster if the Commission's original proposal had been adopted, and not only for Denmark. Just as we, in my home country, have the groundwater that we want to look after, and that I choose to use as an example here, there are, of course, other countries with various other environmental and health-related matters that they would like to protect and the EU must never force a country to lower its level of protection. I am therefore extremely pleased that we have succeeded – not as a result of the Commission, not as a result of the Council, but as a result of Parliament's efforts – in ensuring a flexibility which, where there are special considerations, allows individual countries to say 'no' to pesticides that they do not want, as of course should be the case.

Another very positive thing that I am extremely pleased we have adopted is that we will now have a ban on, and can phase out, some of the most dangerous substances contained in pesticides. These are substances that have already been prohibited in other applications by means of the regulation, referred to as REACH, that we produced a couple of years ago. These are substances that are so dangerous that we will not permit them in textiles, we will not permit them in electronic goods, we will not permit them in toys or in all manner of other applications, but they are still permitted in pesticides, which then end up in our food! This is, of course, totally unacceptable and I am therefore extremely pleased that we will now be rid of these dangerous substances in pesticides.

A third thing that I would like to mention and that I think is extremely positive and something we can be pleased about is that we have now introduced reduction targets for the individual Member States. We have introduced action plans through which the individual countries are to achieve both a qualitative and quantitative reduction in the use of pesticides. Qualitative refers to the fact that there are clearly some

substances that are more dangerous than others and we should, of course, be particularly careful with these substances, but it is also a good idea to reduce use in the quantitative sense, that is to say the overall use of pesticides, because this will obviously also result in a reduction in the use of these substances that end up in our countryside and in our food.

However, in conclusion I also have to say that there are things that could have been done much better. Neurotoxic substances, for example. These are substances that impair the development of children's brains. The fact that we are not phasing these substances out is, in my opinion, unambitious and a shame. I also think that it is a shame that we have included the possibility of exempting these dangerous substances if industry can demonstrate the need to do this. I think that we should have been more ambitious. However, when it comes to the bottom line, I am pleased and satisfied. This is a victory for health and for the environment.

Anne Laperrouze, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, here we find ourselves, I hope, on the verge of adopting this pesticide package. The two compromise texts that will be put to the vote in this House seem to me to be balanced and worthy of our support, and this for several reasons.

The advances for producers and users are significant: the simplification of the authorisation procedures through, among other things, a division into three zones and the mutual recognition that goes with it. I should have liked to have had only one zone, to guarantee even more consistency on EU territory, but the Member States proved to be a little overcautious. Increased training requirements for sellers and users alike – teaching them how to understand and handle pesticides better – are guarantees not only of better health protection but also of economic gains.

The advances for those who protect animals are also significant, not least through the pooling of data derived from animal testing. The advances for health and environmental protection are very significant; in the long term, the most dangerous substances will be replaced by less harmful ones.

I must address the very controversial issue of endocrine disrupters. Until now there has been no definition of these. No legislative text dealt with this question. The compromise gives the European Commission four years in which to draft science-based proposals for measures intended to define endocrine disrupting properties. This scientific definition will enable products to be classified according to their disruptive or non-disruptive effects and, in fact, will provide the industry with the scientific legal framework that it requires.

The compromise text also takes account of the issue of bees and of their crucial role in the ecosystem. I believe, in fact, that the wording found in the compromise, combined with the European Commission's declaration, represents a major step forward. The effects of active substances not only on the overall development of bees, but also on nectar and pollen, will be taken into account. I should like to reassure certain stakeholders who have cast doubt on the availability of active substances and products. This compromise takes account of their fears. The three-zone system guarantees Member States the possibility of authorising a larger number of products. There is also the possibility of derogations.

As far as minor uses are concerned, Parliament has fought to have the Commission draft proposals in the short term to establish a European fund. There is also the review clause, which calls on the European Commission to analyse the impact of this legislation on the diversification and the competitiveness of agriculture.

Last but not least – and this has been pointed out by my fellow Members – we are encouraging pesticide manufacturers to develop new and effective products that respect human health and environmental protection.

To conclude, I should like to point out that plant protection products are medicines for plants and thus should be used only in a controlled and judicious manner. These texts recognise and are going to further accentuate the importance of integrated production when it comes to sound and sustainable agriculture. The two texts that we have arrived at manage to strike a balance between health and environmental protection and the availability of products for farmers.

I should like to conclude by saying what a pleasure it has been working with you, ladies and gentlemen, on this very sensitive matter. Our work has, I believe, been an exercise in listening, mutual understanding and cooperation. Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, and well done in particular to our two rapporteurs, Mrs Klass and Mrs Breyer, who were excellent negotiators in the search for a compromise with the Council.

Liam Aylward, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – Madam President, we are speaking in this Chamber on the eve of a vote which is a critical one for agriculture, health and environment. Let us be very clear: any one of us legislators who has identified and raised problem issues during this legislation process has done so out of concern for agriculture and future food supply.

Of course I am concerned about any overuse of pesticides and about their effects. There is no doubt that rates of cancer have increased. We have increased residues in our air, water and food, which affect our health and environment. Also note, it is our farmers who are in most direct contact with pesticides. The intention of this legislation, which I applaud, is to protect our citizens' health and environment and agriculture.

As legislators, however, we must always seek out balance and base legislation on sound science. We cannot and should not legislate in the abstract. By moving away from the Commission's original scientific, risk-based approach to a hazard-based one, we fell at the first hurdle. Without a relevant impact assessment, which many of us requested repeatedly, nobody can state exactly how many substances will be banned.

Ireland has a unique temperate but wet climate. This makes our potatoes and winter cereal crops susceptible to weeds and disease such as blight. The removal of an estimated 22 substances, including Mancozeb and Opus, will affect product availability.

So, following the introduction of this legislation in 18 months' time, what is the view? Pesticides which are already on the market under current legislation would remain available until their existing authorisation expires. If in Ireland we can prove that a particular substance which should be withdrawn is necessary to combat a serious danger to plant health and that there is no safer substitute, this substance may be approved for up to five years repeatedly, despite the ban.

In theory this may work. In practice we need to make this work. In the present climate we cannot afford to decrease EU food production and be less competitive in our market-leading potential. We need to push and urge industry to invest in alternative, biologically sound products which are equally if not more effective. We have a precedent. We have all seen the case of the use of a non-chemical, natural, cheap and effective remedy spray used to protect white grapes worldwide.

I welcome Parliament's amendment which goes some way to protect bees, which are crucial for farmers and food supplies through pollination.

Finally, I would ask colleagues to support UEN Amendment 182 and to reject the package Amendment 169. The Commission, the experts, will come up with the proper scientific basis for endocrine disruptors in four years. We cannot prejudice this scientific assessment with a non-scientific-based definition.

Hiltrud Breyer, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, I actually wanted to speak about Mrs Klass's report, but will now take the opportunity to respond to the previous speaker.

You should read the agreement! What you just said was, we have introduced the amendment so that endocrinal substances will not be on the market for a further four years. Your amendment will bring about exactly the opposite situation. Please look at it again. Perhaps you could withdraw your amendment tomorrow, as it conflicts with what you have just said.

What the pesticide industry wants is that we do not set any criteria. Everybody in the House must, of course, ask themselves whether they have prostrated themselves before the pesticide industry or whether they are creating added value for citizens, health and the environment. This is the crux of the matter and nothing else. Otherwise, we have taken all measures to support agriculture as always. The Danish example, in particular, is very impressive: it has succeeded, within twenty years and without loss to agriculture, in halving the use of pesticides, doubling water quality and halving the quantities of pesticide residues.

And now to Mrs Klass, many thanks for your work! However, as a group we would, of course, have liked to have clear objectives and clear timetables. Nevertheless, we hope, of course, that this will be a spur for Member States to generate competition amongst themselves as to who is the most prepared amongst them to really take plant protection and sustainable management seriously.

And, of course, we would have liked more rights for the residents of areas adjacent to agriculture. I also hope, in this connection, that the ground-breaking judicial ruling by the British High Court to clearly encourage and support citizens in their requests for information may perhaps also be used to provide similar access for more citizens in their Member States throughout Europe. I also hope that we have made a little progress towards more transparency.

Roberto Musacchio, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the dialogue on these measures – the pesticides directive and regulation – has been very difficult. Parliament rightly insisted on legislation that would be effective and suitable for the task. There has been debate in Parliament, but above all strong resistance in the Council, and economic powers have been mobilised in force in defence of vested interests.

We should, in fact, be concerned with general interests. Consumers should be able to eat foods uncontaminated by residues, citizens should be able to enjoy an environment unspoilt by these pesticides, and farmers should be able to work safely and towards a new quality of product.

There is an excessive use of chemicals in agriculture that damages all these things – our food, the environment and farmers are all forced to pay a high price for this industrial produce. The abuse of chemicals is linked to an old model of agriculture, where value is placed on quantity rather than quality and where produce becomes disconnected from the land, the seasons and the workers. It is a costly model for everyone, a harmful model also, because of the impact it has on the greenhouse effect. The legislation we are adopting is thus part of a movement to establish a more modern, healthier model of quality agriculture that meets the needs of citizens and the environment, with a greater commitment to labour and generating greater income.

I have to report that our efforts have borne fruit, thanks to the perseverance of both the rapporteurs and all the experts who worked together with their counterparts in the Council. The objective of reducing pesticide use, and not only the dangers associated with it, has been added to the list of commitments to be met under the respective national plans only. This chiefly concerns high-risk substances.

If priority is thus to be given to non-chemical methods, to the defence and integrity of the soil and water supply, avoiding any contamination of common resources such as water, then individual countries must have a sense of this great responsibility to reduce pesticides and move to sustainable use. Aerial spraying is virtually prohibited and – where there are no viable alternatives – local people must be notified in advance of the composition, times, intensity and schedule of the spraying. Progress has thus been made with regard to rights to information too, and access to data via the Internet.

We did want the regulation to abandon the idea of three rigid zones, but the Council did not agree, and so it has been retained. The outcome is nonetheless significant; these are measures that will be adopted to fight the contraband in illegal, counterfeit and dangerous substances, as well as others. We are taking a real step forward and I hope that the parliamentary vote will not come to blows!

Johannes Blokland, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (NL) Madam President, the debate about the sustainable use of plant protection products and their admission on the market is a particularly complex one. It is difficult to strike a balance between good and bad. Whilst chemical substances cause damage to the environment and health, our agriculture cannot function without them, since the risk of crop diseases would increase too much. This, in turn, would have adverse effects on food production and the economy.

The most important task policy-makers and politicians have is to strike a healthy balance between sustainability and agricultural economics. In my view, the present compromise proposals go some way to achieving this balance, I can endorse them. I am delighted, for example, that the system of risk mitigation is being maintained, rather than relying solely on reduction in use alone, as, in practice, the reduction in use on its own does not always guarantee a reduction in risks. There are cases where the quantity of pesticides may be reduced, but when the product is then used in higher concentration levels, this is of little benefit to the environment or our health.

I am also pleased that the admission regulation has not become as restrictive as proposed in this House at first reading. Extra restrictions are now being imposed on the admission of products, and rightly so, but this will not harm agriculture to a disproportionate extent.

I should like to offer my sincere thanks to both rapporteurs for the cooperation and efforts in achieving this result.

Ashley Mote (NI). – Madam President, I have been deluged with messages from growers from all over the south-east of England who regard this proposal as near catastrophic. It will result, they tell me, in smaller crops and in higher prices, and it will open the way for importers who do not have the same criteria imposed upon them. There will be job losses, some units will become non-viable and production will stop. There will be closures in my constituency because there are, in some cases, no alternatives to key substances used by specialist growers.

There has been hopelessly inadequate impact assessment in many countries except my own, and the switch from risk assessment to hazards has already been commented on. If you are going to use hazards as criteria you might as well ban petrol and caffeine. Even the science is against you; pest resistance problems will be aggravated; there will be a loss of biodiversity. Integrated pest programmes have already decreased the need for pesticides. What is important are the options, not quantity. And you seem to have ignored the benefits of crop rotation. You have no right to destroy one of the few sectors of British agriculture still thriving just to appease Danish disinclination to process drinking water from the ground.

Marianne Thyssen (PPE-DE). - (NL) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, our rapporteurs have worked very hard on an agreement that deserves our support, primarily because it seeks to achieve ambitious environmental and health objectives but also because it remains agriculturally-economically rational, which means it has an eye for both the certainty of food supply and the viability of farming in the Union.

As ever, a compromise is about give and take. I still find it difficult to live with the cut-off criteria because I would have preferred to have seen a selection on the basis of a scientifically underpinned risk analysis, although I have to admit that the derogation option keeps things workable.

On the positive side, I would mainly like to highlight the following points. First of all, Member States have a margin when they determine the volume reduction goals. Secondly, the Union has been divided up into three zones where admissions are mutually recognised, which brings us closer to a unified market with less red tape and earlier availability of better plant protection products. Thirdly, I welcome the fact that Member States have sufficient flexibility to determine how buffer zones around watercourses are handled. Finally, what is also to be applauded is that Member States can take measures to make it easier to use plant protection products for minor crops. This is particularly important for countries practising intensive agriculture on small plots of land, and I therefore hope that the fund for minor users will be topped up sufficiently.

A good guideline for the use of plant protection products is: as little and as safely as possible, but as much as is needed for a safe and profitable crop. If we recognise and monitor sensibly, if efforts are made for professional and informed use and if we also take into account that agricultural production takes place within a global market, we strike the right balance, and that is why this compromise receives our support.

Anne Ferreira (PSE). - (FR) Madam President, Commissioners, firstly I should like to thank the rapporteurs. We are conscious today that, although plant protection products have enabled a significant increase in agricultural production, in some instances they also have a very negative impact on health and the environment. That is why, aside from the legislation that will be put in place, there is also an urgent need for an epidemiological register making it possible to measure the impact caused by the use of various pesticides according to the way in which professionals and their families, and, of course, consumers, are exposed to them. In certain regions a particularly rapid increase in various types of cancer has actually been observed. Children of users and, in particular, of farmers, are also affected. Aside from this crucial issue of people's health, it is also the impact on the environment that should be measured. We are already aware of the harmful effects of certain chemical substances on groundwater and rivers. I might also add, on this issue, that I do not believe that the proposal to refer the buffer-zone matter to the various national arbiters is a satisfactory solution. Rather, I believe that the Commission will have to be extremely vigilant regarding this issue.

Today we are also seeing an increase in soil erosion, which could jeopardise the agricultural use of many areas of land across the European Union in the decades to come. The fertility of this land is greatly diminishing. The European Union is reacting to confront these risks; that is good, but it should also support farmers in a move to reduce, if not eliminate, harmful pesticides. The future common agricultural policy should integrate this objective and take better account financially of the link between high-quality production and agriculture. Research into agronomy and ecotoxicology, as well as training for farmers, should be used to support new production methods and should be adapted to the specific characteristics of the territories.

I shall conclude simply by quoting the title of a film that has just come out, which concerns the theme of this evening and which is called: '*Demain nos enfants nous accuseront*' [Tomorrow our children will accuse us].

Mojca Drčar Murko (ALDE). - Madam President, let me join those Members who consider the second-reading agreement a well-balanced compromise, given the complexity of the matter. It shows the way for further improvements in the sector, towards more efficient and safer plant protection products, and is flexible enough to avoid situations in which the ban on certain pesticides would, in the final analysis, reduce the irreproachability of agricultural products.

In particular, I wish to welcome the improvement of the original Commission proposal aimed at avoiding the duplication of tests and studies and promoting non-animal tests.

I hope that this could have an impact on other, related sectors, such as plant protection product data requirements, which are right now moving through their own revision process.

Even if pesticides, in contrast to chemicals, are intended to be toxic and their safety assessment is therefore a special case, it does not mean that redundant animal testing should take place or that scientific knowledge cannot develop in ways that will identify further redundancies and that further potential reduction in animal testing will be possible in future. It should be noted that development and registration of new agricultural pesticides or plant protection products can use upwards of 12 000 animals in dozens of separate and often overlapping tests.

Leopold Józef Rutowicz (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, pesticides are harmful to the environment and to animals. I should like to point out that the conditions in which old pesticides are stored in many countries are such that the products represent a danger to the environment and to human beings. It will be impossible for poor countries to deal with this matter without Union aid.

Sustainable use of pesticides is an important issue. The provision of information and training for users is crucial, as is support for the latter by the agro-technical services. Some experts believe that the quantities of pesticides used are many times greater than is actually needed. This is commonest where small users are concerned, as these people lack the necessary agro-technical knowledge on many subjects.

Other important issues are placing the pesticides on the market, scientific research in this area and all types of action to reduce the impact of pesticides on health and the environment whilst still proving effective. I should like to thank Mrs Klass and Mrs Breyer very much for the reports they have prepared. I should also like to point out that these directives make a great deal of sense, provided that they are effectively implemented and become part of agricultural practice.

The Union for Europe of the Nations Group supports the directive.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE). – (NL) Madam President, the Directive on the sustainable and risk-reducing use of pesticides and the Regulation concerning the placing of pesticides on the market are both extremely necessary and useful. The sustainable production and consumption of food is, after all, a basic human right. There are two compromises between Parliament and the Council before us. Our group will approve both documents, although we would have liked to have seen a firmer end result, of course. In fact, I was rather taken aback by the attitude of, and fierce protests from, the farming lobby and the pesticides industry in relation to this dossier, given that the laws on which we will be voting tomorrow will guarantee better protection of man and the environment and will also, in the end, lead to more innovation and safe replacement products.

Nobody can maintain any longer the criticism levelled by the farming lobby that more than half of pesticides will disappear. In fact, even agricultural organisations now admit that no more than 9% of products will need to disappear, and even then not right away, but phased over a period of several years. Crucial in this matter is, as before, the protection of public health against carcinogenic substances that can bring about changes in DNA, affect fertility or upset hormones. The compromises that are before us on this subject are honourable, with due consideration for the farming world. It has even been agreed that if a specific farming sector is at risk of running into difficulty, a separate plan may be drawn up to give that sector more time.

We are, in my view, presenting an honourable and acceptable compromise between ecology, on the one hand, and agricultural economics, on the other.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ROTHE

Vice-President

Mary Lou McDonald (GUE/NGL). – Madam President, there are plenty of examples of sound EU environmental policies which improve the lives of citizens across the Union and there are, of course, also many examples where unnecessarily bureaucratic measures come from the EU and restrict the potential to sustain our rural economy and way of life. Unfortunately, I believe this pesticide package may fall into the latter category.

In raising my concerns on these measures, I want to make it clear that I do not have industry in mind but rather the farming community – farmers who, I will remind the previous speakers, have as much concern with human health as any other citizen and who bear no malicious intent in that regard.

This package lacks the sufficient scientific rigour which is needed both to defend our health and our economy. The lack of a thorough impact assessment, taking into account effects on our environment, health, economy and the sustainability of our rural communities, is testament to this failure to apply sufficient rigour.

It is my fear that the package will have the opposite effect of the progressive intentions behind it. The well-intentioned attempt to create a more sustainable countryside may ultimately undermine the countryside by imposing overly stringent rules on an already struggling farming population.

I have listened intently to the arguments made unanimously by farmers in Ireland, and I believe that they are right to be concerned with this package and that the long-term interests of our citizens and of the rural communities are not protected in these measures.

The trialogue position does represent an improvement on the proposal but more needs to be done on the Regulation by way of amendment to meet these real concerns.

Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV) Madam President, It is rare for a committed eurosceptic like me to be able to commend a proposal and recommend that the House votes in favour. The reason for this is that we are dealing with cross-border environmental problems and the ability of the internal market to function. Nevertheless, the proposals tend normally to be unreasonably bureaucratic – not so in this case.

This proposal avoids unnecessary bureaucracy. Our rapporteur is on the right track. This report proposes strict and tighter controls. The use of poisons such as alcohol and tobacco must be an individual decision. Collectively, it must be possible for us to be protected against toxicity. That is what is proposed.

The proposal offers flexibility, mutual recognition, division into zones and the national right to prohibit pesticides over and above those included here, which is absolutely excellent. Pesticides that have already been approved are not being withdrawn. I do, in fact, have reservations about that. We should be very strict when it comes to poisons of this kind.

I would like to remind you of what our fellow Member, Mr Mote, said about there being a risk of citizens buying products from other countries once we introduce stricter rules in the EU. I do not believe that that will happen. It is important for it to be stated that a product comes from the EU Member States. People will then choose to buy such a product in particular. I therefore recommend that the House vote in favour of this excellent compromise.

Françoise Grossetête (PPE-DE). – (FR) Madam President, I should of course like to congratulate our rapporteurs, then to commend the agreement that has been reached thanks to the remarkable work that they have accomplished with the help of the European Commission and of the Council. We have here in fact what seems to me to be a particularly important agreement because it is a balanced agreement that takes account of everyone's interests, that is to say, it takes account of the protection of consumers' health – these consumers who become anxious as soon as pesticides are mentioned, who become concerned when they hear that pesticide residues contaminate fruit, vegetables and cereals. The reduction objective contained in the agreement, with the abolition of carcinogenic and genotoxic substances, is therefore very important.

Protecting the environment and biodiversity, with the incorporation of the bee problem, protecting water and protecting our land are of course key aspects. So too is protecting farmers, these farmers who are the first to be affected by the use of such pesticides, who will look on with satisfaction at the harmonisation of legislation and the simplification of procedures, and who will be able to continue to use certain substances that they require for agriculture, but for what we now hope will be a sustainable type of agriculture. The chemical industry, which agriculture needs, also has a duty to evolve and to find alternative solutions. With this text, there can no longer be any confusion between the concepts of danger and of risk. Pesticides are obviously dangerous, but it is their methods of use that determine whether they pose a risk to professionals, consumers and the environment. It is therefore important to ensure that professionals receive proper training, that the general public is given information and that a kind of school of best practice is introduced.

To conclude, I would say that import controls absolutely must be harmonised, since we cannot demand a number of things from our farmers and then continue to bring products into the European Union that do not comply with our legislation. There would be a risk there of unfair competition.

Thomas Wise (NI). - Madam President, I do not know what is going on, but I am reminded of Vladimir Ilyich Lenin, one of whose most famous quotes is 'worse is better'. As I enter the last six months of my tenure in this place, I can see that is just what is happening. Worse is better! It is better from my point of view, because the sooner people realise just how damaging the EU is to their incomes, their livelihoods and food production, then we will be better off out – and that is what I stand for.

This report takes no cognisance of hazard or risk; it cannot identify between the two of them. Let me tell you now. It is icy out there – that is a hazard. There is a risk I will fall over when I walk home. You can legislate for neither of them.

It will damage food production. It will put farmers out of business. It will make food prices higher, particularly in the UK. I will be voting against this because worse is better and, when the message gets out, we in Britain will leave the EU.

Dorette Corbey (PSE). - (NL) Madam President, I should like to thank the rapporteurs and shadow rapporteurs alike. The compromise that has been reached is, to my mind, a step in the direction of more sustainable farming, and this is desperately needed. Needless to say, pesticides play a key role in preventing diseases and plagues of pests, but chemical pesticides also pollute the environment and can be harmful to health. This is why it is important to narrow the chasm between regular and organic farming in a responsible manner. That is precisely what this legislation does, and it does so mainly via three measures that are important in this regard.

First of all, some of the most dangerous chemical pesticides are being banned. Exceptions are allowed where no alternatives are yet available. The cultivation of tulips is not at risk, therefore, but it would not do it any harm if the level of toxins dropped slightly.

Secondly – and this is at least as important – incentives have been included in the legislation to promote the development of more sustainable products and products for minor crops. Minor crops are crops that are only cultivated in small amounts, such as tomatoes, Brussels sprouts and tulips. Many horticulturalists feared that these crops would come under threat as a result of this legislation, but, fortunately, this fear has proved unfounded. Quite the reverse, in fact, given that the regulation provides for the introduction of a special fund for the promotion of research into products that are suitable for minor crops.

A third measure that is also of significance is that Member States should, in this context, make plans to reduce the risks involved in using the remaining chemical pesticides. The use of chemical pesticides is being reduced everywhere, but particularly in sensitive areas, such as close to schools. That, too, is important.

These are all measures that benefit the environment and public health. If it was up to me, I would have banned the neurotoxic substances at the same time, as these can influence the functioning of the human nervous system and so should not be sprayed on agricultural crops.

Frédérique Ries (ALDE). – (FR) Madam President, the people of Europe should be pleased today with the very sound agreement reached by the Commission, the Council and, of course, our rapporteurs, on this issue of pesticides, and, going by what I have heard in this debate, it has been reached in a climate of very intense and particularly effective lobbying in the United Kingdom and in Ireland.

It is a legislative package, then, that reconciles health and the environment with competitiveness and innovation, instead of pitting them against one another, as is all too often the case. It is important to bear in mind that, although the some 800 chemical molecules concerned undeniably play a role in protecting crops against pests, there are many people today who are against exposing populations to avoidable health risks, and I am specifically thinking, of course, of farmers, who are more exposed than others to certain harmful substances, CMRs and endocrine disrupters.

The figures from the WHO are edifying: one million incidences of serious poisoning by pesticides, with some 220 000 deaths each year. It is this philosophy that consists in using chemicals for everything, in causing a cocktail effect and in taking a short-term view of agriculture that is today being called into question. A necessary change of direction is taking place which, tomorrow, if the compromise is of course accepted by our plenary, will formally bring an ambitious, realistic and resolutely modern pesticide policy into the world. It is ambitious, because Europeans want, as we do, to get rid of dangerous products; they also support a ban on aerial spraying and increased protection for public areas. It is realistic, because economic life cycles are respected, two-thirds of the substances placed on the market are safe and are therefore authorised for 10 years, on a renewable basis, and manufacturers have no legitimate cause for concern.

To conclude, Madam President, this pesticide package is modern because the integrated management of pesticides is an essential strand of a new agricultural policy, one that, for Europe, involves having fewer, but better, pesticides.

Zbigniew Krzysztof Kuźmiuk (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, I should like to highlight three issues in the course of the debate on the reports on the sustainable use of pesticides and placing plant protection products on the market.

Firstly, the provisions under discussion only concern two stages of the use of chemical products, namely their placement on the market and their subsequent use. As yet, no appropriate regulations exist concerning the removal of such substances from the market and their disposal. In my country, Poland, the disposal of plant protection products is a major issue. Significant financial support is a priority, rather than additional legal provisions. The local authorities on whose territory the dumps for substances of this type are located require financial aid to be able to dispose of them. Secondly, it would be desirable if, pursuant to the principle of subsidiarity, the individual Member States had the final say concerning confirmation, restriction and denial of authorisation for the use of a chemical product on their market. Thirdly, I would like to express the hope that the solutions adopted in Parliament will create a level playing field for all European farmers in relation to the use of plant protection products. I trust too, that illegal practices involving the trading and use of these products will be reduced to a minimum.

Madeleine Jouye de Grandmaison (GUE/NGL). – (FR) Madam President, the report's proposals are along the right lines, and I should like to commend the rapporteurs on them. Although it is true, as the Commission says, that pesticides mainly concern the common agricultural policy, it is no less true that such a directive should aim to have the environment and public health as its main legal basis. Its scope cannot be reduced to a simple market-harmonisation or competitiveness problem. Proof of this is the case of the French outermost regions of Martinique and Guadeloupe where, in the case of Martinique, 20% of the land, 20% of the island's surface – that is, a surface area of 1 000 km² – have been polluted indefinitely by the chlordecone molecule, the persistence of which is unknown. This is a molecule that has polluted not only the land but also the surface waters, some groundwater areas and the marine waters of the coastal region, greatly damaging our economy. Who is giving thought to the current public health problems? If it is not too late, I would advise Parliament to study the case of Martinique, which France is very aware of.

It is crucial for this directive to bring about a significant reduction in the use of chemical pesticides, not least through the promotion of sustainable alternative solutions such as organic farming and biopesticides. This will be a credit to Parliament. Lastly, let us not forget – and this has been pointed out many times – the ravages of pesticides on fauna, especially bees. It is also important for Parliament to be vigilant concerning free-trade products, in particular agricultural products sourced from countries that are not rigorous in their use of pesticides.

Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM). – Madam President, what we have in common here is a desire to protect health, but we should remember that it is the farmers who produce the good, fresh, nourishing food that is the basis of our health. I come from a very wet country. My farmers struggle continually with fungal infestation. Fungi – unlike insects that come and go – come and stay. To ban, or impose diluted, fungicides could make potato and grain farming impossible in Ireland, but this proposed legislation is already having another effect.

Already in our media there are articles promoting GM potato-growing as an answer to the EU restrictions on pesticides. Which will be more damaging to bees and the environment: the continued responsible use of pesticides as practised by Irish farmers, or GM? We are told pesticides might disrupt DNA. GM is based on disrupting DNA. It is more necessary than ever that we start with a full impact assessment.

Fernand Le Rachinel (NI). – (FR) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, in the wake of the triologue between the Council, Parliament and the Commission, the text adopted on 18 December on the pesticide package seems to be well-balanced.

Indeed it takes account both of the interests of farmers and of the necessary protection of the environment, protected areas included. Having followed this matter closely, I am pleased with the result obtained, as it will allow farmers to pursue their economic activity without being penalised by the total elimination of pesticides and plant protection products, which will be strictly controlled.

I would point out in this regard that the producers of acid fruits and vegetables in my region of Normandy have been at the cutting edge of agro-environmental practices for several years now. Fortunately the Council

and Parliament have found an extremely useful area of agreement in this period of uncertainty, which has been made worse by the CAP's closing balance sheet and by the threats hanging over the agricultural budget.

To conclude, we will always stand by farmers in defending their tool of work and their irreplaceable role in society, which consists first and foremost in feeding their fellow men and then in preserving the countryside and in developing the land to everyone's satisfaction. In the face of the irresponsible pressure exerted by ecologists, it is comforting that common sense has prevailed.

Anja Weisgerber (PPE-DE). - (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, tomorrow we will vote on new regulations on the subject of plant protection, a subject that arouses a great deal of emotion in the populace. This was also reflected in the deliberations in Parliament. We would all like fresh, healthy, local food at affordable prices without hazardous residues from plant protection products. The result achieved in the trialogue will create the preconditions for this. The new Plant Protection Regulation is a great step towards more consumer and health protection.

Priority was given once more to scientific criteria rather than political dogmas when establishing the exemption criteria. The result of the trialogue is a giant step forward compared to the result of our Parliament at the first reading. Almost 80% of all active substances will no longer be affected but only those that constitute a risk to human health or the environment, and this is on a scientific basis. There will also be sufficient plant protection products available for sustainable management in the future. However, substances that are really hazardous will also be banned.

In future, there will no longer be 27 national licensing authorities but only 3 licensing zones for licensing plant protection products. The Member States within these zones must then mutually acknowledge their licences in principle. The new Plant Protection Product Regulation will provide the harmonisation required for a long time with justification in the plant protection product sector. We will then have a uniformly high level of protection without jeopardising sustainable agricultural production within Europe. We will now achieve a real internal market, uniform competitive conditions and a great deal of progress towards health protection. This is wonderful success for consumers and farmers. Thank you very much.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (PSE). - (RO) The use of plant protection products in compliance with efficient farming practices is vital to be able to produce a sufficient quantity of good-quality food, which will offer a high level of protection to the consumer's health and the environment.

Reducing the risks and impact associated with pesticide use and setting targets aimed at reducing how frequently these products are used will help guarantee sustainable farming.

The presence of a high level of pesticides in the food consumed in the European Union results from the dependency on these chemical products which, although necessary to help control any infestation and boost production efficiency, can have adverse effects on public health.

Some Member States, including Romania, are facing a high level of infestation affecting their agricultural land, with pesticide use seeming to be the best method for eliminating the pests.

For this reason, the proposals for implementing integrated pesticide management, the use of alternative substances and risk management will help yield suitable agricultural products which take into account the environment and public health safety, thereby reducing dependency on plant protection products.

At the same time, the large number of pests on Romania's agricultural lands means that we have to use treatments sprayed from airplanes. However, once the directive comes into force, these spray treatments will only be applied when there are no viable alternative solutions to combating the pests, in order to provide the environment with an adequate level of protection.

I am pleased with the compromise result, which has received the backing of the majority of political groups. It will also ensure a balance between the availability of plant protection products and, by implication, a sufficient quantity of food products, as well as help maintain European farmers' competitiveness and increase the level of protection for the environment and health.

Holger Krahmer (ALDE). - (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, plant protection products were, and still are, essential agricultural resources. Farmers require a minimum selection of plant protection products because it is a matter of protecting the indigenous cultural landscape, producing top-quality food and protecting resources.

Our debates about chemicals are too often conducted on a very irrational level. We must think and act rationally if we are to achieve sensible results. The effects of Parliament's original position would have been fatal: a blanket ban on plant protection products would result in lower agricultural yields and, ultimately, rising food prices. Therefore, I am happy that an acceptable compromise was found in the triologue negotiations. It is welcome that we have retained the three-zone ruling even with considerable exemptions for Member States. A courageous step to a consistent internal market solution would look different at this stage:

Alongside the acceptable compromises achieved, we should not second guess a final definition of endocrinically effective substances but actually allow the Commission its four years to produce a scientifically-based definition. Otherwise, we will overstretch the precautionary principle here.

I find it regrettable that we are not permitting any impact assessment of the agreement now reached.

Janusz Wojciechowski (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, our work on a further series of tasks aimed at regulating issues important for human health within the European Union is drawing to a close. I believe that the compromises we hope to agree on are sound. They should ensure that the restrictions introduced will promote health without threatening the development of European agriculture.

It is important to bear in mind, however, that all such changes aimed at tightening up safety conditions in agriculture result in significant cost increases. The latter have to be borne by our farmers, who are simultaneously being required to improve their competitiveness on global markets. Our farmers will have to pay more for safer pesticides. I shall reiterate what I have said in the House on many previous occasions. By all means let us introduce high standards for our farmers and food producers. Let us also, however, impose those same standards on importers of food from outside the Union, otherwise our efforts to raise standards will prove counterproductive.

Jim Allister (NI). - Madam President, I do not accept that we have yet got a balanced package on this matter. For me this debate highlights two follies: first the abject folly of the EU, without pausing for even an impact assessment, dashing down the road of banning multiple plant protection products, not caring that there are no substitutes and that indigenous food production will drastically suffer, particularly in the cereal and vegetable sector, and thereby forcing ever-increasing dependence upon imports from countries who care nothing about these things.

Madam President, I have heard much talk in this debate about science, but what sort of science is it that does not subject itself to proper impact assessment?

The second folly is that of my country in particular, which is perhaps the most affected by these proposals, having subjected itself to qualified majority voting in the Council on these matters to the point where we are now probably going to be impotent to resist them. It is due to the idiocy of subjecting ourselves to qualified majority voting that we find ourselves in this position, and yet some under Lisbon would say we should hand over more and more subjects to that category.

Richard Seeber (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, this is a balanced compromise and therefore I will support it. I would also like to say thank you, at this point, to all those involved. The dossier was, as we are hearing in this debate, created with a great deal of emotion, but nevertheless it succeeded in reconciling the different protection aims which we are pursuing with this legislation.

Europe purports to be one of the most advanced plant protection legislative powers worldwide and that is a great plus. It was important for us to find a balance between the protection aims in question and health protection, the internal market goals and, of course, environmental protection, but a balanced result between the specific protection aims has also been achieved. It was important for us to observe the various principles, for example, that the whole thing was based on facts and scientific principles and not on emotions, secondly, that we stayed with the risk-based approach and not the hazard-based approach as before. This is extremely important for the practicability of the whole legislative project and for its implementation at a later date.

At the same time, it should be remembered that we do not give preferential treatment to imports in the implementation and disadvantage national or European production. But in this instance the Commission still has a great task ahead of it. These principles were taken into consideration in a balanced manner, overall. Therefore, we can live with the compromise. As far as the details are concerned, it is particularly important for me that Member States are given the necessary flexibility and subsidiarity for groundwater protection, so that they are in a position to be able to respond to their specific circumstances. The Netherlands cannot

be compared with Germany or with Malta or Greece in this instance. It is also important that the use of pesticides in Natura 2000 areas and in bird sanctuaries is reduced to a minimum. Member States will have sufficient room to manoeuvre to implement this accordingly. However, this is a compromise which should be supported by everybody.

Bogdan Golik (PSE). – (PL) Madam President, I should like to begin by congratulating the rapporteurs on their excellent reports. Time is short, so I shall only refer to the report by Mrs Klass and highlight certain shortcomings of the proposed directive.

The directive lays down a training and certification system for distributors and professional users of pesticides. The proposed arrangements should, however, provide for mutual recognition between Member States of certificates confirming completion of training in the use of pesticides. The directive also retains the regulations of the system of technical control and maintenance of equipment for the application of pesticides based on national legislation. I believe it would be appropriate to regulate this matter at Community level. If such control were based on international provisions there would be every reason for mutual recognition of the results by the Member States. This is particularly relevant in relation to the exploitation of fields located in borderlands and to official plant protection action. One final reservation I should like to mention is the failure to take account of the special circumstances of forest protection. Forests cannot be maintained without aerial spraying.

Lambert van Nistelrooij (PPE-DE). – (NL) Madam President, as a Dutch MEP, I followed this legislation with due attention and care. In my low-lying country, the situation is very specific. Unlike other areas in Europe, it is impossible to work with buffer zones prescribed by Europe along all water courses. This would not work. It would make normal sustainable production in farming and horticulture impossible. The Netherlands, however, is also known for its minor crops, including tulips, onions and chicory. This is why we should pay specific attention to how the compromise is to be worded. The compromise that is now being struck is a great improvement on the one in Mrs Breyer's proposal, which was the subject of vote in the Commission. As a member of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, I voted against on that occasion. There are now sound transitional provisions which, in combination with innovation and replacement products, can help industry along. Moreover, this fund for minor crops that is about to be introduced will give these alternatives a shot in the arm. Also, the three regulations, the three zones in Europe for recognition and admission are also much better aligned with actual practice.

I should like to add one area of concern, namely the admission of products from outside the European Union. We lead the way when it comes to striking a good balance between public health and practical applicability, but what happens with external imports? This competitive position, along with the parallel import and parallel trade should, to my mind, be raised in the WTO, where matters of this kind are discussed.

We can endorse the proposal. I should like to thank the rapporteurs and particularly Mrs Klass and Mrs Hennicot-Schoepges for their efforts in this respect. All that remains is this one area of concern that matters to farmers, namely we are practising sustainable farming, but what about everyone else? This problem remains unresolved for the time being, and I would appreciate hearing your reaction to this.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE). – (HU) Fellow Members, food security is a major goal of the European Union, but this is a poor compromise. Hungary will oppose this report in Council, and the Hungarian Members of the European Parliament do likewise, because it is damaging to European agriculture.

We face two particularly important problems. The zone system is artificial and contrary to the European Union's principle of subsidiarity, and, as the remarks of my fellow Member from the Netherlands have just demonstrated, it makes flexible response impossible. It is further harmful to European agriculture because the level of risks increases, the danger of resistance increases, production costs rise, and because, as many of my fellow Members have mentioned, we will not be able to monitor the products of third countries. For this reason, this directive poses extremely serious dangers.

Finally, the consequence of radical environmentalist perspectives is that restrictions on plant protection products will make way for GMOs, which would not be desirable in Europe.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Madam President, I would like to thank those who worked on these two important reports. One would imagine from the contributions of some here this evening that the EU had absolutely no control currently on the marketing and use of these chemicals – we do! We have strict rules at the moment and, indeed, rules on residues and food. So I bow to neither side nor extreme of this debate

this evening, particularly those who fail to see the need for plant protection products in food production and those who say that these two pieces of legislation are a disaster for farming and the food production in Europe.

I am a bit concerned about the comments of Commissioner Dimas when he says that people are worried about pesticides. Yes, that may be the case, but the question is: how justified are these worries? What have you done as the Commission to point out to consumers that the vast bulk of our food is produced using products to give us quality, safe food? Yes, some ingredients used in chemicals are very hazardous, but the risks of using them depend on how they are used and depend on compliance with maximum residue levels (MRLs) in our food. As far as I am concerned, those who use them are well-trained, in my experience, and we need perhaps to step up the training in other Member States.

Twenty-two substances are on the way out; in Ireland and the UK there are huge concerns about cereal production and potatoes. The questions are: will the agrochemical industry respond and produce new products? The Commission does not have the answer to that question. Will the derogations work? What happens if there are no alternatives? I think that that needs to be addressed, because we in Ireland want to continue producing cereals and potatoes. The question of imported food is a very real one, and I beg for five seconds extra on it. If the Commission would work with EU food producers on this, we could make progress. It is just not tenable that the Commission can sit here and say that we will ban the use of substances in Europe but that those outside the European Union can continue to send us food using those substances. It is not a competitive position, it is not tenable, and I ask you to address it here this evening.

Pilar Ayuso (PPE-DE). – (ES) Madam President, I would like to make reference to the Breyer report. It must be said that European farmers are fully aware that particular attention must be paid to human health and to the protection of the environment when using plant protection products. However, the industry is deeply concerned because the European Parliament does not understand the impact that this regulation may have in the future.

Assessments of its potential impact indicate that, due to the unavailability of plant protection products in the future, it is going to be very difficult to control pests and diseases that affect the cultivation of many foods – specifically, all Mediterranean produce – as well as the cultivation of ornamental plants and cut flowers.

I am fully aware that the agreement adopted in the trialogue was the result of hard negotiation and I therefore have to acknowledge the work the rapporteurs have done. Nevertheless, it must be recognised that the temporary definition of endocrine disrupters will result in the disappearance of a large number of active substances, particularly insecticides, which are of utmost importance to farming.

The producers must have at their disposal a sufficient quantity of active substances in order to effectively and safely combat any disease or pest affecting their plants, bearing in mind that often the danger lies not in the product itself but in its misuse.

For these reasons, the Spanish delegation of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats supports the proposals requesting an impact assessment and will vote in favour of Mr Sturdy's amendments – which I have signed myself – relating to endocrine disrupters, and those in support of plant protection products being made available in an emergency.

Furthermore, if this regulation is adopted in the terms of the agreement reached, the outcome will be a reduction in food production and a rise in prices, which will result in our importing those same foods that we do not produce treated with the very products we are banning.

Robert Sturdy (PPE-DE). - Madam President, on the Breyer report, I say to the Commission, why are you against an impact assessment? What is so vital or of so much concern that the Commission are opposed to an impact assessment?

There is no scientific evidence to suggest that some of the products that we have been using are dangerous to public health. Some of them are, but there are quite a few you propose to take off the menu that are not dangerous. I am thinking particularly here of one called Triasol which is vitally important to the production of wheat within the European Union. You have failed, and I mean this quite clearly, you the Commission have failed the general public when you failed to stop GMOs coming into the European Union, and the Commission admits this. You have admitted the fact that you have failed to stop GMOs coming into Europe. You failed when it came to the report that I did on maximum residue levels. We have a member here from DG SANCO – the Commissioner is busy talking at the moment, but when she has stopped talking she might

just listen to what I have got to say. They have failed to control imports coming in with maximum residue levels of pesticides. They are being found on supermarket shelves.

So, if we are going to ban these products within the European Union, what are you going to do about the imports coming in? Are you just going to say: well, it does not really matter – these products are going to be coming in anyway? Let us leave it and just assume that people will not bother about it?

Farmers throughout the European Union have been the most responsible people when it comes to producing food and putting this legislation in place basically means saying to them that they are fools and they are not interested. No farmer in his right mind would use a chemical which is dangerous to public health. We have done a huge amount of surveys on this.

I leave you with one or two last thoughts on this. We are about to ban battery cages for the production of eggs and yet you will give a derogation on that. Yet that is fairly important to people. I worry about the fact that you, the Commission, have failed so far to put in place all the legislation which we have. It is vitally important here that you give the farmers the opportunity to prove themselves and prove the fact that these products are safe.

Alojz Peterle (PPE-DE). - (SL) There are some alarming health trends which are largely due to the irresponsible use of pesticides. It is clear that an increase in health and a decrease in incidences of cancer is not possible when our food is becoming increasingly poisoned. I am talking about one of the key environmental and health issues, and that is why only a change in the development paradigm can help us, not mere cosmetic actions.

The work carried out by my colleague Mrs Klass and fellow Member Mrs Breyer, in conjunction with shadow rapporteurs, is a step in the right direction, and I wish to express my full appreciation for that. I am pleased to note that both reports identify a number of fronts for action, while also addressing the manufacturers, dealers and users of pesticides. At the same time, however, we request the introduction of national action plans with quantified objectives.

It seems to me very significant that the notification of neighbours has been included, as this could make an important difference, not only for humans, but also, in particular, for bees. This means that we can easily prevent harm, simply by focusing on those who might be causing it. In this directive it is stipulated that Member States may include provisions on the notification of neighbours in their national action plans. I would rather that it were stipulated that they must do this.

I am convinced that it is possible to allow plant protection with non-chemical, that is biological and mechanical, products to play a bigger role.

Neil Parish (PPE-DE). - Madam President, Commissioners, can I say to you that less than a year ago we were debating in this Chamber what we were going to do about global food security, and was there enough food in the world, and we were terribly worried about it. Here we are, less than a year later, debating this legislation tonight, which has the potential of actually reducing food production in the European Union; and there is a morality about producing food because what you must remember is that if we in Europe do not produce food we can probably pay for it, but the developing world cannot.

Much of this legislation will affect our crops – not only wheat, as Robert Sturdy has said, but potatoes in particular. We have had two of the worst summers that I have ever seen in the last two years in northern Europe. We have needed fungicides to reduce blight and actually grow the potatoes. And if people in Europe do not eat potatoes, what do they eat, Commissioners? They eat rice and they eat pasta both of which – and certainly rice – the developing world is very short of.

Further to what Robert Sturdy has said, many of these pesticides and fungicides we are using, if they are used properly and you have the proper withdrawal period, pose no problems, and by using these particular chemicals we can produce very good food. And if you stand and tell me that you will stop imported food coming in that has been actually sprayed with these particular types of chemicals – you will not! For the simple reason that, if they had been properly applied, you can actually test your wheat as much as you like as it comes through the port of Rotterdam, but you will find no residue there. So I think we really do have to wake up to the fact that we in Europe need to produce food and we need to produce it safely, make sure that we reduce the amount of chemicals we use, which we are already doing, and we have got to make sure that we are training farmers to spray properly, which again we are also doing.

So, I would urge you: please, have a proper impact assessment, because it was two years ago you did your impact assessment. We have had two of the wettest summers on record; it is time for you to look again. We really do urge you to have a proper impact assessment.

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). - Madam President, Mr Struan Stevenson has offered me his two minutes as he is unable to be here. May I take it as PPE-DE time?

President. – My pleasure!

Avril Doyle (PPE-DE). - Madam President, exaggerated claims have made it difficult to ascertain fact from fiction at different stages of this difficult debate. Yes, there is a need to control the use of agrochemicals – we all accept that – and, if not used sustainably, they can be hazardous to the user and the environment. But, if used sustainably, and if the maximum residue levels and withdrawal period are respected, they are of minimum risk, and of none at all to the consumer.

The proposal to base decisions for approval of an active substance on the intrinsic properties of the substance – the hazard-based approach – rather than basing it on the scientific principle of risk assessment is a major concern.

Alcohol, pure alcohol, is a hazard. If you drink pure alcohol, we know what happens. But when sufficiently diluted at 4% or 12% or whatever – when used sustainably – there is minimum risk. May I say that these are two different issues.

The EU impact assessment has been referred to. The scientific definition, and lack thereof, of endocrine disruptors has already been referred to. However, the positive note is that the derogation period will allow industry to invest in much-needed R&D and to develop new products and viable alternatives. I would invite the agrochemical industry and their CERP community to look into and invest in this area.

The anomaly of allowing imported food products using plant protection products generally, while we will not allow our farmers to use them, continues to be one of the mysteries and one of the major problems we have with legislation of this sort. However, on balance I think a lot of improvement is being made from the original proposal and I am inclined to support it.

Colm Burke (PPE-DE). - Madam President, I wish to highlight the importance of explaining to affected stakeholders early on in the legislative process the reasons why it is necessary to regulate.

As a representative of a predominantly rural constituency, I have received a considerable number of representations from highly concerned constituents in the farming community on this particular dossier.

There is a general perception amongst this community that regulations are being arbitrarily handed down from Brussels without any input from the bottom up. Therefore, I firmly believe that Member State governments need to do a lot more explaining of these matters with affected stakeholders, rather than taking the easy route of foisting the responsibility on the so-called Brussels bureaucrats. After all, it is the Member States that have to implement these measures in the final instance, and it is the Member States that have the resources in terms of local representatives to explain these matters to farmers.

It is important that those who are producing food within the EU are not over-regulated compared to those who bring their produce onto the market from outside the EU. Any proposal must have balance for consumers, farmers and the environment, but we must also make sure that the correct information is made available to all of the stakeholders.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE). – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, as a doctor I am acutely aware that it is our duty to European consumers to eliminate crop treatment substances that are shown to be harmful on the basis of scientific evidence. At the same time I appreciate that the rapporteurs have managed to find a balanced solution to the new regulation which will motivate industry to seek and develop safer alternative pesticides. Until then it will be necessary to grant the exemptions that are needed by countries with wet climates and southern countries simply must understand this. I insist that the Member States and also the Commission perform thorough and uncompromising checks to ensure that food and flowers imported from countries outside the European Union have not been treated with banned pesticides and fungicides. It is not simply a matter of measuring levels of residues in food. We must not permit such unequal terms of competition for European farmers. I also agree that the Commission should be criticised for failing to carry out an impact study as a result of which we are unfortunately unable to respond to all of the concerns raised by citizens over this regulation, although I am essentially in favour of it.

Gerard Batten (IND/DEM). - Madam President, the common agricultural policy has done enormous damage to British agriculture at enormous financial and economic cost.

Now we have these proposals on pesticides. It is estimated that this directive could mean the banning of 15% of pesticides. It is estimated that such a ban would cut wheat yield by 26% to 62%, potato yield by 22% to 53% and some other vegetable yields by 25% to 77%. This will have the effect of sending retail prices soaring, affecting worst those least able to pay.

I wonder whether the rapporteurs could give us the identity of just one person afflicted by, or who has died from, the effects of these pesticides? Probably not! But I could tell you of lots of my constituents who cannot afford to pay more for their food bills.

Péter Olajos (PPE-DE). - (HU) I am pleased that the Directive on the use of plant protection products has essentially placed this matter within the competence of Member States, especially as regards the size and designation of the buffer zone. I am in favour of prescribing action plans at national level and support the proposal that the law should put the reduction in the use of such products at its core. I am also pleased with the compromise reached on aerial spraying.

As regards the Directive concerning the placing of plant protection products on the market, the proposal is fundamentally sound inasmuch as it addresses the prohibition and gradual replacement of products that have seriously harmful effects on human health. At the same time, monitoring materials arriving from third countries may raise problems.

I consider the authorisation of plant protection products in a 3-zone system unacceptable. One does not need to be a plant protection expert to be horrified at the thought that Hungary, for instance, would fall within the same zone as Ireland, which has very different weather and agricultural production conditions.

Reinhard Rack (PPE-DE). - (DE) Madam President, I would like to address a subject which has not yet been discussed today in this connection. At the end of the day, we have again reached what it is to be hoped is a reasonable compromise in Europe. But what have we done along the way? Let us remember the discussions over many months with some extreme accusations by one side against the other and vice versa. All this has been devoured by the media with great enthusiasm. All that in the media has led to consumers being undermined and everyone agreeing again that 'Europe is doing everything wrong' and 'Europe is against rather than for the citizens'. Now, at the end of the day, we have reached a halfway reasonable solution, a compromise solution, but still one on which there will be a great deal of agreement. What will be left then, on average? Little to nothing!

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). - (PL) This is the first time the European Commission, the Council and the Parliament have adopted such a thorough and wide-ranging approach to provisions concerning the quality and safety of food. Tomorrow's vote in Parliament will conclude three years of work. Our task is to ensure that provisions are clear, safe, and knowledge-based, especially as regards such a sensitive area as food production. That is why, together with a group of Members, we are highlighting the need for ongoing monitoring of the effects of the regulation adopted regarding the use of pesticides.

We maintain that provisions based on sound knowledge will create trust amongst consumers concerning the use of pesticides on a scientific basis. The compromise reached will help improve the condition of the population's health, but will increase production costs. We should keep that in mind when discussing financial resources for the common agricultural policy. We also wish to enquire whether imported food will comply with the strict provisions that apply within the Union. I appeal for support for Amendment 179, Amendment 180 and Amendment 181, which we tabled jointly with other Members.

James Nicholson (PPE-DE). - Madam President, I have to say I have grave concerns about this proposal that is before us here tonight and the effects it will have on the future of our agricultural industry.

I want to put on record that I support the amendments put forward by Mr Sturdy, which I have signed, and which I am happy to support. I think they will at least help give the industry some support in the future.

Yes, we do need and we do require legislation, but it must be good legislation. We do not need to damage production in the process. We need a strong impact assessment to know what effects this will have, and this is what is required and what is needed, and this we do not have at present. We must have more facts and not fiction, and we certainly should dwell on the facts.

There is no point in Europe legislating itself out of business because we cannot control what is imported in. This is where the Commission have total double standards on what they impose within the European Union and what they allow into the European Union, for all that will happen is that people will go outside.

Stavros Dimas, *Member of the Commission.* – (EL) Madam President, I should like to thank everyone who took the floor during today's debate for their very constructive speeches. On the basis of the agreed text, which is a compromise and a very successful compromise, the Member States are obliged to prepare national action plans setting out quantitative targets to limit risks.

Under these national action plans, the Member States are also obliged to monitor the use of pesticides which have on occasion caused specific problems and to set targets for reducing the use of certain pesticides. This represents significant progress which, in addition to protecting the health of European citizens and the environment, will bring about financial benefits, due to the reduction in national health spending, and the benefit of a reduction in the use of pesticides under the new legislation.

Apart from national action plans, the proposed compromise package also contains a number of other important aspects. The principle of prevention must be applied. Within the framework of integrated pest management, priority is given to other, non-chemical methods of plant protection.

Protection of residents and bystanders has been improved, in that national action plans may include provisions concerning information for persons who may be exposed to spray drift, while land sprayed from the air must not be adjacent to residential areas.

All pesticide distributors, not just those who sell to professional users, must ensure that some members of their staff have a special certificate of aptitude – which of course, as one Member commented, will be mutually recognised – to provide information on pesticides and are available to provide advice to customers. Only certain categories of small distributors will be exempt from this requirement.

As far as the ban on aerial spraying is concerned, a compromise solution has been found on the processing of exemption requests. Exemptions will follow a two-stage procedure. Firstly, the preparation of a general aerial spraying plan, which will be subject to express approval by the authorities, followed by the submission of special individual requests for aerial spraying, which will be subject to the conditions on which the general plan was approved.

To close, I should like to add that the Commission is satisfied with the outcome of negotiations and is therefore in a position to accept all the proposed compromise amendments.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ROURE

Vice-President

Androulla Vassiliou, *Member of the Commission.* – Madam President, thank you all for your very fruitful participation in this very interesting debate. The Commission has attached particular importance to this file and I have been personally committed to the highest level of public health which it seeks to achieve. There have been long and difficult discussions during the trialogue which the rapporteur has steered with great dedication and skill, and I thank her for that.

The Commission supported the common position and can now support the proposal as it emerges from the second reading. All the innovative aspects of the proposal have been retained, in particular the approval criteria, which will ensure that dangerous substances which pose a high risk to public health are eliminated or substituted by safer alternatives, improved mutual recognition, and the substitution of some products by safer alternatives. Let me reply, however, to some of the comments that have been made here.

According to the Commission's estimate, only 4% of the substances currently on the market would disappear because they are endocrine disruptors and only 2% because they are carcinogenic, mutagenic or toxic to production. The total number of active substances which are currently on the market and which possibly would not be approved under the new regulation is expected to be less than 25 substances.

This evaluation has been confirmed by a report from the Swedish Chemical Agency and is also in line with the revised impact assessment from the UK Pesticides Safety Directorate. Moreover, I would like to point out that the new criteria will apply to substances already approved only upon renewal of their approval, and for most of them the renewal date is 2016. The industry will therefore have ample time to develop other safer substances.

I would also like to make reference to some comments made about imported food. Let me remind you that, as from 2008, we have the regulation on maximum residue levels which is fully applicable. If an active substance is not approved for use in plant reduction products in the EU, the maximum residue level for this substance is set at the level of detection. This MRL is valid for EU production, but also for imported food and feed.

There are, however, several reasons why an active substance could not be approved in the EU, and the possible risk to consumers is only one of them. Others can be linked to environmental issues or the protection of workers, which fall under the sovereignty of third countries where the pesticide is used. In these circumstances the use of the pesticide could not be acceptable for us, but the treated crops would not necessarily pose a risk to EU consumers. The third country which wants to export commodities treated with such substances to the EU may therefore ask for an import tolerance as long as it can submit data proving that there is no risk to human health from the consumption of these commodities and that these data are favourably evaluated by EFSA and formally adopted in EU legislation. This is the position regarding imported goods.

Coming back to the directive which we are hopefully about to adopt, the Commission considers the final compromise to be properly balanced, to achieve the objectives of health and environmental production, as well as to ensure the availability of pesticides to farmers. We now look forward to the formalisation of the second-reading agreement.

This is certainly a very good way for the European Parliament and the Council to start a new year, and good for our citizens as it benefits their health. It is also, we believe, beneficial to our farmers as it ensures their own production through specific measures, such as the promotion of safer products. What was achieved is important. It was achieved by all of us together and serves as an excellent example of how interinstitutional cooperation can directly benefit our citizens.

Christa Kläß, *rapporteur.* – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, it is now possible to identify a sugar cube in Lake Constance using state-of-the-art analysis. However, we must also ask ourselves how we deal with these new discoveries, what we do with them.

We now need objective risk assessments to find a balance between the justified health and environmental requirements and the justified concerns of business and food safety, including within a worldwide comparison.

The questions, which colleagues have asked, have not been adequately answered by the Commission, in my opinion. It is not enough to say that four substances no longer apply or two substances no longer apply and there are only 25 substances in total. No, we wish to have an accurate economic assessment, an assessment that not only fulfils economic criteria but also health criteria. We still need an evaluation. The Commission must now thoroughly analyse the effects of this new legislation so that we know what effect it will have at the end of the day. We must continue to monitor this, as scientific discoveries will always continue.

The compromise which has been reached brings a new direction in European plant protection policy. It brings more common action Europe-wide and it requires targeted measures from Member States, which guarantee the sustainable use of plant protection products.

As rapporteur, I thank you for your support. We have managed to find a good compromise from different starting positions. I would like more positive thinking for the New Year. One thing that can be said is that I did not have enough positive thinking: plant protection products will ensure healthy and sufficient food and a healthy cultural landscape for us in Europe!

Hiltrud Breyer, *rapporteur.* – (DE) Madam President, I, too, would like to give my thanks for a lively debate. I would like to emphasise once again that I am still of the same opinion; this is a milestone for environmental and consumer protection and, most of all, it is a magic moment for Europe. Europe is now in the fast lane. Europe is showing that it is the world's trailblazer. This decision to phase out highly toxic pesticides is unique in the world and the European Union can profit therefore from this.

Now, with regard to the arguments put forward again and again in this debate that the matter of imports has not been clarified: that is incorrect, the matter of imports has indeed been clarified. With the ban on these highly toxic substances, they will become illegal in Europe. That means that when we have imports – let us take fruit and vegetables as an example – these imports must, of course, comply with European legislation and, specifically, by means of the Regulation on Maximum Residue Levels. If substances, such as pesticides, that have been banned in Europe are found in the residue quantity test, then the product is illegal. This means that bananas coming from Costa Rica and treated with carcinogenic substances that we have put on the

index and that are therefore banned are illegal within the European Union. This is clarified quite clearly in the Regulation on Maximum Residue Levels. Therefore, there is no reason whatsoever to encourage further dissent, panic and fear!

All I can do is point out, once again, and thankfully the Commissioner has already highlighted this, that while the initial PSD study indicated that 80% of pesticides would disappear from the market, this figure has been considerably reduced in the meantime. Unfortunately, you did not mention this correction in the PSD study.

Therefore, please stop creating this fear and dissension. Let us now really celebrate the success we are all here hopefully achieving for the benefit of the citizens of Europe, for the environment and for health protection.

(The President cut off the speaker)

President. – Mrs McGuinness, you have a point of order.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE). – Madam President, this is on a point of order, because I think people are talking and not listening.

I heard what the Commissioner said on the food import situation. I think you are missing the point and I think, with respect, our rapporteur is also missing the point. Farmers in Europe will be banned from using particular substances. Their cousins outside the European Union can use these products. We will not find residues in the food that comes in. We are talking about a competitive disadvantage for EU producers. Perhaps at another point, we could address the real world rather than this vague ether we are currently in. Sorry for the anger.

President. – The joint debate is closed.

We are not going to re-open the debate.

Mrs Breyer has the floor.

Hiltrud Breyer, rapporteur. – Madam President, I and the Commissioner both explained the situation very clearly. If you do not listen – or perhaps you do not want to hear that we have solved the problem because it does not fit in with your campaign against this regulation – then I am at a loss! But I will state again that the problem is solved. In the European Union you cannot market a substance that is not allowed to be marketed in the European Union. Full stop.

President. – We are not going to re-open the debate. I would encourage you to continue it in the corridors, if necessary.

The joint debate is closed, and the vote will take place tomorrow.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Nicodim Bulzesc (PPE-DE), in writing. – I support the compromise of the Breyer Report on the placing of plant protection products on the market because it will provide for greater stability and security for farmers and food producers.

However, the compromise agreement states that the new legislation would only gradually replace the existing EU law, and that pesticides already approved under current rules would remain available until their existing authorisation expires. Products that contain hazardous substances are to be replaced within three years if safer alternatives exist.

If voted, the report will be a step towards better health through environmental protection and a means of allowing the EU to move on to a better system without further delays.

Magor Imre Csibi (ALDE), in writing. – (RO) I welcome the compromise text on the sustainable use of pesticides and I would like to congratulate Mrs Klass for the fine work she has done.

In my view, we have before us a balanced text, which will ban the use of certain harmful pesticides, but without harming European farming.

Furthermore, I would like to say how pleased I am to note that among the non-chemical methods of plant protection and pest and crop management suggested, the use of GMOs does not feature as an option. They could have been included among the non-chemical methods.

In this case, an avenue would have opened up in the future for marketing in the EU food products containing GMOs. The compromise text proves to us that this is not the case.

Once again, the European Parliament is saying a categorical NO to the use of GMOs. Therefore, the united voice of 58% of Europe's citizens is making itself heard again. On this occasion, we also have the Member States on our side, represented by the Council.

Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The regulations governing pesticides are important as a means of reducing the risks involved with pesticide use to the population's health and the environment. However, the measures adopted with this aim must be reasonable and take into account both production quality and achieving maximum harvests.

In the current economic crisis, boosting food production may be one solution. As Mrs McGuinness noted in the report presented at the end of last year to the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, the price of wheat has risen by 180% in two years, while food prices in general have risen globally by 83%. These high prices are generated by the stringent standards which we impose on European producers.

Without disputing the need for better regulation of pesticide use, I still feel that one of the measures proposed will lead to a reduction in the number of plant protection products available on the EU market. The upshot of this will be a fall in productivity in certain sectors, such as the cereals sector.

Certain provisions of this legal act will affect producers due to the fact that they entail a ban on the majority of pesticides available on the market, favouring instead the marketing of products regarded as being safer, but much more expensive. Consequently, production costs will grow, which will put farmers from new Member States at the biggest disadvantage.

Rovana Plumb (PSE), in writing. – (RO) If all the players involved approve this recommendation, this will ensure the conditions required to harmonise the principles relating to environmental protection and animal welfare with the efficient operation of the internal market.

The provisions concerning mutual recognition and the zoning system have been accepted by Romania, given that clauses have been included in the text, allowing Member States (MS) to take measures aimed at adapting the terms for authorising plant protection products (PPP) in order to take into account the specific conditions, along with clauses refusing recognition in specific justified cases.

This version is considered therefore to offer sufficient guarantees. This entails the additional benefits of reducing the administration burden as the PPP evaluation will be carried out in only one state within each zone, which will take into account the specific conditions in all MS in the zone.

As a social-democrat MEP, I believe that we need to make sustained efforts to protect the environment, human health and animal welfare, without however compromising agricultural production.

15. Action Plan on Urban Mobility (debate)

President. – The next item is the oral question to the Commission by Mr Costa, on behalf of the Committee on Transport and Tourism, and Mr Galeote, on behalf of the Committee on Regional Development, on the action plan on urban mobility (O-0143/2008 – B6-0002/2009).

Paolo Costa, author. – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the Commission, which you, Mrs Vassiliou, are a part of, has announced the publication of its Action Plan on Urban Mobility several times. The plan was due to be submitted to the Council and Parliament last autumn. The Commission made this commitment at the conclusion, last March, of the consultation on the Green Paper on Urban Mobility, which was launched in 2007, and again in the 2007 Freight Transport Logistics Action Plan, and in its Communication on a strategy for the internalisation of external costs and transport in 2008.

Time has passed, but the action plan is yet to see the light of day. As we near the end of the current legislative term, the Committee on Transport and Tourism, which I represent, is concerned that much of the work put in over the last few years may come to nothing. Can you reassure me, Commissioner, that the action plan is

ready? Can you tell me that it will be made public in the next few weeks, to enable Parliament to finalise its recommendations, as contained in the Rack resolution 'Towards a new culture for urban mobility', passed by this House in July 2008?

Mrs Vassiliou, urban mobility is without doubt an issue affecting the local, and on which local competence will always take precedence over national or Community competence, but that does not mean that it should be tackled without any state or Community intervention whatsoever. Who if not the European Union can and should define the Community's role in this? Who can and should interpret the limits imposed by the principle of subsidiarity in this field?

The Commission's – and therefore the EU's – evasion of this subject does nothing to help solve the problem of urban transport and citizens' mobility, nor the problems of air pollution in cities – we know that 40% of CO₂ emissions are caused by urban transport and that 70% of other transport pollutants are urban. Nor does it help the problems of road safety – we know that 50% of fatal accidents take place in cities – nor those relating to the production of consumers, less able citizens, whose mobility is dependent on public transport.

Can we accept that there should be differences between Member States? Between cities, in standards of protection for the urban environment? In road safety standards in cities? In standards of citizens' access to mobility? Or are they not fundamental rights that the Union should help to guarantee for all Europeans? Well then, we need to establish standards and uniform minimum objectives, but also best practices and financial incentives. We need coordination and innovative projects, and to develop and share reliable and comparable statistics.

If the Union takes it on, will this not help in realising those subsidiary solutions that Member States and local communities have every right to be protective of? Mrs Vassiliou, it may be that you are about to give us a list of good reasons for the delay, and even the failure to present the Action Plan on Urban Mobility. If you want to try and defend the failure to keep this commitment, before you do so, ask yourself – are these genuine reasons and not banal excuses? Do not contribute, Mrs Vassiliou, to the idea – which has become popular recently – that the Commission has become so afraid of disturbing the Member States that it has given up on solving Europeans' problems. It would be a suicidal move for an institution such as the Commission that has not been strengthened by the French Presidency's successful term.

Delivery, delivery, delivery: that is what European citizens want, and for that reason alone they are ready, I believe, or they could be, to look on our institutions with a more friendly eye. The small example of the urban mobility plan could be a real help in addressing this much larger problem.

Androulla Vassiliou, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, first of all I would like to convey the regrets of Vice-President Tajani for not being with us. He is on a very important mission to Japan.

Let me go straight to the point. The Commission remains fully committed to developing an EU policy in the field of urban mobility because it is convinced that, although responsibilities for urban mobility lie primarily with local, regional and national authorities, in some specific areas there is an added value of action at European level.

As a matter of fact, although cities are all different, they face common challenges. The problems in urban mobility are significant and growing and affect many citizens and businesses, which are confronted with traffic safety problems, with limited accessibility of public transport, with congestion and health problems caused by pollution. To illustrate the importance of urban mobility, let me provide you with some figures: 60% of the population lives in urban areas and 85% of the EU GDP is created there. However, cities also generate 40% of CO₂ emissions, and two out of three road accidents take place in urban areas. Finally, congestion, which is one of the main problems that citizens have to face everyday, is responsible for the loss of about 1% of the EU's GDP every year.

Sustainable urban mobility is therefore a key element to achieve our goals with respect to climate change, economic growth and road safety. This is why the Commission has been launching actions in this field since 1995, in order to promote the exchange of best practices. The highlight has been the extremely successful CIVITAS programme that started in 2000.

The 2007 Green Paper 'Towards a new culture in urban mobility' then identified broad areas for potential complementary action at EU level to promote greener and safer cities and smarter and accessible urban transport.

But what can be done concretely at EU level? We can help local authorities to implement related EU policies and to make best use of EU funding. EU-wide dissemination and replication of innovative approaches can give authorities the possibility to achieve more and better results at lower cost.

We can help foster markets for new technologies, for example clean and energy-efficient vehicles, and facilitate harmonised standards for broad market introduction of new technologies. Finally, the EU can guide authorities towards solutions that are interoperable and facilitate smoother functioning of the single market.

The Commission will therefore continue to act, because we think, as a large majority of stakeholders do, that there is much to be gained from working at EU level to support initiatives at the local, regional and national levels.

Now let me answer your question: why the adoption of the Action Plan on Urban Mobility has been delayed. Unfortunately, the conditions were not appropriate for the adoption of a comprehensive action plan by the Commission before the end of 2008.

But my colleague Vice-President Tajani would like to reassure you that he remains committed to working towards the adoption of the Action Plan and to develop an EU policy in the field of urban transport in full respect of the subsidiarity and proportionality principles. To this purpose, it is not the intention of the Commission to propose a one-size-fits-all solution; on the contrary, we would like to develop a toolbox, including short- and medium-term practical actions, in order to provide cities with the tools to address, in an integrated way, specific issues related to urban mobility. Then, it will be up to local authorities to decide what is more suitable for them, according to their own objectives and needs.

In order to address the concerns that might still exist regarding the strategic role of the EU in urban mobility, Vice-President Tajani's intention is to demonstrate with concrete actions how the EU can add value and quality to urban mobility in Europe. On the basis of the responses to the Green Paper and many discussions with stakeholders, a number of actions have been identified and will be launched later this year.

To promote innovative solutions and new technologies, we have already opened a call for proposals, closing at the end of March, which will provide up to 50% funding to the projects selected. Once the Directive on the promotion of clean and energy efficient road transport vehicles comes into force, around March, we will initiate the development of an internet site to facilitate joint clean vehicle procurement.

On information and exchange of approaches, we intend to start up, around April, a website providing information on urban mobility legislation and funding in Europe, as well as on good practice. We will also reflect with stakeholders on the future of our CIVITAS programme and how to build on the vast knowledge and experience generated in the CIVITAS-funded actions.

Finally, to help increasing knowledge on sustainable mobility policies, we will launch a study on aspects related to green zones and a study on the opportunities for making public transport systems more interoperable. We intend also to establish an expert network for considering aspects of urban road pricing and internalisation of external costs.

I am convinced that this package of actions, which will be soon undertaken at EU level, provides an important basis for moving forward in the field of urban mobility.

Reinhard Rack, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, with all due respect to the Commission and to you as a person, you have not really answered Committee Chairman Costa's question. You had already given us a good intimation when you indicated – and this is something that was already evident in the Green Paper on Mobility in the City – that we need common European solutions to a problem that almost all European cities have in one form or another, some quite different and some quite similar. We welcomed that at the time, a few months ago, and we have looked forward eagerly to the proposals from the Commission that we were promised. They have not materialised. And if there was an intimation in your statement, then I have noted it now as follows: there will be no comprehensive action plan. Why not?

If we believe what we hear – and we hear a great deal in this House and in the institutions of this European Union – it means that there is one Member State or perhaps a few Member States who have caused anxiety, and unfortunately, also caused anxiety to this Commission, with the pretext that subsidiarity could be infringed. The European Parliament has stated expressly in its proposals that it does not wish to interfere with subsidiarity. You have emphasised once more that you do not wish to present a uniform plan to suit everyone, but presenting no plan at all is not a solution. Let us take this step, keep this promise! The re-election

of the Commission will not be guaranteed by doing nothing and by one or more Member States not being insulted, but re-election will be guaranteed if something positive is submitted and presented.

Gilles Savary, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, you have just supported us in the initiative that we, the European Parliament, plan to take on this issue. You have just told us that, for obvious reasons, that is, because of the importance of urban transport in the transport field, and because of the objectives of the European climate-change plan, the European Union cannot fail to take an interest in urban transport. Mr Barrault, before you, took the initiative of introducing a Green Paper, with the promise of an action plan. You cannot today deny us this action plan and explain to us that you are implementing it on the quiet, without Parliament's deliberations, without Parliament's control, without any visibility.

It is for this reason that I managed to get my fellow Members – and I must thank them, especially Mr Rack, who did a huge amount of the groundwork – to agree to the European Parliament's doing something completely out of the ordinary and producing the action plan that you do not want to produce, in an own-initiative report, before the elections. This entirely heterodox initiative will carry considerable political weight, since it will involve questions being put to the new European Commissioner for Transport, who will be heard by the Committee on Transport and Tourism, and it will therefore carry a great deal of weight in terms of his approval by the European Parliament. I find it regrettable in fact that, today, the European Commission should give in to any old objection from any old Member State.

And it is precisely because we are concerned about this development, which is an institutional drift, whereby the European Commission has decided no longer to play the Community card, but the strictly intergovernmental one, that we are today validated in our desire to negotiate an action plan among ourselves, to submit it to you and to ensure that the next transport commissioner makes a clear commitment regarding the follow-up action to be taken on it.

Jean Marie Beaupuy, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, with all due respect to your position and to you personally, Commissioner, I should like, if I may, to say two things in response to your speech. You have tried to sidestep the issue and you have done a balancing act.

You have pointed out to us what the various chapters that were due to appear in this action plan were, and I believe that my fellow Members and I can only be pleased to have actually found the bulk of our proposals in this list. You have therefore furnished us with proof that, within the Commission, you possess all the elements needed to publish this action plan in all its parts.

For my part I believe that there could be four explanations to account for your first sentence of part two, which says, if I have correctly understood the translation, that the conditions are not favourable.

Possibility number one: is there a shortage of technical information within the Directorate-General for Transport? The particulars provided by Mr Barrot, within the context of the Green Paper, seem to suggest that, on the contrary, the Commission is very well equipped with technical information.

Possibility number two: you say that the conditions are not favourable. Are some Member States opposed to this plan? As far as I know, though, Commissioner, the Commission is independent of the Member States. I do not for one second believe that you would have bowed to the pressure of certain Member States.

Possibility number three: are there differences of opinion within the Commission itself that would prevent you from submitting this action plan to us? My goodness, I hope not!

Lastly, are you refusing to hold the debate with the current European Parliament so as to postpone it until next year? Given the excellent reports that bolstered our relations with Vice-President Barrot during the drafting of the Green Paper, I dare not believe this.

Commissioner, we are a few weeks away from the elections. This action plan is in my view an excellent example with which to demonstrate to our fellow citizens that, at the same time as it shows respect for subsidiarity, Europe is very in touch with their health problems, and so on, which you have listed.

I deeply regret this delay and, like my fellow Members, I hope that you will be able to remedy it as soon as possible.

Michael Cramer, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the constant delay and your answer, Commissioner, are not acceptable. Time is running out.

Urban traffic plays a key role in the context of climate change. It is responsible for about 70% of all greenhouse gases in cities. The EU will only succeed in achieving its own climate protection goals if it changes its transport policy. The greatest potential lies in the cities because 90% of car journeys made in cities are less than six kilometres long – distances which could easily be covered by taking the train or bus or by cycling or walking.

I hope that the Commission has used the delay to consider how the EU can effectively help governments and cities. There is actually no European added value when the report is as vague and non-binding as the Green Paper and the Rack Report.

We Greens request that EU Cofinancing be redesigned to be environmentally friendly. To date, 60% of EU money has been used for road-building projects, while only 20% goes into public transport and rail. We want at least 40% for rail as decided by Parliament in my report on the first rail package.

Secondly, we only want to grant EU money if cities can present a sustainable mobility plan. Thirdly, we want to increase road safety with a general speed limit of 30 km/h with the possibility for cities to set higher speeds for specific roads independently.

That is not only good for the climate, it will also reduce accidents because 40 000 people die on Europe's roads every year.

Oldřich Vlasák (PPE-DE). – (CS) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, it is clearly a great pity that there has been a delay in the publication of this document and the action plan. Let us not forget that 70% of people in Europe currently live in cities and it must be our aim to secure as soon as possible urban transport which offers greater levels of accessibility, safety and especially reliability while also taking far greater account of the environment. I therefore expect that the published document will not only include new trends but will also evaluate new approaches and measures such as support for healthy forms of transport, for example cycling and walking. Individual communities would then be able to select from this list the most achievable and appropriate options for themselves. In my opinion this is the basic approach. We should ensure support for it, which must of course come from the structural funds in such a way that the resources will serve the desired objective.

Monica Giuntini (PSE). – (IT) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I very much agree with those who have spoken before me: in this day and age, the urban environment plays a fundamental part in all our lives and not just the lives of those who live in cities or large towns.

The data provided by the Commission in the Green Paper 'Towards a new culture for urban mobility' clearly show that 60% of Europeans live in an urban environment, and that these areas generate a large percentage of European GDP. These statistics were also cited by Mrs Vassiliou.

These figures have not changed in recent months, and we must in fact take account of the growing problem of traffic congestion in large cities, as well as the environmental crises that remain a pressing hot topic, just as we cannot overlook Parliament's recent efforts on the climate change package.

There have been steps taken on urban mobility under European Union regional policy, and there are numerous forms of EU funding: in the last parliamentary term, EUR 2 billion were spent on the Regional Development Fund, and a sum of approximately EUR 8 billion has been earmarked for 2007-2013. The Cohesion Fund may also support this work.

I therefore believe it is truly important for the Union to adopt a common policy, an overall action plan, respecting of course the principle of subsidiarity and the authority of Member States and local bodies. The benefits that would stem from this are plain to see, indeed it is hard to understand why a plan of this scope has not been published before now.

This is the position expressed in the oral question tabled by the Chairman of the Committee on Transport and Tourism and supported by the Committee on Regional Development. In view of the fact that we are almost at the end of this parliamentary term, I hope that there will be a re-think and that the Commission will actually publish the Action Plan on Urban Mobility, which will have such a positive impact.

Jan Olbrycht (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, Commissioner, clearly, issues relating to urban transport are very important in terms of both economic development and environmental protection. There can be no doubt of that and it hardly needs to be debated.

Problems of a different nature have arisen, however, in the course of the European Parliament's work on the text of the Green Paper. These problems have already been mentioned and mainly relate to the division of power between local authorities, national authorities and authorities at European level. Doubts have arisen as to whether the European Union should be involved in local matters, or whether it should leave those to national and local authorities.

In this connection, I should also like to draw the attention of the House to the fact that, in the course of this debate, the question also arose as to whether this Green Paper will lead to action that will somehow assist the cities, or whether it will lead to action that will bind the cities to take certain action. We agreed that these actions should be supportive, in other words, that they should involve assistance. The question that now arises in view of the delay is as follows. What was the European Commission aiming at by presenting the Green Paper? What was its long term plan? Did it really wish to engage in dynamic action, or was it merely interested in sounding out opinion on this matter?

In the light of events, it seems to me that, following the initial very sceptical reaction, the Commission slowed down the process of further work considerably and is still considering how to proceed in relation to the action it began. It is high time for unequivocal decisions.

Saïd El Khadraoui (PSE). - (NL) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to endorse what has already been said by my fellow MEPs. I am very disappointed with your response. You stated that the Commission will, of course, come up with a number of proposals concerning urban mobility. Whilst this is self-evident, if you ask me, it is not what we have asked for. What we want is a cohesive vision, an action plan detailing measures and proposals which the Commission will be launching in the next few years so that we can discuss these, not just among ourselves, but also with the public and with any stakeholders and affected parties.

Consequently, I should like to ask you to report to your colleagues after all, to insist that a few matters be reconsidered following this debate, and to come up with a proposal very quickly, before the elections and before this Parliament adjourns for the summer, at any rate.

As our fellow Members have said many times before, urban mobility is something that affects everyone in Europe. In all our cities, we face problems of mobility. At European level, the Union can play a very positive role to resolve this issue and related problems; as an investor in new technologies, as a body that lays down and disseminates new technological standards, as the authority that is, indeed, best placed to spread new ideas and good practices, that can promote the fleshing out of mobility plans, that can launch new funding mechanisms, and suchlike.

In this light, I would very much urge the Commission to reconsider its response and to come up with a plan of action soon.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE). – (RO) The action plan on urban mobility is a must for the EU's urban communities. 67% of European citizens expect a European policy to be developed in this area.

What response can we give to Europe's citizens?

The costs resulting from urban traffic congestion are rising to approximately 1% of European GDP. In order to reduce the pollution level in urban environments and traffic congestion, we need to invest in public transport and in intelligent transport systems.

Last year we approved the report on promoting the use of green vehicles in public transport.

Prague is the capital city which has set an example, with its purchase last year of green buses for its urban public transport system, using state aid.

I call on the Commission to also give due consideration to urban mobility during the mid-term review of the framework for the utilisation of structural funds.

Androulla Vassiliou, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, I really appreciate your contributions. I shall certainly convey all your concerns to Vice-President Tajani, who, I know, remains committed.

The Action Plan is, in fact, included in the Commission's work programme for 2009, and I know that Vice-President Tajani is personally committed to progressing with the Action Plan. Therefore, I have no doubt that what you have said will be seriously taken into account by him. I know that the impact assessment

has been completed and, as I said, the Action Plan is in the legislative programme and hopefully will proceed this year.

President. – The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Krzysztof Hołowczyc (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PL) In the 2007 Green Paper, the Commission points to the legitimacy of the debate concerning the need for it to be involved in the issue of increasing mobility in cities within the Union, on the basis of the principle of subsidiarity. Pursuant to the principle of subsidiarity the Union acts in the framework of its competences only when its action is essential and brings added value to the actions of Member States. The aim of the principle of subsidiarity is ensuring that decisions are taken as close to the citizen as possible. This is achieved by constantly checking that action to be taken at Community level is justified in relation to the possibilities that exist at national, regional or local level. The role of the Member States regarding the legitimacy of also involving the European Union's institutions at local level is further strengthened in the Treaty of Lisbon, currently at the ratification stage.

In the package under debate concerning possible action aimed at increasing the level of mobility in urban conurbations, innovative technologies tend to be dealt with separately from intelligent transport systems. The synergies between these two areas should be exploited to draw them together in order to increase flow along streets and make travel more comfortable. Other benefits would be better travelling conditions, shorter journey times, energy saving, fewer emissions, less expenditure on managing the vehicle fleet and on the maintenance and renewal of the surface. Road safety would also be improved.

In the light the above, the foundation for the Commission's action plan on urban mobility will be completion of ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon and implementation of the Czech Presidency's programme. The latter deals with improving the operation of the Union's internal market in transport as a matter of priority.

16. Revision of the Broadcasting Communication - State aid for public broadcasting (debate)

President. – The next item is the oral question to the Commission by Mr Visser, Mr Belet and Mrs Hieronymi, on behalf of the Committee on Culture and Education, on the revision of the broadcasting communication – State aid for public broadcasting (O-0102/2008 – B6-0495/2008).

Cornelis Visser, author. – (NL) Madam President, Commissioner, it is unfortunate that Mrs Kroes is prevented from being here this evening because of an accident. I should like to take this opportunity to offer her my sincere wishes for a speedy recovery. Politically, though, I fundamentally object to her interfering with national, public broadcasting.

Last Thursday, together with Mrs Hieronymi and Mr Belet, I organised a hearing for the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats about the Commission's public broadcasting communication. I can tell you that the interest from the sector and the Member States was considerable. Even the Directorate-General for Competition attended in great numbers. This subject is obviously high on their agenda. The Director-General for Competition was present all morning as a panel member.

Madam President, the Commission proposal reviewing the rules for public broadcasting is unacceptable as it currently stands. Public broadcasters play a crucial role in the protection of cultural diversity, linguistic diversity and media pluralism. I am vehemently opposed to the Commission's plans. First of all, we need to realise that public broadcasting corporations are a national preserve and that, consequently, it is the national authorities, and not the European Commission, that should stipulate their policy. This is also clearly enshrined in the protocol on public broadcasting in the Treaty of Amsterdam. Member States organise and finance the public broadcasters as they see fit. Commissioner Kroes's plans seriously undermine the principle of subsidiary and the Member States' freedom of movement and replace them with European interference. I am very surprised that, as a Liberal Commissioner, she should opt for this route.

Secondly, I am apprehensive about the proposal to introduce a prior market test conducted by an independent supervisor. This would give commercial channels considerable input. Is that what we want? A market test will inevitably increase the level of paperwork. It is very much the question whether the smaller broadcasting corporations will be able to afford extra manpower, and who will absorb the extra costs involved? Should the broadcasting corporations foot the bill? Or the taxpayer, perhaps? This initiative is not workable in small

Member States. Moreover, this test is very detailed; the proposal is lacking in flexibility. As a consequence, Member States will no longer be able to adopt policy and procedures that tie in with their national systems. Moreover, it is very much the question whether a prior assessment of the market impact and a public evaluation of the new services will not give commercial competitors too much of a head start.

Thirdly, the proposal fills me with worry because the public broadcasting systems are not organised in exactly the same way in every Member State. There is technological diversity, as well as differences in broadcasting systems, organisation and scope. There are also differences in terms of language and culture. The 'one size fits all' rule that is proposed in the report certainly does not work in this case. The proposal takes no account of this.

Having got my concerns off my chest, I should now like to provide a brief outline of what happened at the PPE-DE Group's hearing last Thursday, where the Commission's attitude was very positive. The Commission admitted that the proposals were probably excessively detailed and that the wording needed editing. The Director-General informed me that it is possible to delay the final communication until after 5 March, the day on which the Culture, Media and Sport Committee will be organising a second hearing on this subject. After the hearing, the Director-General said that the Commission might have to draft a fresh version based on this new information, before it submits its final communication. This was an excellent result.

You will understand, Madam President, that I am pleasantly surprised with these pledges. This means, after all, that the Commission is opening its eyes and is prepared to listen to the voice of the sector, the Member States and Parliament. Excellent.

I should like to ask the Commission a few more questions. First of all, will the Commission stand by this prior detailed market test, conducted by an independent supervisor – a question you may be able to pass on to Commissioner Kroes – is the Commission prepared to abandon this idea of an independent supervisor and this prior market test, or does it insist that it stays?

Secondly, how can technological impartiality be guaranteed? Does the proposal not imply that a difference is drawn between the current services of the public broadcasting corporations and the new media services?

Thirdly, further to the comment by the Director-General for Competition, is the Commission prepared, based on the new information, to draw up a new proposal?

Fourthly, what does the Commission intend to do about the Court of First Instance's judgment in the Danish TV2 case? Will it include it in the new proposal? If not, how will it be implemented?

My final question is, is the Commission prepared to involve Parliament in the follow-up procedure and to await further discussion with Parliament?

I hope for excellent cooperation between the European Parliament, the European Commission and the Member States so that the final version of the communication can be thrashed out.

Androulla Vassiliou, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, as has already been mentioned, my colleague Ms Kroes had a small accident so that is why she cannot be with us.

On 4 November 2008 the Commission published, for consultation until 15 January, a draft new broadcast communication. We are serious about the process of wide consultation. Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education has scheduled a hearing for 5 March and, as has already been mentioned, the PPE-DE Group already held such a hearing on Thursday, last week, in the presence of the Director-General for Competition, Philip Lowe.

This dialogue between the Commission and Parliament is important. We stand ready to listen and to reply to your questions. We also know that Parliament agreed in September 2008 that state aid to public broadcasters should be delivered so that they fulfil their function in a dynamic environment, avoiding the use of public funding for reasons of political or economic expediency. This concurs with our views; both public and private broadcasting are important. The dual system of broadcasting is an answer to Europe's media landscape which must be safeguarded on all platforms.

The draft broadcasting communication therefore seeks to consolidate the Commission's state aid case practised since their existing 2001 communication. The draft ensures that our rules reflect the rapidly changing new media environment. The objective of modernising the communication is to increase transparency and legal certainty. The draft communication clarifies that public broadcasters shall provide audiovisual services on all media platforms while leaving private operators sufficient incentives to stay in

the market. This is ensured by the so-called Amsterdam test, which balances the value and the negative effects of publicly financed media services at the national level.

Why do we have these tests? Because having these tests at the national level helps to avoid Commission intervention. The Commission increasingly receives complaints about borderline cases where a public media activity may have no clear value for citizens but where the market impact appears considerable. The Commission, however, feels that repeated interventions in this sector would not be in the spirit of subsidiarity. This is why we want Member States to share the Commission's responsibility for controlling the market impact of state finance media services.

The Amsterdam test will ensure that new media services of public broadcasters satisfy the social, democratic and cultural needs of viewers and listeners while limiting the collateral damage for state aid for private operators to a minimum. We cannot agree that the Amsterdam test would involve an unjustifiable administrative burden. Of course, any test involves work but the minimum effort we require is reasonable and necessary. Firstly, the test is only foreseen for important and truly new services; and here our draft leaves a large margin of appreciation to Member States. Each Member State can decide when a new audiovisual service actually merits being tested. Secondly, the draft exempts pilot projects from the test. Public broadcasters can therefore continue experimenting with new media without any preliminary tests. Thirdly, the draft leaves Member States full freedom to choose their adequate procedures and institutions which apply the test. It is finally worth mentioning that smaller Member States, such as Belgium and Ireland, already implement such tests. The solutions found in these countries are proportionate to the resources available. As the test is quite broad there is also no possibility of infringing on editorial freedom. The test merely requires that a public media service satisfies the social, democratic and cultural needs of society and that its impact on the market is commensurate. To safeguard editorial independence we also open the possibility in the draft that, under certain conditions, the test is done by a public broadcaster itself.

In summary, I would say the Amsterdam test should be seen as an opportunity rather than as a threat. It will help to maintain media pluralism in the new media environment by safeguarding fairness and certainty for both commercial media, including online newspapers and our excellent public media.

IN THE CHAIR: MR DOS SANTOS

Vice-President

Ivo Belet, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (NL) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, good evening, I should first of all like to ask you if you could pass on our good wishes to Mrs Kroes. We hope that she makes a speedy recovery, as we gather that she missed the bend on a slippery surface. We hope, naturally, that Mrs Kroes will be back with us as soon as possible.

Obviously, Commissioner, we agree that you as a Commission guarantee, now and in future, a level playing field for all players in the audio-visual field, namely both the public and private broadcasting corporations. This is crucial for a balanced supply, and it also benefits quality.

What the Commission has now presented, though, is diametrically opposed to this for various reasons, as Mr Visser has already made quite clear. I should like to start by making a brief comment, Commissioner, in relation to what you said a moment ago. This market test that you propose is already being applied in Belgium, among other countries. Well, to some extent, this is true, but not entirely. This market test, or impact analysis, is indeed already being applied to some extent, by the broadcasters themselves, among others, but not according to the modalities as these have been set out in the Commission proposal, which look somewhat different.

I should like to share our reservations with you regarding the proposal. My main objection is that it clashes with the Lisbon Strategy. Indeed, it is the case today that in many Member States, it is precisely the public broadcasting corporations that bring about and encourage innovation in the media. This should, obviously, stay this way. We are, to my mind, moving in the wrong direction with the patronising administrative attitude that holds back innovation. New platforms, particularly in the digital context, on broadband, on the Internet, and suchlike cost a great deal to develop. Investments of this kind are ideally spread as widely as possible and developed in concert. Private and public broadcasting corporations can then offer content on a shared platform, and it is in terms of content that competition should come in, so that the customer can derive maximum benefit.

Do not get us wrong, though. We are 100% behind balanced competitive relations between the public and private broadcasters. There should be room for both to be able to provide quality content. It is obvious, in this connection, that the public broadcasting corporations should account for the government funds they spend and with which they work, even though we are convinced that there are better ways of doing this. In this connection, we would refer to the British example of the BBC, where alliances have been proposed between different partners in terms of development, production and distribution. This is a good example, to my mind, and I would kindly invite the Commission to start thinking with us along those lines.

Katerina Batzeli, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, the revision of the basic guidelines on state aid for public broadcasting put forward by the French Presidency is an extremely topical debate both internally in numerous Member States and for the position of the mass media at European and international level.

At the same time, however, the revision of the telecommunications package, which basically restructures the way in which and the criteria by which the radio spectrum is allocated at European level, has demonstrated that the rules governing the financing of broadcasting services are now of fundamental importance to the future regulation or deregulation of services relating to the information society, innovation and services of public and economic interest. This is the political question which we are basically required to resolve.

Clearly the debate on state aid focuses primarily on so-called public service broadcasters, as defined by each Member State, given the basically minimal resources which they have at their disposal and, above all, the important public service role allocated to them. The important role of broadcasters is mentioned in the UNESCO Convention, the Amsterdam Protocol and in the 2001 Commission communication. In other words, there is already a platform on which the role of the public mass media is clearly defined.

However, the dossier has been opened on the state aid debate and we must take account of certain new circumstances, as you stipulated, and of certain actions which are being taken either wittingly or unwittingly, due to the confusion which often exists between public and private agencies.

I should like to mention certain points: firstly, the question of the definition of the public service mandate should not be confused with the question of the financing mechanism selected in order to provide such services. While public-sector television may engage in commercial activities – such as selling advertising time – in order to generate revenue, this has been condemned by certain governments, such as the French Government, and is being overturned on the basis of national legislation.

On the other hand, commercial broadcasters required to provide a public service also play an important role. The coexistence of private and public service providers is a basic component of the European market.

I should like to close with one other point: the ex-ante procedures proposed by the Commission for examining state aid should worry us, not because subsidiarity is being suspended or superseded, but to see if they are compatible with the terms of state aid.

Finally, I would note that the question of national aid to radio stations and the mass media should be examined within the framework of international relations, because European organisations have to compete with international behemoths and strict legislation will damage European achievements and the *acquis communautaire*.

Ignasi Guardans Cambó, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, I shall try to be brief and, of course, I must begin by also extending my warmest wishes to Commissioner Kroes in the hope that she recovers from her fall. Here, at least, the doorway to the building has been gritted with lots of salt, but I see that there was not enough salt in other places.

The debate we are having is of the utmost importance and, in the end, therefore, its basic objective is to demand, to request, that the Commission involve Parliament. That is the reason for our debate: not to end it here but, rather, to make sure, before the Commission's communication is formalised, that we really are going to have a debate here and that we will all be involved.

Why? Because it is not only our television model that is at stake here; a great deal more is at risk because television broadcasters are not – as we all know, and as we were well aware in our debate on the Audiovisual Media Services Directive – the same as they used to be; what they do, in fact, is process content that they supply via a linear or non-linear platform, and everything interacts perfectly in both areas. Therefore, it is no longer appropriate to talk about public service broadcasting as if this debate were being held in the 1970s or 1980s.

On the other hand, it is clear that this debate must take place, since not everything that is labelled a public service today is actually a public service, and it does not always make sense to use public money to do what certain television companies are doing with public money. At the same time, however – and this is the core of our concern, I believe, and I understand it is also that of some of my fellow Members – public television broadcasters are absolutely vital in protecting our cultural and linguistic diversity and ultimately in binding our societies together because, in theory, they are looking for something more than direct profit.

This financial balance, therefore, must be protected. We must look for new models of financing; we should be creative and open up this debate, but we cannot do so in such a way that we risk something so vitally important to our societies – namely, our current public television broadcasters.

Helga Trüpel, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the Barroso Commission had announced the abolition of European over-regulation as one of its major political goals. We get the impression with the proposals you are making now that you are actually encouraging over-regulation. The hearing held by the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats last week made it clear that there are grave doubts regarding how much you are now interfering in the competences of the Member States. What is now on the table has the stink of over-regulation, and that is not something that we can approve of.

It is correct that we must find a balance between the possibilities for developing public and private broadcasting services. But this also means – particularly in the digital age – that public broadcasting, which stands for quality, cultural diversity, cultural and social cohesion, must have opportunities for development in the digital age. We require this as part of the Lisbon Strategy. If public broadcasting is denied this opportunity, it will be turned into a dinosaur. Then it will not be able to develop well.

When we think of our economic and financial crisis, we have all come to the conclusion that markets must be regulated. Social and ecological regulation is not a position against markets but in favour of fair markets – and that means regulated markets. The same applies to the relationship within which the private and public sectors are able to develop in future if we want to be successful in the digital world.

Erik Meijer, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (NL) Madam President, for 80 years, public broadcasting has had the task of informing the public in the broadest possible sense. This service can survive by public funding that may be collected via a separate radio and television tax and that may be topped up with membership contributions to broadcasting organisations, as has been the case in the Netherlands for a long time.

Alongside this, in recent decades, public broadcasting has been encouraged to earn its own money. This is achieved not only through advertising time but also by making much of the information material collected by the broadcasting house available in the form of audio and video material. It is expected that, as a result, viewers and listeners will feel more closely associated, new target groups will be reached and government costs will be limited. This task, which has grown over the years, poses no problems as long as commercial channels do not feel adversely affected.

From the perspective of commercial channels, the much older public broadcasters may be seen as competitors that are given a serious advantage as they collect funds through taxpayers' money. The question is now whether the public broadcasters' right to exist should no longer be derived in the first instance from their usefulness to society as a whole, but from the possible distortion of competition in respect of commercial channels. As public and private interests no longer clash, the European Commission is faced with conflicting demands.

The future of public broadcasters will be in the balance if their room to manoeuvre is limited in favour of commercial companies' scope for profit. Things will be even worse if this is done without this Parliament's involvement, with the express objections of 19 of the 27 Member State governments being dismissed.

Over recent years, I have asked the Commission a number of times to abandon this fatal plan. This appears to be the only possible solution to me, given the current widespread concern. Moreover, this is a matter that falls within the competence of the Member States, not that of the European Union. I endorse the questions and position adopted by Mr Visser and the other speakers.

Manolis Mavrommatis (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, as my fellow Members who signed the oral question have emphasised and as distinguished speakers stated in greater detail at the public hearing in Brussels last week, we all need to look on public-sector television as a medium for supplying a service to our citizens which will, to a great extent, coincide with the obligation to operate it.

The public dialogue, the independent supervisory authority and the diversity of programmes, in keeping with the history and culture of each Member State, need to be protected in the wake of the development of new technologies and the host of companies that spring up on a daily basis.

Within the framework of healthy competition, the Commission needs to promote new ways of protecting the public interest and public broadcasting.

Mainly, the definition of the public mission of broadcasters needs to be made clear; we need a better evaluation of state aid but also, as regards the rule of transparency, we must not impose pointless administrative and financial burdens on the Member States and public broadcasters in the ex-ante evaluation carried out by the Commission.

More effective control mechanisms also need to be adopted in the new mass media environment. Furthermore, given that public broadcasts play a decisive role in cultural and linguistic diversity, all these media, as well as the public corporations and public television, are obliged to provide quality programmes and, at the same time, within the framework of competition with other similar bodies, they must be able to respond positively to the challenges of the times by broadcasting events of global interest, such as the Olympic Games, the World Cup and so on. Unfortunately nowadays this is something that tends to be prevented simply by reason of the fact that, as private companies have more money, public television cannot afford them. Consequently, citizens will not be able to watch these events alongside other programmes.

To finish, I should also like to point out that what is currently available on the market and the interests of commercial media in defining the scope of the competence and activity of public broadcasters is not, by the same token, conducive to the more general interest, with of course a few exceptions, and the Commission needs to take serious account of that fact.

Maria Badia i Cutchet (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, may I also wish Mrs Kroes a swift recovery.

I would like to make a few general comments on the review of the communication on broadcasting. Firstly, I would like to say that I consider this review initiated by the Commission to be positive, insofar as it will enable the content of the 2001 communication to be adapted to the changes that have occurred both in the field of technology and in Community law.

Furthermore, it retains the main thrust of the 2001 communication, which recognised the essential role of public service broadcasting in guaranteeing quality of democracy and pluralism. I am basically referring to the principles whereby the Member States should define and delimit the supply and content of the public service licences taken up by the corresponding public bodies, and should have the freedom to choose the funding model, thereby avoiding any distortions to free competition.

Furthermore, the licence should be assigned to a specific corporation or group by means of a formal resolution and there should be external, independent supervision of the licence; on this point, I wish to stress the vital role of the regulating authorities for the audiovisual sector.

As far as the most significant additions to the proposal are concerned, I welcome the *ex ante* controls on public broadcasters' provision of new services, but only if enough flexibility is retained for these controls to be adjusted to the institutional model of each State and adopted gradually.

Finally, I believe there must be a very careful assessment of the possibility that certain services that come under the umbrella of public service audiovisual provision may be subject to remuneration or valuable consideration on the part of the citizens who use them, taking into account both the free and universal nature of traditional public service audiovisual broadcasting and the risks of exclusion that may come about should this method of funding be accepted. I hope that the Commission will take these comments into consideration.

Ieke van den Burg (PSE). - Mr President, it is clear that the issue at stake here is the tension between the public interest and its role in society against the impact on fair competition and the functioning of the internal market. The borders between public service broadcasting and private broadcasting, but also other media, are increasingly blurred and this is particularly the case when new media such as internet, iPods, SMS etc. are at stake.

As some people have said, public broadcasting is often the leading actor in innovation in services, but it is clear that this is an impact which is cross-border and across media sectors. Therefore, it is important to have consistency between the broadcasting communication and the general framework of services of general economic interest. This is an important issue which we have dealt with in Parliament's Committee on

Economic and Monetary Affairs. In particular, the PSE Group Members on this committee have stressed that it is important to create more legal security for services of general economic interest, and we would like to see a framework directive and sector legislation on this decided at a political level.

The consultation on the draft communication, which is now before us and has been presented by the Commission, can be commented on until 15 January, and it is important to give a clear signal again that this more horizontal general framework would be an important tool to place discussions like this discussion on public broadcasting in a broader context.

It is important to see who decides the rules and what balance exists in the rules between market interests and public interests. I have the implicit feeling that the market test mentioned in the communication should give primacy to market and commercial considerations instead of these public considerations. This was our intention with the new horizontal rules on services of general economic interest.

I am a bit surprised that the PPE-DE Group is now focusing so much on these specific issues, whereas they were quite hesitant in supporting our appeal for the more general framework. Here is a clear example – also in this case of broadcasting – that, if you do not have a broader clear framework which places more emphasis on and gives more dominance to the public interest aspects, it is always the market interest that will dominate in this type of discussion.

I would like to take the opportunity to repeat our appeal for this framework of service of general economic interest, which, horizontally, should reinstate the balance between those interests in favour of the public interest.

Emine Bozkurt (PSE). - (NL) Mr President, public broadcasting stands for pluralism, diversity, cultural diversity in Europe, the heart of democracy – I did not make this up, the Commission can confirm this – and public broadcasters are of national importance. There are now plans afoot to introduce a market test that is to be conducted beforehand, particularly for new media activities. I do not think this is a good idea, because Brussels should not dictate beforehand how Member States should organise their public services. How the public interest is served should, in my view, be assessed at national level and no compulsory market test is necessary for that purpose.

I should also like to say a few words about the red tape. Whilst I am in favour of checking things through, we should ensure that we do not end up with more rules and more costs for the various Member States.

Moreover, as for supply, I think that we should not draw a distinction between old and new services because, in practice, the lines between the two are blurred. It is not a case of either/or; television programmes often go hand in hand with new services and vice versa. So, just as in Europe, the two are intertwined. It is not just about the market, but also about the public importance of our public broadcasters, which is universally acknowledged, not least by the Commission. I should like to hear from the Commission whether this will be included in the adapted version of the communication and whether the responsibilities will be assigned appropriately, namely to the Member States, even though these will be accompanied by rules for services of general interest that should be drawn up in consultation with the European Parliament and the Council.

Thomas Mann (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, public broadcasting is more than an economic factor. I was at the hearing held by the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats last week in Brussels. The importance of information and of the diversity of European culture and education was noted. If 22 Member States are against revision or intensification because we have different framework conditions and different markets, then it is quite wrong to want an extensive administration, a time-consuming test procedure such as this obligatory ex-ante test, or European interference with an unwieldy bureaucratic concept.

There are already controlling bodies for public broadcasting: the broadcasting councils. We monitor the adaptation to technological change. We monitor the measures in order to ensure fair competition. I am a member of such a body, as the representative of the Union of European Federalists at Hessian Broadcasting [*Hessischer Rundfunk*]. Our independence is guaranteed by law. We are in turn completely and rightly controlled by the public. This is how an effective media policy works.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE). – (CS) Mr President, the state agrees with my fellow MEPs that state support for public interest broadcasting requires legislative clarification. We have been calling for this in the European Parliament for a long time. However, I would still like to draw your attention to further urgent matters that the Commission must resolve as quickly as possible. Out of the many problems I will mention three. Firstly,

there is a need for the general introduction of shared television aerials to include digital broadcasting, particularly on blocks of flats owned by housing cooperatives, in accordance with the exceptions under Article 5 of the information guidelines, as this is a problem for millions of citizens in the new Member States, including the Czech Republic. The second point is support for greater cooperation between the national councils for radio and television broadcasting and the European institutions in order to achieve better application of public service provisions. The third point is to improve coordination between national monitoring authorities for television broadcasting in respect of fines for inappropriate broadcasts that threaten the moral development of children and young people.

Androulla Vassiliou, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I thank you all for your very fruitful discussion, which I will certainly convey to my colleague Mrs Kroes.

Let me comment on some of your remarks. The Amsterdam Protocol points to the need to balance financing with state aid and effects on competition. We want Member States to take the lead on this, because otherwise we will have to do it in Brussels on the basis of complaints.

Our aim is to give Member States more possibilities to develop public service broadcasting, as long as the Treaty provisions on competition are respected. Public service broadcasting should continue to innovate, educate and, of course, entertain. The Commission agrees with these goals.

It is up to Member States to decide on how to finance public service broadcasting. This is clearly stated in the Amsterdam Protocol. Public broadcasters will be able to experiment freely with new projects. The draft communication makes clear that pilot projects are exempt from the tests. We have always recognised the possibility of providing funding for a public service mission, which includes a wide range of varied and balanced programming by public service broadcasters. This will also remain the case for the future.

The Commission also wants to guarantee a mixture of public and private. The Commission aims at promoting public broadcasters to benefit from new technologies in order to serve the social, democratic and cultural needs of society.

The Amsterdam test allows Member States to provide funding for new media services by public broadcasters. It protects the ability to keep up with changes in our fast-moving media environment. At the same time, it is also in the public interest to maintain the incentives for private operators. Innovation by both public and private broadcasters is important for realising the Lisbon objectives, and it goes without saying that public broadcasters will also remain free to launch any kind of new service on a commercial basis in the future without prior assessment.

I want to assure you that we take the consultation very seriously. We will review the text to take into account legitimate concerns. I will ask our services to take Parliament's and Member States' proposals into account as we review the draft.

President. – The debate is closed.

17. Trade and economic relations with Western Balkans (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0489/2008) by Mr Belder, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on trade and economic relations with Western Balkans (2008/2149(INI)).

Bastiaan Belder, *rapporteur*. – (NL) Mr President, I should like to take this opportunity to present my report on trade and economic relations with the western Balkans.

It is not without a reason that I started this report by reiterating the European perspective of those countries. The Union cannot continue to faithfully repeat past promises, such as that made to the western Balkan states at the Thessaloniki European Council of 2003 that they would join the European Union. No, the western Balkans would be better served by tangible action and tailored accession procedures than by well-nigh dutiful rhetoric.

You may well ask why I hold the accession prospects of those countries so dear. First of all, I am wholly convinced that the Union has a debt of honour to repay. This reminds me of the debate on Srebrenica which will hopefully be held in this House on Wednesday evening this week. Moreover, that region is of major strategic significance for Europe. The specific proposals in my report are as follows. I argue in favour of further consolidation of the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA). This is an important tool to

enhance regional integration in that area, which is, in turn, important preparation if those countries want to integrate in the European market and join the Union in three stages. The European Union should mobilise pre-accession funds through aid across a wide front so as to promote the reform process in those countries. The Member States can also play an important role in this by providing specific training to local public servants. This will grant those countries more official capacity to formulate their own ambitious projects that are eligible for EU funding.

Mr President, when I first started work on this report, the first thing I did was pay a visit to my country's Economic Affairs Department in the Hague, where I was pleased to hear that the Dutch Government had taken on board a government-to-government approach. This is something I described in my report as an example that is worth following, not because it is a Dutch approach, but because it is tailored to, and meets the calls from, the western Balkan states themselves to support the accession process actively and appropriately.

I should like to mention one specific item from my report, namely energy cooperation with the western Balkans, which is, I believe, a highly topical subject. On account of its strategic location, that region could well play a significant role in the transit of crude oil and natural gas. The Union should endeavour to adopt an external energy policy. I am also member of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. A number of years ago, we adopted a solid report with a view to adopting a European external policy in the area of energy. Well, just look at the present situation, reinforcing, as it does, this appeal from the European Parliament to the Commission and Council. Surely Brussels should not leave its own Member States out in the cold, literally or otherwise.

I should like to finish off by saying that, as an ex-journalist, I have travelled to the Balkans many times. As a result, I feel much empathy and involvement with that region. In connection with writing my report, I used my travel budget for study trips; together with the Committee on International Trade, and its staff member Roberto Bendini, in particular, together with my own member of staff Dick Jan Diepenbroek, I have undertaken valuable trips to Serbia and Kosovo, and next week, I am hoping to travel to Albania. In short, I may be concluding this report this evening, but the work is not done by a long shot, not for me and not for the European institutions. If we really want to bring that region closer to Brussels and actually demonstrate this by our level of dedication and active support, we have every right to demand that the reform process, the accession, be met with commitment, and this should also be evident. It was a real joy for me to work on this report, and I hope that it will be followed up in separate reports for the individual western Balkan countries.

Androulla Vassiliou, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, first of all let me congratulate Mr Belder for this very good report. Your report comes at a time when the Western Balkans are moving closer and closer to the EU and provides a comprehensive overview of the issues at stake in EU-Western Balkans economic and trade relations. Allow me to focus on some points highlighted in your report.

The Western Balkans, as a region, is a key and valuable partner for the EU. The last Commission communication on the Western Balkans in March 2008 reiterates the EU's strong commitment to the European perspective of the region and confirms, among other things, the importance of the Central European Free Trade Agreement for the economic development of the region. The Commission agrees with the rapporteur that the perspective of EU membership can act as a catalyst for sustainable economic development and for securing peace and stability within the region. The Commission also agrees that the individual fulfilment of the Copenhagen criteria is of the utmost importance when judging the readiness of countries in the region to join the EU. The EU is the Western Balkans' main trading partner. Deeper economic ties between the EU and the region are therefore vital for boosting the region's economic growth.

As rightly pointed out in your report, trade liberalisation and integration is a cornerstone in the stabilisation and association process, and the EU has pursued this objective with the Western Balkans at three levels.

Firstly, at the bilateral level, the EU has granted unilateral trade preferences to the Western Balkans since 2000 so as to facilitate the access of their exports to the EU markets. The Commission has negotiated free trade agreements as part of the stabilisation and association agreements to create the conditions for political and economic reforms and to set the basis for the integration of the Western Balkans into the EU, for example by means of alignment to the *acquis*.

Secondly, at the regional level, the European Commission acted as a facilitator in the negotiations on the Central European Free Trade Agreement (CEFTA) and decided to provide financial support and technical assistance to the CEFTA Secretariat and to the parties to help implement the agreement. At the same time, the European Commission values highly the regional ownership of the agreement and acknowledges that

CEFTA is fundamental for deeper regional economic integration and for preparing the ground for the eventual full participation of the Western Balkans in the EU single market. Moreover, CEFTA created all the necessary structures to discuss trade-related issues at the regional and bilateral level. This is essential for facilitating and deepening regional cooperation and good neighbourly relations. The European Commission will continue to monitor implementation of the CEFTA and will continue to report on this in its yearly report on the accession and pre-accession process.

Thirdly, at the multilateral level the Commission has supported the accession of the countries in the region to the World Trade Organisation as this is an absolutely fundamental step for effective participation in the globalised economy. The EU has mobilised all available policy instruments to support the countries of the Western Balkans in their endeavours for reforms and regional cooperation. The instrument for pre-accession assistance is important for addressing the region's long term development needs. The total funding for the current financial framework for 2007-2013 is EUR 11.5 billion. Last but not least, the European Commission has started dialogues with all the countries concerned in the region to establish roadmaps for lifting the visa regime.

In the light of what has been said, let me assure you that the Commission is taking all the necessary steps to enhance trade relations and to bring the Western Balkans' economy as close as possible to the EU. In conclusion, I wish to congratulate the rapporteur again for this good report and I am pleased to say that the Commission shares its general approach.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday at 12 noon.

Written Statement (Rule 142)

Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) I would like to express my support and appreciation of the report presented by Mr Belder as it recommends specific economic measures aimed at the European perspective of the peoples of the Western Balkans. I would like to draw your attention to three aspects:

1. We need to realistically acknowledge that Serbia is a key player in the success of the Stabilisation and Association Process, while the EU needs to continue to make efforts to win the confidence and long-term friendship of the Serbian people.
2. In the future, ethnic separatist trends and unilateral declarations of independence should no longer be allowed for territories such as Kosovo, South Ossetia, Abkhazia, Transnistria, Northern Cyprus etc. The principle of states' territorial integrity is sacred and must be respected in the future.
3. At the same time, we need to give strong backing to compliance with European standards concerning the rights of persons belonging to national minorities in the Western Balkan states, including the rights of the Romanian-speaking communities in Valea Timocului, Vojvodina, Istria and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia. These rights must be respected, excluding any trends towards territorial autonomy on ethnic grounds and aspirations to collective ethnic rights, which have already demonstrated their potential for conflict and for triggering bloody wars.

18. The common agricultural policy and global food security (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0505/2008) by Mrs McGuinness, on behalf of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, on the common agricultural policy and global food security (2008/2153(INI)).

Mairead McGuinness, rapporteur. – Mr President, when I initiated this report the issue of global food security was very high on the political agenda and, to some extent, it has slipped from the highlights. But it is certainly an issue that is of concern because there are still upwards of one billion people globally who suffer hunger or malnutrition. Thirty thousand children die of hunger and poverty-related illnesses a day. These are horrific statistics and it makes the issue of how we produce sufficient food and give people access to that food a key issue.

I would like to thank the Commission for working with me in drafting this report and also the very many committees in the House, in particular the Committee on Development, which were obviously involved in its production.

In four minutes it is impossible to do justice to what is in the report, but let me just highlight some of the issues which I believe are of importance. Firstly, the fact that I have put the common agricultural policy and global food security in the one heading suggests that the old practice of bashing the common agricultural policy and blaming it for all the ills of the developing world has moved on, and that we are now aware that the common agricultural policy has provided food security for European citizens, and that as a model it can provide lessons for what we need to do in the developing world in terms of food production.

It is very clear that we have allowed agriculture development to slip down the political and development agenda over the last decade or so. There was a time when much of our development aid money went to stimulating agriculture and to projects on food production. That is not the case today, although I think, since the food price hike, we are beginning to refocus on agriculture, both in the EU and globally.

That means allowing those countries which have the resources to grow food to do that, to help them and their small-scale farmers produce food locally to meet their needs. It involves not just the provision of the basic ingredients of food production, such as seeds and fertilisers, but also the know-how, the advisory services, the assistance to farming families in the developing world to allow them to produce to meet their own needs.

It can be done. We have examples of Malawi and other countries that have managed to come from situations of extreme famine to producing food. It takes public policy initiatives to do it. It also requires that the European Union, given its huge involvement in the developing world, urges countries to look at their agriculture and begin stimulating food production in their own countries.

The issue of supply and demand is a very delicate one because there is a growing world population – it will increase by 40% by 2050 – so we are going to have to look at these issues. The problem of competition – as we have witnessed – between food production, feed production and fuel, is obviously a key concern. I suppose, driving all of this, we need to look at the issue of research and development.

I believe that we have not done enough in terms of research and development. We, in Europe, had looked towards producing less food and therefore perhaps had not looked at the need to look at the efficiencies of agricultural production and the need to produce more into the future.

One of the key messages that I really want to get across in the short time I have is to say that farmers worldwide will produce food if they can make an income from doing it, so the pressure on policymakers is to get that right, to provide the policies that will give farmers stable incomes. How do we do that? By providing stable prices and also looking at the costs of food production. Unless farmers get that income stimulus, they will pull back.

I give a warning. Well over a year ago we were talking about high commodity prices. Today there are surpluses of grain, for example, in store and no market for them. Those farmers will not produce as much in the next season, and that could exacerbate the longer-term problem of global food security.

There is a lot in this report. I hope colleagues can support it and again I thank the many people who took a great interest in it.

Androulla Vassiliou, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, the Commission welcomes the report prepared by Ms McGuinness and the intense debate which has taken place in the various EP committees on the elements surrounding this very topical subject, which range from trade to biofuels, price monitoring, investment policy, the financial crisis, climate change and water use in agriculture.

The Commission shares the broad analysis on the causes of the food crisis which hit many developing countries in the first part of 2008. The Commission will continue to analyse the link between food prices and energy prices. The causality issue is a highly complex one as it involves the interplay of a number of demand and supply factors. Energy prices constitute only one of these factors but one which has both a direct and indirect impact. The topic of biofuels was discussed in detail during the various EP sessions. There is a clear difference between EU and US policy on the extent to which cereal production is being diverted to biofuels. EU biofuels policy does not reduce the availability of food, as the quantities of feedstocks used are very small on a global scale.

Even if the EU moves closer to its 10% target, the impact on food prices will be limited, in particular for two reasons: first, more and more biofuels will come from non-food feedstocks or will be made from residues or waste. Second, the efficiency of techniques for producing biofuels will further improve, and average yields can also be expected to continue to increase.

A sustainable EU biofuels policy is overall a pro-poor policy. It will provide additional opportunities for the two thirds of the world's poor who live in rural areas and thus depend on a thriving agricultural sector. However, not all groups will benefit to the same extent. The Commission is committed to closely monitoring the effects on food security and on food prices.

The EU has already taken steps in order to address global food security by adapting the CAP to the changed market and global situation. The health check which was recently agreed will modernise, simplify and streamline the CAP and remove restrictions on farmers, thus helping them to respond better to signals from the market and to face new challenges.

The agreement on the health check abolishes arable set-aside, increases milk quotas gradually leading up to their abolition in 2015, and converts market intervention into a genuine safety net.

New challenges, such as climate change, water management, renewable energy and biodiversity, which will have an impact on developing countries, have also been addressed in it.

The CAP will not remain static after 2013, and the preliminary debate has already been engaged since the informal agricultural ministers meeting in Annecy in September. The future CAP has to be seen in the context of a broader vision in which sustainable development, competitiveness and global food balances will form an integral part.

Various high-level events have placed global food security high on the international agenda. There is a clear understanding and recognition internationally to place agriculture and rural development higher on the policy agenda at national, regional and possibly at continental level. For example, we have discussed in detail the topic of agriculture and food security during our college-to-college meeting with the African Union in October, a debate which we intend to intensify in the course of this year.

Last but not least, the Commission needs to follow up on the G8 leaders' statement on global food security. In the run-up to the adoption by the Council of the food facility on 16 December, the European Commission has already had very fruitful discussions with the UN high-level task force.

The European Commission looks forward to the implementation of the comprehensive framework for action. The Commission is convinced that the global partnership on agriculture and food security which is gradually taking shape will have a key role in implementing the various recommendations made in this report, including how to support smallholder farmer production and what type of trade policies should be adopted to contribute to food security, especially in the most vulnerable communities.

Evidently, export restrictions and bans should be avoided and the way forward is more rather than less trade liberalisation. Enhanced trade flows are part of the solution towards food security.

The Commission hopes that the bold step taken by the European institutions to mobilise the one billion euros which will complement other financial instruments which have been earmarked to respond to the food crisis – of both a short- and medium- to long-term nature – is followed up by other donors.

The Madrid Conference on food security for all on 26 and 27 January is certainly a key event to move the debate to another level, one that seeks to identify the key priorities to address world food hunger.

The European Commission will continue to play a proactive role in contributing to global food security and the McGuinness report has certainly been a good analysis to look at some possible avenues which could be considered by the EC and the broader international community.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday at 12 noon.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Kader Arif (PSE), in writing. – (FR) The action taken by Parliament in the wake of the food riots has enabled EUR 1 billion to be released to combat the food crisis. This emergency measure aside, I should like to stress the need for a long-term international strategy that is based on local and subsistence agriculture and that is appropriate to the needs of populations and to the potential of territories.

Indeed, the world population increase, global warming, the uncontrolled production of biofuels and aggressive speculation are so many factors that are increasing the tension on the agricultural markets. These elements

indicate that the crisis will not be short-lived and that public policies as a whole will have to be rethought in order to improve production methods and the regulation of international markets.

I believe that the CAP, with its excesses and imperfections ironed out, could become an example of effective, fair and responsible policy, rising to the food challenge and uniting at the same time the economy, society and the environment. It should also help developing countries by sharing European techniques, knowledge and experience. However, Europe should first and foremost work on reforming international trade rules so that they do not oppose the right of countries to support their agriculture in order to guarantee their food security.

Katerina Batzeli (PSE), in writing. – (EL) International and regional agreements to date have proved incapable of normalising market supply and trade and safeguarding transparent and stable prices for agricultural produce.

The regulation of agricultural markets should be based on a long-term strategy of effective measures and on organising and informing producers in terms of the state of and prospects for the market.

The basic principle of such a policy is to establish an income safety net against risks and crises arising either from adverse natural phenomena or from market distortions and an unusually long and widespread fall in prices.

Integrated and effective policies are needed, such as:

- European and international systems for monitoring production and the market as an early warning system for identifying production trends;
- a global food and food reserve inventory;
- a European system for monitoring the market and recording changes in prices of agricultural product and inputs, which could be combined with a similar international system under the auspices of the FAO.

It would also be a good idea for the future agreement on the Doha Round to include emergencies during which food aid can be provided, because the provisions to date are not binding.

Constantin Dumitriu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO) The conclusions drawn by Mrs McGuinness in her report about global food security are now also evident in Romania. We are facing a rise in the prices of all basic food products, as a result of the devaluation of the national currency, the rise in the cost of raw materials and of the loans taken out by processing companies.

In addition, as a result of global warming, we have seen increasingly frequent incidences of crops being destroyed by natural disasters. In fact, farmers from the new Member States are the most disadvantaged in these situations as the level of grants they are awarded is lower than in the other Member States.

This is why, based on the amendments proposed, I have called on the Commission to examine the possibility of creating certain intervention mechanisms at Community level, independently of any specific aid granted for crop insurance, to prevent and combat the effects of global warming.

The Community standards imposed on food producers are stringent, which is why food prices in the EU are high. I strongly believe however that agriculture can provide the launch pad for the recovery of the European economies affected by the global crisis and the development of renewable energy sources can have a positive impact on the agri-food sector.

If we take the necessary precautionary measures, we can achieve growth in biofuel production without endangering the environment or the food stocks required globally.

Roselyne Lefrançois (PSE), in writing. – (FR) This report on the CAP and global food security provided us with a fantastic opportunity to reflect on how we can ensure that European agriculture plays a full part in achieving the planet's food balance. Indeed, although food needs to continue to increase in the world, the proportion of development aid devoted to agriculture has, for its part, been on a constant decline since the 1980s. That is why I tabled a number of amendments within the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development that are aimed at making this report more ambitious and, in particular, at proposing that the European Commission adopt a comprehensive strategy on food security issues, thus making the Union's Community policies as a whole more consistent.

While I am delighted that this text emphasises the CAP's crucial role in achieving the objective of food security, I regret that the rapporteur is in favour of aligning agricultural policy more with the market and that she accuses environmental protection initiatives of being responsible for a reduction in agricultural production within Europe. This statement is in my view completely misguided, and, on the contrary, I feel it is necessary to take hold of the climate-change problem in order to develop new models that are designed to produce more and better.

Véronique Mathieu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) Today the EU must urgently improve its food safety and rise to major challenges. Firstly, agricultural production will have to double in 30 years since the world's population will reach 9 billion people by 2050. The fact is, 860 million people continue to starve. Such development will have to be sustainable and will have to rely first and foremost on local agriculture.

The huge fluctuation in the global prices of foodstuffs, together with the proper management of global stocks, represent a further challenge. In order to guarantee European farmers a fair income, I support the idea of insurance policies providing a higher level of cover for farmers against price fluctuations, as well as the initiative of setting up a global food inventory regime.

Lastly, in view of the increased trade in animals and plants, the EU has a duty to implement an effective strategy to prevent all health crises in Europe. This strategy should be based on prevention, traceability and responsiveness. In this respect, the recent decision of the Council of Ministers to strengthen and harmonise the import control arrangements will mean that our fellow citizens can be given a better guarantee of the quality of foodstuffs.

Now more than ever agriculture is playing a central role in the areas of growth and development. We must therefore protect it at all costs!

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The global food crisis, caused by the constant rise in the price of maize, wheat and energy, the growth in the world's population and climate change have sparked a series of riots and unrest which, if they are not resolved in the near future, could destabilise countries and regions around the globe. What is alarming is the gap between the rate of population growth, which could reach more than nine billion inhabitants by 2050, and the reduction in global food stocks. This kind of situation will most probably lead to conflicts over oil being superseded by conflicts over drinking water and food or by a fight for survival. At the present moment, the European Union is the main donor of humanitarian aid, but the food stocks are starting to become depleted and developing countries, especially in Africa, need more support to help them fight poverty and chronic hunger. Reducing agriculture's dependency on fossil energy sources, using organic products, maintaining fertile soils and adapting the common agricultural policy to the food crisis situation are some of the key elements which need to be taken into consideration in order to break this deadlock.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE), in writing. – (HU) The most important question facing the European agricultural sector in 2009 is how the global economic crisis will affect the conditions for the production and consumption of agricultural products. The question will be a central topic of the Second Hungarian Agrarian Academy which I am organising jointly with State Secretary Zoltán Gőgös of the Hungarian Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development on 17 April 2009 in the town of Pápa. Since 2006, the price of corn has risen threefold, and the price of wheat by 180% on the international market, while overall food prices have increased by 83%. By 2050 the population of the world will have grown to 9 billion, and in order to provide for their needs we will need to double the level of agricultural production; the days of cheap food have thus come to an end. Therefore it is extremely important to preserve, and where possible increase the agricultural capacity of the European Union. It is unacceptable that as a result of the sectoral reforms of the CAP, agricultural production should have decreased in the European Union. Good examples of this are the sugar reform, which has led to the disappearance of the Hungarian sugar industry, and the subsidies given for the grubbing up of grape vines in the context of the wine reform policy. The separation of direct agricultural funding from production is likewise heading in this direction.

We need to find the appropriate balance between food production and biofuel manufacture, and the latter must not threaten global food security. The United States' bioethanol programme contributed significantly to sending food prices soaring in 2008; based on those experiences, the European Union must re-examine its earlier commitments with regard to biofuel ratios. Finally, I urge speedy action at EU level against the creation of monopolies among food retailers, in order to protect producers.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The rise in energy prices, adverse meteorological events and the increase in demand for energy due to world population growth have produced high food prices. I urge

the Commission to examine the link between high food prices and growing energy prices, especially for the fuels being used.

The agricultural sector needs to improve its energy efficiency. Increasing the proportion of crops for biofuel and using renewable energy could have a positive impact on the agri-food sector, which has been affected by high prices for fertilisers and pesticides, as well as by the increased costs of processing and transport. I urge the Commission to closely monitor the effects of increased biofuel production in the European Union and in third countries in terms of changes in land use, food product prices and access to food.

Incentives to encourage sustainable cultivation of energy crops should not jeopardise food production. I believe that agricultural research is required in order to boost farm productivity. I also invite Member States to avail fully of the opportunities offered in this respect by the Seventh Framework Programme for research and technological development and to adopt measures that will improve agricultural output in a sustainable, energy-efficient way.

19. Developing civil dialogue under the Treaty of Lisbon (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0475/2008) by Mrs Grabowska, on behalf of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, on the perspectives for developing civil dialogue under the Treaty of Lisbon (2008/2067(INI)).

Genowefa Grabowska, rapporteur. – (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, we are changing the subject to discuss contact between the European Union's institutions and its citizens. These contacts are inadequate. There is a deep divide between the Union and its citizens, yet Jean Monnet pointed out that the Union was being created for the citizens rather than for countries and governments.

The Union is enlarging and acquiring more citizens, but its institutions have difficulty in establishing contact with the citizens. This became evident through the painful experience of the French and Dutch 'No' to the Treaty of Lisbon. It is true, nonetheless, that the Union's institutions are endeavouring to improve their contacts with the citizens. They are opening up to them, and are clearly recognising the role of civil society. There is an ever increasing range of Union communication policies in this area. The new term civil dialogue has even been coined to describe these policies. More is required, however. The European Parliament is therefore endeavouring to rise to this challenge, and attempting to create a suitable mechanism for the purpose and promote contacts of this nature between the European Union's institutions and its citizens. This would resolve the issue of lack of democracy and demonstrate that the citizens also play an important role in the decision-making process within the European Union.

Article 10 of the Treaty of Lisbon states that 'Every citizen shall have the right to participate in the democratic life of the Union. Decisions shall be taken as openly and as closely as possible to the citizen.' There is also an additional provision making it possible for one million citizens of the European Union to take a legislative initiative. Following entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, one million citizens will be able to approach the European Commission and invite it to submit a legislative proposal on a subject of importance to the citizens.

That is why I refer to civil dialogue in this report. The latter is a dialogue that is not defined in law. It is essential, however, and I would like it to be guided by the following principles, or rather to guide itself by them. Firstly, I have introduced the principle of civil society representation into this report. I would like civil society to be suitably represented at the level of the European Union, that is to say, I would like it to be represented by partners that reflect and represent the interests at issue correctly.

I would like civil dialogue to be a reciprocal, two-sided process. This means it should not just involve the European Union approaching citizens, and the latter responding. The Union should also inform citizens when their views have been taken into account and explain what the implications of those views have been. That is why we also need feedback from the Union to the citizens.

I would like civil dialogue to be based on the principles of clarity and transparency. We should be governed by clear rules when inviting representatives of society to engage in dialogue with us. We should systematically publish the list of organisations involved in consultation. It would be wise for the Union to appoint a contact person responsible for this area, namely dialogue.

It is not easy to establish rules governing this area. The European Commission already drafted principles for strengthening a culture of consultation and dialogue back in 2002, and I therefore hope it will be prepared

to draft the appropriate principles. These would become common principles for all the institutions. I should like to add too that the Member States should also be required to promote civil dialogue. I have been unable to mention every part of this report. I would, however, like the content to be put to the test at the first available opportunity, namely during the 2009 European election campaign. I would like us to take advantage of that occasion and take a first step towards contact with European citizens, making them aware of the best the Union has to offer and learning from them what we should be fighting for in this House.

Androulla Vassiliou, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, first of all the Commission would like to thank the rapporteur, Ms Grabowska, as well as the Committee on Constitutional Affairs for their excellent report.

We agree that civil society plays an important role in European integration. It is one of the key tools for communication between European institutions, EU society and EU citizens. It helps citizens to exercise their right to participate in the democratic life of the Union.

The Commission has a long and healthy tradition of interaction with civil society organisations. This cooperation between the Commission and civil society has grown, covering a wide variety of issues from policy dialogue to project management, both within the EU and in our partner countries.

The Treaty of Lisbon would put our existing practices on a more formal footing and provide a fresh impetus to further enhance them. It would also open the door to another option for civil society to operationalise its views through the Citizens' Initiative.

Involving interested parties in an active dialogue requires the provision of appropriate instruments for civil society to express its opinions and be heard. The EU institutions also need equally appropriate instruments to ensure that what we hear from civil society and citizens is properly picked up and put into the system. The Commission welcomes the fact that the current report supports many of the ideas the Commission is already putting into effect.

Through its mandate, the current Commission has taken a series of initiatives to involve civil society organisations and individual citizens in a public debate on EU issues. One of the more innovative examples of these efforts has been the citizens' consultations, experimenting with deliberative polling and face-to-face consultations.

To understand people's needs and expectations, over the past 35 years the Eurobarometer has been developed into a very valuable tool for monitoring public opinion in Europe. Neither the Commission nor Parliament can, however, single-handedly organise a Europe-wide public debate. This will only be possible if EU institutions and Member States work together. That is the purpose of the political declaration on 'Communicating Europe in Partnership' signed by Parliament, the Council and the Commission on 22 October 2008.

In this context, the Commission and Parliament are already coordinating efforts with the Member States via the management partnerships, which include regional and local campaigns on specific issues, linking up with action by local authorities and NGOs. Eleven new management partnerships in 2009 will make this approach even more effective.

The Commission shares the view that fruitful dialogue depends on the active participation of all sides: the EU institutions, the Member States and civil society. The Commission hopes that the Lisbon Treaty will come into force and stands ready to take the necessary action to put its provisions into practice and to continue developing civil dialogue.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday at 12 noon.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (PSE), *in writing*. – (PL) If the European Union is to be truly democratic and close to its citizens, close cooperation is required at local, regional and national level between the Union's institutions and its Member States on the one hand and civil society on the other.

Civil society represents many non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations established by the citizens of their own free will. It plays a vital part in the process of European integration as it makes the positions and wishes of the Union's citizens known to the European institutions. It is therefore very important to

provide the citizens with effective and reliable information and to make civil dialogue more popular. This is particularly so regarding the promotion and dissemination of the European Union's actions and intentions, the development of a European network of cooperation and strengthening European identity amongst civil society.

Greater political awareness, a more effective civil dialogue and broader public debate are needed if the Union is to achieve its political aims and intentions.

The Treaty of Lisbon strengthens citizens' rights in relation to the Union by making it easier for them and for associations representing civil society to participate in debates on the so-called citizens' Europe.

The institutions of the European Union should cooperate more closely in order to develop European civil dialogue and encourage Union citizens to engage more with Europe. It is essential to encourage wider participation by the citizens in European debates and discussions. The citizens should also be actively involved in the coming elections to the European Parliament. After all, as Jean Monnet stated, we are not creating a Union for countries and governments, we are creating it for the citizens.

Zita Gurmai (PSE), in writing. – (HU) Membership in a civil society organisation provides European citizens with the opportunity to take active part in policy-making. In view of attaining EU goals, the active involvement of citizens in this process and the creation of concrete, tangible opportunities for them to take initiatives, provide feedback and express criticism and contrary opinions present a true challenge. However, since there is no single, precise legal definition of a civil society organisation, this can present difficulties.

In order that EU citizens might recognise the advantages the European Union offers them, we need to continue to expand democracy, increase transparency and improve the effectiveness of the EU's operation. The democratic deficit in most cases results from the fact that citizens do not always have access to essential information. Some of the documents relating to the Community decision-making process are still not accessible, and thus we need to continue the process aimed at further increasing the accessibility of Community working documents.

The mechanism of consultation forms an integral part of the activities of European institutions. We need to lay down general principles and a minimum set of rules regarding consultation and to establish a framework for consultation that is consistent yet flexible enough to adapt to the particular expectations of the parties concerned.

Jo Leinen (PSE), in writing. – (DE) This report sends a clear signal for bringing the EU closer to its citizens and proposes tangible steps towards making this goal a reality.

We call upon all EU institutions to make dialogue with civil society an important across-the-board task in their political work.

People only support the EU if they are informed about political projects and activities and are able to participate in decision-making, for example through consultations. With the rejection of the Lisbon Treaty in Ireland we have seen what negative consequences deliberately disseminated misinformation can have for European integration. This must be prevented in future by a pro-active information and dialogue policy. This also applies particularly to the Council and to the governments of the Member States, which should make a more active effort to provide better information about the EU.

Access to documents from all the EU institutions must be made easier and improved so that every citizen can obtain an impression of their work.

Our aim is to build a strong European civil society as the basic prerequisite for the development of a European public area. Therefore, we demand the creation finally of the necessary framework conditions, which means, primarily, a charter for European associations, as well as the necessary basic infrastructure for active citizens at European level.

Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański (UEN), in writing. – (PL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the report by Mrs Grabowska on the perspectives for developing civil dialogue under the Treaty of Lisbon is an example of a waste of time and resources. A fundamental question therefore arises. What is this debate actually all about? After all, the Treaty of Lisbon is dead, Ireland rejected it in a national referendum. This means that the aforementioned document does not have legal force. Building anything on it is like building on sand, without foundations. To build upon a treaty that does not really exist because it was rejected is a violation of democracy and of equal rights for free nations. This all brings to mind the definition of democracy. As I

understand it, democracy is a free choice, not something that is imposed and which disregards the will of the people. It is the people who are sovereign in a democracy, not a particular interest group. The supreme expression of the will of the people is a referendum, not a decision taken by a ruling clique, contrary to the will of the people. Is that so difficult to understand?

Dushana Zdravkova (PPE-DE), in writing. – (BG) I would like to congratulate Mrs Grabowska on her wonderful report which I am sure will contribute to improve and develop civil dialogue. There is a great deal that can be said about the development of dialogue between the European Union's citizens and its institutions. As chairwoman of a citizens association in Bulgaria, I firmly believe that this is one of the most important elements for the future development of Europe which needs to be urgently reformed and improved.

I believe that this report will enable the European Parliament to give the necessary guidelines and recommendations to the other institutions, but also to the civil organisations because, without their cooperation and participation, we will be unable to achieve the objective that we have set ourselves.

The report proposes an equal dialogue, taking into account the differences between and independence of the many associations. It will promote civil participation in the political process with a view to tackling the serious challenges it is facing, both at a national and European level. This is why it is vitally important that we find a differentiated approach in order to produce results at a local level because of the different level of development, both in different countries and in different sectors.

I am counting on the other institutions and the Member States taking into account our recommendations as soon as possible, even if the Lisbon Treaty does not come into force soon.

20. Public finances in the EMU – 2007-2008 (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0507/2008) by Mrs Gottardi, on behalf of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, on public finances in EMU 2007-2008 (2008/2244(INI)).

Donata Gottardi, rapporteur. – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, exactly one year ago we took the decision to combine the reports on public finances for 2007 and 2008. There were at least two reasons for this: to try to speed up the process and to take account of the signs of change taking place. We did not know the full extent of the changes at the time, but it was already obvious that by analysing two years together we would gain a more comprehensive and accurate assessment. And we were right! The report we will be voting on tomorrow has been constantly updated.

The tight link between public finances and the financial and economic crisis is very clear. Simply consider the resources allocated to bail out banks and big businesses, the support for manufacturing, and bear in mind the calls chiefly from small and medium-sized enterprises, and the protection for citizens from the fallout of the recession. All of these measures have been brought to the attention of the European institutions and individual Member States, however they should not undermine or weaken our outlook and our commitment on behalf of future generations.

The report involves at least two levels: that which is general, stable and valid in all situations, and that which is an emergency response to the current crisis. The principle remains intact, even strengthened, that high-quality, sustainable public finances are indispensable not only for individual countries but also for the solidity of the economy and the European social model. As regards revenue, steps must be taken to broaden the tax base, without however weakening the principle of progressive taxation, and to reduce the tax pressure on work, above all for mid to low-level salaries and pensions. As for expenditure, action must involve an assessment of the context, requirements, the composition of the population, with due consideration for gender policies and demographic change. Rather than introducing indiscriminate reductions, the aim should be to reorganise expenditure, partly by reallocating budget items and modernising public administrations.

A useful way of doing this is through gender budgeting, a method favoured and promoted by the European Parliament for some time, though still far from being the norm. It increases transparency and comparability, is more readily recognised by citizens and thus builds trust and a sense of ownership.

Today's unprecedented instability calls for determined action. If public sector intervention has become central and essential once more, we must not make the same mistakes again – that would be even more unpardonable. Instead, we must steer the crisis towards a new model of development that is genuinely sustainable, both environmentally and socially.

When we talk about European coordination, we should be thinking of having our own counter-cyclical governance, moving together and in the same direction, stepping up the fight against evasion and tax havens and linking national plans together. When we intervene to support businesses, we must assess the impact on competition, the level playing field and the functioning of the internal market, guaranteeing supervision, accountability, restrictions and consequent behaviour. The review of the Stability and Growth Pact permits controlled flexibility, to be used with care and long-term perspective.

The macroeconomic policies and joint investments should be re-launched in strategic, pre-determined sectors using instruments such as the Eurobonds, while keeping a close eye on the sub-national level and regional stability plans. There was a broad consensus on the report within the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, as most political groups shared this vision. I really hope that this is a prelude to a good result at tomorrow's vote.

Androulla Vassiliou, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, the Commission welcomes the Gottardi report and the substance of the report fits well with that of the two earlier Commission reports on public finances in the EMU released in June 2007 and 2008. The Commission also agrees with the three latest amendments tabled by the rapporteur on 7 January.

The European Parliament's report confirms that the revised Stability and Growth Pact (SGP), so far, has been working as it should. In particular, many Member States have made considerable efforts to meet their obligations with regard to the Pact. Since the reform of the SGP, both the corrective and preventive arms have been applied in full accordance with the provisions of the reform pact and any leniency in enforcement has not occurred.

However, the report also emphasises the very negative economic outlook for the EU and the euro area for 2009. Growth has slowed down considerably, to the point of turning into an outright recession this year. The overall economic prospects for 2010 are also discouraging, so the Commission agrees with the European Parliament that supporting demand by making use of discretionary fiscal policy measures is now essential.

Nevertheless, fiscal policy should be maintained on a sustainable course, anchoring expectations of an ordered resolution of the crisis. In this respect the Commission shares Parliament's concerns regarding the long-term sustainability of public finances and continues to put emphasis on its assessment.

A new report on the long-term stability of public finances in the European Union will be issued by the Commission in autumn 2009. The Commission also takes the European Parliament's view that public expenditure has to be reoriented in order to improve the quality of public spending in line with the Lisbon Strategy. Such a policy orientation is indeed part of the integrated policy guidelines adopted by the European Council. Work is ongoing at the Commission for a more systematic assessment of quality of public finance developments including aspects of performance-based budgeting.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday at 12 noon.

Written Statement (Rule 142)

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE), in writing. – (RO) In the spring of 2006 twelve Member States were going through an excessive deficit procedure. As a result of implementing the recommendations and decisions issued by the Council in the case of countries with excessive deficit, two and a half years down the line the number of Member States going through an excessive deficit procedure is approaching zero. This achievement has been possible thanks to the presence of favourable economic conditions in 2006 and 2007. During the 2008-2009 period we are facing an economic crisis which has already sparked in many Member States economic recession, a rise in unemployment and large numbers of company bankruptcies, especially among SMEs. The European economic recovery plan provides for major public investments for modernising transport and energy infrastructures. Member States are developing programmes aimed at supporting SMEs to allow them to stay in business. In these conditions, Member States in the euro zone, as well as all Member States, will find it difficult to meet the convergence criteria. I believe that measures need to be adopted at European level to enable Member States to face up to the current challenges such as an ageing population, migration, climate change etc. Agriculture, education, health and transport, which are key areas for the EU's economic development and European citizens' quality of life, must benefit from specific public policies.

21. The transposition, implementation and enforcement of Directives 2005/29/EC and 2006/114/EC (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0514/2008) by Mrs Weiler, on behalf of the Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection, on the transposition, implementation and enforcement of Directive 2005/29/EC, concerning unfair business-to-consumer commercial practices in the internal market, and Directive 2006/114/EC concerning misleading and comparative advertising (2008/2114(INI)).

Barbara Weiler, rapporteur. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, before I come to my report, I would like to say once more that we have not conducted ourselves correctly with our decision to debate our own-initiative reports. When I see how the debates proceed – without dialogue, without controversy, without conflicts – I do not feel this to be a proper parliamentary debate and I hope we will put that right quickly after the European elections.

Nevertheless, I would like to express my thanks to fellow Members who are not present. We have worked very well together on the production of the report. I would also like to thank the Commission and the committee secretariat.

We have made many new joint discoveries during the debate in committee. The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection has consciously put the debate on implementation relatively early on the agenda because the deadline for implementation by Member States was the middle to the end of 2007, which to date is not much time for a directive involving an enormous and significant element of harmonisation. Nevertheless, some Member States have not undertaken transposal. Certainly, this has to do with the complicated procedure, but it is interesting that three Member States who have not managed it are some of the founding Member States. Therefore, we cannot assume that they are lacking in knowledge of European law. Three Member States have not yet transposed the directive, four have done so deficiently and inadequately and three Member States have received communications from the Commission that could potentially lead to proceedings at the European Court of Justice. There are a large number of cases of deficient transposal. We established during our hearing that two countries have transposed the directive with a great deal of commitment and creativity, namely the United Kingdom and Austria. It is possible, then.

The benefits of the internal market should be in the interest of the Member States. The aim of this directive should be to clarify consumer rights and to simplify cross-border trade, to introduce reliable and fair regulations and, of course, to strengthen legal certainty.

A very important point for us, as parliamentarians, was the protection of citizens and consumers from fraudulent practices. This applies not only to consumers but also to small enterprises and tradespeople. Our aim, Commissioner, should perhaps be to put these two directives together in the medium term because very many small businesses are confronted by the same irritations in the internal market as consumers. We know of many examples, such as annoying advertising and misleading and aggressive business practices. We all know the address book fraud that is a widespread problem throughout Europe. We know about cheating on the lottery and much more besides.

I would also like to thank the Commission for rigorously introducing the new sweep and search system in airlines and ring-tone advertising. We hope that it will continue to work on this. We expect that it will implement stronger networking with national offices and ensure that black lists are not undermined and sanctions are actually a deterrent – a quite significant point for us as parliamentarians.

I would like to say, in closing, that successful transposal requires cooperation between the Member States and between national and European parliamentarians and, entirely in line with the Treaty of Lisbon, which has been mentioned here, I would also like to argue in favour of national parliamentarians exercising more control over their national governments. These two Acts would be a good start.

Androulla Vassiliou, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, first of all I would like to thank the rapporteur, Mrs Weiler, for her report, the contents of which of course will be carefully considered by the Commission, but also to thank her for the comments she made regarding this procedure.

The Commission fully agrees that it is now very important that Member States adequately transpose the new concepts introduced by the directive on unfair commercial practices and that national authorities also contribute to uniform implementation of the directive right across the EU.

As far as transpositions are concerned, two Member States are still late: Luxembourg and Spain; the Commission referred these cases to the Court of Justice in June last year.

The Commission also coordinated cooperation on transposition in order to avoid incorrect transpositions. Nevertheless, some problems remain in a limited number of countries mainly because of their reluctance to comply with full harmonisation. For those cases the Commission will not hesitate to launch infringement proceedings.

The report mentions the need to protect not only consumers but also SMEs against unfair commercial practices. On this point the Commission reminds the European Parliament that a full harmonisation directive on unfair business-to-consumer practices was already a very ambitious proposal which would have failed if its scope had been extended to business-to-business unfair competition practices.

It has been concluded from the consultation leading up to the proposal and from the deliberations in Council that there was little support for extending the scope of the directive to cover business-to-business unfair commercial practices.

As regards aggressive practices which were regulated for the first time at EU level through the directive on unfair commercial practices, it was considered that such practices occur almost exclusively in business-to-consumer relationships. Misleading business-to-business practices are already covered by the directive concerning misleading and comparative advertising. Such practices should continue to be regulated solely by this directive.

As regards enforcement of consumer protection legislation, the Commission will continue to coordinate enforcement actions through the consumer protection cooperation network.

In this context the Commission notes that Parliament's support for the 'sweeps' as an enforcement tool. The Commission intends to further develop this mechanism and has planned a further sweep for later this year. Further to the request from Parliament, the Commission is also pleased to add that the forthcoming second version of the consumer scoreboard will contain data gathered during the sweeps carried out so far.

As the report mentions the need for information campaigns to raise consumer awareness of their rights, the Commission would like to inform the members of its recent 'Is it fair?' website which includes for example educational material on the blacklist of banned practices.

To conclude, the Commission would like to assure this House that it will continue to work closely with Member States to ensure adequate and effective enforcement of the directives on unfair commercial practices and misleading comparative advertisement.

The database containing national transposition measures and case-law will be set up this year and will serve as a useful tool in this respect.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday at 12 noon.

(Following upon Mrs Weiler's comments, the President read out the provisions of Rule 45(2) of the Rules of Procedure)

Written Statement (Rule 142)

Zita Pleštinská (PPE-DE), in writing. – (SK) European consumers are often confronted with unfair commercial practices and deceptive and misleading advertising. The category of vulnerable consumers, which includes children and senior citizens in particular, is most exposed to the risk of fraud.

I welcome the Commission's effort to assist Member States in transposing a directive which will help to increase confidence of both consumers and traders in cross-border transactions. It will ensure greater legal certainty for consumers and, at the same time, protect small and medium-sized enterprises against aggressive unfair commercial practices.

This directive will be crucial for the future development of consumer rights in the EU and for fully developing the potential of the internal market. Since some things still remain unclear in the transposition of this directive, I welcome the report of Mrs Weiler drawing attention to the problems with transposing the directive into national legislations.

In order for us to be successful, judicial authorities will have to reinforce cross-border cooperation regarding misleading database services. I attach great importance to information campaigns for heightening consumers' awareness of their rights because these are a key factor in providing them with greater protection. Only a well-informed consumer is able to detect misleading advertising and avoid the disappointment it may cause.

I believe that the 'blacklists' will enable us to uncover unfair commercial practices and completely prohibit misleading advertising.

22. CFP and the ecosystem approach to fisheries management (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0485/2008) by Mr Guerreiro, on behalf of the Committee on Fisheries, on the CFP and the ecosystem approach to fisheries management (2008/2178(INI)).

Pedro Guerreiro, rapporteur. – (PT) This Commission communication raises a diverse range of questions as part of the debate on a possible reform of the common fisheries policy by 2012.

My report, which has been adopted by Parliament's Committee on Fisheries, puts forward a number of factors that we consider important in the context of this debate.

Fishing is a fundamental activity for guaranteeing human beings' food and survival, and this is the primordial objective of any fisheries policy.

In this context, it is worth underlining the importance of fishing in the waters of each Member State's EEZ for its sovereignty and independence, particularly in terms of food.

The common fisheries policy (CFP) should promote the modernisation and sustainable development of the fishing industry, safeguarding its socio-economic viability and the sustainability of fish stocks and guaranteeing the supply of fish to the public as well as food sovereignty and security, the preservation of jobs and improved living conditions for fishermen.

Taking account of its own objectives, a CFP must therefore not be subordinate to other Community policies that have since been defined.

In other words, a fisheries policy is not and cannot be a policy for the oceans or for the marine environment.

Since fishing is an activity that exploits a self-renewable resource, the first and principal task of fisheries management is to control total fishing effort in such a way as to guarantee the maximum sustainable catch.

A policy for fisheries must start from the assumption of an interdependence between the welfare of fishing communities and the sustainability of ecosystems, of which they are an integral part, in particular by recognising the specific features and importance of small-scale inshore fishing and artisanal fishing.

The application of an ecosystem approach to marine management necessarily requires multidisciplinary and intersectoral action between the various measures that have an impact on marine ecosystems, going far beyond and upstream of those adopted in the area of fisheries.

The proposal for an ecosystem-based analysis of the assessment of fishery resources must be based on validated scientific data, rather than on hunches based on preconceived ideas.

It must also be recognised that there are significant differences between the various marine areas and the resources that occur in each of them, between the various fleets and gear used and between their respective impacts on ecosystems, which requires fisheries management measures that are diversified, specific and adapted to each case, with fishermen being compensated for their socio-economic consequences where necessary.

In order to guarantee the sustainability of resources, fishing activity and the respective local communities, we believe it is vital that the Member States should exercise their sovereignty over their 12 miles of territorial waters and for the area corresponding to the EEZs of the outermost regions to be considered an exclusive access zone.

In this context, there is some concern at proposals regarding access to resources that aim to promote a system of transferable individual quotas, which would have consequences in terms of the concentration of fishing activity and the individual appropriation of fishing rights.

It should also be pointed out that a policy that encourages the indiscriminate scrapping of vessels, that takes no account of the specific features of fleets, resources, needs as regards consumption in each Member State and the socio-economic impact, is inappropriate and unjustified.

Lastly, I should like to emphasise that the sharp decline in income in the industry stems not only from restrictions on fishing activity, but in particular from the stagnation/fall in first-sale prices, accompanied by the increase in production costs (diesel and petrol).

Androulla Vassiliou, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, the Commission welcomes the report presented and the support given to our perspectives regarding the ecosystem approach.

One of the main messages the Commission gives in its communication is that, while fisheries depend on healthy marine ecosystems, fisheries management cannot take on the role of overall ocean management on its own. Healthy marine ecosystems can only be safeguarded through a policy which involves all sectors which impact on these ecosystems.

This is why the Commission sees the maritime policy, and especially its environmental pillar, the Marine Strategy Directive, as key to the implementation of an ecosystem approach. This approach will give assurances to the fishing industry that all human impacts on marine ecosystems, not only fisheries, are addressed in a proportionate and coherent way. This is also the overall thrust of the report and we appreciate the agreement on this point.

I will emphasise that this does not mean that one policy is subordinate to another – that we, by taking this approach are establishing a hierarchy between, for instance, the Marine Strategy Directive and the common fisheries policy.

The Marine Strategy Directive serves the common fisheries policy by being the necessary integrative instrument to safeguard the resource base for fisheries in the future, and the common fisheries policy will contribute to the Marine Strategy Directive by putting in place management measures necessary to support the objectives for healthy marine ecosystems.

As stated in the report, meeting food needs, safeguarding fishing industries and fishing communities, and preserving the sustainability of marine ecosystems are not irreconcilable. On the contrary, in the long term there is a synergy between these objectives.

The report touches on many questions regarding the specific instruments to be utilised in the future. These are important and pertinent questions which we will address in the debate regarding the reform of the common fisheries policy. I will therefore not comment specifically on these questions here.

I will, however, point out that there are a couple of points where we may be in disagreement. It is indicated that fishermen affected by management plans and measures to protect ecosystems should be subsidised or compensated. We do not think that direct subsidies is a way forward, but that the solution is to help the industry to be more economically resilient and to help coastal communities diversify into other economic activities.

It is also indicated that restocking from aquaculture may be an instrument to replenish wild fish stocks. Although this may be an option in a few very specific cases, we do not think that this is the way forward in general. Fish stocks should be rebuilt by proper management of the human impacts on the marine ecosystems, including the impacts of both fisheries and other sectors.

We will return to a more detailed debate on the instruments for fisheries management in the context of the debate and development of the common fisheries policy reform, starting with our publication of a green paper in April. In the mean time, I thank Parliament for its support for our approach as expressed through this report.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday at 12 noon.

Written Statement (Rule 142)

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (PSE), *in writing*. – (RO) Current fish stocks in European Union waters are continuing to dwindle, both due to excessive fishing and the use of unsuitable equipment and to the impact which other sectors, in particular tourism, are having on marine biology life. Scientific research into identifying the factors

that influence marine ecosystems, including the impact of climate change, will provide the opportunity to determine the development of fishery resources and ensure that precautionary measures are taken to prevent the rapid, continuous depletion of fish stocks.

As fishing is an essential activity for guaranteeing food and man's survival, managing the fishery resources' sustainability becomes vitally important at a time when marine biodiversity is deteriorating. For this reason, social, economic and environmental aspects need to be taken into account in all the initiatives promoting the sustainable development of the European Union's coastal areas.

23. Equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions (short presentation)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0491/2008) by Mrs Riera Madurell, on behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, on transposition and application of Directive 2002/73/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council, of 23 September 2002, amending Council Directive 76/207/EEC on the implementation of the principle of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion, and working conditions (2008/2039(INI)).

Teresa Riera Madurell, rapporteur. – (ES) Mr President, the directive referred to in the report is an amended version of a 1978 directive on the same subject, prepared in the light of the Treaty of Amsterdam, the case-law developed by the Court of Justice of the European Communities and the new social realities. It is a version that incorporates key elements of the improvement in women's rights, which are those assessed in this report.

The legal text presents the definition of direct and indirect discrimination, assault and sexual assault; it requires Member States to encourage employers to adopt measures that prevent all forms of gender discrimination; and it safeguards workers' rights following maternity or paternity leave.

By implementing this Directive, the Member States not only commit themselves to establishing equality bodies that promote, assess, implement and support equal treatment, but also undertake to instigate social dialogue, with the aim of promoting equal treatment in the workplace through collective agreements, in a planned manner. They also commit to strengthening the role of NGOs in promoting equality, to establishing effective measures to penalise those who do not abide by the provisions of the directive, and to implementing protective measures for those who provide support to victims.

If the Commission had been able to draw up the report which, according to the directive itself, is mandatory every four years, our evaluation work would have been relatively simple. For that to have been so, all the Member States should have transposed the directive within the given time period, done so properly and submitted all the information to the Commission. That, however, was not the situation we found ourselves in when we began.

When the deadline for transposing the Directive had passed, nine Member States had not provided information on the measures they had adopted in order to transpose it. The Commission had then initiated infringement proceedings and, in May of last year, proceedings were still underway against two Member States. Furthermore, due to the directive's complexity and the new elements it contained, the Commission had detected problems with its transposition in 22 Member States, although it was expecting to resolve many of those through dialogue.

In order to make a report that was thorough, useful and as complete as possible, we needed to have more data available and therefore also decided to request information from Member States. With the information provided by the Commission, that received from Member States – through their equality bodies and national parliaments – and the contributions from my colleagues in the various groups, we were able to write this report, which now provides a clear idea of how the transposition process is progressing in each of the Member States.

After this experience, I would like to stress that collaboration between the national parliaments and the European Parliament was fundamental in enabling us to do our job properly. Without the information provided by the parliaments and equality bodies, we would not have been able to write this report, at least not as thoroughly as we have done; nor would it have been possible without the mutual collaboration that we have been able to establish with the Commission, or without the invaluable help provided by the services of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, my office and the services of my parliamentary

group. I would like to extend my thanks to all of these women. I also wish to thank the shadow rapporteurs for their contributions and their willingness.

From the very beginning, our aim was for our work to be not merely thorough and useful, but the result of the broadest possible consensus, since we needed to gain an accurate picture of how the transposition was progressing. This directive is highly important, since it equips the European Union with very effective tools that enable Member States to strengthen their legislation on equal treatment in the workplace – something that is fundamental if we are to achieve the goals we have set ourselves as Europeans.

We should not forget that even today in the European Union there is a 28.4% difference in employment rates between men and women, that we are a long way off the Lisbon target of achieving 60% female employment by 2010 and that, in addition, women earn on average 15% less than men.

If this report also serves to further awaken people's consciences on this matter in Member States, then we can be doubly satisfied.

Androulla Vassiliou, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, the Commission welcomes Parliament's report on this important Directive, and we thank Mrs Madurell for her hard work on this.

Directive 2002/73/EC is an important tool for fighting gender discrimination in access to employment, vocational training, promotion and working conditions. It has significantly improved Community law in this field, with clearer definitions of types of discrimination and a number of innovative legal solutions. They include provisions for the protection of pregnant women and women on maternity leave, the involvement of social partners and NGOs in ensuring gender equality in the workplace, and the establishment of equality bodies.

This report is of special importance given the many inequalities still affecting men and women in the area of employment. It draws the attention of the Member States, the Commission, the social partners and civil society to the Directive's key provisions and stresses the need for full implementation. It can therefore contribute to greater compliance with the Directive and to greater awareness of the Community legislation on equal treatment of men and women.

As the guardian of the Treaties, the Commission continues to monitor closely implementation of the Directive in the Member States. It is keeping up the dialogue with the Member States in connection with infringement procedures, with a view to ensuring the Directive is properly implemented.

In fulfilment of its reporting obligation under the Directive, the Commission will adopt a report in the first half of this year on the Directive's application in all Member States and will communicate this to Parliament and the Council.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Proinsias De Rossa (PSE), *in writing*. – The Irish Equality Authority is considered to be a model of good practice. Yet, the Irish Government has recently cut its budget by some 43% and fast-tracked the decentralisation of the Authority, at a time when the Government's overall programme of decentralisation of public bodies is being halted.

Indeed, Mr Niall Crowley, Chief Executive Officer of Ireland's Equality Authority, has resigned as CEO stating 'the Equality Authority has been rendered unviable by the decision [...] to cut its funding by 43% and to continue the decentralisation of its staff' and that '[T]he work of the Equality Authority has been fatally compromised'. Moreover, a further six members of the Equality Authority's board have now also resigned.

This report urges Member States to develop capacities and ensure adequate resources for the bodies promoting equal treatment and equal gender opportunities provided for in Directive 2002/73/EC. It also restates the Directive's requirement of ensuring the independence of those bodies.

The Irish Government is clearly in breach of the directive because it evidently has no intention to either adequately resource or ensure the independence of an authority whose funding it has almost halved forcing the resignation of half its board.

Louis Grech (PSE), in writing. – In light of the persisting gap between men and women in terms of employment rates, wages and access to management positions, I call on Member States to speed up the implementation of Directive 2002/73/EC, while ensuring that its provisions are fully and effectively transposed in the national legislation. With a financial crisis unfolding, I am concerned that a slow or low quality implementation of this directive is likely to exacerbate the gender inequalities, endanger the fulfilment of the Lisbon strategy goals and prevent the EU from developing the full potential of its economic capacity.

Regrettable is also the choice of certain Member States to limit the scope of the prohibited types of discrimination, thus only partially complying with the Directive 2002/73/EC. It is disappointing that despite numerous studies on the subject, some national lawmakers are still neglecting the destructive effects of discrimination and sexual harassment on employee morale and productivity.

To better implement anti-discrimination and harassment practices it is necessary to engage stakeholders at grass-roots level, through information campaigns, use of NGOs, and also by more formal instruments such as including special provisions in collective agreements and national legislation relative to gender equality.

Zita Pleštinšká (PPE-DE), in writing. – (SK) The adoption of a piece of European legislation initiates the process of transposing and applying the directive in each Member State. The European Parliament carefully monitors the transposition of every directive, one example of which is the report from my fellow Member Teresa Riera Madurell examining the application of the principle of equal treatment between men and women.

The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality works intensively to draw attention to the fact that gender-based discrimination still persists in many areas of social and political life. Slow and low-quality implementation of Directive 2002/73/EC puts at risk the achievement of the Lisbon Strategy and the development of the full potential of the EU's social and economic capacity.

I call on the Commission and Member States to introduce clear, detailed and measurable equal treatment indicators and standards for evaluating gender relations. I believe that the gender institute which is coming into operation will greatly contribute through its activities to the field of gender equality.

I firmly believe that a successful transposition of this directive can be achieved by sharing best practices and adopting positive measures in areas where discrimination has been identified.

Rovana Plumb (PSE), in writing. – (RO) I was pleased to read on the European Parliament's website that the topic of equal treatment for women and men is in a distinguished third place among the most read news items in 2008. The huge interest in this topic shows us however that there is still a great deal to do, especially in the area of equal treatment for men and women as regards access to employment, vocational training and promotion. In this respect, Teresa Riera Madurell's report is a success thanks to clarifying the role of employers and civil society in promoting gender equality.

I think that the Commission has an extremely important role to play in the battle to establish equal treatment for women and men in the workplace. It needs to verify primarily the way in which EU Member States have taken positive action in relation to the disadvantages women have encountered during their professional career. I am also referring in particular to the integration and observance of the principle of gender equality in the Member States' administrative and political decisions.

At the same time as submitting the reports to the Commission every four years, each Member State needs to offer a coherent presentation of the actual sanctions to be imposed for infringements of this directive, which would very much help to establish the exchange of experience and good practice.

24. Agenda of the next sitting: see Minutes

25. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting was closed at 10.45 p.m.)