

WEDNESDAY, 24 FEBRUARY 2010

IN THE CHAIR: MR BUZEK

President

(The sitting was opened at 15.05)

1. Resumption of the session

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

2. Statements by the President

President. – Let me welcome the President of the European Council, Mr Herman Van Rompuy, to the plenary session of the European Parliament for the first time. We welcome you and congratulate you once again, Mr President.

(Applause)

I would also like to welcome President Barroso. Over the last five years, it has been quite usual for you to sit here; it is not the first time for you at all!

It is with regret that I have to inform you of the death, in the railway accident near Brussels, of Mrs Candeago, our colleague from the Directorate-General for Communication. Mrs Candeago had worked in the European Parliament since December 2008. I would like to convey expressions of sympathy and support to her family and friends on behalf of all of us.

Another tragedy which has occurred in recent days is the flooding on the Portuguese island of Madeira. The biggest storm since 1993 has cost the lives of at least 38 people. The families of the victims of these tragedies are in our thoughts and prayers at this time of sorrow.

I will now ask everyone to stand and honour the memory of the victims of both tragedies with a minute's silence.

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

Thank you.

3. Welcome

President. – Now I would like to extend a warm welcome to two guests who are with us today from Belarus: Mrs Borys, President of the Union of Poles in Belarus, and Mr Milinkevich, winner of our own Sakharov Prize in 2006 and leader of the democratic opposition in Belarus.

(Sustained applause)

Unfortunately, Belarus has again found itself in the headlines over the persecution of non-governmental organisations. The European Parliament upholds and will uphold universal values as something which we value and in which we believe. We will condemn authoritarian regimes which use force and persecute democratic organisations just because those organisations do not share the regime's views.

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

5. Transportation of horses for slaughter in the European Union (written declaration)

President. – I would like to inform you that Written Declaration 0054/2009 by Mrs Lynne, Mrs Jędrzejewska and Mr Schlyter on the transportation of horses for slaughter in the European Union was signed today, 24 February 2010, by a majority of Parliament's component Members. Therefore, in accordance with

Rule 124(4) of the Rules of Procedure, it will be forwarded to its addressees and published with the names of its signatories in the *Texts Adopted* of the sitting of 25 February 2010.

We would like to thank the authors for submitting this declaration.

Elizabeth Lynne, *author*. – Mr President, it is great news that we have achieved the right number of signatures. Thank you everyone for signing this written declaration.

President. – I would like to inform you that I did not have the possibility of signing this declaration, and I am ready to do it immediately.

6. Composition of Parliament: see Minutes

7. Implementing measures (Rule 88): see Minutes

8. Decisions concerning certain documents: see Minutes

9. Documents received: see Minutes

10. Written declarations (submission): see Minutes

11. Lapsed written declarations: see Minutes

12. Order of business

President. – The final draft agenda drawn up on Wednesday, 10 February 2010 by the Conference of Presidents pursuant to Rule 137 of the Rules of Procedure has been distributed.

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

Thursday:

Concerning the sitting on Thursday, the Group of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament has submitted a request to hold over the vote on the report by Mr Lehne on annual accounts of certain types of companies as regards micro-entities.

Martin Schulz, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (DE) Mr President, our group had a very intensive debate on the Lehne report this morning. We did not finish discussing this in the group. That happens in groups sometimes. We would like Mr Lehne, as rapporteur, to give us until the March part-session to once more consider the direction we can go with this report and the stance that we as Social Democrats want to take with regard to this issue. There are different approaches in our group – I freely admit this.

I would be grateful if we could conduct the debate, but if you, Mr Lehne, would allow us to postpone the vote until the first March part-session. That would give my group at least – although I believe other groups too – a little more time for a thorough debate and to arrive at an opinion.

Klaus-Heiner Lehne, *rapporteur*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I think it is good that the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament are looking at this in detail. However, I would like to say that Parliament adopted a resolution almost unanimously in December 2008 in which we called on the European Commission to submit precisely the sort of proposal that we are now discussing. Parliament must also stick to what it has itself decided and what has been the declared intention of this House for years.

Because it is only natural for there to be concerns about one thing or another in connection with any legislative proposal, we have resolved the open questions by means of a compromise in the Committee on Legal Affairs. I should make it clear that this compromise is ready for approval. Nevertheless, I do understand that it might make sense to enlarge the group that are in support of this report a bit more. If the efforts of Mr Schulz are aimed at increasing the number of supporters, then I have nothing against a postponement until the next plenary sitting in March. That is my personal opinion on the matter. It is not the opinion of the group, which expressly decided otherwise this morning. However, I think we should give the Socialists a chance to reach

a conclusion so that they too can do something to help reduce bureaucracy and the burden on small and medium-sized enterprises.

Dirk Sterckx (ALDE). – (NL) Mr President, I would like to thank my fellow Member, Mr Lehne, for what he just said, but I would nonetheless like to ask that, in the circumstances, we be given a chance to submit amendments and debate them. At the moment, we have only a vote planned without the opportunity to submit any amendments to Mr Lehne's report.

Martin Schulz (S&D). – (DE) Mr President, I would like to reiterate my request. There is no doubt that we are in favour of debate. We are merely asking for the vote to be postponed. However, in the interests of fairness, I must add that, much as I understand Mr Lehne's wishful thinking, our group is governed by democracy. Mr Lehne, I cannot give you any assurances about the result.

(Parliament agreed to the request)

(The order of business was adopted)⁽¹⁾

Hannes Swoboda (S&D). – (DE) Mr President, I will be brief. In the last few days, two important nominations have been put forward: the first is the representative of the European Commission to the United States of America in Washington and the second is the Special Representative for Afghanistan. Both nominations are controversial and there are various discussions going on about both of them. I do not wish to go into the question of merit just now. I would simply like to ask, Mr President, that, before they take office, both of them appear before the Committee on Foreign Affairs to enable us to have an intensive debate there, and I hope that the President of the Commission and the President of the Council will give this their full support with your help, Mr President.

(Applause)

13. EU 2020 - Follow-up of the informal European Council of 11 February 2010 (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on the statement of the Council and the Commission: EU 2020 – Follow-up of the informal European Council of 11 February 2010

President. – President Van Rompuy, as this is your first speech in the plenary session of the European Parliament, we agreed that it could be slightly longer. President Van Rompuy would like to present to this House his points of view on other issues, on institutional issues, at the beginning of his term of office. Perhaps 15 to 20 minutes will be enough for you?

Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council. – Mr President, I am delighted to have this opportunity to take part in a debate with you not only to report on the informal meeting of the Heads of State or Government of two weeks ago – it was, after all, an informal meeting, with no formal conclusions to report – but also to take this opportunity to meet with you early in my mandate. Had I waited until the first formal opportunity to report on a European Council taking place at the end of March, I would not have come before this Parliament before the end of April, some five months after my designation as President of the European Council. Let me therefore take this opportunity to lay out how I see my role and function. I shall spend a few minutes on this so as not to have to return to this on future occasions.

There has, of course, always been a Presidency of the European Council; not the same thing as the 'President of Europe', as some media put it. So what has changed? Three small things, but which will, together and over time, have the potential to make a significant difference.

First is the element of continuity: past presidents changed every six months; that is, after every second or third meeting. There was little opportunity to develop a long-term strategy. Our partners in third countries were bemused at having to meet a different Head of Government every time they had a summit with the European Union. Greater continuity is fundamental to building relationships and carrying out a serious task.

Second is the full-time nature of the job; previous presidents had to simultaneously manage their own national governments. This meant that, at best, they could only deal half-time with European affairs. By creating a

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

full-time post dedicated to the running of the European Council and its follow-up, including external representation, the European Council now has a better chance to play its role within the European institutional system.

Third is the fact that Heads of State or Government now choose who they want to hold this position rather than it happening haphazardly from an arbitrary rotation system. I hope this, too, augurs well for the support that the President can count on.

These three changes are all pragmatic improvements to the previous institutional architecture but, taken together with the fact that the European Council now becomes an institution in its own right, they give the European Council a better chance of fulfilling its task under the treaties of '[defining] the general political directions and priorities [of the Union]'.

Some commentators have seen a great deal more in this role; others have seen less. On the one hand, some consider the Presidency of the European Council to be a sort of *président* in the manner of an executive Head of State, as in, for instance, France. Others, on the other hand, see it as the mere chairmanship of the meeting of the Heads of Government. In reality, it is neither. It is certainly not a President and not with executive powers in its own right. The incumbent must express the views of the collective Heads of State or Government. On the other hand, the role is not merely one of being a chairman, giving the floor to one or another member of the European Council to speak during its meetings. The task of preparing and then following up its meetings, and representing the Union externally – for instance, along with the President of the Commission at the G20 Summit – and the role as a bridge between the national capitals and institutions clearly go beyond the task of merely chairing meetings.

The role of permanent President is to enhance a shared sense of direction: nothing more, nothing less. Where are we going? How to deal with our neighbours? Who are our main strategic partners in the world? Where do we want to be in 10 or 20 years' time? These are vital issues.

As regards my relationship with the European Parliament, the treaty is quite brief on this: it simply requires that I report to you 'after [...] meetings of the European Council'. That means a minimum of four times a year, though in most years, that is more likely to be five or six and may, in the future, rise to 10. It will not be long before many of you will be fed up with the sight of me! I will continue to multiply other usual contacts with Members of Parliament, such as the meetings I have begun with leaders of groups and the monthly meeting I have with the President of Parliament.

Indeed, my role should not be confused with that of the President of the Commission. Mr Barroso chairs an executive that is elected by and is accountable to the European Parliament. It submits legislative and budgetary proposals to you, I do not do so. The Commission President has an intimate day-to-day contact with the European Parliament, not least working on those legislative and budgetary proposals. My task is, rather, to ensure that the Heads of State or Government can collectively agree on an overall strategy for the European Union, both as regards its internal development and in terms of its external relations. I have a weekly meeting with President Barroso. We are both acutely aware of the need to avoid any conflicts of competence or misunderstandings as to who is responsible for what. Public opinion and third countries may well find it difficult to grasp the difference between the President of the Commission and the President of the European Council; I am very confident that we are on the right track.

In this context, it is also important to remember that I am President of the European Council and not of the Council of Ministers; these are two separate institutions. The ordinary Council, which is the other branch of the legislature with the European Parliament, will still be chaired by a Presidency that continues to rotate every six months among the Member States. Only in the configuration of foreign affairs where it coordinates executive power does it have a permanent president in the form of Catherine Ashton, Vice-President of the Commission and High Representative for Foreign Policy.

I pause at this point to pay tribute to the work being done by Catherine Ashton. In facing up to multiple challenges in the field of foreign affairs and security and in preparing the External Action Service, she deserves our support. It will be my privilege to work closely with her in representing the Union externally.

Let me just say a few words about the European Council itself.

The first formal meeting under my chairmanship will take place at the end of next month. We did, however, have a useful informal gathering of Heads of State or Government earlier this month at the *Bibliothèque Solvay*, just a few hundred metres from here. Whether it was because of the more intimate surroundings of the library or the physical proximity of Parliament, our discussions were fruitful.

As I said, I cannot report any formal conclusions to you from an informal meeting. At most, I can share with you my own personal conclusions from the discussions which I have set out in a letter to the members of the European Council and which I know has been circulated within Parliament. My aim with this informal Council was mainly to prepare our future deliberations on the issue of how to improve Europe's economic performance as we exit the immediate economic crisis. This involves looking at our targets and ambitions – and we have a very useful paper from Commission President Barroso on this – but also how to improve our governance of these issues. How we go about managing our integrated European economy – the world's largest market – in order to improve our economic performance is one of the central questions facing the European Union.

Our initial exchange of views on this involved looking at how we set targets, how we follow them up, how we evaluate results. It is in large part about coordinating the exercise of national competences whilst making full use of the European Union competences and instruments available. It is therefore a task to which the European Council is eminently suited. At the Solvay meeting, all members of the European Council agreed that we need better, more focused economic coordination in the Union, both for major economic policy – certainly in the euro area – and for micro-economic policy. A lot of this is very technical, but let us just take the idea of bringing down the number of common economic objectives to concentrate on four or five. These objectives should be quantifiable and divisible in national set objectives; it makes no sense to have scoreboards on, say, 65 different sets of data.

Moreover, all members of the European Council are willing to take more responsibility in a common European strategy for growth and jobs. Such personal involvement is indispensable; we need to go from paper recommendations to real-life commitment. I was glad to find such a level of ambition around the table. Whether you want to call it better coordination, better governance, or even a *gouvernement économique*, the key is the common commitment to success.

We also had a quick discussion on how to better implement Europe's actions in the reconstruction of Haiti; we want to take this discussion further with an eye to better implementing Article 214 of the Treaty on the coordination of humanitarian aid. A discussion on how Europe should respond strategically to the Copenhagen conference on climate change will be pursued at the next European Council. Unexpectedly, of course, there was a discussion on the situation in Greece. I took it upon myself to ensure that this was handled in the European Union's institutional framework and not outside it, and that the agreement reached met with the approval of all 27 Heads of State or Government as well as the President of the Commission and the President of the European Central Bank. This degree of consensus was a message about Greece's acceptance of its responsibility to cut its deficit in a credible way and of our solidarity with it if needed. I very much look forward to hearing your views on all these matters, not least on how we can face all the challenges facing our Union.

I can assure you that I have one overriding goal for the coming years; to ensure that our Union is on track to be strong enough internally to maintain our own social model and externally to defend our interests and project our values. I think that all European institutions can, and must, work together for those goals.

(Applause)

José Manuel Barroso, *President of the Commission*. – Mr President, let me first of all congratulate President Van Rompuy on what was a very good informal European Council for the first time under his chairmanship.

After reaching agreement among all of us on an important statement on Greece, we discussed the Europe 2020 strategy – a strategy for sustainable growth and employment. I had the opportunity to focus on the substantive policy issues we are facing, on the challenges, and on the lines which the Commission will formally propose next Wednesday.

Before the crisis, the European economy was making progress: we saw 18 million new jobs and a more dynamic business environment. However, these gains have been wiped out by the financial crisis and its impact on many of our areas of activity: a 4% fall in GDP in a single year, unemployment shooting up to 10%, a huge hit to our prosperity, a real threat to our societies. At the same time, the task is getting tougher: we have an ageing population, a growing productivity gap with our competitors, and failings in education and research. However, we also have many strengths: we have the world's biggest market economy; we have the single market; we have the euro area. All this has proved to be an important asset in the crisis.

But today, Europe faces a very important choice; I would say a defining choice for future generations. Hoping for a return of the good old days is no option. One option is limited change – the lowest common denominator

which brings some reform and some growth. But we could never get back what we lost in the crisis. This option would result in a Europe which is second class in the new global order. Minimal changes, some kind of adaptations.

I believe we can and must be more ambitious. We can aspire to an economic strategy that puts Europe on the path to competitiveness and that can create millions of new jobs. But this cannot be done by half measures and incremental change. We need to instil a sense of urgency, a recognition that business as usual will not protect our European way of life and will not defend our social models. On the contrary. Those social models will be put at risk if we do not adapt to a much more challenging global environment.

This requires a joint effort. We need the Member States; we need the European institutions; we need stakeholders and society at large; and we need specifically the active involvement and support of this Parliament, the European Parliament, for shaping this strategy and for communicating it to the people.

Next week, the Commission will set out the key elements of the strategy that it will formally propose to the European institutions. It will centre on three priorities: smart growth, inclusive growth, sustainable growth.

First, the core driver of growth must be knowledge; knowledge and innovation that produces tomorrow's ideas, tomorrow's skills, tomorrow's technologies. Second, to keep in force our European model of society, we need to deliver more jobs. Our goal must be healthy, prosperous, secure societies, where everyone feels they can play their part. That means giving people jobs and skills and it means tackling the scourge of poverty head on. The problem of poverty is not only a national problem; it is a problem for which we need a common European response.

Our social market economy must be hardwired to seize the opportunities of the future. I am talking about sustainable growth, recognising the importance of tackling climate change, recognising the pressure on resources. With this, I mean a competitive economy, deepening the internal market, creating better conditions for investment – especially for SMEs – a European economy able to hold its own in a globalised market place.

These priorities are not unfamiliar. But the fact that we have not yet succeeded in realising these goals makes them more important, not less. Where we need to make a radical change is not in our prescription of what the European economy needs, but in our approach on how to make it happen.

What do we need in order to succeed? Firstly, the strategy must be comprehensive. We cannot have a pick-and-mix strategy allowing everyone to do the easy parts, the feel-good things, and leave the real challenges to the others. There are still many issues: when I think about completing the single market, about the quality of our taxation systems, about the way we spend money at a time of intense pressure on public finances, to name but a few.

Secondly, our strategy must engage all parts of our societies. We will not succeed in putting European society on the right track for the future if this comes at the cost of social conflict. That is why a proactive approach to creating jobs and addressing the scourge of poverty are essential. It is also why we have been wise to reform financial markets. We want a strong financial sector able to finance innovation and help businesses to grow: one which acknowledges its broader responsibilities to society and governments which came to its aid at the time of need; one which accepts that effective supervision at European level is necessary today.

Thirdly, we must not confuse having an overall vision for the European economy with the question of 'who does what?'. It should not be a question of a debate on competences. What we have to see is the added value of a European approach. It is quite evident at a time of globalisation, when we need to discuss with America, with China, with Russia, with others, that there is added value in a common approach; for instance, in the G20, an initiative that was in fact launched by the European Union during the French Presidency by the President of France and myself, when we proposed to the American President to accept those summits. It is indeed necessary to recognise that we have greater influence if we act together. It makes no sense to recognise global interdependence and to reject European interdependence. That is why we need to act together.

Still, a lot of action will have to come at national level. Of course, there are national responsibilities which we expect to be addressed mainly by governments, but we also expect governments to commit sincerely to a European approach. The European approach is necessary, not to bring back powers in Brussels – this is not our intention at all – but to help the indispensable reforms in our societies so that they can bring more prosperity, more well-being to our citizens.

We will only succeed if we are ready to work together, not against each other, and therefore we need credible ownership at all levels. We need strong and true coordination in the economic field. The Lisbon Treaty gives us these instruments and we will use them.

In this European Council, I saw awareness of this problem. I can compare the discussions this time with the discussions five years ago when we were discussing the Lisbon Strategy. Let me tell you very frankly and very openly that I saw among Heads of State or Government much more awareness of the need to act together and also of the external constraints on the European economy. I sincerely hope that this time, narrow national interests will not again resist the need for closer coordination and an effective system of European governance.

We also need significant European Union level flagship measures to typify what we are trying to achieve: some concrete plans. We are going to present some of them: projects like an Innovation Plan, a new skills programme, a proper industrial policy, a digital agenda, green technologies, and a specific plan or action against poverty; projects that have a value, an impact in themselves; projects that show why Europe provides part of the solution and which show that the European Union is not just talking, it is acting.

Let me finish by calling upon you, the European Parliament, to show your strong support for these projects as legislator, as budgetary authority and as champion of European action in every corner of the European Union.

Joseph Daul, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Mr Van Rompuy, Mr Barroso, ladies and gentlemen, the European Council of 11 February was the first to be convened and presided over by Mr Van Rompuy, whom I would like to welcome on his first appearance in the plenary session of the European Parliament.

Mr Van Rompuy, the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) expects a lot of you. I welcome the positive and pragmatic spirit of your speeches since your nomination, and I appreciate the tone that you want to set in the European Council, but I expect you and the Council of Ministers to be aware that with the Treaty of Lisbon, your relations with us, the MEPs, have changed. We are equal decision makers, and that has not only legal consequences, but political ones as well.

Now I would like to come to the substance of the debates of 11 February, which is, of course, the 2020 strategy, but it is also the euro and economic and budgetary policy, since speculation against the Greek debt and the euro were certainly unexpected guests in the Solvay library.

I would like to put the following question: is the weakening of our common currency solely due to the Greek crisis, or is the euro the target of direct attacks by those who are unhappy about its power and that of the Member States involved?

Secondly, are we going to wait until the situation in certain euro area countries deteriorates before we react, as we did with Greece? If not, what plans are there to put things right in the countries most at risk? A question for you there, President Van Rompuy.

I ask these questions because, while I am happy with the solidarity measures taken on 11 February, I seriously doubt whether we Europeans are really on top of the situation. What is the situation, if not the fact that the Greek warning has shown the extent to which we must take courageous decisions to finally make sure that our currency, the euro, reflects the political power behind it?

Of course, we talk a great deal, we talk about economic governance, we also talk about monetary governance, but we could make matters a great deal simpler and certainly more effective if we devised and implemented real budgetary coordination of the euro area members. The former French Prime Minister, Edouard Balladur, has himself recently recognised the need to abandon sovereignty in some areas – something that is not easy for a Frenchman – and has spoken in favour of the national budgets of the euro area States being approved by the Eurogroup even before being submitted to the national parliaments.

I would like to take up this bold idea, and I ask the European Council to consider it and to analyse it seriously. By properly coordinating their budgets, the euro area States would acquire unprecedented influence and room for manoeuvre. This power would mean that they have a strong influence on the development of new global regulations, but it would also demand that the European forces unite within the international financial organisations, where the euro must speak with one voice.

Let me cite a striking example – which was mentioned by Mr Barroso I believe – that of the IMF, where the voting rights are calculated according to the economic weight of the states. With these criteria, the United

States enjoys 16.7% of the voting rights, Japan 6%, China 3.6% and the six founding members of the European Union 18.49%. However, if they presented a united front to the IMF, the euro area countries would represent 23% of the votes, and all the countries of the European Union, still united, would represent 32% of the votes, that is to say, twice as many as the United States.

Presidents, ladies and gentlemen, that is the reality of the balance of power in the world. However, because it is still divided, Europe is unable to punch its full weight. Can we tolerate this any more? The PPE Group does not think so. It is time, President Van Rompuy, for the euro area countries to open their eyes to this state of affairs and to learn from it. They would then be prepared for what they will soon have to do out of necessity, namely, truly unite instead of clinging to this facade of economic sovereignty, which is nothing but a dangerous pretence.

Stephen Hughes, on behalf of the S&D Group. – Mr President, since the start of the economic and social crisis, over seven million people have joined the unemployment lines in Europe. By the end of this year, it is quite likely that over 25 million people will be unemployed. The good health of our economies and public finances, which we have striven so hard to put in order since the early 1990s, has been ruined in less than two years. Despite costly recovery measures, all we have managed to avoid so far is a complete collapse of the system.

Economic growth remains extremely weak, and many people have lost faith in the idea of an early recovery. Fears for the future trouble our societies, inequalities of all kinds have widened and some of our Member States are in desperate need of EU-wide solidarity and protection, having become the targets of ruthless and uncontrolled speculation. The crisis has gravely undermined Europe's global competitiveness and weakened its political influence.

That is the gloomy landscape in which Europe now needs to reinvent its future in order to safeguard its model of economic and social development.

President Barroso, you are going to be asking the Spring Council where we want Europe to be in 2020. That is a very important question, but can we afford to argue about the distant future without first providing an answer to those millions of Europeans who are now feeling the impact of the crisis on their lives and who worry what will happen to their lives tomorrow – will they have a job; will they have the prospect of finding a new job? What answers can you give them?

I cannot go back to my region tomorrow and tell my people that they do not need to worry, that we have a plan for 2020. I need to answer their immediate worries and fears, and I want to be able to tell them that they will be able to keep their jobs, that new jobs will soon start to be created and that these jobs will be decent jobs with decent salaries.

At the moment, the only medium-term policy agenda is that set down by the European Council in December: the consolidation of public finances. By 2011, Member States are expected to start consolidation to bring their public deficits within the 3% limit within two years. At the same time, unemployment will still be rising; growth will be too weak to bring unemployment down.

There are other ways to pull Europe out of the crisis: putting people at the heart of our policy agenda and especially those who have been most hit by the crisis. I would urge President Van Rompuy and President Barroso to reconsider the nature of the so-called exit strategy. Europe should choose a morally decent way out of this crisis: a human way based on our fundamental values – which actually is also a smarter way in economic terms.

This will not be the case if macro-economic policy is totally focused on rapid consolidation. That would mean cuts in public investment, in education and training, in social and in health services. Consolidation cannot be achieved through tax rises alone. Europe's growth potential would suffer even more than it already has and, as a result, the recovery would be extremely slow and a large share of the current unemployed would become long-term unemployed.

Europeans deserve a more balanced and socially responsible policy approach. We believe this approach should involve an 'entry strategy' into the labour market, which should form an integral part of the 2020 strategy and constitute its roadmap for the years up to 2015.

It should combine the macro-economic policy agenda with structural policies in the economic, social and environmental fields to aim at the creation of at least five million net new jobs by 2015, particularly in the green economy. The European Council should state this intention clearly at the March summit as a key objective of the new strategy.

Proper economic policy coordination reaching well beyond the policing role of the stability pact should ensure that gradual fiscal consolidation in the different Member States is combined with the preservation of key public spending in growth areas and key social policies.

This will demand a political leap in thinking with regard to Europe's – and, in particular, the eurozone's – economic governance.

The March or June summit should give a mandate to its president, in close cooperation with the Commission, to submit an ambitious plan for the strengthening of economic governance in the EU for decision by the December 2010 Council.

We need to challenge the old way of doing things if we want to learn lessons from the current crisis and make it history as soon as possible. This is a chance to make Europe relevant to people and not just to markets. This can only become a reality if the 2020 strategy is indeed about people and about jobs – in other words, if it incorporates an ambitious social and decent-jobs agenda.

In the name of my group, I urge you to do all you can to put people, and not least, the most vulnerable people, at the heart of the European project.

Guy Verhofstadt, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, first of all, let me come directly to what I would call the most urgent problem today. We can talk about 2020, but we have a more urgent problem today: the eurozone and Greece. We have to find solutions to that.

I think we, the European Parliament, have to take the initiative in this field. It is important to determine what exactly happened in Greece. Today, we received contradictory information. Greece says that it has given all the information to the European Union and European institutions. At the same time, the European Commission and Eurostat are saying that they did not receive all the necessary information. At the same time the investment banks – Goldman Sachs, Morgan Stanley, Deutsche Bank – are minimising what they have done in the Greece case.

I therefore think it is the task of this Parliament to organise hearings with the relevant committee as quickly as possible, so that we can hear all the parties concerned on this matter and find out exactly what is happening in the case of Greece. We cannot talk about remedies, about solutions, about reforms in the European Union if, first of all, we do not know what really happened in the case of Greece in 2008 and 2009 and before that, and I think it is absolutely necessary that the different parties are heard by this Parliament.

The second point is that we also have to tackle the problem of the Greek debt. I think there is only one good solution to that. Yesterday, I read the article by George Soros in the *Financial Times* on the matter, and a few days ago I read the article by Joschka Fischer in the German press. He is saying what many people are saying: the best solution to the Greek debt is a European solution – euro obligations, or a European monetary fund, without any costs to the European taxpayer, but with a solution for the future. I think it is also the task of this Parliament to ask the Commission and the Council to reflect on that possibility and to go beyond the national interests of the current Member States of the European Union to examine this possibility.

Thirdly, I think the most important part of this debate is, naturally, what to do about 2020. I think Greece is a very good example of what went wrong with the Lisbon Strategy. The Lisbon Strategy was too weak; the gap between the German economy and the Greek economy widened over the last 10 years: it became bigger, not smaller, after the Lisbon Strategy. What we need – and it is the first decision to be taken by the Commission and the European Council – is to recognise that the open coordination method was not a good method; it was too weak a method. We need a bolder instrument inside the European Union. This bolder instrument is economic governance inside the European Union.

Mr Barroso, I hope that in a few days' time, at the beginning of March – I think it is 3 March – you come forward with a paper on this. I hope it will include a bolder strategy than the things that were concluded or not concluded at the informal summit. It is still an intergovernmental, open-coordination method. They make it a little bit better, a little bit faster, but at the end, it continues to be an open coordination method based on intergovernmentalism. What we ask from you is to take the lead on that, on this economic policy and on this economic governance, and to come forward, together with Olli Rehn, with a bold proposal to have economic governance inside the European Union. It is nonsense to have monetary union on the one hand and not to have an economic and social and political union on the other. The problems with Greece are proof of that.

(Applause)

I think this is a time when we can expect something bold from the Commission, and I hope that on 3 March, the Commission will propose a document that is far more ambitious than the – in my view – disappointing conclusions of the informal summit.

(The speaker agreed to take a blue card question under Rule 149(8))

William (The Earl of) Dartmouth (EFD). – Mr President, I would like to ask Mr Verhofstadt this question: are you advocating that countries which are not in the eurozone should bail out countries which are in the eurozone? Is that what you are advocating?

Guy Verhofstadt, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – Maybe it will be necessary in the near future to bale out Britain, because I have seen that the fiscal deficit of Britain is even higher than the fiscal deficit of Greece.

(Applause)

The fiscal deficit is, if I am not mistaken, 12.9% of GDP for the moment. So I think what is most important for the moment is that we have a credible strategy towards the eurozone, and I am very sure – maybe not tomorrow but the day after tomorrow – there will come a time when Britain is a member of the eurozone. Be sure.

Rebecca Harms, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (DE) Mr President, I hope that the British kindergarten will be kind enough to listen for a moment.

(Heckling)

I had intended to start my speech with the EU 2020 strategy, but now I am going to begin by talking about Greece, particularly in light of the intervention from the right of this House. I believe that what is least helpful in the dispute over the situation in, and the prospects for, Greece is an anti-Greek, nationalistic or anti-European attitude. In my opinion, mistakes that have been made for a long time are now being revealed in Greece – often, more comes to light in a crisis than in good times.

I would like to pick up on an issue raised by Mr Verhofstadt. If we do not want anti-European developments, we need to discuss who in Brussels is responsible for allowing these things to be concealed in Greece for so many years – probably even during the entire preparatory period for the monetary union. Mr Barroso, I believe that you have a crucial share of the responsibility in this regard. This, in particular, is something that you need to disclose, because as yet, we have only seen the tip of the iceberg in terms of responsibility and we have not seen the system of irresponsibility that lies beneath it.

Secondly, a lot needs to change in Greece, too. We need to have a – preferably friendly – discussion with Greece about this within the euro area. If this help is necessary – which I think it will be – and if European solidarity needs to be employed once again – and I would not want to rule it out in any way at this point – then Greece needs to make some real changes. There is the excessive public sector, for example. If I am to believe the Greeks with whom I have spoken, 25% of Greek workers are employed in the public sector, and it is not even a good public sector. It is definitely in need of reform.

However, it is not only in terms of expenditure that changes need to be made, as there is clearly something very wrong with the revenue side as well. I think that Mr Papandreou has the right idea with his intention to publish the tax declarations of the high earners in Greece. It is not necessary to buy CDs from Switzerland; there is another way to go about this. This will very quickly shed light on the fact that, in Greece too, the revenue can be considerably improved if tax evasion is ultimately prevented and the people in Greece who are living in the lap of luxury pay their taxes like decent citizens.

My colleague, Mr Giegold, will probably talk more about the Eurobonds later. I would just like to say one sentence about the EU 2020 strategy. Mr Barroso, you made absolutely no mention of the failures of the Lisbon Strategy. I believe that the failure to evaluate the Lisbon Strategy does not bode at all well for the success or possible success of the new strategy. As an integrated strategy, it is, in principle, not bad, but ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Timothy Kirkhope, on behalf of the ECR Group. – Mr President, I would like to thank Mr Verhofstadt for reminding us all of the failure of left-wing economic policies in the United Kingdom. We are very grateful for the advice and I hope my colleagues and I will be able to remedy that in the forthcoming general election.

Even before the recent crisis, the economies of Europe were losing ground to our major rivals and competitors. Our growth level was less, our unemployment higher, our relative trading position was in decline and our share of global output falling. We had launched the Lisbon Strategy, but without enough conviction or commitment; unsurprisingly, it has not succeeded. Europe 2020 must not go the same way. I am very pleased that my group was among the first to submit proposals to help with its progress.

We now need to set a new course for our economies. We must recognise that governments do not create productive jobs or raise living standards. Only competitive business and successful entrepreneurs can do that. Our Member States and the institutions of the European Union then need to support them by reducing the burdens they face. We cannot expect to have dynamic economies if we make even greater demands on those who are generating growth and jobs by imposing heavy tax regimes and bureaucratic regulations. We need to encourage more research and development, improved higher education and better vocational training, as President Barroso has just emphasised. The internal market needs to be reinvigorated and extended to new fields.

The stakes could not be higher. For almost three centuries, the strongest economic powers in the world have also been those with the most liberal and the most democratic constitutions; the cause of freedom and economic prosperity have marched together. We are now entering a new era. By the end of this century, considerable economic power may have shifted to states with undemocratic governments. That authoritarian capitalism may not evolve gently into the democratic and responsible capitalism we enjoy today in Europe and the West.

We hope those states will liberalise. We will offer them friendly encouragement to do so, but we know the risks. It is in the interests of our citizens that the 2020 programme succeeds in stimulating the creation of good jobs and rising living standards, and it is in the interests of the free world that the 2020 programme points the way to a stronger economic future for all our citizens.

Lothar Bisky, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Mr President, in times of need, you discover who your friends are, as the saying goes. There are 27 governments in the European Union trying – each in its own way – to rescue their own banks and large-scale industries. This has so far resulted in more debt for each individual country and catastrophic savings rates for citizens. The euphemistic wage restraint policy, reducing non-wage labour costs and the privatisation of life risks such as age, family, sickness and desired education have all been mentioned.

The banks are now using the state rescue packages to speculate against the national budgets. The banks have already made more progress than the states. Hypo Real Estate and Commerzbank, which, in Germany, were rescued using billions of euros of taxpayers' money, are right at the forefront when it comes to the business of excessively expensive government bonds in Greece. Taxpayers' money is being used for speculation and this is money from normal, honest wage earners who do not have Swiss bank accounts like those to which the richer people are fleeing.

(Heckling)

Believe me, I find no pleasure in using negative examples from Germany. However, one governing party in Germany is constantly calling for tax relief, while at the same time, the Greek Government is being called on to increase taxes. Who will have to find this money, though? I fear that it will primarily be those who are already finding it hard to make ends meet. Was it not Germany, formerly the world's highest exporter, that years ago separated wage increases from productivity, thus resulting in social dumping?

In ancient Greek theatre, a crisis means an opportunity – yes, the challenge of a turning point. In order to bring about such a turning point, we must demand that a statutory minimum wage finally be put in place. The same work in the same place must receive the same wage. We need harmonisation of tax types within the Union, but above all, we need genuine European regulation and control of the financial markets and a real European economic and finance policy, coordinated on the basis of solidarity, with binding social and environmental targets.

Nigel Farage, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – President of Europe – this long-awaited day. We were told that, when we had a President, we would see a giant global political figure: the man that would be the political leader for five hundred million people; the man that would represent all of us on the world stage; the man whose job was so important that of course, you are paid more than President Obama. Well, I am afraid what we got was you. And I am sorry, but after that performance that you gave earlier... I do not want to be rude, but you know, really, you have the charisma of a damp rag and the appearance of a low-grade bank clerk.

(Protests)

The question that I want to ask and that we are all going to ask is: who are you? I had never heard of you; nobody in Europe had ever heard of you. I would like to ask you, Mr President: who voted for you?

(Loud protests)

And what mechanism – I know democracy is not popular with you lot – what mechanism do the peoples of Europe have to remove you? Is this European democracy?

I sense, though, that you are competent and capable and dangerous, and I have no doubt that it is your intention to be the quiet assassin of European democracy and of the European nation states. You appear to have a loathing for the very concept of the existence of nation states; perhaps that is because you come from Belgium, which, of course, is pretty much a non-country.

(Reactions)

But since you took over, we have seen Greece reduced to nothing more than a protectorate. Sir, you have no legitimacy in this job at all, and I can say with confidence that I can speak on behalf of the majority of the British people in saying: we do not know you, we do not want you, and the sooner you are put out to grass, the better.

President. – As you said, Mr Chair, you would not like to be rude.

I prefer to go ahead. Mr Chair, will you take a blue card question?

Joseph Daul, on behalf of the PPE Group. – (FR) Mr Farage, are you willing to apply Article 9 of the treaty to ask to simply leave Europe? That way, you will be happy.

Martin Schulz, on behalf of the S&D Group. – (DE) Mr President, I am very disappointed in you, Mr Buzek. It is unacceptable for a group chair to call the President of the European Council a 'damp rag' in this Parliament, rather than offering political criticism.

(Applause)

Mr President, I would expect you to respond to that with a call to order. It is not acceptable for this man to freely trample the dignity of this House underfoot. To Mr Daul, I would like to say that it is not a question of the United Kingdom leaving the EU. It would perhaps be better for Mr Farage to relinquish his mandate if he finds the European Union and the European Parliament so objectionable.

(Applause)

President. – What I said to Mr Farage two months ago I say, again, today: speeches of this kind, which make personal attacks on particular people, are not acceptable in the European Parliament. When I spoke with Mr Farage about this, I pointed this out to him. I would like to say, Mr Schulz, that I have done and am doing just as you suggest.

Nigel Farage (EFD). – You may not like what I say, but just consider your behaviour. After the Irish people voted 'no' in a referendum, you said that, by supporting the 'no' vote, our group had opened the door to fascism; you said that we had behaved as a group in the Parliament like Hitler and the Nazis in the Reichstag. We have been called mentally weak by Danny Cohn-Bendit. You know, it has to be... It cannot be one way ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

President. – Mr Farage, I am sorry but it was not a personal statement. We must keep order and all the regulations of our Parliament.

Frank Vanhecke (NI). – (NL) First of all, allow me to state calmly the fact that we are conducting this debate in this Chamber, in Brussels, in Belgium. In the current economic context, we could describe the country of Belgium as the Greece of the North Sea without any exaggeration whatsoever because this country, Belgium, has, after Greece and Italy, the largest government debt in percentage terms in the whole of Europe. Fundamentally, we are a sick country in Europe and, if I can put it this way, that is in no way a credit to one of the previous speakers, Mr Verhofstadt, former Prime Minister of Belgium. When it comes to fraud and artificially inflating the budget, he could even teach the Greeks a thing or two!

However, let us not get too worked up about that. In particular, let us not claim that we will be able to avert the crisis by running up a higher government debt, the infamous Verhofstadt proposal for a European government loan, which is a bill that somebody will have to foot sooner or later. On the contrary, we have seen, time and again, that it is European decisions that have led us into the crisis, European decisions to throw the Maastricht criteria and the Stability and Growth Pact out of the window all for the sake of appearances, because Europe had to be seen to move forward.

It is also that same Eurocrat obstinacy which is now ramming Turkey's accession strategy down our throats. The economic and geographical reality must now be pushed to one side and European citizens have to pay through the nose for the potential accession of a country which is not even European. The solution is not 'more Europe'. The solution is national responsibility and the obligation of individual Member States to cut their coats according to their cloth.

Corien Wortmann-Kool (PPE). – (NL) President Buzek, President Barroso and, of course, also President Van Rompuy, we are delighted to have you here with us today. Your comments at the beginning of the debate made it clear that you wish to set to work ambitiously, but also that you wish to perform your role as intended in the Treaty of Lisbon. I should like to congratulate you on this in advance.

It is important that you are here in connection with the forthcoming 2020 strategy, because it is crucial for re-establishing Europe's role in the world. Mr President, and here I address President Barroso as well, you know what our priorities are. They centre on a green, social, market economy. This means that our foremost task should be to get small and medium-sized enterprises, as the powerhouse behind our job creation, back on their feet again. We are not talking about just our trade and services here, but also about our European industry, which we have to make competitive again on the world stage. We are also talking about our agricultural sector and high-quality food production, which are also competitive on the world stage. That means that we need SMEs with knowledge, innovation and sustainable technology at their core.

The 2020 strategy must be built on such a foundation. Such a foundation means an exit strategy that will go hand in hand with a strong stability and growth pact and with the necessary reform of Member State governments' spending. Mr President, the old Lisbon Strategy contained too many vague objectives and demonstrated the failure of the open coordination method. Therefore, my question to you is: what specific objectives are you going to bring in to force the Member States, ultimately, to show real commitment to this new strategy, while remaining within the limits of the Treaty of Lisbon when it comes to subsidiarity?

Marita Ulvskog (S&D). – (SV) Mr President, according to the Commission's own figures, 80 million EU citizens are currently living below the poverty line. That is indecent and it is also an obstacle to all other development. At the same time, a man like Mr Farage stands here in Parliament and lets fly with insults at a time when Europe is in crisis and we have a great many important matters to debate. He should be given a time-out and should not be permitted to attend next week's session in Strasbourg. It would be a mild punishment for the behaviour he has exhibited.

Our task now is to produce a new Lisbon Strategy, in other words, EU 2020. In this context, it is important to realise that social cohesion and sustainable development are essential for economic growth. The first society to get away from our dependence on fossil fuels, for example, will take the lead in the creation of new green jobs. However, we need resources if this is to succeed. At least 50% of the funding set aside by the EU and the Member States to get us out of the crisis needs to be invested in a new Green Deal capable of creating these new green jobs. The Seventh and Eighth Framework Programmes must concentrate on research and development relating to renewable energy.

The Commission must also make vigorous efforts to prevent the social exclusion that is currently taking place around Europe and to strengthen the parties of the labour market. In recent years, the EU has rightly begun to be seen as a threat to the trade union movement. This needs to change. A first step would be to revise the controversial Posting of Workers Directive or, as it has come to be known in Europe, the 'Wage Dumping Directive', which is generating so much anger and so much conflict. We have had enough of that here today in Parliament.

Lena Ek (ALDE). – Mr President, the aim of EU 2020 should be to free the potential of the European citizen. All too often we forget that our strategies for growth are put in place for the benefit of our citizens and the future of our children.

There is no doubt that the Lisbon Strategy failed when it attempted to include everything. With such a broad agenda, the focus was lost and so were the possibilities to achieve the ambitious goals that were set.

For the 2020 strategy to be more effective, the format needs to be changed into something completely different. The work should be targeted at the few specific areas where the fundamentals of sustainable growth should be addressed.

As the only directly elected body of the EU, and with full codecision powers in place, this Parliament will have its say in the 2020 strategy. In order to ensure legitimacy and openness, the Commission and the Council will therefore be wise to include Parliament in the ongoing work of the 2020 strategy.

Just as openness and transparency are essential for the creation of a citizen's Europe, they are also key instruments in avoiding crises in public finances such as those currently hitting countries across the Union.

Everyone is pointing their fingers at Greece but there are also other Member States that have avoided benchmarking, deceived Europe about their deficits and cheated with their financial statistics. The method of open coordination has turned into a closed collusion and open humiliation.

Remember, what is true for citizens is also true for governments. Freedoms also bring responsibilities. It is now time for governments across Europe to take that responsibility seriously because the problems we face are serious.

Philippe Lamberts (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I agree with the idea of reducing the number of goals in the EU 2020 strategy to a limited number, provided that they are at least ambitious. Ambitious, firstly, as regards the reduction of our ecological footprint. Therefore, this is not just about the climate and, from that point of view, returning to the 20% figure is, in our view, far below what is really required. Not even 30% is ambitious.

Next, an ambitious goal concerning the reduction in inequalities: for example, reducing the level of poverty in Europe by 50% by 2020; that certainly would not be a maximum to achieve. An ambitious goal with regard to education, research, development and innovation, and, of course, an ambitious goal with regard to job creation.

These goals, as has already been mentioned, must be measurable and must be binding; whether it is a bonus-malus system or something else matters little, but we need results. However, we will not achieve these results without two absolutely vital ingredients.

The first ingredient is strong market regulations and, from that point of view, Mr Van Rompuy, the developments with regard to financial market supervision and the positions adopted by the Council worry us greatly.

As regards the second ingredient, I would like to stress what Mr Daul said. Indeed, Mr Daul, Member States will have to abandon more of their sovereignty, in particular in the fiscal area. I wonder where the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) stands on that. Without strong fiscal convergence, we will be unable to bring stability back to our public finances and build our tax system on a sustainable basis. We are thinking of energy, we are thinking, of course, of taxation on financial transactions.

Kay Swinburne (ECR). – Mr President, I support the direction of the EU 2020 strategy, particularly at this time of economic crisis, and would urge that the EU focus on Europe's existing comparative economic and competitive advantages and use all tools and resources available, particularly in the area of R&D, to create real EU added value.

I would seek for us to prioritise the completion of the single market for services and goods and to take an ambitious approach in creating a single market for innovative research. There should be wide encouragement of research and development both in universities and in private enterprises in Europe so that we can be at the forefront of new sustainable industry and technologies.

We must, however, remain vigilant against legislation that serves to hinder these developmental processes. We need to improve the link between private sector and academic research and work to facilitate the transfer of knowledge into job- and wealth-creating enterprises. As well as improving the availability of finance for innovation, we need to ensure a reduced administrative burden, particularly for SMEs and micro-entities. Following SME-friendly procurement policies and allowing SMEs to participate in public/private partnerships will be a start.

An EU 2020 strategy focused on innovation in areas of existing expertise...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Nikolaos Chountis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, huge unemployment rallies are being held in Greece today by workers in the private and public sectors.

Anger has spilled on to the streets and the workers are indignant in the face of the harsh measures being taken by the Greek Government at the insistence of the European Union, especially the recent European Council at which, instead of taking measures for the benefit of the weak economies, instead of taking measures to put an end to speculation and create an umbrella of economic and social solidarity, instead of accepting that the Stability Pact does not exist and that bringing it back will deepen the recession and instead of accepting that the Treaty of Lisbon has failed resoundingly, the Council is preparing the 2020 European Commission as an expansion and continuation of the treaty.

You are treating Greece as a scapegoat, dictating measures against the workers, who are not to blame for the crisis, that will usher in similar measures for other countries.

The people of Greece and the people of Europe will shortly deal with you as the people of Argentina dealt with the International Monetary Fund.

Rolandas Paksas (EFD). – (LT) It is symbolic that 20 years after the fall of the wall that divided Europe, today we are talking about Europe 2020. Firstly, I would like to approve the fundamental priorities of the Europe 2020 strategy: knowledge and innovation, a society of high employment and a competitive and sustainable economy. I propose that we add two more priorities – infrastructure development and an effective energy policy. While stressing the strengthening of energy security as one of the most important priorities of European energy policy and aiming to ensure the diversification of sources of energy and supply routes, we must not forget the important *Rail Baltica* and *Via Baltica* projects which are important not only to Lithuania. I believe that while preparing a new strategy, we must assess the reasons we failed to achieve the goals outlined in the Lisbon Strategy. We must not only set out new strategy goals and tasks, but turn discussions that sometimes last too long into concrete action with precise deadlines.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ROTH-BEHRENDT

Vice-President

Francisco Sosa Wagner (NI). – (ES) Madam President, I believe that this crisis is an opportunity to move forward firmly and with conviction in creating a strong Europe. In this strong Europe, we will probably have to dispense with the expression 'improving coordination', as it means that everything is dependent on the subjects that have to be coordinated and inevitably leads to paralysis and a lack of clarity.

We know that the finances and the public deficits of European countries will suffer until we move towards European financial integration and Eurobonds are issued.

In any case, the European institutions can already take specific action – I will not focus on all the hot air about coordination. On the one hand, we have the European Central Bank for harmonising financial supervision and on ...

(Remainder of speech not available for technical reasons)

Werner Langen (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, Mr Barroso, Mr Van Rompuy, if the 2020 strategy is to succeed it must – unlike the Lisbon Strategy – actually be implemented. In contrast to what previous speakers have said, the goals were not wrong. The main reason for the failure of the strategy was the fact that the Member States did not stick to the rules and fulfil their obligations. Moreover, the Commission was not courageous enough, Mr Barroso. It was not courageous enough in connection with the implementation, in demanding reforms or in executing its own strategy.

With a broad majority, you have a new Commission for your second period of office – I hope that you will improve everything, that you will re-inject dynamism into Europe, that you will promote technology and that we will not only talk about redistribution but that we will compete with the other economic regions of the world. These regions do not ask whether Europeans agree amongst themselves or whether they are implementing new redistribution programmes. They have their own dynamism, and we need to respond to this. That is the task that this strategy must allow us to fulfil.

As yet, only drafts have been tabled and I hope that they will be improved upon, because these drafts seem very much to have a 'carry on as before' mentality. There are no really new approaches. There is not even anything really new from the Council and the new President of the European Council. However, we need

this strategy in order to be able to keep up with the rest of the world. For this, new framework conditions need to be defined. We need to think carefully about the climate objectives of the past. We need to promote technology and not continue to put obstacles in its way.

As a collegial body, the Commission is called on not to represent the interests of individual commissioners, but to take a leading role in Europe. You can be certain of our unreserved support. Only then will the 2020 strategy succeed – not with the cowardliness of the governments and the insistence that someone pay for what the relevant partner in Europe does not deal with themselves.

Stéphane Le Foll (S&D). – (FR) Madam President, President Barroso, Mr Van Rompuy, I would like first of all to say that, as far as the 2020 strategy is concerned, everyone agrees on the targets. However, the problem our continent has today is that it is emerging from a serious crisis, the characteristics of that being that we have extremely weak, or even negative, growth globally.

This therefore requires political awareness and, for me, that has two goals. Firstly, that of knowing how we organise ourselves politically. In the positions you hold, you have two major responsibilities: to encourage coordination of economic policies – this is absolutely vital – and to set targets with tools to achieve them.

This brings me on to the second goal, which I believe is essential, and, at the same time, it will be a question. To achieve goals in public policy, a budget is needed. Today, Europe is confronted with this dilemma: the Member States have significant deficits and the more significant their deficits, the less they will throw in Europe's common pot. Therefore, we are less able to revive our growth.

How do we solve this dilemma? This is the question I put to you. It depends on two elements. Firstly, what are the guidelines that you will defend when discussing the budgetary perspectives with the Member States? Secondly, are you able to move towards innovations that will allow the European Investment Bank and the European Bank of Reconstruction and Development alike to assume much greater responsibility and – why not? – to enable Europe to borrow to finance this necessity, which is the growth of tomorrow?

Sylvie Goulard (ALDE). – (FR) Presidents, after the Lisbon Strategy, we now have the 2020 strategy. Is it a simple name change or a change of direction? I address this in particular to Mr Barroso. While reading your contribution to the informal Council, while hearing you talk today quite rightly of the number of poor in the European Union and of the need to develop financial regulation, I said to myself, Mr Barroso, that it is a pity that you were not a proper President of the Commission over the last few years! Then you would have been able to do everything that you are proposing to us today. Today, you say that it is the crisis that prevented you from doing it, but it is easy to blame the crisis. In the end, every sin can be forgiven, so let us not waste any more time.

I turn therefore with hope to Mr Van Rompuy, firstly to offer him a warmer welcome than the one he was offered previously by one of the other Members – not by the others. It is you we are counting on. It is slightly paradoxical, Mr Van Rompuy, but we are counting on you to relaunch Europe, a proper European community, and you come from a country which knows what the word 'community' means in terms of the general interest.

If you tackle this, you will have the support of this Parliament, and I believe that, as far as the 2020 strategy is concerned, we must not let ourselves be misled by words. If words mean anything, we must, above all, think medium term, think global and think beyond nationalism. I agree with what Mr Lamberts said: right now, the Members of the Council are not giving us a great European perspective on financial supervision. They have both feet on the brakes.

For my part, I therefore propose a single goal, which you actually mention in your own paper for the Council, and that is to have an Economic and Monetary Union in all its forms, to consolidate disciplines and, of course, to consolidate solidarity. It is also to remind the Council that, while there are problems in Greece, they are partly down to the Greeks and partly down to a lack of solidarity.

Reinhard Bütikofer (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Madam President, it is easy to set fine goals. We all do this at the beginning of every year, we set fine goals, but whether they remain a dream, a sermon or whether they become an agenda depends on whether we provide specific answers to the questions of who, what, how, how much and when. That is what we need to see for the Europe 2020 agenda. In my opinion, Mr Daul hit the nail on the head at the beginning of this debate. The question is, are we prepared to renounce national sovereignty in the area of economic policy, or would we rather do without the cohesion of the Union, or without the euro, or without what we have spent decades building up? The alternative is that dramatic. I

would also have liked to have heard some clear statements from the representative of the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU), because, as we know, it is the Conservatives in Germany who have so often stood in the way of this.

Madam President, Mr Van Rompuy, Mr Barroso, I would like not only to hear the President of the European Council say, with quiet assurance, that the Council wants to lay down guidelines in this area, but I would also like to see the Commission, together with Parliament, taking on the task of actively and with energy working to produce these guidelines for common European economic governance. In so doing, it should not merely be led by the hand of Mrs Merkel and Mr Sarkozy, but should make a sincere effort to bring Europe together under a common economic policy.

Charalampos Angourakis (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Madam President, as you are well aware, while we are debating the results of the informal European Council, the entire Greek workforce, down to the last man, is on strike in protest against precisely these measures, against precisely these results. They are protesting about the European Union itself and the policy of the centre-left and centre-right governments unanimously taking anti-grassroots, anti-labour measures purely and simply in order to safeguard the profits of the monopolies.

The European Union, governments and the Commission are trying to terrorise workers throughout the European Union in a bid to make them bow down before the storm of the anti-grassroots measures. However, in this war, the workers are responding with mass strikes, demonstrations and rallies, about which I have heard you say nothing, Mr Barroso, with demonstrations and strikes being organised by the class-conscious trade unions in numerous countries of the European Union.

There is only one answer which the workers can give to the front being put up by the parties of capital, to the European one-way street, to the compromised trade union leaders, to the widespread attack by the government on wages and pensions: a development in their interests.

Mario Borghesio (EFD). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, there has been a formal show of solidarity with Greece, but in reality, the aim was simply to impose a rigid austerity policy on the Member States of the European Union.

At the closing press conference, Mr Van Rompuy clearly stated that the idea is to establish a kind of dictatorship of the European Union, turning the Council into an imperial junta, with ever greater powers over the Member States.

Before the summit – the *Independent* revealed – he sent a letter to the Heads of State or Government in which he wrote, in one of the enclosures, that the Members of the Council were responsible for economic strategy within their governments and that they should be responsible for it at EU level too. Whether one calls it policy coordination or economic governance, only the Council is able to formulate and uphold a European strategy. He also added that the European Council is very ambitious, that it wants control and wants to act as a leader, albeit, of course, within the scope of consultation, and that that was why he had proposed that the Council meet each month.

These are imperial designs of the architects of the European Union, and they also feature in a project that is circulating in the corridors of the Commission, which calls for 80% of the EU Member States' debt to become European Union debt.

The campaign for an economic superstate launched in recent days is liable to turn not only Greece but all the 27 Member States of the European Union into protectorates.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Madam President, the EU has now adopted a post-Lisbon Strategy in which it has been careful not to commit itself to any testable goals at all. Focusing on the green economy will not, in itself, be enough to guarantee the competitiveness of Europe as a centre of production. In my opinion, in addition to a well-functioning energy supply and infrastructure, this will require well-trained workers and not wave after wave of migrant workers flooding the labour market with cheap labour.

If it is necessary to make the national labour markets more flexible, then it must not lead to the transitional periods for the new Member States being lifted by the back door. A time of crisis, in which more and more people are becoming unemployed or having to eke out a living from part-time work or 'one-euro jobs', is not the time for the EU to give new impetus to the existing merciless competition on the labour market.

The European Union should not, as a general rule, employ despotism. It must not immediately withdraw financial aid from structurally weak regions because no reforms have been carried out – not even as a threat.

We certainly do not need a new advisory committee to evaluate the goals, which will probably end up on the shelf once again. Instead of more centralism, we need to move the subsidies back to national level. Europe 2020 must not trigger another competition marathon and privatisation exodus. Instead, it must guarantee the prosperity of the citizens of Europe.

The EU has a chance now to gain status as a bulwark against globalisation and this will probably be its only chance.

Mario Mauro (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, President of the Council, you may not be well known, as Mr Farage maintains, but I know that your ideals are deeply rooted in European tradition and culture, and for that I admire and respect you.

Precisely for that reason, may I take the liberty of commenting on your very rational speech by drawing an analogy from the world of football. The vision that you have of your role seems to me to be similar to that of a halfback, of a midfielder who has the job of bringing order to the game for a team which, after the rule changes introduced by the Treaty of Lisbon, may find it harder to score goals, that is, to achieve its objectives.

In the light of this example, I believe that it is up to Parliament to risk more than the other players, to be a striker who continually reinvents the game, taking inspiration from the new rules so as to strengthen the team's attacking ability and to put our hypothetical centre forward – the Barroso Commission – in a position to score.

What will happen if we do not follow this approach, which I wholeheartedly support? We will withdraw into a defensive position and we will score an own goal against the interests of our fellow citizens.

Precisely for this reason, Mr Van Rompuy, I ask you to support the new leading role played by Parliament and to see it not as an obstacle, but as an opportunity. We are all required to rise to this historic occasion, to perform a historic role, a historic task, and I am certain that you are the right man to lead us.

Juan Fernando López Aguilar (S&D). – (ES) *(Beginning of speech not available for technical reasons)* ... If we are talking about the 2020 strategy, we are not only talking about the post-Lisbon strategy, but also about the strategy of recognising the failure to fulfil Lisbon, or to put it more harshly and crudely, the strategy of recognising the failure of Lisbon. It is a strategy that was designed to ensure growth and sustainability, but it has not been fulfilled, because it has not succeeded in ensuring sustainability, from a financial, environmental or social point of view.

From a financial point of view, Europe has constructed the Monetary Union, but it is very far not only from constructing the Economic Union, but even from coordinating economic policy and the fiscal stimuli that should accompany the Monetary Union.

From an energy point of view, a single European policy is still yet to be invented. From a social point of view, all over Europe, there is discontent among workers, unions and the most disadvantaged classes, who are concerned about the sustainability of the model that made us better when it made us Europeans, the very model that has succeeded in ensuring welfare and social cohesion.

In view of the informal Council meeting that was held on 11 February, I would like to ask what commitment the Council, the Commission and all the European institutions want to make in order to strengthen the commitment to the social pact that was mentioned in the speech by the rotating President of the Union for the next six months, the Spanish Prime Minister, José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero?

A social pact that is able to clearly state that this time, Europe is going to make a commitment to financial and environmental sustainability, and also to preserving the social model that made us better when it made us Europeans.

Jean Lambert (Verts/ALE). – Mr President, Mr Barroso talked earlier on about wanting an ambitious strategy, and it is true that there are parts of the document EU 2020 which are ambitious, but certainly the greenhouse gas emission figure is not ambitious: it is pathetic, and it is not going to get us where we want to go. We should be looking at 40% by 2020. Of course, the issue is not only about climate but also about resource availability and increasing resource efficiency.

There is a lot, as well, that we seem to have seen before in this strategy, not least about economic growth coming through more and more as a goal rather than an indicator. It should not be the goal of a strategy. The EU has many areas where we have tried to decouple growth from transport, energy use, whatever, and

it has long been decoupled from jobs. So, can we please not talk as if, somehow, growth is going to deliver jobs?

We also need to be looking not just at reducing poverty but reducing inequalities, because that has known demonstrable benefits, and we need to make sure that our financial institutions do not undermine the ambitious goals that we might put in place.

Othmar Karas (PPE). – (DE) Mr van Rompuy, first of all, I would like to thank you for the letter that you sent us. I can tell you that I fully support the principles, values and the direction to take that you set out in the letter. I am pleased that you said today that you want to meet almost on a monthly basis, because it is your job to bring the Heads of State or Government and the Member States back to Europe. The Lisbon Strategy itself was not wrong, but the methods were wrong and the political will was lacking for the objectives to be implemented in the Member States. It must be your job to coordinate the Member States in areas where the powers of the European Commission and the Union are inadequate.

You said very clearly that the market is not enough. Yes indeed, we want a social market economy. The monetary union is not enough. We need political union. The first test for all of us will be the 2011 budget, which will already have to be based on the Europe 2020 strategy. Europe 2020 is not the goal; it is the instrument with which we will do what we need to do in response to the financial and economic crisis. We need more coordination in budgetary policy, fiscal policy, economic policy, research policy and education policy, because we cannot improve our competitiveness with economic goals alone. We therefore need the Small Business Act to be implemented in the Member States. Our motto should be 'small businesses first', because that will create jobs in the regions.

There are three things I would like to see. Mr Barroso, we need a study of the effects of all of the Commission's measures on the real economy, not just on the banking sector. We need a review of our finances which also takes account of demographic changes and the social security and pension systems. We also need a joint package that includes coordination, the excessive deficit procedure, the exit strategy and Europe 2020, so that these do not contradict each other.

Alejandro Cercas (S&D). – (ES) President Van Rompuy, President Barroso, I really like the sound of what I have heard today. I hope that the lyrics will be the same next week, because as we have all understood – as have you – that would mean that we can and must set ourselves objectives, and that we can choose our future.

It would mean that there is no economic determinism, that there is a voice for politics, a voice for citizens, a voice for our future in our own hands. It would mean the economy sets limits for us and provides us with the means, but that the objectives are set by us, and that the economy should be serving society rather than the other way around.

It would mean that, as has been said here this afternoon, we need a long-term strategy, not just a short-term strategy, because I believe that is the lesson we can learn from the past. The lesson we can learn from the past is that we have experienced considerable economic growth, but on the basis of speculation, which has not taken into account justice, fairness, the environment, the future or future generations.

I therefore really hope, President-in-Office of the Council, that next week, we will have documents that contain an ambitious agenda, an agenda that points to sustainability, an agenda that makes economic, social and environmental concerns compatible, because they are interdependent.

I would now like to say a few words about the social dimension of the agenda: that is where the demands, dreams and fears of citizens are manifested, the dreams and fears of those that are within and outside the labour market, of the victims of the arrogance of the financial markets, which has taken control of the real economy and destroyed it.

That is where the hopes lie that we will put an end to this, that we will make a policy for full employment, for quality jobs, for jobs that are inclusive for all, and that we will finally make Europe's objective excellence rather than the fight to lower social standards.

Sven Giegold (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Madam President, Mr Barroso, Mr Van Rompuy, the crisis in the European economy is so deep that we have to expect very specific proposals in this situation – specific proposals along the lines of those put forward here by various speakers. European economic governance has been called for in many different ways by Parliament.

Provide a proposal for how the risks relating to the high levels of debt can be distributed so that Greece and other countries are not crushed by high interest rates. Provide a proposal – as called for by the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs yesterday – for how we can tackle the imbalances. It is not only the countries with the deficits that need to be penalised and to make changes. Reforms also need to be made in the countries that have excessive surpluses. We need European statistics that are independent and we need to take effective measures to prevent tax competition. Such proposals have been put forward in Parliament. It is now up to you to finally put these things on the table.

Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE). – (FR) Mr Van Rompuy, Minister, Mr Barroso, ladies and gentlemen, finally, you are with us, President of the European Council, welcome! However, I will begin by reiterating my great disappointment that your first political move was not to come and present yourself to the representatives of the peoples of Europe following 1 December, the date you officially took office.

Like us, Mr Van Rompuy, you are a politician, and politics cannot exist without democracy. The democratic lesson of the French and Dutch referendums of 2005 and of many other peoples, had they been consulted, is that citizens are saying they are not against Europe, but they have the feeling that it is being built without them, and sometimes against them.

It is therefore thanks to Mrs Merkel, who was in your seat in 2007, and to Mr Sarkozy, who had just been elected President of the Republic of France, that citizens were once again placed at the heart of European integration with the Treaty of Lisbon, which created the high office that you hold.

Mr Van Rompuy, you must understand that nothing can be done without the citizens and their representatives, just as our Parliament must understand that nothing can be done without the Member States and hence, the Heads of State or Government.

Let us get to the point: the peoples of Europe are suffering because they no longer understand the huge global disruption going on around them. Your duty is to give meaning to it, to set the course, to convince the European Council that Europe is not a problem, but a solution. Europe does not expose, it protects. Europe does not suffer, it acts.

What is your vision of the world and of the European Union's place in it? Could you tell us what part intergovernmentalism plays in your European strategy, in particular, with regard to the economic governance that we are lacking and the establishment of the External Action Service?

Mr Van Rompuy, the European Union walks on two legs. The Member States and governments and the peoples. We are looking for the head, and you are the head! Moreover, you should not be in the passenger seat, but in the driving seat, and the future of the European Union will depend on your ability to steer the Member States towards a political Union. Thank you for being here, Mr Van Rompuy. You are a man of great quality. Do not fear the peoples and their representatives. Love them and they will love you back.

Sergio Gaetano Cofferati (S&D). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, in defining the mid-term strategy, the Union will have to take account of the effects of the economic crisis, which is today penalising this part of the world – and other parts too – and, of course, of the shortcomings that gave rise to the modest results of the previous strategy, the 2000 Lisbon Strategy.

The crisis gives us some specific pointers with regard to development and full employment, if we want to incorporate – as I believe is necessary – this objective in our action.

Firstly, regulatory instruments and supervision of the financial system and of the banks are required to ensure that the negative conditions that are severely penalising us today are not repeated.

Secondly, we will need to invest heavily in innovation, research and training, particularly if we want to move towards a green economy. For substantial investment to be possible, however, Europe must equip itself with Eurobonds and with a system of rewards and penalties so that it can achieve its economic objectives. Those are the main shortcomings of Lisbon I.

We will have to introduce uniform redistributive policies with regard to both taxation and pay. Moreover, a coordinated industrial policy is required for sectors in order to protect the historic manufacturing structure of our region of the world. Lastly, we need to reshape and relaunch social dialogue as a force for cohesion and for curbing the dangers of long-term unemployment with which we have to come to terms.

Pilar del Castillo Vera (PPE). – (ES) Madam President, President Van Rompuy, President Barroso – who is not here, but whom I am also addressing – the truth is that it has been very good to see you together and, in my opinion, this is because we have seen that there is a move towards and a focus on what should be the foundations of the common strategy in the next ten years and, in my view, this is extremely important.

What most interested me about the proposal that we have seen in writing and what you have said is that there only need to be a few objectives: only the top-priority objectives; that they need to be tangible, that we need to be able to measure them and they need to be constantly evaluated in order to see whether or not we are making progress in that direction.

I think this is fundamental, and it is a substantial change from the Lisbon Strategy.

I am going to highlight one objective: the internal market. The European internal market was conceived more than 20 years ago. Twenty years later, there is a long way to go before we have a truly internal European market in the majority of sectors. In some cases, this is because they are very new sectors, such as the digital market, but in other cases, there is such a degree of fragmentation and such barriers that we are depriving the European economy of the large-scale framework that it needs in order to be able to really develop all the competitiveness that it needs, which will bring about growth, which, in turn, will bring about employment.

Mr Van Rompuy, Mr Barroso, we need a great deal of political impetus: ‘business as usual’ can no longer be a tool. We need a great deal of leadership, and you have a big responsibility. You do, of course, have my full support for making this possible.

Udo Bullmann (S&D). – (DE) Madam President, President of the European Council, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to briefly address two points. Firstly, do we already have a Europe 2020 strategy that promises success? No, as yet, we do not. I will tell you why. If, in the Commission and the Member States, you say that we will first carry out a rapid consolidation of the budgets and then deal with the economy and employment, then this is a miscalculation. If you do not believe us, read the statement issued by the International Monetary Fund yesterday. Private sector demand is a long way from recovery. We are concerned about public investment. If you do not pursue an integrated strategy with specific employment goals at the centre, we will have no chance of dealing with the crisis.

Secondly, do we have an answer to the debt crisis in the countries that are under the most pressure? No, as yet we do not. More than one country has made mistakes. However, if you read the data carefully and listen to the analysts, then you know that at least half of the Greek excesses are the fault of speculators – the speculators that, for five years, the Commission did not want to regulate – the hedge funds. Now we are finally doing that, but what does it actually mean in practice? We need a European monetary fund, a fund to help these countries. We need to be able to offer credit at sensible rates not only outside the euro area, but within it, too, with conditions attached. However, we need to establish a European policy to solve the crisis – and we need to do so now.

Enikő Győri (PPE). – (HU) Ladies and gentlemen, as a member of the Trio Presidency and as a Hungarian MEP, I follow with great appreciation the activity of President Van Rompuy for the strong European commitment and faith with which he took on his new duties. It is absolutely true that now is the time to determine how the Presidency of the European Council will operate. I am convinced that Europe, in the throes of a crisis, needs a strong hand and orientation at the helm. It is also a question of credibility for the new programme to avoid the fate of its predecessor, the Lisbon Strategy. I say this also as a member from a previously communist country. In that nook of Europe, there is – perhaps understandably – a natural aversion to bombastic long-term plans.

I have one institutional and one substantive comment. Concerning the institution: we have to decide to whom this strategy is addressed. If it is addressed to EU leaders, then what has been done until now is adequate and the tight schedule is a good thing. However, if we think it is addressed to the citizens of the EU, whom we want to win over to our side, whom we want to work with and not against in shaping a stronger, more competitive Union that delivers more benefits to citizens than it does now, then we must proceed in accordance with the Treaty of Lisbon and honestly involve the European Parliament and, what is more, national parliaments as well. Today’s debate is no substitute for dealing with the topic in this House in the usual manner, with the rapporteur’s statement, in the committees and the political groups.

As for the substantive comment, the most important goal must be job creation. That must be the starting point for all new strategy. How to accomplish this? We know very little about that at this point. We know this much: fewer priorities, pinpointing bottlenecks, tighter economic policy coordination. That is all fine,

but please, take into consideration the following: first, let us not throw out that which has been working well. The EU has been strengthened by the existing community policies, and moreover, it goes against the founding treaties to discard cohesion and agricultural policies that serve well the interests of EU citizens. Secondly, the new strategy is to serve the interests of all regions, not only those of certain companies or countries. Through cohesion, the EU's competitiveness will grow as well. Thirdly, let us tailor the strategy to the countries. That is what will lend credibility to the whole thing.

Anni Podimata (S&D). – (EL) Madam President, this is a very interesting debate being held here today on the strategy for 2020, but we all know full well that the informal European Council on 11 February was dominated by the so-called Greek question. We also know that the informal summit culminated in a statement by the Heads of State or Government giving political support to Greece, expressing a readiness to take action to stabilise the euro and pointing out that Greece has not requested any financial support from the European Union.

I should like to take this opportunity to remind the House that the Greek Government and the Greek Prime Minister have repeatedly emphasised that Greece is not asking for money, it is not asking for German or Austrian or Swedish or any other European taxpayer to pay its debts, which it will deal with, which it will limit through its own efforts based on the measures which have already been announced.

While we are on the subject, Mr Verhofstadt, it is not correct that Greece has said that it has provided all the information on the Goldman Sachs bond; it has said that it will provide it promptly. Moreover – I cannot see the President of the European Commission here; I should like to express my perplexity as to why explanations were only requested from the Greek authorities and from Greece about a practice which was applied to saturation point by numerous Member States in the euro area over the ten years from 1998 to 2008, as reported in numerous articles in the foreign press recently.

Greece is not asking for money. It is asking for something else. Something which should be self-evident, not only by reason of its participation in the euro area, but also, more generally, by reason of its participation in the European Union: an expression of political support, solidarity and basic and honest trust. Support not just in words; support which has substance and content and will not be removed and undermined as soon as we are no longer behind closed doors.

Greece is asking for its partners not to do or say anything to fuel speculation and to stop sowing doubt as to whether or not Greece will be able to achieve results with the measures it has announced because, in the final analysis, that would undermine the efforts which the country is making.

We must not bury our heads in the sand. We all know that, through Greece, speculators are targeting the euro area and the euro. So let us take all the measures needed to protect the euro area and the euro.

(Applause)

Paolo De Castro (S&D). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I must express my sincere regret, and that of the entire Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, which I have the honour of chairing, that no reference whatsoever has been made to the agri-food sector in the 2020 strategy.

It is absurd that the Commission's proposed strategy for the next 10 years does not include the central issue of the challenge relating to food security, growth and job retention in rural areas.

Madam President, how can one conceive of a green and sustainable Europe without taking into account that 45% of all European territory is managed by farmers? How can one fail to take into account the nearly 30 million people who work on that territory? These are workers who must be safeguarded and protected. Before we focus on new jobs, we must protect the existing ones.

I would remind you that agriculture provides a whole host of essential services relating to, among other things, food, biodiversity, the landscape and the environment, and these are tasks that are performed for the sake of the social and economic life of rural areas.

The Spanish Presidency has also insisted strongly on the need for a powerful common agricultural policy. I am therefore concerned about this very serious omission, which I hope Parliament will be able to put right.

Liisa Jaakonsaari (S&D). – (FI) Madam President, this is the year of the tiger, and China is an economic tiger.

At the moment, India is a colossal building site, and I think that Indian development will have a huge impact on Europe. It is precisely for this reason that we need a new rhythm, the new beginning that EU 2020

symbolises. We need a common economic policy, an intelligent tax policy and the courage to acknowledge our structural weaknesses: research and product development. These issues have been very well presented here.

I have two questions. How in future are we to monitor the implementation of the Stability and Growth Pact on the basis of this Greek tragedy and the lesson it has taught us? My other question is this: what carrots and sticks are we to employ to enable the EU 2020 strategy to be more successful than the Lisbon tragedy, since the Member States could not care less about it?

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE). – (RO) Madam President, President in Office of the Council, I am pleased that you are here with us. I do not understand why the Council is attempting to make a decision in such haste, without any serious consultation with the European Parliament. We need the 2020 strategy as the Lisbon Strategy has not proved to be effective. However, the documents which are going round are general and fail to provide any clear statements referring to the future challenges.

One example is the social aspect. The main social problems in Europe are the increased ageing of the population and the lack of high qualifications for workers.

In these circumstances, allocating less than 2% of GDP to research, development and innovation is a first mistake which needs to be quickly rectified. Research and development could be based on public-private partnerships and on encouraging business people to invest in research laboratories and institutes in order to discourage the brain drain to the United States or Japan.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D). – (SK) I will try to be brief, in order to keep to the limit. I am disappointed that the President of the Commission is no longer sitting here, but I believe that the man responsible for interinstitutional cooperation is sitting here.

As an important step towards making strategy 2020 a success, I would therefore like to speak in particular about how essential it is for the various EU institutions to stop competing against each other and for us to cooperate together in earnest on the instruments without which it will be impossible to achieve the objectives of strategy 2020.

It is, therefore, very important for national egoisms to be genuinely transformed into a sense of national responsibility and also a sense of responsibility at the European level, because unless we address the issue of harmonising social policy and harmonising tax policy as soon as possible, it will not be possible to fulfil the objectives of economic policy or of our common European economy which will turn us into a genuinely competitive region in a globalised world.

Andrew Duff (ALDE). – Madam President, I am most grateful to President Van Rompuy for describing his job spec, but I still do not quite understand why he is declining to answer my parliamentary question. I would like to ask him to reconsider his approach to the issue of parliamentary questions.

Can I also apologise to President Van Rompuy for the disgraceful performance of Nigel Farage. I guarantee him that the great majority of British MEPs are going to treat him with great respect.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Madam President, the eyes of the whole of Europe – and not just Europe – have been on Greece recently, as numerous speakers have already said.

Against the backdrop of global economic crisis, it is not, of course, just Greece that has serious economic problems. There are other countries as well, as we all know.

We are witnessing an unprecedented speculative attack which – I am sorry to say – has lately taken the form of slander of the worst form by some of the media.

Be that as it may, you can all be certain that Greece is not bankrupt, Greece is not collapsing. Moreover, our country has never asked for financial support. What it has asked for and is asking for is political support. What it has asked for and is asking for is real proof of solidarity from the other Member States within the framework of European Monetary Union because, in the final analysis, that is what is at stake.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) At the start of the year, the unemployment rate reached 10%, while the deficit has grown in numerous Member States. Europe's citizens are waiting on immediate solutions to the current fundamental challenges: demographic changes and climate change, as well as the economic and financial crisis.

The European Union must invest, as a priority, in creating and preserving jobs in education, health care, agriculture and transport and energy infrastructures. The European Union needs a sustainable energy strategy and a modern, safe and efficient transport infrastructure. We must invest in energy efficiency measures for the benefit of both housing and modernising industrial facilities, thereby enabling us to create more than two million new jobs by 2020.

In addition, reducing polluting emissions means modernising industrial facilities across the European Union and not relocating European industry to third countries. Last but not least, the ageing population and fall in the birth rate necessitate reform to the social systems so that every citizen in the European Union can be guaranteed a decent living.

IN THE CHAIR: MR LAMBRINIDIS

Vice-President

Maroš Šefčovič, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, honourable Members of the European Parliament, the session went a little bit over time and the President of the Commission had to leave because of other obligations, but it is an honour for me to answer on behalf of President Barroso and on behalf of the Commission.

I would like to start by thanking you all for a fascinating debate, for many interesting ideas, and for the enthusiasm and support you are showing for the EU 2020 strategy. Without your support, the EU 2020 cannot and will not succeed. I can assure you that the Commission will be very bold; the EU 2020 will put citizens, employment and reduction of poverty at its core and centre. I can also assure you that we have learned the lessons of the Lisbon Strategy and therefore we will focus on a lesser number of targets and we will definitely improve on governance.

At the Commission, we are very much encouraged by the strong interest and what we hope will be strong support from the European Parliament. We are also very much encouraged by the sense of urgency in the European Council where it is very clear that the atmosphere today is very different from that of five years ago when we were discussing the parameters of the Lisbon Strategy.

But we need to do more; we need to get local and regional support for this strategy and, most importantly, we need to get the people behind it. We must make sure that they will not see it as another administrative exercise but that they will see it as an approach on how to improve life in Europe and in their countries and regions. I would like to ask you, honourable Members, to help us with this task. Let us not compete among the institutions, let us cooperate, let us focus on the priorities and let us deliver the concrete results.

In the EU 2020 strategy, we would like to introduce a three-interlocking-pillar system based on a smart, greener and inclusive economy and we would like to build upon these pillars flexible initiatives which would be aimed at the bottlenecks, at the problems which are slowing the European economy, which are blocking it from using its full potential. We would like to focus more on education and training, so that the labour force in Europe will maintain the competitive edge which Europe deserves. We will keep the EU 2020 strategy linked to the stability and growth pact, because a solid fiscal position is key to the economic stability.

We talked much today about Greece and I would like to assure you that there was consensus that the euro area Member States would take determined and coordinated action if needed to safeguard financial stability in the euro area. The Commission will closely work together with Greece and monitor how it implements the recommendations. A mission led by the Commission with the ECB and drawing on the IMF for technical support is now in Athens to assess the need for Greece to take additional measures.

Let me be very clear; we have the tools to safeguard financial stability in the euro area if needed; this involves, in particular, the euro area Members, the Commission and the European Central Bank and we stand ready to put in place a European framework for coordinating the action. But each stage in this process must be allowed to take its course, and it is now for Greece to press on with the reforms and to put the necessary measures in place. I believe that we are ready to take bold action, be it on the EU 2020 strategy or on the situation in Greece.

Herman Van Rompuy, *President of the European Council*. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am glad that we have had this debate; I am glad that I accepted your invitation to come here, at the very beginning of the process of the 2020 strategy, because the debate has only just begun. We had a debate just recently, on 11 February, we will have a spring Council at the end of March, and we will finalise the 2020 strategy, or

the strategy for employment and economic growth, at the end of June. We therefore have a considerable amount of time in which to exchange views and determine the course of action once and for all.

I therefore welcome this European ambition that I have found here this afternoon, and I welcome this sense of urgency that I have encountered this afternoon. There was one speech for which I have nothing but contempt, but I am not going to comment on that further.

As far as the economic strategy is concerned, I will make a distinction between three periods. The first period is the period that we are still in now, in other words, the financial crisis and all its consequences. Allow me to use a different language from what I have heard this afternoon throughout the entire debate. I will explain. I would like to use a language that also reflects what is positive about the European Union, because surprising though it may seem, there are also positive things that have happened recently. We have drawn consequences and learnt lessons from the crisis of the 1930s. We now find ourselves one year on from the major crisis and, in fact, in 2010, we now have positive growth in most countries once more. That did not happen during the 1930s. The crisis actually lasted until the end of the decade.

Why do we have this positive growth now? Because we have taken measures. We have taken measures to save the financial institutions, not because we particularly like them as such, but because, without them, there is no economy. We have conducted an intelligent monetary policy. We have injected liquidity into the economy, something that no one did 70 years ago. For at least 16 countries, we have created a zone of monetary stability, in spite of all the problems. In the 1930s, we had competitive devaluations. We have not had them today. We have conducted a risky budgetary policy using budgetary deficits to stimulate the economy. We did not do what was done in the 1930s, namely restore budgetary equilibrium as quickly as possible. Therefore, we have protected our internal market, which is not perfect. We must improve it, and Mr Monti will provide us with some concrete proposals. However, we have not lapsed back into the protectionism of the 1930s. Therefore, we have learnt some lessons from the major crisis that we have just experienced.

I would even go a step further. It is thanks to the European Union that the G20 was born; we were the ones who took the initiative to create this embryonic world governance. It is the first time that the big powers, new and old, have come together to combat the crisis, in an imperfect way, but we will continue to work along these lines. So Europe, the European Union, should not always be put on the defensive. There are also some very positive things that have been produced.

Now we must leave this strategy, this so-called exit strategy, behind. We have to find a balance between abandoning the budgetary stimuli too quickly and returning, in the medium term, to budgetary equilibrium, which is absolutely necessary to fund our pension system, our social security system and our health care system. So it is a difficult balance that we have to find, and the Stability and Growth Pact provides us with the means to do it, because it does not require an immediate return to budgetary equilibrium. It requires a step-by-step approach, whereby we first reach a stage of 3% and then, in the medium term, budgetary equilibrium. I think that we have conducted and we are continuing to conduct a wise policy.

As far as the Lisbon Strategy is concerned, we know its handicaps, but we must not forget either that the financial and economic crisis has completely disrupted the implementation of the Lisbon agenda. There have, of course, been omissions; I am not going to list them here, they are well known. I will say this, however: we need some major reforms, or important reforms, and these important reforms, at European level and nationally, will demand budgetary choices. It is not by chance – and I have repeated this in the written conclusions that you have read – that we want to link the budgetary discussion, effectively in its legal framework of the Stability and Growth Pact, to economic reforms. This is because, if we say that we need to do more research and development, for example, then we must make provision for that in the national budgets and in the European Union's financial perspective. That means that some budgetary choices will need to be made.

Another consequence of the choices we are making for the Lisbon Strategy is that the goals that we are proposing will not always be soft goals. It so happens that they could be hard goals. This is where it gets difficult. There is, on the one hand, the demand for reforms and, on the other, the implementation of the reforms. I do not say that I have heard it here, but outside this House, at European level, people are demanding hard measures, major reforms, hard reforms, and when people go back to their countries, I see few results of all that. We therefore need a consistent position. It is not just the European Union that will implement reforms. We can encourage them, stimulate them and provide the right framework for them, but it is at national level that a large number of reforms will have to be made, and therefore, it is a matter of demonstrating significant political will, and political commitment is the most important thing.

It is often said that we need more binding measures. However, we should think about this. I have made quite a few proposals, which I believe are more intelligent than binding measures. However, even the Stability and Growth Pact, which contains many binding measures, has failed to put some countries back on track. Therefore, the method is not everything, the method does not resolve everything, and without political engagement, without commitment, the method is worthless.

As for the economic strategy, it is all very well for some to say that we need more constraints. However, as far as economic guidelines are concerned, the Treaty of Lisbon does not make provision for that. I myself did not draw up the Treaty of Lisbon, others did, but it does not provide for any sanctions, penalties, or negative measures as regards the implementation of the economic guidelines. Take a close look at Article 121 so that you are fully aware of this. Political commitment at both European and national level is therefore crucial, and without this political commitment, nothing will be done.

One final word about Greece. I believe that we have sent out the right message. We have conveyed the message of the responsibility of the Greek Government, which must handle an extremely difficult situation, a situation that it inherited. It is taking some brave measures. On 11 February, it told us that if the current measures are not enough to achieve a reduction in the deficit of 4% of GDP in 2010, it would take additional measures. We have made a commitment to carry out more monitoring, not only on the initiative of the European Commission, but also with the help of the European Central Bank and even of experts from the International Monetary Fund. I therefore believe that we really have framed and defined very clearly the aspect of responsibility. If necessary, there is, of course, an element of solidarity. Greece has said that it does not want to use that, but we have provided for two messages: a message of responsibility and a message of solidarity, if necessary.

Naturally, we must draw conclusions from what has happened in Greece in recent years. In the euro area too, we must be more proactive with regard to both data collection and politics itself. This crisis was also a challenge, a challenge in the sense that we must practise the policy of coordination more. In fact, every crisis is a challenge. We must learn lessons from every crisis. Well, we will learn them. In the same way as we learnt lessons from the crisis of the 1930s, we must now also learn lessons from the financial crisis: more regulation, more monitoring of bonuses, a more far-reaching banking policy. However, we must also learn all the lessons from the experience of Greece and others.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that I have felt the same ambition in this House; I have felt the same political will to pursue an economic policy and strategy which can cope with the difficulties that we face today. As many of you have said, this is not just the responsibility of one or two people; all the European institutions and all the Member States must assume collective responsibility. Otherwise, we will not save our social model; otherwise, we will lose our position in the world. It is therefore in this frame of mind that I have come to meet you here this afternoon, and it is in this frame of mind that I will continue my work.

(Applause)

President. – Thank you very much, Mr President. It was indeed a great pleasure to have you here with us for your maiden appearance in plenary. In Greece, we have an expression for someone who assumes tough new duties. We say: *σιδηροκέφαλος*, which means may you have an iron head in order to sustain everything that will fall on it during a difficult course. I think you have exhibited that; if you do not have it, you are developing it. Thank you so much for being here with us.

The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Elena Oana Antonescu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The economic crisis has left a deep negative imprint on the EU countries' potential for economic growth. We have followed the debates on this topic and seen that attention has been focused on the measures for exiting the crisis and reviving economic growth financially. It is undoubtedly a good idea to tackle the problems in order of severity. However, it is important for us to realise that the situation is no longer the same as it was prior to the crisis. It is actually the economic model which needs to change. It must be based more on innovation and non-polluting energy sources, and focus on people's state of health. We cannot have a dynamic economy unless we have motivated workers. We cannot have a sustainable economy either if we support environmental protection only with half-measures. I believe that in order to restore the potential for economic growth, we need to start with changing the economic model itself, which must focus on what generates innovation and personal motivation. Exiting from the crisis is basically not a problem about economic or fiscal policy.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D), *in writing*. – (LT) Europe has already had a lesson, having been unable to implement the goals set out in the Lisbon Strategy and I hope that it will learn from the mistakes that caused the economic and financial crisis. Therefore, in future, I call on you to pay greater attention firstly to the creation of jobs and to create not just any jobs, but try to ensure high quality full employment, taking into account the needs of the labour market and ensuring social inclusion. Secondly, it is very important to fight for gender equality and the abolition of poverty, especially with regard to people in the most vulnerable groups, as they are most affected by poverty during these hard times. I would also like to draw attention to education systems and the importance of acquiring new skills. Since the labour markets of the EU Member States are experiencing dynamic change, it is necessary to ensure that workers have the required skills for future labour markets. Therefore, it is imperative to invest in internal staff training and lifelong learning. We ought to pay most attention to one of society's most severe problems, growing youth unemployment. If young people are not given opportunities to enter the labour market, then there is a danger that Europe will lose a whole generation of young people. At the informal meeting of EU Heads of State or Government on the Europe 2020 strategy on 11 February, the very important matter of governance was raised. Although the European Council is very ambitious in this matter, I would nevertheless call on you to ensure even more active participation by the European Parliament, national parliaments and various Council sectors.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) In this debate, those who hold responsibility within the European Union remain far removed from the real problems of citizens. The examples which we continue to find on our visits and in our contact with workers, farmers, fishermen and owners of micro- and small enterprises demonstrate that the approaches and policies of the European Union are only serving to render employment more precarious and to aggravate unemployment and exploitation.

At a time when unemployment figures have topped 23 million and poverty affects more than 85 million people, it is not acceptable to persist with the policies which have caused this situation.

We therefore insist on the need to terminate the Stability Pact and to replace it with a Development and Employment Pact prioritising the creation of jobs with rights and an increase in production.

It is necessary to break with the so-called Lisbon Strategy and instead back a Social Progress Strategy which gives priority to the fight against poverty, supports quality public services and social resources, and promotes equality and women's rights. That means developing a budgetary policy which speeds up the allocation of Community support funds and transfers them more quickly and easily to the Member States...

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

Kinga Gőncz (S&D), *in writing*. – (HU) The EU 2020 strategy can only succeed if the Member States demonstrate sufficient commitment to carrying it out. Besides unequivocal acceptance of national responsibilities, the key to success lies in implementing Community policies with their concomitant resources provided for catching up, regional development and agriculture, which will all contribute to economic growth and job creation. The top-down working method now taking shape, based on the heightened political accountability of prime ministers, also provides stronger guarantees of a successful execution than was the case for the Lisbon Strategy. The 2020 strategy also sets out the next budgetary term's priorities without providing for detailed discussion at present. Consequently, one has to emphasise right now the importance of a common agricultural and cohesion policy for the next seven-year budget beginning in 2014. Without economic, social and territorial cohesion, there is no strong, competitive Europe. Convergence between the regions strengthens Europe's competitiveness.

Livia Járóka (PPE), *in writing*. – (HU) Ladies and gentlemen, one of the most important challenges facing the EU is the reassessment of the Lisbon Strategy, with the associated fight against poverty and exclusion and the strengthening of social cohesion. The 2020 initiative, which constitutes one of the mainstays of the Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian Trio Presidency, has to respond to the long-term demographic and social challenges facing the continent. This means no less than a rethinking of the European labour market and educational system. In the face of the failure of the present European Employment Strategy, the 2020 programme must indeed create more and better jobs, with primary consideration given to the increased participation of women and disadvantaged groups in the labour market. It is commendable that both the European Commission's agenda and the action plan of the incoming Trio Presidency place emphasis on factors indispensable to the programme's success, such as measures targeting undeclared work, the black economy and early school leavers, as well as improving self-employment conditions. Since socio-economic exclusion is the result of numerous interdependent factors, solutions may come only from a more comprehensive action plan addressing all areas together, rather than from the project-based ideas that have

hitherto prevailed. In order to be successful, isolated initiatives must be abandoned in favour of measures that are woven into a balanced policy package that focuses on early interventions and can ensure genuine improvement in each of the true measures of social exclusion reflected in the Laeken indicators.

Iosif Matula (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The current economic crisis is the most severe in recent decades, with its impact being reflected in the reduction by half of growth potential across the EU. This economic decline is also going hand in hand with an increase in the population ageing rate, which is hampering the efforts to help the EU economies recover. Against this backdrop, the 2020 strategy, which is intended to be a continuation of the Lisbon Strategy, must create the conditions required for sustainable growth and fiscal consolidation. In fact, lifelong learning must be much more accessible, with universities being much more open to accepting non-mainstream students. Better correlation between supply and demand and greater labour mobility will provide workers with more opportunities in places where there is greatest demand for their skills. Modern social security and pension systems are required in order to reduce poverty and exclusion. Employment policy must focus on labour market flexibility where employees assume responsibility for their working life through ongoing training, adapting to change and mobility. It is vital to adapt to the current climate of economic crisis and an ageing European population so that we are able to provide a sufficient level of support to people who are temporarily out of work.

Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) I share the sentiments of fellow Members who have raised the issue concerning the absence of agriculture from the EU 2020 strategy. I believe that agriculture is an area which can contribute to the European Union's development and is, at the same time, an important sector because it is at the heart of the European way of life. Last but not least, particular attention must be focused on agriculture because it has been hit extremely hard by the economic crisis. In order to ascertain the extent of the impact, we only need to look at the reduction in real income per agricultural worker, which has reached as much as 35% in some European Union Member States.

Ioan Mircea Pașcu (S&D), in writing. – In line with the opening statement by President Van Rompuy, my intervention is devoted to the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty. While, in theory, the creation of the High Representative's double-hatted position looks good, in practice, given its 'uniqueness', it creates problems unforeseen by the authors of the treaty. In the absence of a deputy, equally double-hatted, the High Representative will more and more have to choose between staying in Brussels and being present, for instance, at the European Parliament, and flying to a foreign capital, where the EU needs equally high representation. Of course, Lady Ashton can 'deputise', but, if she does, it will have to be on an 'ad hoc' basis, at the expense of either the Council or the Commission. And if the 'rotating Presidency' steps back in to restore the balance, we end up with more bureaucracy, rather than less bureaucracy.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE), in writing. – (PL) Europe 2020 must not repeat the failures of its predecessor, the Lisbon Strategy. The new strategy has been shaped, to a significant degree, by the economic crisis, the effects of which it is going to have to tackle. At the same time, we must make up for our neglect. Since the provisions of the Stability and Growth Pact are so rigorous, how did the EU come to have a deficit of 7% and debt of 80% of GDP? Who is responsible for this? What we most want for the EU is a return to a path of rapid growth, and this is primarily what the strategy should help accomplish. The current provisions of the strategy do not show how to achieve this, nor do they show how to reconcile Europe's social achievements with demographic problems, with the poor performance of the health insurance system or the failing pension and benefits system. Furthermore, what about hours of work? Finally, what about the establishment of a system for the oversight and monitoring of banks and other financial institutions? Or how do we want to increase productivity? We need a new approach to these new challenges.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE), in writing. – (PL) The priority of the new Euro 2020 strategy is to be a more intelligent and ecological knowledge-based market economy. To achieve this objective, we should, above all, concentrate on strengthening the single market and increasing the free flow of services. The role of the European Community should be to promote entrepreneurship, and also to simplify the registration of businesses by lifting legal and economic barriers. Support, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises, is a significant matter. Lifting the requirement for micro-enterprises to submit annual financial statements and improving access to credit may be important steps in this direction. The results of the Eurobarometer survey on people's entrepreneurial mindset show that the European Union is still behind the United States, but also that over half of young EU residents would like to become entrepreneurs in the next five years. I also think it is important to concentrate on creating economic growth based on knowledge, and on creating a competitive, cohesive and more environment-friendly economy. This is also why we have to pay attention to, and increase spending on, the development and preparation of young people to meet long-term challenges.

The EU should implement a European digital agenda as quickly as possible to contribute to the establishment of a truly single, common market in Internet trade, so that consumers will be able to take advantage of competitive price offers in other Member States and SMEs will be able to operate in the European market unhindered.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (S&D), *in writing*. – (HU) The EU 2020 strategy must stand on two pillars. On the one hand, solidarity among Member States which guarantees that no Member State will be left behind in the crisis. On the other hand, Member States also have to show solidarity with the community by faithfully carrying out jointly decided obligations. During the debate on the future of the EU, we should never lose sight of the already functioning policies. Common agricultural and coherence policies are the true results of European integration and symbols of solidarity between Member States and nations. As a Hungarian Member of Parliament and a politician from a new Member State, I consider the new priorities formulated by the European Commission as having equal importance: building a knowledge-based society, fostering innovation, strengthening social inclusion, creation of new jobs and a more resolute stand against climate change within the framework of sustainable development.

The weakening of the previous common policies cannot be allowed to be the price paid for stronger cooperation in the above areas. The food safety guaranteed by the common agricultural policy is becoming ever more important in the 21st century as food and drinking water assume the same strategic significance as oil did in the 20th century. If we really want to strengthen the global competitive position of the EU, we cannot allow certain regions to be left behind because of obsolete infrastructure and poor educational, social and health services. Therefore, there is a continued need for a strong cohesion policy based on solidarity.

Traian Ungureanu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) The EU 2020 strategy must mark a breakthrough. Otherwise, EU 2020 will be a Lisbon 2, a strategy which will have to be replaced in 10 years' time by another new strategy. EU 2020 must clearly mark the start of the post-Lisbon phase. We must set the priorities for the strategy which we are launching so that the reforms which will be generated by EU 2020 will survive in the medium and long term.

There are three priority areas which must feature in EU 2020 without fail. The first one is active support for SMEs, based on the correlation of Community programmes with macro-economic policies. This approach will guarantee a healthy economic environment for private entities. The second is an education system which prepares the workforce based on the demands of the market. This process will ensure a better employment level in Member States. Finally, the European Parliament must have an increased role. This will allow real information from Member States to be used and prevent the disparities widening between Member States' economies. An EU 2020 strategy organised according to clear priorities will quickly revive economic growth in the EU, especially in the context of the current financial and economic pressures.

14. Parliament's priorities for the UN Human Rights Council (Geneva, 1-26 March 2010) (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on Parliament's priorities for the UN Human Rights Council (Geneva, 1-26 March 2010).

Diego López Garrido, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (ES) Mr President, the European Union is preparing, in Geneva, in Brussels and in the capitals of third countries, for the first session of this year of the Human Rights Council.

The Human Rights Council is a forum for debating the human rights situation in all the regions of the world, and the efforts of the international community to improve the human rights situation, which is one of the principles, one of the elements, one of the essential characteristics of the spirit of the European Union, the thing that gives it its true identity in the world.

The Presidency of the Council has taken the role that it has to play at this time very seriously. It has taken the challenges that the European Union has to tackle during these sessions of the Human Rights Council very seriously. Proof of this is that the First Deputy Prime Minister of the Spanish Government, María Teresa Fernández de la Vega – in this case acting as the representative of the Presidency of the Council of the European Union – will be attending the 'High-level segment', which is going to begin the Council's 13th session.

The Presidency is therefore going to have an active presence in the work of the Council.

We will defend the European Union's positions on matters with special implications for numerous Member States and, in addition to the national initiatives, the European Union is going to table country resolutions.

We continue to believe that the Council needs to have instruments in order to defend human rights, in order to respond to situations of serious human rights violations, either through a specific country mandate – which is the case of Burma or the Democratic People's Republic of Korea – or through mandates on specific subjects within a country, as we hope will be the case for the Democratic Republic of Congo.

These situations need to be monitored by the international community and by the Human Rights Council if we want the Council to maintain its credibility.

One of the items that are going to be on the agenda for the Council's forthcoming sessions is something that we are going to discuss later, in another item this afternoon, which is the special sessions on Gaza and the Goldstone report. The European Union considers – as we will say once again later – that this report is a reliable analysis, and the European Union stressed the importance of conducting adequate, reliable research into the possible violations of international human rights legislation and international humanitarian law.

Finally, I would like to discuss the problem of the Council Review.

This is going to be a crucial year for the negotiations on the review of the Council's work, which is going to take place specifically in 2011.

The European Union is beginning to work on, but intends to consolidate, a clear position, a clear strategy for the Union so that we can maintain an active role and a commitment to the protection of and respect for human rights.

In any case, it is clear that the European Union is going to continue to advocate the independence of the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, as it always has done, along with the independence of special procedures, the participation of non-governmental organisations in the Human Rights Council, the capacity of the Council to tackle key serious human rights violations, and the establishment of country mandates.

Spain, and the Spanish Presidency, are aware that it has taken over the rotating Presidency at a crucial time for the Union and for the United Nations in terms of protecting and promoting human rights in the world.

The Treaty of Lisbon has also opened up a new phase, as it has in so many other areas, in terms of the Union's external action, and we hope that our joint work, under the leadership of the High Representative, will therefore make the European Union's voice clearer in defending the fundamental principles of the work of the Human Rights Council. We also hope that this phase of moving towards a more active, transparent and efficient Council benefits from the transitional phase that the Union is going through under a Presidency – which I currently represent – which will do everything in its power to ensure that the paths taken by the Union and by the Council from now on lead to the same goal, which is the promotion and protection of human rights in the world.

Kristalina Georgieva, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I find it very appropriate that I am here today for the first time on the issue of human rights, which fits the priorities of my portfolio so well.

The Commission very much subscribes to the presentation by the Spanish Presidency, and I would like to add two sets of remarks to what has been presented here with regard to the priorities of the forthcoming session and how the EU would align with those priorities.

The first concerns thematic issues. The EU and the group of Latin American countries are jointly working on a draft resolution on the rights of the child, with a specific focus on the fight against sexual violence against children. The Commission is very concerned at the increase in sexual violence in zones of conflict and crisis situations and the spillover on the most vulnerable, especially children. The EU will, in accordance with the European consensus on humanitarian aid, ensure that this is properly addressed in the resolution.

The EU would also actively participate in a panel on the rights of persons with disabilities. There is a very clear link with our EU internal policies, as we will soon conclude the accession process to the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

Another thematic area of particular interest is the right to food, which is consistent with the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, as well as the human rights of internally displaced persons who,

unlike refugees, are not adequately protected by international conventions, and we will press on in connection with this point.

The second remark I would like to make concerns the support from the EU for the adoption by the plenary of the reports of the Universal Periodic Reviews concerning states that went through this process in December. This is a very important moment, in which the states reviewed can make public the commitments that they make for the improvement of the human rights situation. At the same time, states may choose to request international assistance for the implementation of these commitments. The Commission continues to remain very open to discussing with partners ways and means to support the implementation of the recommendations of these reviews.

Very critical, as already stressed by the Spanish Presidency, is the fact that the impact of this process depends, first and foremost, on the transparency and openness displayed by EU Member States, because we can only be effective by leading by our own example.

Laima Liucija Andrikienė, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – Mr President, I welcome the fact that the European Parliament is going to adopt a resolution on the upcoming session of the Human Rights Council. I also welcome the fact that the European Parliament will be sending a delegation to the Human Rights Council, since our recommendations to the EU Council are usually tabled on how to improve the work of the Human Rights Council and strengthen the role of the European Union in it.

This 13th session is the most important one to take place in 2010, and it will include high-level meetings and discussions with government ministers on a number of important issues already mentioned by the Commissioner and the Minister, such as, for example, the impact of the global financial crisis on the human rights situation worldwide.

We welcome the fact that our American partners are heavily engaged in the work of the Human Rights Council. However, we should note with concern that some countries are trying to hijack the whole process and undermine the credibility of the Human Rights Council. Iran has signalled that it might run in the elections for a place on the Council. It would be highly regrettable if Iran was elected, as this would in fact increase the number of countries with problematic human rights records on the Council. The Human Rights Council would then risk becoming as defunct and inefficient as its predecessor, the Commission on Human Rights. In other words, the credibility of the Human Rights Council as such is at stake, and we should therefore do everything we can to maintain the Human Rights Council's authority.

Richard Howitt, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – Mr President, I would like to begin by welcoming this Parliament's involvement in UN initiatives. In the autumn, we lobbied in New York for the appointment of a new Assistant Secretary-General to raise the priority for human rights in the UN, and next month we will once again be at the Human Rights Council itself: not simply in dialogue with our EU representatives, but also working with third countries as part of Europe's common efforts to promote respect for human rights with the rest of the world. I am proud that, in Geneva, we see that Europe is a champion of human rights and, with the work due to start in June this year, our resolution today says that we should be a champion of further reform of the Human Rights Council itself.

The Council remains too politicised, and our text today justly criticises those delegates who cynically lined up in their cars outside the UN in Geneva at 6 a.m. in order that they could be first in to fill up the speakers list to help Sri Lanka in its 'no action' motion to evade criticisms of violations in that country and to evade the spirit of the setting up of the Human Rights Council: that it should work throughout the year to deal with human rights abuses whenever and wherever they occur. In this Parliament, we agree with many of the principles enunciated by the Spanish Presidency in terms of further reform, and I would like to join with my friend Mrs Andrikienė to say that it will be a further death blow to the Council if Iran, with its devastating human rights record, is elected unopposed next time, as some fear.

The hardest test on human rights for any nation is when we stand accused of human rights abuse. That is why I am very pleased that, at the organisational meeting in Geneva on 18 February, both the European Union and the United States spoke in favour of the joint study on secret detention being presented to the Human Rights Council this time. We will not always agree with criticisms, but we must always be open to them if we expect others to do the same.

Kristiina Ojuland (ALDE). – (ET) High Representative, Commissioner, we in the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe want the European Union to be visible at the forthcoming 13th session of the UN

Human Rights Council. As the co-author of this resolution, I particularly want to draw attention to points 9 and 13 in the resolution, which deal with matters relating to Iran.

It is unacceptable to us, the ALDE Group, that the UN Human Rights Council is unable – not to mention unwilling – to react with the necessary speed to the human rights crises in Afghanistan, Guinea, Iran, Yemen and Iraq. The point of the Human Rights Council, which brings together all the countries in the world, is to constantly monitor the human rights situation on the territory of all Member States and to react without delay to any worsening of the situation.

The current sluggish handling of the situation clearly gives a sign of the weakness and inability of the organisation to adequately implement the goals it has set itself. The weakness of the organisation is also evident from Iran's candidacy at the election of the UN Human Rights Council taking place in May 2010, which is quite comical. The very thought of it is absurd, considering the helpless attempts by Iran's theocratic regime to suppress the civil disorder which has seized the whole country using a repressive apparatus. The only possibility is to blame the entire international community.

We respect the choices of the Iranian people, and the aim of our criticism is to achieve a better future for the Iranian people. We appeal to the European Union's High Representative for foreign affairs and security policy and the Vice-President of the Commission to take a resolute stand in this matter, and to put strong pressure on the UN.

Heidi Hautala, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (FI) Mr President, the European Union has a great opportunity to endorse a move to strengthen international law at the next Human Rights Council.

We have heard long lists of important issues from the Council and the Commission, but do we have any guarantees that the European Union will actually insist that they are addressed? For example, I might mention that the Goldstone report on the breaches of international humanitarian law during the war in Gaza has had a very controversial reception in the Member States. In my opinion, we have a right to receive an account from the representative of the Council on how the various Member States now view this important report. This report is crucial at a time when we are trying to put an end to seeing all those who are guilty of international humanitarian law violations and war crimes go unpunished and, instead, to bring them to justice.

Secondly, like my fellow Member, Mr Howitt, I would like to mention the new report on secret detention centres. The European Union must take more decisive action on torture and all inhumane treatment in prisons, some of them secret. We must also be able to face the fact that the Member States of the European Union are themselves guilty of such things. This cannot go on; we also have to investigate these matters inasmuch as they affect us.

We have an opportunity to boost the power of the International Criminal Court by adopting a forceful position on how the Court's Code of Professional Conduct should be amended this spring.

Charles Tannock, *on behalf of the ECR Group.* – Mr President, the Human Rights Council has undoubtedly laudable aims but it is seriously compromised by some of its members. Many of them have scant respect for human rights and democracy including Cuba, China, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Nicaragua and Gabon – and Iran, as a potential candidate – to name just a few. Clearly, therefore, this body has little substantive moral authority. It is all the EU has to engage with at UN level and it is nevertheless doing some good work on food security and the rights of the child. However, they attack Israel's human rights record obsessively but their own contempt for human rights often escapes scrutiny.

This Parliament's resolution rightly highlights that the 13th session omits to mention the serious human rights problems associated with regimes like Guinea-Conakry, Afghanistan, Iran and Yemen. Secondly, this resolution makes reference to the CIA and extraordinary rendition. We should think twice before attacking our American allies when they are still shouldering a vastly disproportionate burden of responsibility for our security in the European Union.

Nicole Sinclaire (NI). – Mr President, whilst the Commission is very keen on defending our human rights, we British have known since the thirteenth century exactly where we have stood. I am afraid to say that the Lisbon Treaty is a pale shadow of our Magna Carta.

The Commission likes to see itself as a global actor in the area of human rights and seems to be keen to judge others and to offer help and advice. However, it should take a critical look at itself. I find it deeply ironic that, whilst the EU rightly supports the rights of the Kashmiris who patiently await a referendum on the right to

self-determination that they were promised by the United Nations in 1947, the Commission actively seeks to take away competence from its own Member States in the important areas of high policy, via the Lisbon Treaty. In fact, this brings me on to the subject of a referendum that was promised to the British electorate but which simply never happened. Therefore, my electorate awaits self-determination, along with the Kashmiris.

José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, I think that this is an excellent opportunity to affirm the universality, indivisibility and interdependence of human rights, which is what this motion for a joint resolution to be adopted tomorrow does.

Parliament has expressed its opinion on several occasions, normally through the Annual Report on Human Rights in the World, and through various resolutions, as we did recently in the case of Iran.

Some fellow Members have referred to the paradox – a word that they have used – of certain countries that have an extremely poor record on human rights being part of the body that is responsible for monitoring them, and I think that the case of Iran is one of the most obvious ones. This is not the only example, and I think that the United Nations will become ineffective if it is really resourced by these countries, and will lose all political legitimacy and moral authority to condemn these events.

While I am talking about this, Mr President, this week, another of Parliament's bodies has been considering the expulsion of a member of this House, the expulsion of Cuba. In addition, today we must mourn the death of Orlando Zapata Tamayo, a 42-year old builder and political prisoner, who has died following a hunger strike and arbitrary, inhumane and cruel imprisonment.

The Chair of the Cuban Commission for Human Rights and Reconciliation, Elizardo Sánchez, a person who is very close to the spirit of social democracy, has said that this death was entirely avoidable and that he considers it to be a murder dressed up as justice. Commissioner, I would like to ask you – as we already know the position of the President-in-Office – if you think, from an ethical and democratic point of view, in response to the deplorable events such as the death of Mr Zapata, and if the Commission thinks, that relations between the European Union and Cuba need to be raised to a higher level and given priority?

15. Welcome

President. – I should like to welcome Monsignor Jorge Ortiga, Archbishop of Braga, together with the bishops and the Portuguese episcopal delegation accompanying him.

Your Grace, may I take this opportunity to express our solidarity and our condolences to the people of Portugal, especially the people of Madeira, who have suffered greatly over the past few days. Our thoughts and our prayers are with them.

16. Parliament's priorities for the UN Human Rights Council (Geneva, 1-26 March 2010) (continuation of debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on Parliament's priorities for the UN Human Rights Council (Geneva, 1-26 March 2010).

Vittorio Prodi (S&D). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the 13th session of the UN Human Rights Council is an extremely important occasion.

I would simply like to mention one or two cases that are not addressed very often. Specifically on the subject of prisons, but not those for terrorists, I would like to point out the truly inhumane conditions of the prisons in Rwanda and in Libya, where totally innocent people held in detention are sentenced to death.

Furthermore, I would like to mention the issue of the Sahrawi people, which has remained unresolved for so long now, and I would also like to mention the rights of climate refugees who are driven from their countries by dramatic forms of climate change. These are all factors that must be taken into account, precisely because they are also the foundations of our society.

Alexander Graf Lambsdorff (ALDE). – (DE) Mr President, for its 60th birthday in 2005, the United Nations gave itself two new structures. The first was the Peacebuilding Commission and the second was the Human Rights Council. While the Peacebuilding Commission carries out its work fairly effectively and has largely

met expectations, the same cannot be said, with the best will in the world, about the Human Rights Council. It has been said here – and expressed in the resolution – that a reform is sorely needed. The work of the Human Rights Council is too one-sided – my fellow Members have mentioned this – for example, Israel is discussed from a one-sided perspective. To be honest, I am not happy that the only major issue that the Presidency has highlighted here is the Goldstone report, which is certainly worth discussing, but it is not the main issue.

If Mr Howitt says that the election of Iran – if successful – would be a death blow to the Human Rights Council, then I would like to know what that means. I would like a uniform position to be taken on this by our Member States and also by the European External Action Service because I believe that, if things continue in this way, we will need to seriously consider putting the focus of our human rights work in the United Nations back onto the Third Committee, which at least has universal representation and greater legitimacy.

Daniël van der Stoep (NI). – (NL) You know it, we know it, the UN Human Rights Council is one big farce. This Council is being held to ransom by the Organisation of the Islamic Conference, which is made up of countries which protect each other and which seek to provoke the fine state of Israel and to falsely accuse it.

Mr President, this so-called Human Rights Council opposes everything that human rights are about, in particular, freedom of expression. It is outrageous and despicable that this Parliament should take this terrible Council seriously. Mr President, if this House really does believe in human rights, then it should condemn the steady stream of resolutions which seek to strangle freedom of expression, as well as flagrant human rights violations committed by the countries which make up the Human Rights Council. Mr President, in addition to Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Indonesia and Egypt, who are amongst the gravest violators of human rights in the world, now Iran, too, wants to become a member of the Human Rights Council. Well then, we just need North Korea to join the club and we will have pretty much all the rogue states happily sitting alongside each other.

Mr President, for my party, one thing is clear: the UN Human Rights Council is a dreadful body and one that cannot be taken seriously. This House must distance itself immediately and directly from the Human Rights Council and absolutely refuse any dialogue with this bunch of villains.

Cristian Dan Preda (PPE). – (RO) I wish to begin by reminding you that, when it was created as a unique body dedicated to human rights as part of the United Nations system, the Human Rights Council inspired hope, namely, the hope of increasing protection for fundamental rights at a global level.

The introduction of the Universal Periodic Review mechanism, which is the most important innovation in relation to the now defunct UN Commission on Human Rights, was intended to resolve the relevant problems, the excessive politicisation and selective approach in handling cases of serious human rights violations. This mechanism is vital so that the Human Rights Council can fulfil its mandate in whatever way possible. However, it must be emphasised that the old demons have not disappeared entirely and excessive politicisation continues to affect the work of this body. On the other hand, we must say that the Universal Periodic Review mechanism is not sufficient to ensure effective protection for human rights.

When the Council does not react with sufficient alacrity, as happened in the case of Guinea, to let me give you just a single example, this has extremely serious consequences. This can make the perpetrators of human rights violations simply feel that they have nothing to worry about. This Council's credibility depends therefore on its ability to take firm, rapid action when serious human rights violations occur.

In this respect, it is important for the European Union to promote the creation of mechanisms at Human Rights Council level specifically designed to respond to crises such as those, if we take current examples, in Afghanistan, Guinea Conakry, Iran, Yemen or Iraq. I believe that it is in the European Parliament's interest for this body, the Human Rights Council, to be as powerful and effective as possible, because I would say that we need a credible partner in the dialogue on human rights.

Corina Crețu (S&D). – (RO) I would like to talk about the situation in the Gaza Strip which, as you know, is a constant source of concern in terms of respect for human rights, especially after the deterioration in circumstances as a result of the clashes last winter. I do not believe that we can measure who has suffered more in this conflict. Military actions by both sides have meant that mainly civilians suffer, unfortunately. However, in the context of the situation on the ground, it is extremely difficult to differentiate between soldiers and civilians among Palestinians. On the other hand, the rocket attacks launched by Hamas have terrorised Israeli civilians.

I visited the area during the conflict and saw the problems and fears facing both sides. I believe that any attempt to pin the blame for the events which have occurred on just one side is at variance with the reality. The bloody clashes in the Gaza Strip and the tragic humanitarian consequences are a painful plea for concentrated action in all the hot spots around the globe, in particular, against the causes responsible for making defenceless civilians suffer, and for more extensive and effective involvement by international organisations, with a view to giving impetus to the dialogue for peace. This is an area where the European Union has not only the necessary capacity and credibility, but also the duty to take more robust action globally.

Tunne Kelam (PPE). – Mr President, one parliamentary priority is also to address an alarming situation where the Human Rights Council's activities have resulted in extreme politicisation. It is therefore of utmost importance that the EU member delegations should stand up for the establishment of criteria for becoming a member of the Human Rights Council. That applies especially to minimum requirements of cooperation with special procedures, and resisting the use of 'no action' motions which have prevented the adoption of resolutions on certain states who are keen to avoid criticisms of their human rights policies.

I would like to refer to two other parliamentary priorities. Firstly, Belarus. Contrary to expectations, the human rights situation has not improved, but is worsening. I would like today to stress Mr Milinkevich's message. The EU has now got real leverage to put pressure on Lukashenko's regime to make him bring about genuine improvement as a condition for further EU economic aid and cooperation.

Secondly, I would like to call for support for last week's public address by the 18 Russian human rights activists, including Sakharov Prize winner Kovalev, who are extremely worried about a further clampdown on independent satellite information in the Russian language, which the Kremlin has achieved through applying pressure.

It is really damaging to the values of the EU to praise human rights advocates like Kovalev and, at the same time, to surrender to Mr Putin's claims that broadcasting alternative information in the Russian language by European satellites is something hostile.

Elena Băsescu (PPE). – (RO) I would like to draw your attention during today's debate to the case of Israeli soldier Ghilad Shalit, who was kidnapped in Kerem Shalom in June 2006, aged just 19. Last week, I was part of the official European Parliament delegation in Israel and one of the meetings was with Ghilad Shalit's father, Noam Shalit. In spite of Articles 13, 23 and 126 of the Geneva Convention on the rights of prisoners of war, Ghilad, who also holds French citizenship, has not had his rights respected in terms of receiving visits from his family and the International Red Cross, receiving humane treatment and having the exact location where he is being held prisoner disclosed. I must emphasise that even Article 77 of the Goldstone Commission report, which is otherwise critical of Israel, recommends that Ghilad Shalit should enjoy the rights guaranteed by the Geneva Convention. On the other hand, Israel respects the rights of prisoners.

Csaba Sógor (PPE). – (HU) At the March session of the United Nations Human Rights Council, the European Union must unequivocally state that the international community cannot keep silent about human rights violations, not only those occurring in developing countries but also the contraventions that may be observed in developed countries. The Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities, adopted by the UN General Assembly on 18 December 1992, is equally binding on developing and developed countries, including EU Member States. The first paragraph of the Declaration's second article states that persons belonging to national minorities have the right to use their own language, in private and in public, without interference or any form of discrimination. At present, this article is often honoured in the breach in EU Member States as well. The EU can only be credible if it finds a solution that deals with human rights contraventions within European Union territories in a way that sets an example for the whole world.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, the next two years will be crucial in crystallising the role of the UN in the human rights sector because, as you know, the intergovernmental review of the Human Rights Council will be published in 2011.

There is a danger, during this period, that the countries to which my fellow members referred and which do not set particular store by this sector, will try to limit the role of the UN.

I should like to add the following to what has already been said: firstly, as the European Union is – and I trust that it will continue to be – one of the most important factors in terms of the defence of human rights, one of our priorities must be for us to speak internationally with one voice and, where possible, to avoid discord.

Secondly, we need to step up our cooperation with the United States of America in the defence of human rights.

Thirdly, and lastly, the European Parliament must – and can – carefully monitor the specific procedures that will follow in terms of the universal periodic examination of the Council, so that there is a real and substantial contribution on our part to the promotion of human rights in all the Member States of the United Nations.

Mariya Nedelcheva (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, Mrs Georgieva, Mr López Garrido, I would like to draw your attention to point 13 of this resolution on Iran's candidacy in the United Nations Human Rights Council.

On 15 February, Iran was subjected to a universal periodic review, which reviews the situation regarding the protection and promotion of human rights in the country. The Iranian regime asserted that respect for human rights is guaranteed there. I would like to underline various facts regarding these assertions by the current regime.

Only yesterday in Parliament, Mrs Radjavi gave us an overview of the arbitrary arrests and acts of torture inflicted on Iranian women and opponents of the regime. We also deplore the political conditions prisoners must endure, and Camp Ashraf has become the symbol of non-respect for human rights. My parliamentary colleagues provided several eyewitness accounts during the January part-session.

Today, we cannot accept Iran becoming a member of the highest authority for the defence of human rights. Consequently, I wonder what message we are going to send out to other states that genuinely respect human rights. Europe must speak with one voice, demonstrating its consistency, and, as Baroness Ashton said in her statements, let us say that, at this stage, Iran's candidacy is inconceivable.

Alf Svensson (PPE). – (SV) Mr President, as regards our group's joint resolution on the UN Human Rights Council I am particularly pleased about paragraphs 6 and 25, in which we repeat the EU's strong support for country-specific resolutions. In those cases where human rights are systematically abused, country-specific resolutions are an incredibly important instrument, both in the Human Rights Council and in the UN General Assembly. In many cases where the government of a country has long failed to participate in dialogue or programmes to improve the situation in question, country-specific resolutions represent the only remaining action that the international community can take against these crimes.

It is not about naming and shaming, as some critics believe; neither is it the case that we in Europe enjoy poking our noses into other countries' internal affairs. It is quite simply a matter of signalling that we will not accept a regime's systematic abuses and oppression of its own people. It is about showing that we side with liberty, not with oppression. That is why it is important that the EU camp continues to defend the existence of country-specific resolutions within the UN system.

Andrew Henry William Brons (NI). – Mr President, the countries of the European Union should put their own houses in order before pointing their fingers at others. Many European Union members prosecute and imprison people for non-violent freedom of speech. In particular, they seek to make any opposition to immigration a criminal offence. Book-burning is alive and well. Political parties are banned, as in Belgium, or their ban is sought on invented evidence, as in Germany, or a backdoor ban is sought, as in the United Kingdom, where my own party has been banned, by a court order sought by the government, from accepting new members for an indefinite period.

It is not enough for countries to call themselves democratic: they must also respect freedom of speech, they must respect freedom of association and they must respect freedom of elections.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Mr President, I am grateful for the speeches by Members regarding this absolutely essential and crucial issue, which, as I said in my first speech, is one of the core elements of the European Union: defending human rights.

In this respect, we believe that participation in the United Nations Human Rights Council, including support for the existence of the Council, is a position that must be upheld by the European Union. The European Union has always advocated that a Human Rights Council should be established to replace the former Commission, as I said before. Furthermore, it has believed that it should be an instrument that can adequately deal with human rights situations worldwide, situations which require the United Nations and its members to take action, adopt a position or make the corresponding declaration.

In fact, the Presidency of the European Union, the Presidency of the Council, has always systematically taken part in the discussions at the various part-sessions of the Human Rights Council on behalf of the European

Union, and this will continue to be the case. The Presidency of the Council of the Union will take part in the next part-session of the Human Rights Council on behalf of the Council of the Union. Naturally, this is perfectly compatible with the declarations and positions of each of the Member States of the Union and of the European Commission, as another institution of the Union.

I therefore would like to say that we are in favour of the existence of this body, and in favour of drawing on all of its potential, which, in some cases, is achieved, and in other cases is not: obviously, there are certain situations in which, as a result of the votes that take place, the European Union and its Member States do not achieve all their objectives. There are really positive cases, for example, the position on Somalia: there are violations of human rights in that region. There are other cases in which the objectives have not been achieved, but the positives always outweigh the negatives.

I would like to say that we are going to talk about some of the cases of countries that have been mentioned in the various speeches.

I do wish to talk about the case of Iran, because there have been repeated allusions to the subject of Iran's candidacy. As you know, declarations have constantly been made on this subject. Here in front of me, I have three declarations made this year alone by the Union's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Catherine Ashton, regarding the situation in Iran, condemning and expressing her concern about cases of human rights violations and executions that have taken place in Iran.

Regarding the question of the candidacy, we first have to say that this is a matter that is currently still one of national competence (the position regarding candidacies of countries to join the Human Rights Council). In any case, the matter of the human rights situation in Iran and the human rights violations, and therefore the question as to whether or not Iran's candidacy for the Human Rights Council will be accepted, must be managed carefully in order not to cause the opposite of the desired effect. We therefore understand that the European Union, here, must try to have the most coordinated position possible (which is what is happening at the moment), while respecting national competence and, as I said, exercising caution.

In short, Mr President, we consider the Human Rights Council to be a place where we must defend the European Union's position, and we think it is the right place to do so. Furthermore, our commitment to it has always been to ensure that it does not cause the universal movement defending human rights to take steps backwards, to regress, especially in terms of humanity's achievement, which is considering human rights to be a universal value, a universal value that should be defended over and above borders, traditions and diversity, because it is something that is linked to the very essence of human beings.

Kristalina Georgieva, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, thank you very much to all Members of Parliament for the recommendations they have conveyed. We will make sure that we share these with the High Representative.

Let me make four points in response to specific questions and comments.

First, on Iran and the candidacy of Iran: I very much support the view expressed by the Spanish Presidency. I can only stress that each and every elected member of the Council is expected to display in practice the highest commitment to the protection and promotion of human rights.

On the very sad case of the loss of human life in Cuba, the death of Mr Orlando Zapata, I would like to express the condolences of the Commission to his family and strongly condemn the continuous imprisonment of more than 200 political dissidents in Cuba as well as other expressions of disrespect for fundamental human rights. The Commission calls upon Cuba to change its policy and to live up to its obligations under international law. We will continue to address the human rights issue in the dialogue with Cuba, with the authorities there, and we will use this dialogue as a vehicle to press the issue of human rights.

On the calls by many for the EU to speak with one voice on human rights issues, the Commission is very strongly in support.

The fourth point, on Gaza: I think it would be more appropriate to take up this point in the next discussion on the Goldstone report.

President. – I have received six motions for resolutions⁽²⁾ to wind up the debate in accordance with Rule 110(4) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Mara Bizzotto (EFD), in writing. – (IT) I have many reservations about the UNHCR's overall credibility. In any case, I hope that the presence of a delegation from the Subcommittee on Human Rights at the next session of the Council will provide the European institutions with an opportunity to raise the urgent issue of Christianophobia. We are well aware that we do not need to turn back the clock to find serious cases of anti-Christian persecution: we are not in fact talking about the past, but about the present, and unfortunately, in all likelihood, also about the future, because, every day, from every corner of the globe, we receive worrying, tragic news of Christian believers being attacked, discriminated against and killed. We also know that the issue is a sensitive one, and that although it has not been addressed properly up to now, this has happened not only because of the diplomatic balance that the participants have to maintain in meetings such as the UNHCR, but obviously also because of the anti-Christian policy pursued by countries which, whilst they are not exactly enemies of Christianity, do at least traditionally tolerate anti-Christian acts.

It follows that the EU and this House, on an occasion illuminated by the spotlight of world politics, should promote within the international community a new approach to the issue of Christianophobia, so that it is universally and immediately recognised as a serious violation of human rights and of religious freedom, and so that the community takes action to halt its worrying spread.

Proinsias De Rossa (S&D), in writing. – I support this resolution which calls, inter alia, on the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Member States to work towards a strong EU common position on the follow-up to the Goldstone report and demands the implementation of its recommendations and accountability for all violations of international law, including alleged war crimes, and urges all sides to conduct investigations that meet international standards of independence, impartiality, transparency, promptness and effectiveness, in line with United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/64/L.11. It further stresses that respect for international human rights law and international humanitarian law by all parties and under all circumstances is an essential precondition for achieving a just and lasting peace in the Middle East. The resolution also calls on the EU High Representative and Member States to actively monitor the implementation of recommendations included in the Goldstone report by means of consultation of EU external missions and NGOs in the field and calls for the recommendations and related observations to be included in EU dialogues with all parties, as well as EU positions in multilateral fora.

17. Implementation of Goldstone recommendations on Israel/Palestine (debate)

President. – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on the implementation of Goldstone recommendations on Israel/Palestine.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Mr President, I would like to thank the European Parliament for the opportunity to speak on this issue of the fact-finding mission, a mission sponsored by the United Nations, on the conflict in Gaza, which took place between the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009, and is known as the 'Goldstone report'.

The United Nations took careful note of the statement by its Secretary General, Ban Ki-moon, to the Security Council on 21 January 2009, in which he gave his impressions following a visit to Gaza and South Israel just after the hostilities ended.

In addition, the report that has already been referred to in some of the speeches on the previous item, the Goldstone report, which was published in the middle of September last year, was debated in the 12th Session of the Human Rights Council, from 14 September to 2 October.

From the very beginning of this conflict, the European Union has insisted that the parties fully respect human rights and comply with their obligations under international humanitarian law.

⁽²⁾ See Minutes

The European Union made it clear that it would closely monitor the investigations into the accusations and violations of human rights.

In Geneva, the Swedish Presidency of the Council established the European Union's position in the following way: firstly, the European Union considers the report to be serious, as it contains reports of serious violations of international humanitarian law, including deliberate attacks on civilians. Secondly, the European Union stresses the importance of adequate and credible investigations being conducted into the possible violations of international law by the parties to the conflict, in line with international legislation and therefore ensuring that the mission directs its recommendations to both the Israelis and the Palestinians.

The European Union confirmed its constructive position with regard to the Goldstone report when, in the debate of the United Nations Security Council on 27 January, just one month ago, it highlighted the importance of conducting adequate and credible investigations into the possible violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law. I can inform you that, subsequently, on 4 February 2010, a few days ago, the Secretary-General of the United Nations published a report on the application of the United Nations General Assembly's Goldstone Resolution.

The Secretary-General relayed the responses of Israel, the Palestinian occupied territories and Switzerland, and in his observations, he said that the processes initiated by these three parties were under way and that no opinion could be given on the application of the Resolution by the parties concerned.

It remains to be seen how this matter is going to be dealt with in the United Nations General Assembly.

The Spanish Presidency's priority in this respect is to achieve a consensus regarding the Union's position on the draft resolution that the Palestinian authorities want to submit to the United Nations General Assembly at this time.

We have two objectives: firstly, we want the resolution to be adopted by consensus, and, if not, we want a European Union position to emerge on this that is as integrated as possible.

In any case, I repeat that the Presidency of the Council endorses what the Goldstone report asked for, which is for credible, investigations to be conducted that are independent of the parties.

Kristalina Georgieva, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I just want to endorse what has been said by the Spanish Presidency. Although the EU has not endorsed all the recommendations, it made it clear that it takes the Goldstone report very seriously. It has invited all parties of the conflict to launch investigations into alleged violations – caused by parties of the conflict – of international humanitarian law and international human rights law. This investigation should be in accordance with international standards.

So far, the steps taken by Israel, the Palestinian authorities and Hamas fall short of providing tangible results, and yet accountability must be established. Therefore, the EU keeps repeating our key message that the parties to the conflict make substantial efforts in conducting independent and credible investigations into the alleged violations. Since this directly concerns my responsibilities, it is worth recalling that the Commission provides substantial funding to humanitarian organisations whose projects aim to provide vital assistance and protection to Palestinian civilians.

The EU will strive to ensure that the appropriate follow-up is given at the Human Rights Council meeting in March and to engage at an early stage in the preparation of a consensual resolution. In this context, I would like to state here that on 18 February, the Palestinian Delegation tabled a draft General Assembly resolution further to the United Nations' Secretary-General's report as a follow-up to the Goldstone report. The Palestinian side indicated that it is their intention to seek General Assembly action on the resolution on Friday, 26 February, to reiterate the main points of the General Assembly resolution 64/10 of 5 November 2009, and to ask the United Nations' Secretary-General to report again in five months. As we sit in this room, Member States and the Commission are in intensive consultations on this issue with the aim of reaching a common position on this resolution.

May I – very much in support of the Spanish Presidency – end up with the point that it is important to seek a common EU position and avoid the previous three-way split.

Elmar Brok, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr López Garrido, Commissioner, I believe that a credible investigation into the violations of international humanitarian law is important and that this is what we must focus on. The conclusion needs to be examined, but this applies equally to both parties involved, including to those waging asymmetrical war by firing on Sderot and other towns from a densely populated

area, thereby determining the battlefield. This is being investigated fairly and no one-sided conclusions will be drawn in this regard.

This also goes to show that, in the Middle East, but also in other comparable regions, only peaceful solutions will bring lasting results. As long as no peaceful solution and no lasting understanding can be found, we will never solve these problems. In such cases, full account must also be taken of the security aspects of the State of Israel and these aspects must be taken seriously, including in light of the fact that new rockets are being developed here, which are problematic.

However, I would also like to point out that it is right to call for an international investigation, although not everything can be investigated within the framework of the Goldstone report. This report is intended to deal solely with the occupied territories. It has been pointed out that not a single Member State of the European Union voted in favour of the report in the Human Rights Council. Some abstained, others voted against it and others – such as the United Kingdom and France – refused to take part in the vote at all. We should also take this into account, as the resolution was carried by such ‘representatives of human rights and democracy’ as Cuba, Nigeria and China. We ought to bear this in mind when evaluating this matter. We need to stand up for human rights, but not on the basis of this report in order to wage political war against one of the sides.

Véronique De Keyser, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (FR) In December 2008, Operation ‘Cast Lead’ in Gaza resulted in around 1 500 deaths, the majority of those killed being women, children and other civilians. Families were destroyed, and schools bombed. A population was thrown into panic, trapped and unable to escape.

I was in Gaza during the military operation, with some of my colleagues present here, and we were stunned that such a tragedy could unfold in front of the international community without leading to a huge wave of protest. Gaza has not changed since then. The destruction remains and the siege continues.

However, there has been the Goldstone report. Mr Brok, what is the difference between the Goldstone report and the resolution that followed? The Goldstone report, this brave report that simply demands that justice be done, is that too much to ask? The pressure today to bring down this report and the discrediting of Judge Goldstone is unbelievable. His name is being dragged through the mud; he is being called an anti-Semite, even though Israel is not the only one to have the finger pointed at it in the Goldstone report. Fatah and Hamas are not spared criticism.

However, today I will say quite clearly, and I apologise to my fellow Members, that the Israeli Government is the only one that has established a sort of reign of terror and practised censorship to block any follow-up to the report. Mr Lieberman, you are not in this House, but you were here yesterday, and I would like to say to you: there will be no intimidation in this Parliament!

We want independent inquiries that are in keeping with international standards, not military tribunals judging their own soldiers. Mr Lieberman, I will also say that you are not welcome, not because you represent Israel, but because your racist and xenophobic positions are incompatible with European values. No democratic state can dare to break international law without having to justify its actions. This Parliament will not allow itself to be intimidated. It will simply continue to demand that justice be done, that light be shed on the tragedy of Gaza, not in a fierce way, but in a determined way. Today, I implore the Council and the Commission simply to abide by that. Light and justice, nothing else.

Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, the Goldstone report tries to fulfil the mandate it was given. That mandate is, or was, the following: ‘To investigate all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law that might have been committed at any time in the context of the military operations that were conducted in Gaza during the period from 27 December 2008 and 18 January 2009, whether before, during or after.’ And that is exactly what the Goldstone report has done – although it was not just Mr Goldstone, it was also his two female colleagues.

They conducted investigations on what happened in Gaza and came up with conclusions that are disturbing to say the least. They are extremely disturbing because they find in most of the instances they looked into that breaches of international law and international humanitarian law and breaches of the Geneva Conventions have indeed been committed by the forces of a state that claims to be the sole democratic state in the region. That is indeed very disquieting.

We should not let it pass. So when we are called upon to take a position on this report, the question is not whether we are for or against Israel, for or against the Palestinians, for or against Hamas; the question is

whether we condone breaches of international law, of international humanitarian law and of the Geneva Conventions, no matter by whom they were committed. That is what we need to answer.

Caroline Lucas, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – Mr President, let me say how delighted I am that we are finally discussing the Goldstone report in plenary, because it is a vitally important issue, and to date, the EU has been shamefully absent in these issues. It is quite unacceptable that the Council still has not endorsed the recommendations of the Goldstone report. The Commission says it is taking it very seriously, but that is not good enough: we want an explicit endorsement. The Presidency says that it backs it: well, it should back it publicly and explicitly and make sure that the rest of the Council does as well.

Against that backdrop, I have to say I am pleased that in Parliament's motion for a resolution on the Human Rights Council, which we will vote on tomorrow, we have two very strong paragraphs calling on the High Representative and on Member States to publicly demand the implementation of the report's recommendations.

The resolution further calls on them to actively monitor the implementation of the recommendations for consultation of EU external missions and with NGOs in the field, because the evidence we have so far is that neither the Israeli authorities nor Hamas are taking their responsibilities sufficiently seriously. In Israel, the investigations into targets and tactics used during Operation Cast Lead have been carried out by army commanders or military police, severely compromising the independence of the findings, and from the Hamas side there is still a failure to address adequately the firing of rockets into southern Israel. In the light of these failures, it is clear that the EU should put pressure on the UN Secretary-General to prepare a genuinely independent assessment.

Finally, given the ongoing humanitarian crisis in Gaza, I call again on the Council and the High Representative to put far more pressure on Israel to lift the siege which is preventing reconstruction and exacerbating the suffering.

Michał Tomasz Kamiński, on behalf of the ECR Group. – (PL) Mr President, the Goldstone report is exceptionally unbalanced and unfair. It comes from the United Nations Human Rights Council, whose members include countries such as Iran, Nicaragua, Somalia and Libya. What right do those countries have, where respect for human rights has been reduced to zero, to evaluate Israel, the only democracy in the Middle East?

The report comes from a very suspect source which is obsessively ill-disposed towards Israel. Out of the 25 resolutions on human rights which the UN Human Rights Council has adopted, as many as 20 are devoted to Israel. Not one of them is about the countries which are members of the Council, countries which, and I stress this, have an awful human rights record from women's rights to electoral rights.

I stress that this report is completely unbalanced. It attempts, in fact, to absolve the terrorist activity of Hamas. The report does not state the fundamental fact that, in the eight years before Israel, in its own defence, took action in the Gaza Strip, thousands of rockets were fired at innocent Israeli citizens. Every country has the right to defend itself against terrorists. Israel, too, has that right. It should also be said that 150 criminal investigations of the actions of particular Israeli soldiers are currently under way in Israel. In Israel, there is a free parliament, and there is a free press which often criticises its own government and its own armed forces. None of these features is to be found, unfortunately, on the terrorist side.

I think, therefore, that this unbalanced and unfair report, which, in my opinion, attacks our main ally in the Middle East in a shameless fashion, should not be taken seriously.

Kyriacos Triantaphyllides, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (EL) Mr President, the report by Justice Goldstone provides the most blatant proof of the crimes and of the infringements of international law and international humanitarian law by Israel against the Palestinian people. The investigation has given rise to strong indications that the Israeli forces have committed serious infringements of the Fourth Geneva Convention. It should be noted that, while the Palestinian side, although criticised in the report, accepts international law and calls for its application, Israel, on the other hand, refuses.

While certain parties are trying to undermine the report, we call on the Member States of the European Union to stand up for the principles that govern international law and the European Union and to support the debate of the report at the UN General Assembly and its notification to the Security Council with a view to its ultimate ratification and for measures to be taken. The report should be sent to the International Criminal Court in The Hague for examination. If the European Union is truly interested in resolving the Palestinian

problem, then it should stop tolerating these crimes, because tolerance translates into encouragement and complicity.

Furthermore, based on the conclusions in the report, suspension of action to upgrade relations between the European Union and Israel and the application of the provisions of the association agreement should be examined immediately.

The people of Palestine and of Israel have every right to a future and to life. We have an obligation to exert pressure to achieve a fair solution and peace. The Goldstone report should be used to give new impetus, with a view to achieving a fair solution.

Bastiaan Belder, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (NL) The Goldstone report was very much the focus of attention last week, during the working visit to the Jewish state of the Delegation for relations with Israel. The delegation received detailed information about Israel's judicial investigation during and after the military operation in Gaza, from both military and civilian representatives. This thorough investigation of their own actions provides a detailed rebuttal of the Goldstone report's damning accusations against the Israeli authorities.

Moreover, quite apart from the Goldstone report, the IDF, the Israeli armed forces, take any allegation levelled at them seriously and investigate them thoroughly. There is a marked contrast here between the IDF and Hamas, the terrorist movement that is to blame for the Gaza operation. When have we ever seen Hamas investigate its own actions?

Mr President, the available documentation about the Gaza operation leaves us in no doubt about the answer to that. Hamas deliberately exposed Palestinian citizens to an acute threat of war, even in places like mosques. In contrast, just consider the intentions and actions of the Israelis, consider the protection of the lives and property of Jewish citizens against Hamas's terrorist rocket attacks, which have been going on for years, as well as Israel's real concern for Palestinian lives. Look at all the precautions they took during the operation.

Mr President, despite the intentions of the Goldstone report, this biased investigation leads to justification on two counts: that of Israel's military operation against Hamas and that of Israel as a democratic state governed by the rule of law. You only need to visit the Middle East!

Louis Bontes (NI). – (NL) It was clear from the very start that Israel was going to be labelled as perpetrator and aggressor in the Gaza conflict. Goldstone and his working methods are endorsed by countries such as Egypt and Pakistan and we know the state of human rights in those countries. It is beneath any acceptable standard.

The report makes no mention of the twelve thousand rockets fired on Israel from Gaza, which posed a very serious threat to the local population. Israel was exercising its right of self-defence. There is not a single word in the report about Hamas, nor about the fact that they used their citizens as a human shield or that they used civilian buildings in which to store arms and from which to launch rockets. Not a word about that. Not a word about the fact that the Hamas police force was once part of a military organisation which waged an armed struggle against Israel.

Mr President, there is only one thing we can do with this Goldstone report and that is to throw it in the bin, and right away, too. We should not waste any more time on it. This is part of a political process. This cannot carry on. Put an end to this political persecution of the state of Israel.

Gabriele Albertini (PPE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, public opinion is divided on the Goldstone report.

In particular, the Israeli armed forces are accused of having deliberately caused the deaths of countless civilians during the urban guerrilla operations. This is a very serious accusation, which appears to overlook certain undeniable facts, such as the distribution of leaflets throughout the battle zone to explain that houses containing weapons and munitions could be hit, and the telephone and radio warnings, including on Hamas frequencies, before attacks were launched on buildings identified as arms depots.

The so-called 'roof knocking' technique was also used: if, after all those warnings, the air force still identified buildings full of people, small explosive and, above all, loud, charges would be launched to quickly evacuate the buildings.

The Israeli army introduced warning signals for the Gaza civilians that no one else had put into practice before. Anyone who uses all these precautions cannot, under any circumstances, be accused of deliberately targeting civilians.

Yesterday, on the same day, I met two major political figures: the Israeli Minister for Foreign Affairs, Avigdor Lieberman, in the morning, and the President of the Palestinian National Authority, Abu Mazen, in the evening. In both cases, the meeting was held in a calm and relaxed atmosphere, and the hope expressed that, after too many decades of fighting, weapons will finally be abandoned in favour of a peace process.

Just as both governments have also requested, Europe must maintain its balanced role as an impartial judge, sheltered from ideological positions that could only further inflame the feelings of both sides.

IN THE CHAIR: MR SCHMITT

Vice-President

Richard Howitt (S&D). – Mr President, late last year, you and the High Commissioner for Human Rights, Ms Pillay, came to this Parliament and told us that the Goldstone report into the human rights violations on both sides in the Gaza conflict was thorough, objective and met international standards.

So let us not try to rubbish this report. Let us act on it. With others in this debate, I have personally spoken with representatives of the Israeli Government, representatives of the Palestinian Authority and, in Gaza itself, representatives of the commission set up by the de facto authority, to plead with them to cooperate with Goldstone and to undertake their own credible and independent investigations to bring to account those responsible for violations. I spoke with the US Assistant Secretary of State, Michael Posner, when he was here, to encourage Israel to do the same.

To our Spanish Presidency colleague preparing for this Friday's UN vote, I say: do not pursue EU consensus at all costs. The idea put forward by some for a unanimous EU abstention would be a travesty for all the victims of this terrible conflict. We should negotiate the best text possible, but then I hope more than the five EU States who voted 'yes' last time will vote 'yes', to keep the pressure up.

This investigation into alleged breaches of international humanitarian law by the Human Rights Council – just as much as the 2004 International Court of Justice ruling on the separation rule – should be treated with the proper status of legal rulings of international treaty bodies that they are.

I condemn the leader of the Conservative Group in this debate, who has called the UN, a 'suspicious source'. It represents the highest aspirations for all of us on this planet and deserves all of our support.

I would like to say – in a European Union forged from war – for us, war crimes must be held to account. So, when the UN Secretary-General reported to the Security Council concerning compliance by Israel and the Palestinians that 'no determination can be made', that cannot be good enough. These allegations must be determined, and Europe must show determination that they should.

Frédérique Ries (ALDE). – (FR) Mr President, the purpose of this debate is not to set ourselves up as prosecutors and judge what we are not qualified to judge. Our aim, a twin aim as it happens, is, first of all, to help shed light on the responsibility of the different parties in the Gaza war and, beyond that, looking more to the future, I would say, we must ask ourselves what we can say and do today to help rebuild a dialogue.

As it happens, I do not think that the Goldstone report is constructive in this regard. Furthermore – and it is worth recalling because it is rare – this was the conclusion reached by all the European countries, none of which have supported it in front of the worthy prosecutors and great defenders of freedoms and of human rights that are China, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Russia and Cuba, to cite just a few examples. The report is much debated, it is biased and, whether we like it or not, it will not help us move forward.

On the other hand, it is up to Israel to choose to assume its responsibilities as a democratic state and to shed full light on the war in Gaza. At stake are its military, diplomatic and media interests – those interests that the Hebrew state was able to establish in the past.

Jan Philipp Albrecht (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, I am pleased that the European Parliament has succeeded in producing a resolution on the Goldstone report that has fairly broad support without simply transferring the conflict in the Middle East to Brussels. If we want to retain the chance of lasting peace, we

must appeal to what unifies all parties involved, instead of – as some are doing here – emphasising the sources of division. The source of unification is the applicability of international law, in particular, with regard to human rights, throughout the world.

However, just as the parties to the conflict must allow and support an independent investigation, the international community must avoid making a one-sided judgment. Therefore, we also need to make it absolutely clear that the one-sided demonising of Israel is not only inappropriate in this debate, but it is inappropriate in general. Those powers that are working to call into question the legitimisation of the State of Israel must be clearly repudiated by us in Europe. Instead, the powers in Israel that are fighting with us for peace, tolerance and human rights in the Middle East must be strengthened. It therefore needs to be made clear here and now that we find the obstruction of the NGOs in Israel by government representatives like the Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, unacceptable. This policy is harmful to the people of Israel and therefore to peace in the Middle East.

Charles Tannock (ECR). – Mr President, the Goldstone report was commissioned by the UN Human Rights Council, which is inundated with Israel's enemies, so you could hardly have expected a balanced analysis. The US Congress called the Goldstone report irremediably biased and unworthy of further consideration or legitimacy. It fails to mention Hamas terrorism and ignores the fact that Israel is investigating 150 allegations of misconduct by the IDF and will prosecute wrongdoers.

But behind the controversy about this report lies a human tragedy, the tragedy of the Palestinians who long for moderate and incorrupt leaders who will bring them peace, security and prosperity through a settlement with Israel. Neither must we forget the tragedy of civilians in southern Israel, targeted relentlessly by Hamas Jihadi fanatics who hid in their schools or launched their deadly rockets.

The ECR Group continues to press for a two-state solution as the only way to bring about a long-term sustainable solution to the conflict in the Middle East, but the Goldstone report does nothing to bring us any closer to that point.

Helmut Scholz (GUE/NGL). – (DE) Mr President, Israel's right to existence, the protection of its people and the efforts to promote as close cooperation with Israel as possible are, for me, as a German and a left-wing politician, political givens. However, I find it unacceptable that, for years now, 1.5 million Palestinians have been placed in the largest open-air prison in the world as hostages of a misconceived policy. Anyone who is aware that more than 44% of children under the age of 14 live in the Gaza Strip will realise what a dangerous legacy this policy has created for the future. Clearly, the 2008 war and the inhumane policy towards civilians are intended to be forgotten. For that reason, we call for an investigation and for atonement.

Taking a relativistic attitude to the violation of humanitarian and international law and granting the perpetrators exemption from punishment will only lead to new suicide attacks and wars, and the spiral of violence will continue. Europe must not continue to look away. Thus, the implementation of the Goldstone report, including in the United Nations General Assembly, must remain the job of the EU.

Lorenzo Fontana (EFD). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the UN Human Rights Council has adopted the Goldstone report by an overwhelming majority.

Nevertheless, the names of too many of the countries that make up this large majority – China, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan – give us pause for thought and make us concerned about its composition. We wonder when we read that it is these countries, which do not exactly set an example where human rights are concerned, that are calling for Israel and Hamas to carry out in-depth investigations into the human rights violations committed during 'Operation Cast Lead'.

We do not intend to side with either of the warring parties, preferring to maintain a balanced judgment, voicing the need to guarantee Israel's security within its borders and the right to exist of the State of Israeli and of the Palestinian State, and stating our opposition to the use of violence, terrorism and war to resolve conflicts.

Our Christian culture and our conception of mankind and of history give us cause to hope that all the violations committed will be punished in a firm and balanced way.

Ria Oomen-Ruijten (PPE). – (NL) I have said on more than one occasion that, if you do not know or recognise your past, you can never build a future. This certainly holds true for the conflict in the Middle East.

I have heard a lot of criticism here about Mr Goldstone's report. I know Mr Goldstone from when he was a great conciliator, carrying out and heading up many investigations in South Africa. In my opinion, Mr Goldstone is the prime example of someone who can lay the facts on the table in order to bring conciliation closer. Unfortunately, the way in which this report has been received suggests that no conciliation has come about and instead there appears to have been even greater polarisation. This is why the report has simply been ignored.

Mr President, Israel has ignored the conclusions of the report but, at the same time, it has, in fact, recognised that it *did* make mistakes by paying out compensation to the UN for the damage inflicted and by prosecuting some of its military. The Palestinian side, on the other hand, has not taken any such steps. I wonder if the Committee of Investigation which has been set up in Ramallah is in a position to carry out a thorough investigation in Gaza at all.

Mr President, this coming Friday a meeting will take place at the UN and I very much hope that our new foreign policy representative will be able to bring unity and clarity to the European position. We have to respect human rights and the rights of both parties under all circumstances. Mr President, if we can achieve that unity on Friday, I will be very pleased and then, perhaps, a solution in the Middle East would be within our reach.

Olga Sehnalová (S&D). – (CS) It is always deceptive to compare numbers which conceal the fate of individual human beings. Operation Cast Lead left more than a thousand victims among the inhabitants of Gaza, compared to thirteen victims among the Israeli armed forces. Do we need to know any more in order to conclude who is the guilty party and who is the victim in this war? I believe we most definitely do. For example, the fact that after 2006, thousands of rockets were fired against civilian populations in Israeli towns from the Gaza strip, and these were launched from densely populated areas and quite clearly from public buildings as well. We should ask further questions. How can a state defend its citizens in such a situation? Is it possible to fight with an army against terrorists who use civilians as human shields? If so, is it possible to avoid civilians becoming victims? What did the international community do to prevent this form of terrorism? Are there not intentionally varying standards in the area of adherence to human rights? Finding an answer to these serious questions is a challenging task for the common foreign policy of the EU. The aim of the policy should be to assist dialogue, build trust and seek patiently for a sustainable peaceful solution for the Middle East as a whole. An open-minded enquiry into all of the circumstances accompanying and also preceding the conflict in Gaza might be a step in the right direction.

Niccolò Rinaldi (ALDE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the Goldstone report is destined to remain a milestone of which the full possible future ramifications have perhaps not yet been considered, including as regards the affirmation of international law, to which we liberal democrats are particularly attached.

We welcome the request made in the report for compensation to be paid to civilian victims of an unequal conflict and for the International Criminal Court to be seized of any cases in which the parties fail to conduct genuinely independent and impartial investigations, as was requested last January by numerous Israeli human rights associations. These are facts that may damage even a state such as Israel, which seems to have ceased to draw inspiration from the extraordinary humanism of the great Hebrew culture from which we are all descended.

The truth is that violence remains a disastrous policy. Hezbollah is stronger after the attack on Lebanon, and Hamas is stronger today in Gaza. Anyone who has been to Gaza after the conflict can testify to the people's enormous suffering. We Europeans must also say today, especially to Gaza: let us stay human!

Frieda Brepoels (Verts/ALE). – (NL) I think that the Goldstone report has clearly shown that both Israel and Hamas have committed human rights violations during the war in Gaza. The UN has already twice called on both parties to carry out independent investigations, but fourteen months later, they are still brushing this call aside.

I also ask myself why the European Union is not standing up for international law. Why does it allow impunity to reign in this region? Any credibility in our respect for international law will be lost if the EU leaves these war crimes unchallenged. This report is not about Israel's security. This report is about major human rights violations. There is therefore no conceivable argument why the recommendations of this report should not be implemented.

I therefore call, not only on the High Representative, but on Member States as well, to make every effort to ensure a proper follow-up on the ground. After all, that is the only way we can give the reestablishment of peace negotiations any chance of success.

Peter van Dalen (ECR). – (NL) This report is one-sided. It levels a great deal of criticism at Israel because, amongst other reasons, it fired on economic and civilian targets. However, Hamas misused these facilities. Unfortunately, Mr Goldstone has not seen fit to investigate whether this actually was the case. Mr Goldstone has therefore failed to investigate what Hamas did wrong and consequently rapped Israel over the knuckles. That inspires no confidence in this report, because there are other sources which suggest that Hamas did indeed entrench itself in hospitals, ambulances and civilian buildings.

Mr President, I will conclude on a positive note. The Goldstone report makes many accusations and they have to be investigated. The Israeli Government has rightly taken the initiative in this regard and has launched a criminal investigation. That is to be welcomed. Yet I fear that we will have to wait a long time for Hamas to show the same level of self-examination.

Patrick Le Hyaric (GUE/NGL). – (FR) Whether we like it or not, the Goldstone report has been endorsed by the General Assembly of the United Nations, and I do not see why there should be double standards in relation to international law. International law is international law, and the Goldstone report uses the term 'war crime', something moreover that was clear for everyone to see on their television screens. Even Israeli soldiers have testified that they received orders to shoot at civilians.

Under these circumstances, the European Union and our Parliament must create the conditions to ensure that the Israeli Government abides by international law, using the suspension of Article 2 of the EU-Israel association agreement as a sanction if necessary. This article stipulates that 'relations between the two parties must be based on respect for human rights and respect for democracy'. It is that simple; it just needs to be applied.

The European Union must therefore make clear its determination to refer the matter to the International Criminal Court if nothing is done, in line with the recommendation made in the Goldstone report. Finally, our Parliament must decide on a fundamental issue: do we want a harmonious world in which justice and peace ultimately reign supreme, or the law of the jungle that is the politics of might? We must assume our responsibilities to the peoples of Europe and the peoples of the whole world.

Morten Messerschmidt (EFD). – (DA) Mr President, this matter – this report – is a fundamentally embarrassing chapter in the history of the UN. Who can, in all decency, discuss the issue of the war in Gaza without also including the thousands of Qassam rockets that rained down over the peaceful citizens of Israel for eight years? Who can, in all decency, discuss this issue without mentioning the hundreds of tunnels that exist between Egypt and Gaza and other areas, through which weapons are smuggled in order to damage Jewish interests in Israel? Who can, in all decency, write a report like this without including the fact that Israel has a well-functioning legal system, whereas not one of the murderers in Palestine and not one of the terrorists in Palestine has ever been brought to account for his crimes? The answer to all three questions is Judge Goldstone. This is scandalous! It is embarrassing for the UN system, and by having this debate at all in this Parliament, we are making it an embarrassing affair for the EU, too.

Proinsias De Rossa (S&D). – Mr President, listening to the debate, it is difficult to know what report some of the speakers have read. It is certainly not the one I have read.

Israel denies this Parliament its democratic right to meet Palestinian Legislative Council members in Gaza and denies our Foreign Ministers access. A Hamas militant has been murdered, most likely by Israeli agents using forged European passports, thus breaching Irish, British, French, German and Dubai sovereignty. Israel is treating us with contempt, which is not surprising given the impunity with which it continues to infringe the rights of millions of Palestinians.

The acid test of our commitment to human rights and the rule of law is our response to the Goldstone report, which found that the siege of Gaza is collective punishment of the population and that Operation Cast Lead was to further that policy. It found evidence of wilful torture, inhumane treatment and wilful causing of great human suffering. The report recommends going to the International Criminal Court and that the Quartet should insist on the rule of law.

I support Goldstone's call on Member State parties to the Geneva Conventions, including Ireland I have to say, to start criminal prosecutions in national courts against the alleged perpetrators of war crimes.

Could I just make one correction before I conclude, which is that it has been claimed repeatedly that this report does not deal with the firing of rockets into Israel by Hamas. However, on page 31, the report mentions the impact on civilians of rocket and mortar attacks by Palestinian armed groups on southern Israel.

Hannu Takkula (ALDE). – (FI) Mr President, as members of the European Union, we need to remember what Europe's values are. They are democracy, human rights and freedom of opinion, and we need to adhere to them everywhere.

The purpose of the Goldstone report was to undertake an unbiased study, but, regrettably, it failed in that. That is recognised by all parties who have familiarised themselves with it, and it is also obvious from the report's source material.

We should also remember that this whole thing was started by countries such as Cuba, Pakistan, Egypt and Saudi Arabia, which do not recognise the same values as the European Union and Israel.

I am quite shocked by the remarks that Mr De Rossa and Mrs De Keyser made here. I wonder just what report you have read. If you know, as you do, something about the civil war between Hamas and Fatah, and how much human life has been destroyed in it, then you will agree that we should intervene in the process whereby the Palestinians find leadership and a common voice, and start to build their own country, and not just destroy it, and Israeli democratic society too, by firing rockets at it.

I would like to say that this report is, unfortunately, a blot in the UN's history. We Europeans should also remember that Ghilad Shalit, a European, a Frenchman and an Israeli soldier, is still a prisoner of Hamas, and we must push for his release. That is the first step we should be taking.

Geoffrey Van Orden (ECR). – Mr President, those of us that are friends of Israel may well have questioned many aspects of the way in which Israel intervened in Gaza, but not the right of Israel to defend herself and to take effective action against those that are planning and executing acts of terrorism against her.

I have enormous sympathy for the ordinary Palestinian people, but for 60 years, they have been let down by those that claim to lead them and those amongst them whose profession is terrorism.

It was clear from the start that a report emanating from the dubious Human Rights Council of the UN – and that, Mr Howitt, is what the leader of our group criticised, not the UN; I am afraid your rather petty party point was rather demeaning – would be a one-sided condemnation of Israel. While it makes far-reaching demands of Israel, it says little about Hamas. It does not call for an end to terrorism and attacks on Israel but merely asks so-called Palestinian armed groups to renounce attacks on Israeli civilians and to try and avoid harm to Palestinian civilians.

I see nothing in a 554-page report that offers constructive, positive proposals for lasting peace and stability. Instead, we find that the rhetoric of human rights and the instruments of the ICC are enlisted to attack Israel, and I have to say such distortion does no credit to the United Nations.

Alexandra Thein (ALDE). – (DE) Mr President, neither party to the conflict has so far met the demands of the United Nations for a credible and independent investigation into the accusations of the Goldstone report. This is regrettable, particularly on Israel's part, because, however controversial the Goldstone report might be, any state that calls itself a democratic state based on the rule of law is obliged to allow such serious accusations to be subjected to an independent investigation. An internal military investigation by the Israeli army, which is itself under suspicion, is not sufficient.

If the EU takes its own principles of respect for human rights and international law seriously, it must increase the pressure on both sides, including in the context of its bilateral relations, and insist that the investigation that has been called for into possible violations of international and humanitarian law is carried out according to the principles of the rule of law. War crimes must be punished under international law, as has been said here many times. If necessary, the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court will have to carry out the investigations on the basis of Article 12(3) of the Rome Statute. However, irrespective of the Goldstone report, there is currently no reason to continue the siege on Gaza.

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE). – (SK) The Goldstone report, the conclusions and recommendations of which we are debating, ignores Israel's right to self-defence. Last year's intervention by Israel in the Gaza strip was a tough measure and, personally, I feel sorry for the victims and their families. We must not forget, however, that it was a final response to years of Palestinian attacks on a densely populated area of Israel.

Hamas recently announced that it was ready for dialogue with the international community, including the EU and the US. I would like to make a strong appeal for us not to entertain such an idea until Hamas unambiguously recognises Israel's right to exist and renounces violence. We look with pity on the victims of this long-running conflict, but it is essential to have a reliable Palestinian partner for the peace negotiations, and that means a legitimate, trustworthy and responsible representative of the Palestinian people. Until that happens, it will be a waste of time to produce hundreds more pages of international recommendations.

I would also like to emphasise the role of Egypt, which must act forcefully to prevent any assistance reaching terrorists in the form of weapons smuggled through underground tunnels into Gaza.

Antigoni Papadopoulou (S&D). – (EL) Mr President, the Goldstone report hits the nail on the head. The policy of treating both sides on equal terms is not helping. A series of crimes has been carried out and is being carried out in Gaza. There is poverty, misery and blatant disrespect for the human rights of the Palestinian people. There are witnesses to this. There are reports by the Red Cross, the International Bank and the Council of Europe on crimes against the Palestinians, on financial impoverishment and on inhumane living conditions in Gaza.

We must not turn a blind eye. Mankind has been witnessing acts of violence against the Palestinians for several years now. The Israeli war machine has been striking out mercilessly on the pretext of self-defence. The Palestinian people are suffering.

We condemn the murder of civilians in Israel also, with all our heart and soul. However, that does not mean that Israel is entitled in self-defence to keep committing a barrage of crimes against the Palestinians. It does not give Israel an alibi for engaging in such criminal acts.

Of course we are not public prosecutors, however, nor does the role of Pontius Pilate become us. We cannot wash our hands and allow the bloodshed to continue and for Israel's crimes to go unpunished. In wishing to be respectful and failing to act, we are allowing unaccountability to rage. We are letting the perpetrator go unpunished and are playing fast and loose with the victim. We are allowing the law of might is right to prevail.

Michael Theurer (ALDE). – (DE) Mr President, the Goldstone report describes human rights violations by both sides. Over 1 400 victims in the Gaza Strip are obviously too many. However, I am also certain that, without the rocket attacks on Israel, there would have been no military response. During a visit to the country by the Delegation to Israel, we discovered that Israel does not take military action lightly. The main accusation of the Goldstone report, that Israel deliberately and continually attacked civilians, does not hold water. The question of the extent to which Hamas used civilians as shields has not been adequately investigated. However, the report mentions that the Israeli army provided warnings by means of telephone calls and flyers. Hamas did nothing like this in connection with the rocket attacks on Israel.

However, we also need to ask whether the UN itself did enough in Gaza, for example, to prevent the Hamas rockets being fired in the vicinity of UN facilities. I do not believe that the Goldstone report is a basis for further terrorist attacks on Israel – it does not justify that. It perhaps does not help any further, either. However, it is clear that, here in the European Parliament, we must demand respect for human rights and call on both sides to return to the peace process.

Nicole Kiil-Nielsen (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, in Israel, Judge Goldstone's work is demonised and completely discredited in the eyes of the public. At the same time, a violent smear campaign is being conducted against human rights defenders, notably the New Israel Fund, a foundation which funds the main Israeli organisations for the defence of human rights and, in particular, against its president, Naomi Chazan, a former Member of the Knesset, an academic and intellectual known for her commitment to the defence of women's rights and peace.

Thirteen pacifist groups, such as Bethlehem and Breaking the Silence, are the victims of a veritable witch-hunt. The European Union must provide unfailing support to human rights defenders in all countries including, of course, Israel, whose impunity is an insult to democratic values. The European Union must protect Israel from its own demons.

Robert Atkins (ECR). – Mr President, there is guilt on both sides, but an overreaction on the part of Israel over this report and indeed over Operation Cast Lead. Goldstone is a respected judge of considerable repute, and Jewish. There are undoubtedly flaws in this report, but Israel must recognise that the core of the criticism

is based on fact. You only have to listen to Israeli soldiers who admit to their dubious activities on occasions in the organisation 'Breaking the Silence'.

Israel has been forced to admit the use of white phosphorous as a result of this inquiry, so why has there been no real investigation into the actions of some of their soldiers who have been involved in potential, if not actual, war crimes? The PLC has admitted its transgressions, but Israel on this issue and on the recent Dubai assassination must cease to be so arrogant and recognise the justified concern of sensible decent people throughout the world.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Mr President, it seems to me that the three key words in this debate are 'independent', 'equal' and 'neutral'. There needs to be an independent investigation into alleged breaches of human rights. There has to be equal condemnation of the perpetrators of those breaches and, above all, there is need for a powerful neutral voice to mediate in this unfortunate conflict, something that is sadly lacking at the minute because the position of the vast majority of powerful countries is fairly well known.

I think there is a wonderful opportunity for the High Representative or the newly created President of the Council to supply that neutral voice, something similar to what George Mitchell did in Northern Ireland, as a result of which we now have peace, and people who were shooting and killing one another for years are now in government together. That same opportunity is there for the High Representative to supply that neutral, independent and fair voice that is so sadly lacking.

Diane Dodds (NI). – Mr President, can I ask Mr Kelly, and I am sure he will be glad to do so, to clarify. While the party that I represent in Northern Ireland is certainly in government, my party has been an entirely peaceful party and has not been shooting and killing anybody.

Rather that has been the IRA and their political representatives.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Mr President, there has been a debate, which I think has been very diverse, around not only the Goldstone report itself, but also around the prior situation that triggered the report.

I think that we can say once again on behalf of the Presidency that the Goldstone report is a reference point, as the Council has said, and as Mrs Georgieva has said on behalf of the Commission, and I thank her for her speech. It is a reliable report, it appears to be objective and it expresses the existence or possible existence of extremely serious human rights violations originating from different parts of the conflict.

The European Union cannot remain indifferent in response to the content of the Goldstone report. The European Union cannot remain indifferent in response to a report which objectively and reliably relates the possibility of some very serious human rights violations.

We therefore believe that the proposal arising from this report – which is to conduct independent, credible investigations – is the most appropriate way to respond to the report, which is an important report that should affect all of us. It should provoke a reaction in those of us who, as is the case in the European Union and Parliament, believe in the existence of human rights and in defending them. It should therefore provoke us to react to the extremely serious human rights violations that have taken place in this case.

The debate on this report is going to take place, and we believe that this debate in the United Nations should be supported. It is also going to be debated in the Human Rights Council. We can tell you that the International Criminal Court is working on this and investigating it, and I think that the European Union should therefore maintain a constructive, coordinated position, in relation to the extremely serious matters raised in the Goldstone report, and this is what the Presidency of the Council will do.

Kristalina Georgieva, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, let me first clearly state that the Commission has consistently and forcefully expressed its utmost concern for the humanitarian situation in Gaza. My predecessor, Louis Michel, went to Gaza immediately after Operation Cast Lead. He eye-witnessed violations on both sides and he spoke up against those.

We in the Commission are very keen that two issues should always be high on our agenda. First: the necessity for full respect of international humanitarian law by all parties; second: the necessity to ensure that humanitarian relief efforts can actually reach the people in Gaza.

Since the conflict in January last year, the EU has made it clear that we will closely follow investigations into alleged violations of international humanitarian law, and the Commission has underlined and continues to stress the importance of accountability and countering impunity for violations of international law.

In the context of the Middle East peace process, respect for human rights and international humanitarian law is as important today as ever – and maybe even more important than ever.

For the EU to be a credible player in the peace process, it is necessary to demonstrate that it applies the EU's fundamental values in all contexts and that it complies with the international-law *acquis* consistently at any point and on any issue. Let me again reiterate in support of the Presidency that a common EU line on the Goldstone issue would be a very important step in this direction.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place during the next sitting.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Corina Crețu (S&D), in writing. – (RO) The Goldstone report relating to an extremely controversial situation which stirs up strong passions finds it difficult to obtain the consent of the parties involved when the clashes which occurred in December 2008 and January 2009 between the Israeli army and Palestinian militants in Gaza, an area dominated by Hamas, have caused suffering on both sides. Regardless of the parties' position on the Goldstone report, I hope that it will not be used as a pretext to stonewall discussions aimed at resolving the Palestinian problem in a peaceful way for good. In fact, the priority in the region is to restart the peace talks which will involve, as has been the case so far, both the European Union and the United States of America. The solutions which will be reached must ensure the State of Israel of its continued existence in the region and provide the Palestinians with the guarantee that they will be able to live with dignity in their own viable, democratic and independent state. The European Union must be prepared to assume greater responsibility in this process in order to establish normal relations between Israel and Palestine. I believe that we must remember the most important point made in the Goldstone report: nothing can justify the suffering of defenceless people, and dialogue is a preferable way of putting an end to this situation rather than confrontation and the use of force.

Andreas Mölzer (NI), in writing. – (DE) On 5 November 2009, the United Nations General Assembly adopted the Goldstone report and passed Resolution 64/10. These documents called on both Israel and the Palestinians to investigate, within three months, possible human rights violations during the Gaza conflict. Unfortunately, neither Israel nor the Palestinians have as yet complied with this request. This is a great shame, because the Goldstone report provides a very extensive list of the misdeeds and crimes of both sides. According to the report, during the three-week-long attacks, Israel committed major violations of international law. Civilians were attacked indiscriminately and houses were bombed. The use of phosphorus bombs, condemned by the international community, has also been mentioned. The Palestinians, in turn, used rockets and mortar shells to deliberately kill civilians, according to the report. The accusations are so serious that it is imperative that they be investigated, and quickly. As the UN Security Council has rejected the Goldstone report, it cannot be assumed that the recommendation it contains to refer the matter to the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague will be followed. I therefore call on the new High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Baroness Ashton, on behalf of the EU, to apply a great deal of pressure to both parties to the conflict and ask them to review the crimes.

Róza, Gräfin von Thun Und Hohenstein (PPE), in writing. – (PL) Mr President, Justice Goldstone's report is being presented in the international arena as an objective document on the operation in the Gaza Strip in the winter of 2009. Meanwhile, according to various sources, it has not been prepared in a way which would allow us refer to it with a clear conscience. I would like to mention several features which Ambassador Dore Gold presented during a debate with Mr Goldstone at Brandeis University, and which have been stressed by the Israeli Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

It seems the members of the mission had been expressing convictions on the conflict even before the mission began, and when they were in the Gaza Strip, they were accompanied by representatives of Hamas and witnesses were interviewed in their presence. Justice Goldstone did not show sufficient care when examining the evidence. It also seems unjust that the words of the Israeli authorities which are quoted in the report are considered unreliable, whereas the position of the Gaza authorities, such as Hamas, do not give rise to any doubt in the members of the mission.

In the light of the foregoing criticisms of the Goldstone report, I call on the Commission and the European Parliament to ensure that European public opinion is able to become acquainted with the arguments of both sides concerning the situation in the Gaza Strip. The European Union takes care that economic relations with Israel are as good as possible. Therefore, it is even more important that we are able to build our relations on mutual trust. Reliance on the report of Justice Goldstone alone will not contribute to this.

IN THE CHAIR: MR BUZEK

President

18. Situation of civil society and national minorities in Belarus (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on the statement by the Council and the Commission on the situation of civil society and national minorities in Belarus.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Thank you, Mr President, for giving me the opportunity to speak on this item regarding the situation of civil society and national minorities in Belarus.

The European Union is certainly very concerned about the deterioration of the situation in Belarus, especially with regard to human rights.

The lack of freedom of expression and assembly, the constantly increasing pressure on the media, the laws restricting the use of the Internet and the actions against opposition activists are causing the human rights situation in Belarus to deteriorate and worsen.

In her statement on 16 February, last month, Mrs Ashton, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, also expressed her concern regarding the situation of the Polish minority in Belarus, and regarding the detention by the police of some members of that minority. This statement, this formal position of the High Representative, was also sent to the authorities in Belarus through official diplomatic channels.

On Monday, we were able to discuss this matter in the Foreign Affairs Council, and we were able to have a thorough debate that I am sure will be repeated in future. There was, incidentally, a speech made by the Polish Minister, who expressed his concern and his feeling that there was a need to react and to take a position regarding the systematic harassment of members of the Polish minority. It must also be said that the different facets of the European Union are, without a shadow of a doubt, very concerned, and are monitoring this situation very directly and very closely.

I think it is very important to convey to the authorities in Belarus that they must comply with the commitments that they have made in the OSCE to respect human rights and to protect minorities as an essential part of respecting human rights. In the Foreign Affairs Council that I referred to, there was an express request made to the European Ministers to draw the attention of the authorities in Belarus to this situation through the appropriate channels and in the appropriate forums.

I think that it is in the common interest of Belarus, the European Union and all Europeans that we manage to have an influence in stopping these actions, which are contrary to human rights and to the rights of minorities, that are very considerable and significant in Belarus. At the same time, I think that it is important for Belarus to be working in the right direction, and all of the dimensions of the Eastern Partnership are an opportunity to influence Belarus in the right direction, including the multilateral aspect.

Kristalina Georgieva, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, further to the EU Presidency statement, which actually referred to the position expressed by the High Representative, Baroness Ashton, on the matter very clearly and very forcefully, let me just add the concern about the deteriorating human rights situation in Belarus, in particular with regard to the Polish minority.

The very regrettable backtracking of the advancement of democracy in Belarus in the last years is a very serious matter but, that being said, we must also remain engaged with Belarus and we must keep channels of communication open, however difficult this may be, not necessarily only through government channels – we can, of course, build on the Eastern Partnership and use it – but also through people-to-people contacts. Those contacts may be the most important ones to pursue in Belarus, through student exchange, through business opportunities and through providing cultural exchanges as a platform of engagement with the people of Belarus and as a way of retaining an opportunity for advancing democracy in Belarus.

In closing, let me say that, despite this reversal in the last two years, the Commission would like to remain engaged and pursue, through its interaction with Belarus, acceleration of a positive development bringing the process of engagement back on track, as it was two years ago.

Gunnar Hökmark (PPE). – Mr President, my thanks to the Spanish Presidency and to the Commission for their words on this situation.

I think we need to be clear about one thing: what we are talking about now is not a single incident – it is the actions of a dictatorship and a brutal regime that is denying minority rights as well as the rights of its individual citizens. That is how things are in Belarus, and I think that must be the point of departure for our discussions on the dialogue with the regime.

A dialogue must be mutual. When we show openness, we need to require the regime in Belarus to deliver, and they have not delivered the changes and the reforms that they should deliver. I would like to say and underline very much that this is not a Polish issue. Belarus is in the neighbourhood of the European Union. It is included in the Eastern Partnership. This is a European issue and, by its actions now, the regime in Belarus is distancing itself from open dialogue and cooperation with the European Union.

We shall require, first of all, in a fundamental way, respect for minorities, respect for human rights, a stop to police brutality and a willingness to have a constructive dialogue with the European Union. I think this message must be made clear to the regime. Our dialogue must be a dialogue for democracy and human rights and, of course, we should turn to civil society because Belarus is much more than the regime. It is the people living in Belarus – the students, men and women, society. I think what we have seen lately has proved that we must now proceed with a dialogue directed at civil society in order to strengthen freedom and democracy and respect for human rights.

Kristian Vigenin (S&D). – Mr President, let me, on behalf of the Group of Socialist and Democrats, express our concerns about the human rights situation in Belarus, and particularly with regard to the recent developments with the Union of Poles. We would like also to express our solidarity with all the citizens of Belarus who are not able to enjoy their basic civil and human rights. This is in a European country in the 21st century. I think this is an issue which is not acceptable and we can all agree on that.

This is the starting point. The main questions we have to pose now are, first, where we want to bring Belarus and, second, how we can do it. On the first question, I think we can all agree: we want to see Belarus democratic; we want to see Belarusian authorities democratically elected – parliament, president, governments, and local representatives; we want to see these authorities creating a free and creative atmosphere in Belarus; and, of course, we want to see the country moving closer to the EU.

The second question is how we can achieve this. The European Union has changed its policy towards Belarus from isolation to engagement, and it seems that this policy is producing some results. Of course, it is not enough, it is not being done quickly enough, and the developments we see, as in the last two weeks, show that we have to be much more committed.

What I have discovered as chair of the Euronest delegation and chair of the delegation that is going to Belarus tomorrow to see the situation on the ground is that we lack a joint strategy between the three main institutions: Council, Commission and Parliament. We need such a strategy in order to reinforce each other's efforts, and we really need a political dialogue; we need a roadmap for Belarus which is very concrete, not just general recommendations but an action plan – a roadmap – which Belarus should adhere to. This is the way to continue and it is not enough to do it only under the economic cooperation and the Eastern Partnership.

Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy (ALDE). – (NL) I, too, regard this evening's debate as more of a regional matter. We have seen that Mr Yanukovich has been elected in Ukraine. He is clearly a president who is looking more to Moscow than to Brussels. We must not allow his visit next week to pull the wool over our eyes.

In my opinion, what is now happening in Belarus and the kind of actions that Mr Lukashenko has dared allow himself to take when it comes to the Polish minority in this country are signs that he also is looking more to Moscow than to the West. In so doing, he has evidently felt able to strip a minority of an EU Member State of its fundamental human rights. How is this possible? This is, of course, a consequence of Europe having turned its back too much on the East. We have not been open enough to the idea of genuine access to these countries. Naturally, we must firmly condemn what Belarus is doing to its Polish minority, but we should also relax our policy a little more and operate a less restrictive visa regime. Let us look at our energy policy and let us attune it more to countries like Belarus and Ukraine.

That is the plea I make: that Europe should again turn more of its attention to these countries. That will have a much better impact on their internal political developments than if we condemn them too harshly now and leave things to Moscow.

Heidi Hautala, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FI) Mr President, a crucial reason why this subject is now on the agenda is surely the peaceful demonstration in which 40 representatives of the Union of Poles were arrested, which we must naturally condemn.

Another reason, of topical interest, is something my fellow Member, Mr Vigenin, has already mentioned: after a long, long gap, tomorrow Parliament is sending a factfinding delegation to Minsk, and I am representing the Subcommittee on Human Rights, as one of the four in the party.

We should be concerned about the human rights situation in Belarus. There are problems there to do with freedom of speech, freedom of the media and freedom of assembly and association.

We must insist that Belarus should abolish the death penalty, and, if relations between Belarus and the European Union are to develop, the country will need to improve the human rights situation there in all its aspects. Like others of my fellow Members, I agree that civil society has a vital role to play in this development.

Ryszard Czarnecki, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (PL) Mr President, a lack of a decision is also a decision. A resolution of the European Parliament on Belarus adopted in March will be necessary, but it is even more necessary now. The persecution of Poles in Belarus is not only a matter for Poles, as those who have spoken before me have stressed, but is a symptom of an attitude to European standards, including standards concerning national minorities.

Europe should draw Belarus out of the sphere of Russian influence, but should also require respect for those values which are the essence of the Union, such as civil liberties, freedom of the press, the rights of national and religious minorities and the right of association. If Lukashenko does not understand the language of European values, he will certainly understand the language of sanctions. However, not sanctions which hit at Belarusian society – we do not want sanctions like that – but sanctions which make life difficult for politicians and officials responsible for discrimination against Poles and the democratic opposition.

There is an imbalance in relations between the EU and Belarus: the Union is opening the door for Minsk, but is receiving nothing, basically, in return. This one-way street leads nowhere. It is time for sanctions of a political nature, albeit temporary ones, even if in the form of the absence of representatives of the Belarusian Parliament from the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly and a return to the blacklist of officials of the Minsk regime who will not be admitted to European Union territory.

Kinga Gál (PPE). – Mr President, as the Co-Chair of the Intergroup for Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages, I strongly condemn the actions taken by the Belarusian authorities against the largest Polish minority organisation and the members of the minority community. As we hear today, these were mostly elderly people.

The facts show clear violation of not only minority but also basic human rights. These actions prove the undemocratic nature of the political system and we, those MEPs who have witnessed the Communist regimes, clearly recognise the methods.

Since its establishment, the intergroup consistently has stood up for the rights of national minorities and holds any violation of minority rights to be unacceptable.

We ask the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, to take concrete steps in order to send a clear message to the Belarusian Government that, without engagement in respecting human rights, including minority rights, sanctioning of the relations between the EU and Belarus is not foreseeable.

Minority rights as part of human rights cannot be considered an internal matter. This issue cannot be considered a Polish-Belarusian internal affair. It is an EU matter because, as has been already said, this is about our neighbourhood policy, about our Eastern Partnership. So we ask the Commission to send a clear message and take clear steps.

Bogusław Liberadzki (S&D). – (PL) Mr President, I thank the Council, and also the Commission, for such a quick reaction. This is, indeed, a very good example of our European standards.

Firstly, allow me to say that there is, really, no ethnic conflict here. This is not a Polish-Belarusian or a Belarusian-Polish conflict. It is, quite simply, a disregard for human rights and the principles of free speech, and violation of the rights of national minorities. It could have happened to any other minority. Why has it happened to the Polish minority? It is because it is large, organised and democratic, and because, among others, it has Mr Milinkevich, a winner of the European Parliament prize. Therefore, it started with us.

I would like to ask what we should do. I have had the opportunity to speak to Mr Milinkevich and Mrs Borys twice, now. They declared: we are loyal citizens of Belarus and do not want any economic sanctions. We do not want political sanctions, we want a rapprochement of Belarus and the European Union. We want balance, and we want cooperation to be conditional on progress in the process of democratisation of the country. We, too, should proceed like this. This is why we should open up to the citizens of Belarus, and also make it easier for them to obtain visas. Are charges for visas and a visa policy necessary at all? It is good that, tomorrow, our fact-finding mission is going to Belarus. Let us await its report, and only then will we decide on further action.

Konrad Szymański (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, with the Treaty of Lisbon, we were promised, all of us, much greater effectiveness of European Union foreign policy. It quickly turned out that our role in Haiti was delayed and unseen, the European Union-USA Summit was a failure, and creation of the diplomatic corps was conducted in an atmosphere of squabbling between EU institutions which was detrimental to the quality of the corps. Today, we had another opportunity to show that the Union can act. Unfortunately, the Council has postponed its decision, and Parliament is not capable of reacting to an obvious situation of human rights violations in a country whose role in EU policy was supposed to increase.

Mrs Georgieva, the policy of open doors and student exchange for Belarus has failed, it has failed today, so please do not repeat the same things about student exchange that we have been hearing for five years. This is a defeat which has affected the Union's credibility. The European Union is, today, a weak and undecided player. Washington knows this, Moscow knows this, and with the ambiguous reactions to the crisis in Belarus, Minsk knows this, too.

Jacek Protasiewicz, (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, As Chair of the European Parliament delegation for relations with Belarus, I often have contact, not only with representatives of the opposition, civil society and non-governmental organisations, but also with representatives of the official authorities. I hear the arguments they use, how Belarus has the right to adopt certain international standards at its own pace.

Theoretically, the European Union should not put pressure on this responsible, sovereign country, because responsibility for the internal situation in the country is borne by its authorities. Theoretically, it would be possible to agree with such a course of action, if not for the fact that in these international standards, which Belarus itself accepted when it joined the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe, human rights are not an internal matter.

As happened recently in Iwieniec, a small town in central Belarus, when the authorities used, and I would say abused, the police force against a group of elderly people, pensioners, led by Teresa Sobol, who had, on her own initiative, raised considerable funds, mainly from abroad. She used this money to renovate a ruined building in the town centre. She then transformed the building into a vibrant cultural and social centre for the Polish minority. The police were sent to these people before a court had ruled on the legal status of the building. Next, people called by the activists as witnesses are not being allowed to appear in court to testify and make it a fair trial.

This is not a pace of adopting international standards. This is a departure from international standards, standards to which Belarus has committed itself and which it promises us to respect as part of its dialogue with the European Union. Therefore, I would like to say one more thing. We can talk about sanctions, and the time will come for this. However, it is most important that the economic assistance which is being considered should be conditional upon abandoning this kind of practice and on true, real liberalisation and democratisation in Belarus.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (S&D). – (LT) Government institutions must immediately resolve conflicts and misunderstandings regarding Polish minority organisations in Belarus and do this democratically, without the use of force or violence. I would also like to support the Commissioner's view that we must continue cooperation and maintain people-to-people contacts. Tomorrow, the first official European Parliament delegation in many years leaves for Belarus. Let us hope for open discussions, both with the opposition and with the government. Impressions brought back from Minsk on the conflict mentioned, as well as on Belarus's participation in the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly, could shift EU relations with Belarus in a better

direction. The local elections which will take place in two months are an even more important litmus paper, which will open up the prospect for relations. This time, these should not be elections without a choice, where the media sings from the same hymn sheet and the opposition has no voice and is ignored, where, after unmonitored vote counting, almost 100% of the voters supported one political party and, in the end, deputies were, to all intents and purposes, appointed, not elected.

Marek Henryk Migalski (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, Mr Liberadzki of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament began by praising the authorities of the European Union for their reaction. It is because of your group, Mr Liberadzki, that we are not adopting the resolution today, so it may be that you really do feel satisfaction. However, if Mrs Georgieva, who is, in fact, involved with development every day, is telling us today about what has been proposed, well, I do not know who this might satisfy. It may satisfy you, Mr Liberadzki, and it may satisfy your group, but it certainly will not satisfy Belarusians and neither will it satisfy those who wish Belarusians well. If even Mrs Georgieva, the Commissioner, who has five minutes available for her speech, uses only two minutes of that valuable time, it means that not only what you said, Mrs Georgieva, is not very satisfactory, but that you did not use the opportunity to speak out clearly on the subject. So I call on you, Mrs Georgieva, and also on the authorities of the European Union, to make use of the instruments which are at their disposal to oppose violations of human rights. We are not talking only about violations of the rights of citizens of Polish origin; we are talking about violations of human rights.

Edít Bauer (PPE). – (HU) What we have witnessed in the past few days in Belarus is a dreadful example of the political repression of the democratic opposition and the Polish minority. Imprisonment of political opponents and intimidation of minority representatives are well-known practices used by authoritarian regimes. As a citizen of Slovakia and a representative of a minority, I understand the situation of the Polish minority as well as the plight of Mrs Borys in Belarus. The treatment of minorities as enemies and hostages of a neighbouring country is a regressive political manoeuvre usually seized upon by a political leadership when facing difficulties. Harassment of national minorities is part of the political practice in undemocratic regimes. Minority rights are an integral part of universal human rights, however, as confirmed by the Framework Convention of the Council of Europe. Violation of minority rights, harassment, intimidation and discrimination against persons belonging to minorities cannot, therefore, be considered a country's internal matter. For that reason, the threatening, blackmailing message of the Belarus Government, conveyed to MEPs by the ambassador of Belarus, is completely unacceptable. Mr President, there is only one message the European Parliament can send to the government of Belarus, namely, that its repression of the democratic opposition and policy of threats against a minority are simply unacceptable.

Ślawomir Witold Nitras (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, I listened with great attention to what was said by the Commissioner, Mrs Georgieva, and would like to say that I expect behaviour which is a little more energetic. I suspect that Mrs Georgieva's statement would have been the same two weeks ago, before these events. This is certainly not acceptable.

However, there is one thing with which I do agree, only I would expect clear effects and slightly different emphases to be evident. It is, indeed, true that those who, today, are arguing for sanctions sometimes forget that sanctions have already been tried, and that Belarusian policy was exactly the same, in spite of the sanctions.

We must not say, today, that we are going to support civil society in Belarus because someone who has been there knows that, in fact, civil society may be just beginning to appear. I expect, today, from European institutions, that the obligations which the state has towards its citizens, and which are not being met in Belarus, will be met for that state by the European Union. I would expect that we will help to establish independent media there, that we will support the first free television station which exists there and which has been financed up till now by, I think, the governments of two European countries. It is my expectation that we will be able to create real possibilities for large numbers of Belarusian citizens to study in Europe, because it is they who make up civil society.

Mirosław Piotrowski (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, in the previous term, the European Parliament adopted several resolutions on Belarus, in which, accurately diagnosing the situation, it called upon the Lukashenko regime to stop violating human rights.

The European Union has shown good will, partially lifting visa sanctions against Belarusian officials. It is with surprise and anxiety that we have observed the recent aggressive policy of the Belarusian authorities towards national minorities, especially the Polish community. This policy should be seen in the context of preparations for the elections to be held in Belarus next year.

The illegal seizure of property belonging to the Polish minority, and the ostentatious repression of opposition leaders, who, it should be noted, were awarded the Sakharov Prize by the European Parliament, is a manifest provocation of our institution. Our House should not only react in the traditional fashion with an appropriate resolution, but should take specific action to discipline the Belarusian authorities and should appeal to Mrs Ashton to appoint, on the basis of Article 33 of the Treaty of Lisbon, a special representative to monitor breaches of human rights in Belarus.

Krzysztof Lisek (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, Mrs Georgieva, it is very good that we are talking about Belarus here in the European Parliament, but talking is not enough. Today, the European Union – and this is what I would expect from the European Commission – should prepare a strategic plan for supporting the democratic opposition, for supporting civil society and non-governmental organisations, and for supporting free media. We are talking, today, about matters such as democracy and human rights, which are something natural for us and are what Europe is built on. Belarusian society is mostly made up of people who can only dream about values like this. Therefore, we expect the European Commission to develop a strategic plan to help civil society.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Mr President, following these speeches, I can only agree with the condemnation that has been expressed by Members regarding the human rights violations taking place in Belarus which, in this specific case, are affecting a minority, the Polish minority in that country. They therefore affect the European Union, not only because they concern a minority that has a national reference point in a European Union country, but also because what we are talking about is a serious violation of the human rights of minorities, and therefore our attitude would be exactly the same whether it was a Polish minority or another minority.

We are talking about a violation of human rights, which we have said are universal rights, and so this is not an issue that strictly requires a reaction from the European Union simply because in this case it concerns a Polish minority. We should say exactly the same thing if a different minority were involved, because all human rights are indivisible and universal.

I would like to say that the fact that a regime makes mistakes and violates human rights should not mean that its citizens are punished.

We therefore believe that it is important for Belarus to be in the Eastern Partnership. What Commissioner Georgieva said to us about ‘people-to-people contacts’ is important. All of this is important, and it is, of course, equally important, as many of you have said, to constantly, clearly and directly convey to the Belarusian authorities our entirely critical and condemning attitude to the human rights violations.

This is, incidentally, what the High Representative, Mrs Ashton, is resolved to do, as she is monitoring this matter in close contact with President Buzek, who is currently chairing the debate. She is also going to use the opportunity of attending the forthcoming investiture of Mr Yanukovich in Kiev, which it is presumed will be attended by Mr Lukashenko, to tackle this issue, which will continue to be discussed in future by the European Union’s Foreign Affairs Council, because it is a very important matter. I am therefore very glad that today, it has been possible to debate it immediately in Parliament, in this House.

Kristalina Georgieva, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, let me first thank Members for the discussion in this House, and make four points.

My first point is that respect for human rights is categorically a cornerstone of external relations of the European Union, and it is the foundation on which engagement with any country, including Belarus, is built.

Second, the deterioration of democracy in Belarus had a very unfortunate low point recently, but it did not start last week. It started around mid-2009, and this led the EU Council of Ministers in November 2009 to request that the Commission formulate a proposal for the so-called ‘joint interim plan’ in support of reforms to be implemented with Belarus. The Commission’s services have prepared a draft of this joint interim plan for reforms. It is now with the High Representative, and the High Representative certainly would gladly take into account the recommendations coming out of the fact-finding mission that Parliament is starting tomorrow.

My third point is that it would be with this last event in mind when the High Representative turns back to the services with feedback on this joint interim plan, that it would be finalised.

Let me make my fourth and last point. In the second half of the 1980s, perestroika started in the former Soviet Union, and it led to, for the first time in the lives of many – mine included – an opportunity to compete

for student and professional exchanges. In my case, it led me to the London School of Economics. It dramatically changed my professional life. It certainly made me much more helpful, more useful, to my own country.

It is with this strong belief that it is by opening up the democratic channels for countries under oppressive regimes that we as Europeans can help these countries that I made – and again would repeat – my point on the importance and usefulness of people-to-people contacts, the usefulness of support for businesses, the usefulness – despite the great difficulties, the very unfortunate disrespect for minorities, which we condemn – of remaining engaged in a way that would lift up the chances of the Belarusian people to take the road to a free world and to be connected with the Union, and I would repeat the call for us to remain engaged in that way.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place during the next monthly session.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Sebastian Valentin Bodu (PPE), in writing. – (RO) The Republic of Belarus is one of the European States for which involvement in the European Union's Eastern Partnership marks an important step forward in the development of bilateral relations, as well as in the relations between Belarus and every EU Member State. In regarding this partnership as a positive instrument for bringing about change in the Republic of Belarus, consideration must also be given in this mechanism to the position of civil society in this country because of the important role played by civil society in the operation of the rule of law. In particular, civil society maintains the transparency of the Partnership mechanism, helping to reinforce cooperation between Belarus and the EU. In addition, civil society must be guaranteed participation in all key processes as part of the Partnership (platforms, committees etc.), as well as public control of these processes. Belarusian civil society must be able to participate in drawing up the public agenda, which will lead to social, economic and democratic progress in Belarus. This is why frequent meetings between representatives of civil society and the government must be encouraged.

Filip Kaczmarek (PPE), in writing. – (PL) The repression which has recently been used against activists of the Polish minority in Belarus is part of a much wider problem. The Belarusian authorities do not tolerate any independence. They do not want, and they do not accept, the idea of civil society. Every manifestation of independence is treated as political opposition. This is not, therefore, an internal conflict in a non-governmental organisation, and neither is it a Polish-Belarusian conflict. It is, rather, an expression of the consistent stance of the Belarusian authorities, which are attempting to prevent liberalisation and democratisation. It is a pity that in Poland, there are political forces which are trying to use the situation to achieve their own, particular goals, and are using events in Belarus to discredit the policy of the Polish Government. Politicians who behave in this way surely do not understand that they are doing exactly what Lukashenko expects. It is in his interests to polarise and divide public opinion in Poland and Europe. Repudiation of Polish and European policy towards Belarus is an abuse of freedom, and is detrimental to the effectiveness of joint action for freedom and democracy in Belarus. Thank you very much.

19. Beijing +15 - UN Platform for Action for Gender Equality (debate)

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

– oral question to the Council: Beijing +15 – UN Platform for Action for Gender Equality, by Mrs Svensson, on behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (O-0006/2010 – B7-0007/2010), and

– oral question to the Commission: Beijing +15 – UN Platform for Action for Gender Equality, by Mrs Svensson, on behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (O-0007/2010 – B7-0008/2010).

Eva-Britt Svensson, author. – (SV) The issue of women's rights is always high on my agenda, and therefore I am particularly pleased when they are also a focus of our discussions here in plenary, as today. The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality has adopted a resolution that represents Parliament's position as regards the Beijing platform. I would like to thank our colleagues on the committee very much for their good cooperation.

The platform adopted in 1995 within the framework of the United Nations was an historically important step. The Platform for Action adopted was the first global document of its type. It took an overall view of women's conditions and rights. The UN has a long and proud tradition in the area of human rights and adopted a declaration as far back as 1948.

The Universal Declaration comprises 30 articles and they are often cited. This Declaration already stated – in Article 2 – that everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms without distinction of any kind, and sex is expressly mentioned. Within the EU, the issue of equality between women and men has a clear basis both in the treaties and in the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The committee was united on the importance of the Beijing platform and the need to work more specifically within the EU on systematically monitoring developments and ensuring that we move towards increased equality in every area. The new European Institute for Gender Equality, based in Vilnius, will be a way for us to obtain assistance with this work and will also be able to provide research to show which political measures are most effective, for there are many areas in which we do not have the necessary facts or knowledge.

I support the proposal for a European Protection Order, which I am very pleased that the Spanish Presidency has tabled. The Beijing platform contains a number of areas that are incredibly important if we are to make progress. These are areas such as poverty which, first and foremost, affects women, inadequate access to health care for women, violence against women in all its forms, and inequality in economic structures and in economic policy.

As you are aware, a delegation of eight MEPs is to travel to New York to represent the European Parliament. We will follow the discussions and negotiations that form part of the assessment of how far the world has come in 15 years towards achieving the objectives of the platform. We will take the resolution that we are adopting tomorrow with us to New York, and it is important for us to have it with us.

The Committee adopted one paragraph stating that sexual and reproductive health and sexual and reproductive rights are part of women's rights and that these need to be improved in Europe and globally. The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) has requested a separate vote on this paragraph. We all know that when people want to vote separately on a paragraph, it is because it is particularly important, and that is why they do not want it voted on in a block with the rest of the resolution.

I entirely agree with the PPE Group that paragraph 9 is central. However, I fear that they want to vote down this paragraph, which I feel would be deeply regrettable. I am fully aware that the Members of this Parliament have differing views and values, and that is only right. That is why we debate and discuss. This wording is a minimum, however, and should be able to be supported by everyone. No other wording has been proposed to replace paragraph 9. It would be most unfortunate if we went to New York with a resolution that does not even state the minimum on this fundamental issue, which is, after all, an extremely central issue at global level.

I hope and believe that everyone can accept the wording as it stands, because it only states what is self-evident to all of us. In the process, we also worked closely with thousands of different women and women's organisations, giving this document a unique basis.

Diego López Garrido, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (ES) Mrs Svensson, thank you very much for your question, because you know that one of the key, central and priority issues for the Spanish Presidency of the Council of the European Union is gender equality. The Presidency has a series of objectives expressing this idea of equality in terms of the importance of the non-discrimination directive, and also in relation to something that you mentioned, which is combating gender violence and the importance of having an order to protect the victims of gender violence.

In this respect, I am very happy to see Commissioner Reding here, who is responsible for implementing everything relating to equality between men and women from a judicial point of view. I would also like to start by apologising that the Spanish Minister for Equality is not here, as she has just attended a vote in the Spanish Senate on the reform of the abortion law, which, incidentally, had a good outcome, as it has just been adopted this afternoon in the Spanish Parliament.

The Council of the European Union has always approved and has always been behind the Union and the United Nations in the area of gender equality. The Swedish Presidency produced the Beijing +15 report, which the Spanish Presidency is going to present to the 54th session of the Commission on the Status of Women, and it must be said that although a great deal of progress has been made in this area, there is still a lot to be done.

In this respect, the Presidency has highlighted, for example, the need to improve the data and to make better use of the indicators that we created at the Beijing Platform. As you know, there are 12 indicators produced within the European Union for monitoring, assessing and evaluating actual gender equality, although in some cases, we have still not succeeded in designing them, for example, in the areas of human rights, the media and the environment.

I would like to say that the Spanish Presidency is going to hold a technical meeting in May to discuss women, the media and stereotypes, as a subject relating to the media, which is also something that falls under the remit of Commissioner Reding.

I would like to conclude by saying that there is a very important issue at the moment, as everyone knows, which is the economic crisis. As well as the damage that is being done, it could also be an obstacle to the progress of equality between men and women. It is, however, also true that paradoxically, gender equality could help us to overcome and combat the crisis: through gender equality and equal access to jobs for men and women.

I am talking very specifically about the Europe 2020 strategy. The European Union institutions have made it clear that they want the Europe 2020 strategy to have a gender equality dimension right across the strategy, so that the issue of equality between men and women is also part of the strategy.

In its report last year, the European Parliament asked the Council and the Commission to include a chapter on integrating the gender dimension in the 2020 strategy. The Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council on 30 November last year, the informal EPSCO Council, the one that has just taken place in Barcelona, also said that the Member States and the Commission must work to ensure that, in accordance with their competence, the gender dimension can be consolidated in the 2020 strategy, and that all the relevant political fields are taken into account. I am therefore sure that this, along with the Commission's programme of work, a major programme of work that has always been a fundamental instrument for guiding this strategy, is going to mean that this aspect is included in the document which the Commission has promised us for 3 March on the 2020 strategy (which has been mentioned by President Van Rompuy and the President of the Commission, José Manuel Barroso).

We need to keep on working, we need to keep driving gender equality policies forward. It is not only an issue of justice, but an issue of consistency with the spirit of the European Union, so that it can continue to be a reference point in the world for equality between men and women.

Viviane Reding, Vice-President of the Commission. – (FR) Mr President, for me it is an honour that my first speech during Question Time in Parliament is an answer to questions concerning women. Indeed, as Commissioner for Fundamental Rights, I think that the subject of fundamental rights linked to equal treatment between men and women is one of the most important and also one of the oldest. Furthermore, I recall with great emotion how, more than 15 years ago, as a young Luxembourg MEP, I prepared the Beijing Platform for Action in Luxembourg; now, here we are in the European Parliament to prepare the follow-up to the Beijing Platform for Action. We have come full circle.

I do not need to underline that; as you know, equality between men and women is one of the fundamental values of the European Union, and you can count on the unfailing commitment of the Commission in this area.

In the course of this year, I will present a new Commission strategy for gender equality, which will be a follow-up to the existing Roadmap for equality 2006-2010. In a few days' time, when the work of the 54th Commission on the Status of Women begins at the United Nations, marking the 15th anniversary of Beijing, the European Parliament will send a very important delegation. I myself will be present there, along with the President of the Council, and this will be a first. We will both take the floor during the plenary session. I think that this, too, is a very strong symbol.

It will also be an opportunity to gauge, at international level, the progress made in the 12 areas for action which were identified in Beijing, but also to see what inequalities persist, because even though there have been successes, there are still challenges to meet. Furthermore, I must say that the European Union is and will remain an important supporter of the work of the United Nations, concerning both the ongoing reform of the institutional mechanisms and the creation of this gender entity within the United Nations.

The European Union also represents an influential supporter in development terms, in particular, in the context of the Millennium Development Goals, which ensure an important place for 50% of the citizens who contribute to this development globally. Indeed, we know very well that without the contribution of

women, there will be no development. That is why equal treatment between men and women is a horizontal policy in the Commission, conducted not just by the Commissioner responsible for this area, but also by other Commissioners in their own areas of responsibility, namely the areas concerning policies within the European Union as well as its external policies and, in particular, its cooperation and development policies.

We all know that the creation of the Beijing Platform for Action represented a major step forward. Following the adoption of this platform, gender mainstreaming became widespread throughout the European Union. That was the signal sent out in Beijing. The impact has been truly remarkable given that, in all our Member States, our equality policies are no longer confined to targeted actions, but are, from now on, integrated into all relevant policies.

The Beijing Platform for Action has also enabled us to follow progress made in relation to equality on the basis of indicators developed by Council for most of the areas of action. There are 12 actions and nine indicators. We are very proud of the results, but there are still three indicators to establish, which I think the Council is committed to doing by adopting conclusions to forge ahead and develop these outstanding indicators.

The 15th anniversary of the Beijing Platform for Action. The Swedish Presidency has taken stock of what has been done in the EU with regard to equality. The Council has adopted some conclusions, and Parliament will present these papers, which will, of course, also find their place in all the other policies that the European Union will develop.

Both Presidents have just expressed their opinions on Europe 2020. It is only natural that in this system, which is going to get Europe moving again, women will play a special role, especially at a time when fewer and fewer people are in employment. In fact, we no longer even have a choice: we need women for economic development. It is no longer even just a question of gender equality; it is a question of economic policy, and that alone. We therefore have no other choice in the matter. We need women if we want Europe to overcome its difficulties, and these new indicators will, of course, help us in this way. Within the high level group, we have developed a work programme that will enable us to monitor existing indicators and create indicators that still need to be implemented. Naturally, we will be assisted in this task by the European Institute for Gender Equality, which, from next week – and this is another symbol, which comes at exactly the same time as the meeting is being held in New York – will be established permanently in Vilnius.

Mr President, on my return from New York, I will visit you to discuss the Commission's strategy on equality. We will do it together. We will do it for 50% of our population, for 50% of our citizens, and we will succeed.

IN THE CHAIR: MR SCHMITT

Vice-President

Christa Kläß, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the World Conference on Women next week in New York will give us the opportunity to bring the equality of men and women to the attention of society worldwide. In so doing, we will certainly subject our current position with regard to what we have achieved and what we still want to achieve to close critical examination. The call for equality, development and peace at the World Conference on Women that took place on 15 June 1995 in Beijing is still a concrete statement of our goals today, including in Europe.

We are on our way, with the goal firmly in view. However, we have to admit that the road is not an easy one, that there are traffic jams, blockages and sometimes even one-way streets along the way. We constantly need to redefine the route, always keeping the destination firmly in sight. There is an old German saying: many roads lead to Rome. During the search for the right common path, I therefore invite us all to find more common ground.

Gender equality policy cannot and must not be a subject for voting on and for narrow, enforced majorities. My group grants the freedom to decide on this matter, and therefore, Mrs Svensson, we would like a split vote. Equality needs to become a way of thinking. This requires sensitivity and it requires the power of persuasion. In her resolution, Mrs Svensson has touched many open wounds. There are still many unfinished matters that need to be addressed and they have been mentioned: no stereotypical thinking, equal pay for equal work, poverty among women, violence against women and the ageing society, which affects women in particular. For us, these are the absolutely key issues in this resolution that we want to address.

Mere declarations of intent are of little help. The list of the many resolutions, strategies and pacts alone takes up two pages of Mrs Svensson's report. It is very important to my group that, whenever we talk about equality,

both men and women are mentioned – on equal terms, so to speak – and we hope that the follow-up conference to Beijing will also result in us progressing a step further towards greater equality.

Zita Gurmai, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – Mr President, in 2010, we mark the 15th anniversary of the launch of the Beijing Platform for Action. This is a moment of reflection where we need not only to evaluate what we have achieved so far but also to think about new ways of attaining the goals set out in 1995.

The beginning was reassuring: in 1995, a global consensus was reached according to which women and men were equal from all points of view, including political, economic, legal and social. However, despite this consensus, the sequel is less stirring. Many of the goals of the Beijing Platform for Action are still far from being reached. In many countries, women are still not sufficiently empowered and poverty has a feminine face.

Moreover, even in the 21st century, even in developed countries, we notice again debate on some basic issues, questioning already-established rights such as sexual and reproductive health rights. I am very happy that the European Parliament is not following such trends but, on the contrary, committing itself to these basic rights. Nevertheless, the political debates, the conservative attacks on human rights are alarming and they clearly underline the fact that the fight for women's rights is far from over.

I do not think that human rights can be subject to compromise. We must not put up with the lowest common denominator. Therefore, when we go to New York in a few days' time, we have to make efforts so that all women have the same rights and that these rights are protected. I will personally do this under the motto 'My body, my right', which we have to convey to all the women of the world.

Antonyia Parvanova, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, looking back at what has been achieved since the adoption of the declaration and Platform for Action in Beijing 15 years ago, one cannot deny that a lot remains to be done. We are still far from Beijing's strategic objectives. Inequality and gender stereotypes persist in all the world's regions, including the European Union. If we want to make progress on this agenda it is crucial to have, at national and EU level, reliable and comparable data on the Beijing indicators. We then also need to make sure these indicators are monitored in a timely fashion in order to update our EU strategy on gender equality accordingly.

Here in Europe we still have a lot to address.

Let us take the situation in the labour market: we need to fill the gender pay gap while also looking at the place and the representation of women in leadership positions in both public and private organisations.

Going more deeply into social considerations, inequalities and discrimination affecting women lead to exclusion and poverty most of the time. Poverty is the greatest single determinant of health. The feminisation of poverty has a real impact on the physical and mental health of women.

Minority women are experiencing poverty, exclusion and discrimination. Their needs are largely unknown and ignored and their voices are not heard. For Roma women, life expectancy can be up to 10 years less than those of the majority. Infant mortality is three to four times greater than the majority population.

Discrimination, exclusion and poverty also need to be considered in the light of the ageing population. The differences in life expectancy between men and women will entail increased economic and social difficulties for single elderly women. This is the new rising phenomenon and a serious one which has to be closely looked at and properly addressed.

Finally, Madam Commissioner, I would like to strongly encourage you to come up with a directive on violence against women. All of us will be behind you.

Nicole Kiil-Nielsen, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FR) Back in 2006, the UN acknowledged that the most vulnerable populations and the poorest populations were the main victims of climate change. The fact is, women form the majority in both categories.

In sub-Saharan Africa, for example, although women are already discriminated against in terms of access to and control of land, the increasing scarcity of cultivable soil due to drought reduces their means of existence even further.

A recent report forecasts that in 2050, a billion people will have fled from hostile environments. The loss of security of these climate migrants, forced to take refuge in makeshift camps, raises the level of threat against women.

However, we have to admit that in the last 15 years, not one European legislative text on the environment has included the aspect of gender.

On behalf of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, I therefore call on the European Union and its Member States to integrate the perspective of equality between women and men in all impact assessments, legislation and policies regarding the environment.

Marina Yannakoudakis, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – Mr President, it is just under 100 years since all women were given the right to vote in the United Kingdom. Fighting for women's rights is not a new phenomenon, and I want to pay tribute to all the women's organisations round the world that are still fighting for equality between men and women.

Women want to be able to make independent choices about their careers or their family aspirations: the choice to work in a traditionally male occupation or, equally, the choice to look after children and work in the home. What we really need to do is empower women. We as Conservatives believe in choice and, with choice, flexibility for women and subsequently equality.

Are we unintentionally making women less employable by demanding that businesses offer rights that they cannot deliver in today's economic climate? Equally, do we put women off staying at home with children because we as a society value this less than the workplace?

The Commissioner rightly said that we need to get women out of the recession and back working. I say we also need to secure jobs in small businesses, and this will help us achieve this goal. Through over-legislation, we are risking the demise of small businesses, thus, in turn, limiting the very choices we are fighting to give women and, consequently, the equality they deserve.

Mara Bizzotto, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in the Swedish Presidency's report on Beijing, there is no reference whatsoever to the situation of non-Western women in Europe. Therefore, either the problem does not exist or we do not want to see it. However, the situation of Muslim women in the world today, including in Europe, is tragic.

If Western feminism is having an identity crisis, it is because the fashion for multiculturalism has led so many of us to avoid tackling these issues, which are at the heart of the battles faced by so many Muslim women in Europe and the world.

Let us leave multiculturalism and political correctness where we found them and let us rise to the new challenge: European men and women must now, not later, support Muslim women in Europe in their battle for emancipation, and thus also help those movements in the world that speak out against Islamic fundamentalism.

Are we willing to fight to ensure that women in Europe are free from the symbol of spiritual death that is the burkha? Are we ready to discuss the deteriorating conditions of women in Muslim communities in Europe?

If the spirit of debate on these issues prevails over silence, then we will also have the strength to support the cause of liberating women in the world from Islamic oppression.

Edit Bauer (PPE). – (HU) 15 years after the adoption of the Beijing Platform we could and should obviously talk about a lot of things. Yet I would rather talk about that which is our task. We have one tool in our hands, and that is lawmaking. Many things have happened during these 15 years, in Member States as well as at EU level; great steps have been taken, mainly as a result of the adoption of anti-discriminatory laws. This represented a significant step forward towards bringing about equal opportunities. Admittedly, we cannot be satisfied with Community legislation, or often even with that of Member States, as we often see proof of how ineffective these regulations remain. Often the situation changes very little after the laws come into force. As an example, we can cite the wage gap between women and men. For more than 30 years, the law has prohibited gender discrimination, yet these differences have scarcely changed in the last 10 years, occasionally even showing an upward trend.

Access to these rights is a particular problem, since legal redress is often extremely expensive and complicated. Authorities responsible for enforcing equal treatment, charged with the oversight of anti-discrimination legislation in Member States, are generally poorly equipped and, due to a lack of resources, their competence is often limited to the provision of information and advice. Hopefully, this year we will also get a chance to look into the effectiveness of the laws we formulate and adopt here. It is evident that not everything can be

solved by legislative means. Stereotypes are difficult to change, yet we have to recognise that the effectiveness of our laws stand or fall on whether we succeed in doing so. One sentence by way of conclusion: from time to time, it is certainly worth looking back at the road we have covered, but we also have to see clearly where we are headed. We pin great hopes on the reformulated 2020 strategy as well as on the reformulation of the equal opportunity strategy.

Edite Estrela (S&D). – (PT) I very much enjoyed listening to you. You have given us positive messages and confirmed your willingness to act. Indeed, there needs to be a lot of action because, 15 years after Beijing, we can see that, unfortunately, the results are still of very little significance. It is not only the face of poverty which continues to be female, but also the face of illiteracy, unemployment and low wage rates. Discrimination in access to education and health care continue to exist. Women are the principal victims of trafficking and physical, sexual and psychological violence. Women are under-represented in politics and on the boards of companies or, put another way, they are excluded from political and economic decision making.

We also know that in order for equality policies to be adequate and effective, diagnosis needs to be reliable, based on comparable statistical data which is disaggregated by gender. That is what we need in order to be able to make the correct diagnosis and then implement the correct measures.

Teresa Jiménez-Becerril Barrio (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, I would like to say that I did not come to Parliament to applaud the brand new law in Spain on abortion.

What I am concerned about is human life, and I am particularly concerned about the women – who I am here to defend – whose lives are in danger as a result of gender violence, and I am here to offer them a space in which they can live freely and safely.

Parliament's Resolution of 2 February 2006 recommended that the Member States adopt an attitude of zero tolerance towards all forms of violence against women, and that they adopt the necessary measures to ensure better protection for victims.

The Stockholm Programme, which was adopted in this House, established an area of freedom, justice and security for all European citizens, and combating gender violence was considered to be a priority in that programme. This reflected my request for the Spanish Presidency to promote a European protection order for the victims of gender violence during its mandate, to ensure that the victims of these crimes have the same level of protection in all the Member States.

In a Europe without borders, the fight against gender violence should also be without borders, and the Member States should work hard to harmonise their legislation so that the fight against ill-treatment of women overcomes the legislative obstacles in its way and we can finally protect the lives of women and their children, at least within the European Union,

I therefore ask the Commission and the Council to do everything that is necessary and everything in their power to move forward with the European protection order for victims, which is a very effective instrument for ensuring that those who fail to respect the dignity of women and their right to live freely and safely do not go unpunished.

Iratxe García Pérez (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, ... (*beginning of speech not available for technical reasons*) ... 30 000 women joined their voices, their ideas and their plans for moving forward in a fairer and more equal society. They came from different places, from a vast number of ideologies and cultures, but they were united in the objective of fighting for the rights of equality and justice to be recognised, for the social and political participation of women, for the sharing of responsibilities, for the rights to sexual and reproductive health.

Today these objectives are more present than ever, and therefore there is still a long way to go. This resolution therefore raises fundamental questions such as the need for the European Commission to develop its strategy of monitoring the programme of work, solid links with the Beijing Platform, and promoting gender equality policies, not forgetting the gender perspective in the legislative processes.

It is important that we do not forget that today, Europe can be a reference point for the rest of the world in terms of equality policies, but in our work and our efforts, we must also keep in mind all the women outside Europe who have absolutely no fundamental rights.

For them, and for the women of Europe, we need to work hard.

Mariya Nedelcheva (PPE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to congratulate Mrs Svensson on the drafting of this resolution on the United Nations Platform for Action for Gender Equality.

To this day, inequalities between men and women persist in many areas. Here I am thinking of employment, where the wage gap is flagrant and where it is still difficult to reconcile family life and a career. I could list many other cases.

In spite of the efforts made to combat inequality between men and women, none of the goals of the Beijing +15 Platform for Action have been fully realised. It is not a question of forever redefining our goals here, as we know them well. Rather, we must reconsider the measures put in place to achieve them.

It therefore seems to me to be essential that the European Union spell out its strategy within the framework of the goals of the United Nations Platform for Action, focusing on three major areas. Our strategy must consider the short, medium and long terms.

In the short term, there must be a detailed examination of all sensitive areas, in the context of the economic and financial crisis. It is a matter of defining precise indicators allowing us to evaluate and measure the impact of the crisis on employment and the economic situation of women. These indicators must be concentrated on economic, social and environmental aspects.

In the medium term, it is a question at national level of regularly monitoring and of updating the statistical data that we have. This is why regular revision of the series of indicators already developed within the framework of the Beijing Platform for Action must be conducted as a function of the relevance of the political, economic and social context. Taking these two aspects into account will provide us with the consistency we need at European level to achieve our common goals.

Finally, in the long term, we must ensure that gender equality policies are integrated, but also encourage the exchange of good practice between the Member States and, of course, ensure that the European Commission's roadmap matches the progress achieved.

By adopting this structure at three levels, we will markedly increase our chances of finally realising our main goals.

Silvia Costa (S&D). – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, Beijing +15 is confronted this year with a financial, economic and employment crisis that is having a negative impact on the living and working conditions of millions of women throughout Europe and the world, but which may represent an opportunity to review development models, the organisation of the labour market and social policies.

In strengthening the Beijing +15 objectives, the European Union must prioritise, on behalf of women, policies for providing access to environmental resources and credit, including by means of micro-finance; the balance between family life and work life, including by means of the adoption of the directive on parental leave; training policies and incentives for businesses that employ young people and women; and the fight against trafficking in human beings with a new directive, which we hope will be based on the resolution approved during the last part-session in Strasbourg.

Above all, we must focus development cooperation support on the empowerment of women in the poorest countries, and in African countries in particular, building a possible Euro-African alliance with the women.

It would be good – I am addressing the Commissioner and the President here – if the European delegation in New York promoted and gained support for the campaign to award the Nobel Peace Prize to the women of Africa, symbolically represented by the leaders of associations active in those countries worst affected by conflicts and poverty.

Sylvie Guillaume (S&D). – (FR) Today, we are debating equality between men and women, 15 years after the Fourth World Conference on Women, which took place in Beijing, and we are also celebrating the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

I would like to establish a link between the two, as it is certainly true that women remain the main victims of job insecurity. In France, for example, they represent 80% of part-time workers, with precarious and poorly paid jobs. Eighty per cent of women also earn less than the minimum wage, meaning that, in the end, they draw pensions that border on the minimum subsistence income. Added to that is the fact that the average pay gap between women and men persists at a very high level.

To a degree, therefore, gender equality exists only in theory, and women, who furthermore are still faced with a large number of family responsibilities, are sometimes forced to do several jobs for several employers and yet still end up earning less than men.

That is why we absolutely must introduce public policies that specifically target these inequalities, both in the labour market and in the home, as well as social security systems that actively respond to women's needs. Without such measures, the Beijing goals are liable to remain in the realms of utopia.

Vilija Blinkevičiūtė (S&D). – (LT) The principle of gender equality is very important to the European Union in striving for the goals of growth, employment and social cohesion. The European Union has made great progress in implementing the Beijing Platform, but we cannot be entirely satisfied with the current situation. The report on the implementation of the Beijing Platform has shown that in the European Union, the goals it set out have not yet been achieved. It is very important that the Beijing indicators are used to develop the gender equality perspective in national reform programmes, as well as in national reports on social security and social inclusion. There is still a lack of sufficiently reliable and comparable data both at national and EU level determining social indicators, including the poverty of women, violence against women and institutional mechanisms. One of the tasks of the European Institute for Gender Equality is to handle comparable data. The aims laid out in the institute's work programme should particularly help implement the indicators set out in Beijing. I am convinced that, at the time of the economic recession, it is essential to strengthen institutional mechanisms for gender equality.

IN THE CHAIR: MR VIDAL-QUADRAS

Vice-President

Mairead McGuinness (PPE). – Mr President, I thank colleagues for their contributions to this debate.

I recently addressed a high-level group of public service workers, women who had reached the highest level on their jobs, and they were concerned about how they could make more progress. I want to turn this debate around a little because I think we spend too much time trying to push women up into professions and not looking at why there are professions that men do not get involved in. The key reason is that they are not paid well enough, and I will be quite basic on this – we do not pay people enough to do the cleaning work, the work that nobody wants to do. Maybe if we looked at how we distribute payments in these sorts of professions, we would achieve equality at that level as well as at the other end. I think we need to look at these issues if we are to have genuine gender equality.

I think the Spanish Presidency is very concerned, for example, about the role of women in agriculture. Again, they have a huge part to play but it is not recognised and it is certainly not counted, and, again, that is an important aspect of our upcoming reforms on agriculture policy.

There are two other issues which I want to mention. A lot of women are contributing to this debate, but I think we have to be honest about how many of us have dependent children. Could we be here if we had? Yes, but only because we earn a great deal more money than other people who cannot follow suit.

Lastly, let us acknowledge the women of Iran. Yesterday, we heard from them and I think this House and this debate should recognise their struggle and wish them well.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) Equal opportunities for men and women is a fundamental principle of the European Union enshrined in Community legislation. In 2009, women accounted for 24% of members of national parliaments, 26% of members of national governments and 33% of CEOs of European companies, as well as for 18% of professors at European public universities. I also wish to mention that 81.3% of young women have completed at least secondary education, while 59% of university graduates in the European Union are women.

The European Union's strategy for growth and employment aims to ensure that by 2010, the employment rate among women should be 60%. However, the risk of poverty among women is primarily due to the situation of single-parent families headed by women. I believe that it is important for us to guarantee women equal opportunities for developing and planning their career, as well as conditions supporting a personal, professional and family life balance. On this point, I want to stress the importance of child care facilities. We are aiming to ensure that 30% of children under the age of three are able to register for and benefit from care services for children in this age group.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). – (PT) As we approach the celebration of International Women's Day, the centenary celebrations and 15 years since the approval of the Beijing Platform for Action, we can see that serious problems continue to exist in women's lives, since they are victims of precarious employment, unemployment, growing inequalities, the crisis of capitalism, and violence in society, in the workplace and within the family. Poverty has a female face, including here in the European Union, where women make up the majority of the 85 million people who live in poverty. For these reasons, we do not merely support the resolution which was approved in the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, but also hope that it will be approved by a majority of this Parliament, including the paragraph which emphasises that sexual and reproductive health and rights are an integral part of the women's rights agenda, and that it is essential to step up efforts to improve women's reproductive rights and health, both in Europe and globally.

It is time to put an end to inequality and stereotypes and prioritise promoting equal rights for women and men in social progress.

Corina Crețu (S&D). – (RO) One of the areas of action specified by the Beijing Platform for Action in 1995 was aimed at combating violence against women. Fifteen years on from this historic UN conference, the assessment of the efforts made to improve the situation of women in the world is disappointing. Numerous programmes adopted down the years have sadly remained far from a reality, not to mention the Millennium Development Goals, which include the promotion of gender equality. Unfortunately, domestic violence, the use of rape as a weapon of war, genital mutilation, forced marriage, human trafficking or sexual slavery remain the nightmare which destroys the lives of millions of women throughout the whole world.

I believe that we cannot talk in terms of success unless the European Union becomes even more heavily involved in this area. We need a comprehensive strategy aimed at tackling poverty, lack of education and information, impunity, armed conflicts and human trafficking for the purposes of prostitution. I think that it is important for us not to forget that, before it becomes a cause of evil, violence against women is an effect triggered by a whole set of factors which we must take more united and firm action to eradicate.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, there is a scarlet thread running through the Platform for Action from Beijing, namely non-discrimination. That is a good thing. Women should not be given a worse deal than men without good and sound reasons.

However, I do not think that quotas of women – so-called 'positive' discrimination – is a sensible approach to this. Skills must be the key criterion, not gender. I therefore strongly reject the quota of women in the appointment of the European Commission. Instead of concerning ourselves with quotas, we ought really to be focusing on women who are oppressed and discriminated against.

In Europe, we allow Muslim women to continue to live in a kind of parallel society, where violence against women and other forms of oppression are part of everyday life. We allow Muslim women in Europe to have no freedom to make decisions over many areas of their lives. It starts with the mode of dress, continues through education to their choice of career, as well as to their choice of husband. Women's rights campaigners from Islamic countries approach us, hoping that something will be done about it here. Where is the Europe of human rights when we need it?

I therefore believe that we should stop these artificial discussions about quotas and instead work to combat the massive discrimination that occurs daily in Europe under the guise of the freedom of religion – this truly has no place in our enlightened community of values.

Monika Flašíková Beňová (S&D). – (SK) Had it not been for the previous speaker, yourself and the Minister, we would have been a women's group discussing how to improve gender equality. This is unquestionably one of the most important issues in modern society and in the modern age and I agree with Mrs Svensson that there is an essential need to coordinate activities at all levels.

Besides the actual problem of persistent gender inequality, there is also an absence at the European level of a high quality gender-differentiated resolution of the agreed indicators, for example, in the areas of female poverty, violence against women or the human rights of women. The Commission should therefore give Eurostat the task of developing links to coordinate the collection of comparative data or data from the Member States, while, at the same time, the Commission should put pressure on the Member States to cooperate actively with Eurostat.

Despite this, the EU is still a world leader in the field of gender equality and I think we should share with the rest of the world the examples of good practice that we already have in the EU. In the next round of

negotiations, we should also talk about the good things we have managed to achieve. I believe that in five years' time, when it will be the 20th anniversary of Beijing, we should finally be able to celebrate greater progress in resolving gender inequality worldwide.

Angelika Werthmann (NI). – (DE) Mr President, gender equality is a fundamental principle of the EU. This principle is stated in the treaties, on websites and is happily cited often and in many places. It should therefore be justified to ask why we are always talking about it. The answer is, quite simply, because equality is not implemented in many areas. I look forward to the day when we no longer need to talk about this and the principle of gender equality has finally been realised in the social sphere.

Diego López Garrido, President-in-Office of the Council. – (ES) Mr President, I agree with all the speeches that have been made, all of them except for a speech by Mr Obermayr, which, incidentally, I only agree with partially.

I must say that these speeches by female Members are an expression of a new phase that is beginning in the European Union, also in the area of gender equality.

Gender equality does not only benefit women; it also benefits men. Gender equality is an essential principle for coexistence. I therefore thought that both women and men would speak today, because it benefits us all, not only women, and I think that the European Union has made a very intelligent commitment to gender equality.

It has done so in Article 2 of the Treaty on European Union, which mentions the principle of equality between men and women for the first time in primary law; in Article 3 of that treaty; in Article 8 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which states that all the Union's policies must be governed by the principle of gender equality. This means all the policies: in other words, the treaties place the principle of gender equality at the heart of European policies, and it has become a core principle on the political agenda of the European Union. What we need to do is to put into practice this mandate given to us by the Treaty on European Union.

This is what the Spanish Presidency wants to do and what the Council of the Union wants to do, and we are convinced that we are going to have the cooperation of the Commission.

Only yesterday, we had a meeting with the Commission in Madrid. Commissioner Reding was there, and we are sure that there is going to be very close cooperation from the Commission to help our ambitions regarding gender equality to become a reality during this Presidency.

To begin with, just to mention something that is coming up soon, 8 March is going to be an important day, as it is International Women's Day, when the European Parliament in Strasbourg will discuss the Women's Charter. On the same day, the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council will also discuss the idea of equality linked to social cohesion, which is another of the Union's principles, gender equality linked to social cohesion and eradicating violence.

The subject that has been mentioned most frequently in your speeches has probably been the need to eradicate gender violence, which is the greatest scourge on our societies, the worst of our societies: violence against women.

I am sure that the protection order against gender violence is going to be one of the achievements, because we will have to see what happens over the coming months as achievements. Once again, I will say that we will be counting on the cooperation of the Commission and the European Parliament in this area.

Viviane Reding, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, the equality directives started in the 1970s and since then, many directives have not only changed laws in the Member States – there were no laws in the Member States at that time – but have created the laws in the Member States, the laws of equality between men and women at all levels of our society. Nevertheless, and you are right in this, we have good laws but practice does not follow. I believe that the first thing we will have to do is not to create new laws, but see that the laws are de facto applied in society.

I dream of a time when we can have a debate in this House and 50% of the speakers are men and 50% are women. I have a dream where we no longer need International Women's Day because there is no longer any problem. It is nice to dream, practice is there, and we have to take things in hand. That is why I am very grateful to the Spanish Presidency which has put the woman question at the top of the priority list.

I am very dedicated, together with my colleagues in the Commission, to have gender mainstreaming included in all the policies which we are going to present. Together with my colleague Mr Andor, who is responsible for employment, we will see that this is put into practice in the 2020 programme.

For the other elements I will, as I have already said, work together with the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality on the new strategy for equality where questions such as the gender pay gap and women in decision making will be high on the agenda because they are real structural problems which we need to solve. But there are also questions of society which go very deep and which we have to tackle with the help of women's organisations, with the help of the Ministers in the Member States, with the help of national laws, with the help of European laws, and there is, of course, the terrible question of violence against women. I believe that this is going to be at the forefront of the work which we are going to lead.

I think nevertheless, ladies, that when your strong delegation goes to New York to celebrate 15 years of the Beijing Platform, we should be proud, because if we look at what we have achieved in the last 15 years, it is a great deal. All right, we have not yet arrived at where our dreams will lead us, but we have achieved much and, through this experience, we can very much help women on other continents. That will be the subject of the New York meeting. It will not only look at what European women are doing, but also at what European women, European policies, the development policies can do for women in other continents.

I also believe in this sense that the Charter of Fundamental Rights, which is a beautiful text which should be read by every child in the European schools and which should be worked on by every student in our universities, really makes the right point: there is no difference between men and women. They are equal and it is our responsibility to see that we speak up when this fundamental question is not put into practice in our application of laws in the Member States. It is not only in this place where we should speak up; we should speak up in our Member States, too, and point to the problems which are arising and which are not solved, and not keep quiet until we have solved the problem.

I make a call to all the men in this Parliament. Please join your voices to the voices of the women.

President. – I have received one motion for a resolution⁽³⁾ to wind up the debate in accordance with Rule 115(5) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow at 11.30.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Vasîlica Viorica Dăncilă (S&D), in writing. – (RO) The United Nations introduced International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women, which the whole world celebrates on 25 November every year. This phenomenon is very widespread, with 45% of women in Europe victims of different forms of violence. At a global level, one woman in three has been beaten, forced to have sexual intercourse or been abused in other ways. This phenomenon is reflected not only in violence in the family against women and girls, but also through exploitation, acts of sexual violence, human trafficking, honour crimes, dangerous traditional practices, such as the burning of brides or early marriages, and other forms of violence against women's bodies, minds and dignity. In most cases, the aggressor is the husband or partner, or an acquaintance. I think that violence against women is one of the most serious human rights violations. It is also all the more serious as it is present on every continent, in every country and culture, regardless of the level of economic development. The perpetrators of these acts must be severely punished. In the case of large-scale offences, the International Criminal Court must play an important role and establish a close correlation with the decisions made by national courts.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (S&D), in writing. – (PL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the 15th anniversary of the famous World Conference on equal rights for women, organised by the UN in Beijing, is just approaching. During those 15 years, the 189 countries which signed the UN Platform for Action for Gender Equality have managed to make a certain amount of progress in all 12 areas of concern identified in the document. However, most of the problems identified then are still current today, in particular, the problem of domestic violence against women and the involvement of women in armed conflicts. These subjects do not need to be presented in the European Parliament – we discuss them during debates on cases of human rights violations at almost every plenary session. Therefore, I would like to express my esteem for the UN

⁽³⁾ See Minutes

initiative. Every five years, a detailed review of the Platform for Action is conducted in a great many countries (the last time was in 2005), and the most urgent matters are highlighted. Five years ago, at the conference in New York, the attention of countries which are signatories to the Platform for Action was drawn to the high numbers of rapes committed against women, the rise of HIV/AIDS infections among women and the discrimination which exists against women in employment. Unfortunately, those observations could be made again, today. What is needed is a very specific action plan, with the real support of all signatories to the Platform and with the involvement of the European Union, so that at the next review of the programme in five years' time, clear progress will be evident.

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (S&D), in writing. – (RO) I firmly believe that gender equality must be among the key objectives of any democracy. While considerable efforts have been made in the European Union to achieve the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, it has not been possible to meet them all. We still face in Europe strong stereotypes associated with women and significant gender pay gaps, while the progress made in terms of attracting more women to take up decision-making positions has been extremely slow. However, in general, equal opportunities remain, unfortunately, only an aspiration, especially in the countries of Eastern Europe, the new members of the EU. In order to attain better results in Member States in terms of achieving the objectives of the Beijing Platform for Action, reliable, comparable data on the situation of women is an absolute must, both at European and national level. There should also be a regular review carried out of the progress made in the critical areas identified by the Platform. However, I am pleased that the Spanish Presidency has included the problems of gender equality in its list of priorities and has focused particular attention on women working in the agricultural sector. I would therefore like to take this opportunity to congratulate it on this initiative.

Joanna Senyszyn (S&D), in writing. – (PL) One of the strategic areas defined in the Beijing Platform for Action is that of the rights of women as an inalienable, integral and indivisible part of universal human rights. The objective is to fully introduce international instruments for the protection of these rights, including the Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women. One form of discrimination is violation of the reproductive rights of women. A report on respect for reproductive rights in Poland in 2007 and the recommendations of the UN Human Rights Committee which are based on this report show clearly that Polish women have difficulties in gaining access to reimbursable contraception, medical care during pregnancy, prenatal tests and even to pain-free labour. They are denied the possibility of a legal abortion in practically every case, even in cases which are permissible under law. As a result, 200-400 legal terminations of pregnancy are performed in Poland every year, compared to 100 000 illegal ones.

I propose adoption of a legal abortion rate, calculated as the number of legal terminations of pregnancy per 1 000 live births per year, as a measure of the equality of women in Member States of the EU. In countries where women have the right to choose abortion, this rate fluctuates at around 200. In Poland, it is 1. This is an objective measure of the violation of women's reproductive rights in Poland. I appeal for more effective cooperation between the EU and the UN over monitoring of women's rights and the introduction of measurements which quantify violations of women's rights.

Anna Záborská (PPE), in writing. – (FR) The resolution does not reflect the whole Beijing Platform for Action. As ever, it is easier to dwell on sexual stereotypes, 'reproductive health', not to mention abortion, CEDAW, violence and quotas. Are there no other problems for the vast majority of women and mothers in Europe and throughout the world? Is it not time to tackle other obstacles as well? Point 9 of the Beijing Platform for Action, however, declares as its goal the empowerment of all women. It is essential that all women can identify with public equal opportunities policies, which respect their natural difference and their necessary complementary nature, and do not lose sight of the importance of national and regional identities or historical, cultural and religious diversity. The implementation of the Platform for Action falls under the sovereign responsibility of each Member State, taking into account and showing strict respect for diverse religious and ethical values, and for the cultural heritage and philosophical convictions of individuals and their communities. Had the implementation of the Beijing Platform respected these premises, we would not have observed just a slight improvement in the situation of women. This resolution sends out a biased signal that divides rather than unites.

Artur Zasada (PPE), in writing. – (PL) I fully support Mrs Svensson's work on the problem of gender equality, and I agree that the issues she has raised have a significant influence on the process of achieving equal rights for women and men. At the same time, I would like to point out that many women consciously and freely choose to work in the home on behalf of the family. Sometimes they are forced to give up their career for unforeseen reasons, such as the need to care for an ill or disabled child. A significant problem in this situation is the lack of appropriate solutions concerning retirement pension entitlements for these women. In many

countries, there are no solutions at all in this area, or those which are in place are not sufficient to ensure women a decent living. Therefore, it is essential, too, that the debate on gender equality should also include the matter of the entitlement to benefits of women who run the home and care for children.

20. One-minute speeches on matters of political importance

President. – The next item is one-minute speeches on matters of political importance under Rule 150.

We are going to give preference to those Members who did not take the floor during the last period of one-minute speeches under Rule 150 over those who did take the floor last time.

Traian Ungureanu (PPE). – (RO) On 4 February 2010, Traian Băsescu, the President of Romania, announced the decision confirming the Supreme Council of National Defence's approval of Romania's participation in the US anti-missile system. The agreement is due to be submitted to the Romanian Parliament for approval. At the same time, the president stated that the agreement is not targeted at Russia. I believe that this allows Romania to demonstrate its ability to act as a strategic partner of the United States in the Black Sea region and become a net European supplier of security.

In the current context of tough global challenges, the Romanian-US agreement will inextricably consolidate the security system for European allies. It is my belief that the European Union will welcome this major agreement.

Joanna Katarzyna Skrzydlewska (PPE). – (PL) Mr President, I would like to express my profound alarm at the rapidly worsening situation of fellow Poles in Lithuania. Lithuania is a member of the European Union. In spite of this, the fundamental rights of the Polish national minority are being violated in Lithuania. There are almost 300 000 Poles in Lithuania, in regions where they make up 60-80% of the population, but they are not entitled to use their mother tongue as an auxiliary language in official situations. A court has ordered the removal of bilingual street names. Court enforcement officers are being sent to enforce this order. Polish names are being Lithuanianised. Poles are suffering discrimination during restitution of land. The right of Polish children to receive education with Polish as the medium of instruction is being curtailed. The electoral rights of their parents are being restricted.

The future of the Union is currently in the balance. Do we still want to live in a Europe of illusory values, or of real values? Which direction the Union goes in depends, in part, on us. Are we going to turn a blind eye to overt discrimination against a minority, or are we really going to build a secure Europe in a spirit of respect for human rights?

Andres Perello Rodriguez (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, I would like to report something to Parliament and ask for its support. I want to report that in the south of the Union, in the industrious and enterprising city of Valencia, there is an historic marine quarter called Cabañal, which could be destroyed by a plan that the council wants to implement after abandoning the area for almost 20 years.

The local residents have protested against this plan. At the request of the Supreme Court, the Ministry of Culture has ruled that the plan will amount to a desecration of heritage, and the Constitutional Court also recently tried to stop it or ruled that it should be stopped.

The response of the public authorities has been to refuse to submit to the institutions, with the resulting risk, danger and lack of political concern.

The plea for support that I am making is for the local residents to receive the help that they ask for from Parliament regarding this desecration of heritage, to ensure that such a major, barbaric aberration cannot take place in a district such as Cabañal in the south of the European Union.

Cristian Silviu Buşoi (ALDE). – (RO) Last week, I attended the meeting of the European Union-Moldova Parliamentary Cooperation Committee. The results of this meeting are extremely encouraging in terms of bilateral relations and the Republic of Moldova moving closer to the European Union.

The pro-European government in Chişinău has made visible progress in the few months since it took power. I believe that this progress is a clear sign of the sincere desire to embark on a one-way path to Europe. The political will of the Republic of Moldova's current government to promote reforms aimed at building a sound democracy and prosperous economy is evident from the discussions last week. I welcome the start of the negotiations on a new association agreement in January this year. I believe that the European Parliament

must be actively involved in this process and support the conclusion of such an agreement and a visa waiver scheme.

The Republic of Moldova shares the European Union's values. This is why I believe that both the European Commission and European Parliament must support this government with financial assistance, which must be granted as quickly as possible, as well as through the expertise the European Union has to offer in the various areas targeted for reform, such as justice or the economy.

Ryszard Czarnecki (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, unfortunately, I am having to speak, once again, about the situation of the Polish minority in a Member State of the European Union – Lithuania. It might seem that if a state does belong to the European Union it should observe all European standards. However, Vilnius is not doing this.

There is still no agreement in Lithuania over bilingual street names in places where the Polish population is not so much a minority as a majority. There are significant problems over the operation of education with Polish as the medium of instruction. As a result of action taken by the Lithuanian education authorities, around 100 Polish school classes are to be closed. Recently, significant restrictions have been imposed on artistic groups which propagate Polish culture.

There is a strange imbalance here, because Lithuanians in Poland are guaranteed all their rights and receive large subsidies from the Polish state budget. It is time for an elementary and civilised response. It is time international organisations, including our own European Parliament, took up the matter of discrimination against Poles in Lithuania.

Gerard Batten (EFD). – Mr President, this evening, I attended a reception for the Shen Yun Performing Arts Group in the Members' Salon. Last year, I had the pleasure of seeing the Shen Yun Show in London. Its purpose is to revive interest in and to illustrate traditional Chinese culture, a culture of course that the Chinese Communist Party and government have done their best to destroy over the last 60 years.

I was appalled to learn this evening that a planned performance in Romania in April had been cancelled because of pressure from the Chinese Government. It is completely unacceptable that Romania, a country that claims to be a democracy, allows itself to be pressurised in this way by a Communist tyranny. I should also say that Shen Yun promotes the philosophy of truthfulness, tolerance and compassion so it is not surprising that the Chinese Government and Communist Party fear that contrary ideology.

I would like to suggest to the President, Mr Buzek, that we redress the situation by inviting Shen Yun to stage a sample performance in the Parliament at the earliest convenient date. This would be a clear gesture of support to those incomparably brave Chinese democracy activists.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Mr President, I would like to take this opportunity to condemn in this House the fake use of Irish, British, French and German passports in the recent killing of the Hamas commander. The chief of the Dubai police said he was 99% certain that Mossad was behind the killing.

If that is the case, this was a flagrant abuse of EU passports to commit a crime in a third country and particularly a breach of trust where Ireland is concerned because, ever since we got our independence in 1922, we have been a neutral and friendly country thus allowing our citizens to travel, maybe more freely, in places where other people would not be allowed to travel.

The use of the fake passports in this situation has jeopardised that position, especially in Dubai. I would call on the High Representative in particular to investigate this matter and, if the government or Mossad were behind it, redress should be given to us and to the other countries involved.

Alan Kelly (S&D). – Mr President, we will get over this confusion eventually. The regional aid map for State aid rules in Europe is in serious need of redrawing. A major concern is that when I wrote to the previous Commission on this, they were basing their policy on 2006 figures from Eurostat. Now that the regional aid map is up for review, it is extremely important to recognise that the European economy is in a dramatically different picture. Taking just one example in my own country, unemployment levels in the mid-west of the country have grown by over 40% in the last year and this without mentioning the previous years where figures were rising already. Areas in the mid-west, like Limerick, Clare and Tipperary, need large-scale state funding to stimulate primary job creation, and it is getting to critical levels.

Given the dramatic turnaround in the Irish economy, as in other economies, the years of 2006 and 2007 might as well have been a lifetime ago. While I recognise that it is partly up to Member States to inform the

Commission of any changes in their economic status, the approach of the Commission should not remain the same regardless.

Corneliu Vadim Tudor (NI). – (RO) Ladies and gentlemen, I think that the most important gift that God has given Man is the dog. You are familiar with the quotation from Madame Roland, who would be guillotined during the French Revolution: ‘The more I see of men, the more I admire dogs,’ while Lord Byron wrote: ‘Dogs have all the virtues of man without his vices.’

I represent in this Chamber several millions of animal-lovers from my country who are outraged by the cruelty shown towards stray dogs which are ruthlessly killed. Foreign visitors to Romania are appalled to see dogs’ dead bodies lying on the roads, a barbaric sight which even children have to witness. At the moment, the prefect of Bucharest is requesting an amendment to a law amended by the Romanian Parliament, calling for the elimination of stray dogs. However, dogs are guardian angels. It is also well known that in days gone by, they helped protect the health of the inhabitants of fortified towns because where there are dogs, there are no rats or snakes.

I ask the European Parliament to request that the Romanian Government complies with the Universal Declaration of Animal Rights issued in Paris in 1978. We must put an end to the massacre of stray dogs in Romania. Anyone who does not love animals does not love people either. For goodness’ sake, we are, after all, living in the third millennium AD!

Ramon Tremosa i Balcells (ALDE). – Mr President, I would like to denounce the situation of the Catalan and European swine sector. The price of pigs has continued to decrease for over a year and for several months now, has been clearly below the production cost. One of the reasons why it is happening is because of pig imports from emerging countries. In too many cases, these imports enter the European Union without being sufficiently controlled at European customs.

In too many cases, these pig imports do not fulfil several European regulations on quality and food security that the European Union imposes only on European producers. It seems that the same will happen in the coming years: increasing animal welfare requirements for European producers but with no controls on imports from emerging countries.

This is a clear case of unfair competition. In this way, Europe will lose its farmers and pig producers and, without them, Europe will lose an important part of its agri-food industry. These worries I wanted to share with you.

Valdemar Tomaševski (ECR). – (PL) Mr President, I would like to refer to the situation of national minorities in Lithuania, where their rights are continually being reduced.

In Lithuania, in areas populated by concentrations of national minorities, there is a general ban on the use of bilingual information signs, which have been used for 20 years. Schools for national minorities have had their subsidies reduced, and preparations are being made for their closure as part of what is being called a ‘reform’. The original spelling of foreign names cannot be used in identity documents. Furthermore, difficulties are being created for Poles in Lithuania who are trying to regain land seized by the Communist system, and recently even the cultural life of minorities has been hit. Wilia, the oldest traditional Polish song and dance group in Lithuania, has had its government funding reduced to a quarter of its former level, and three full-time positions have been closed, leaving only one.

The rights of national minorities in Lithuania should be respected as the Union requires in its motto: Unity in Diversity.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE). – Mr President, Mr Tremosa i Balcells raised the issue of low-cost production in agriculture and it is an issue which I have huge concerns about, as do many others in this House. However, I am more concerned about the Commission and how they view agriculture, rural areas and indeed the food industry because, in the EU 2020 strategy, they seem to have almost forgotten about this vital sector of the European Union. I would urge the Commission not to ignore this important area. I hope that it does not reflect a view that this sector is not important any more, particularly as we look at reforming the European Union’s budget.

I would remind the Commission that the agriculture and food sector is vital for food security reasons, for environmental protection reasons, and for jobs in rural areas. I think that this view needs to be reflected in the EU 2020 strategy.

I thank a young farmers' organisation in Ireland, Macra na Feirme, who represent men and women, for bringing this matter to my attention and I hope the Commission is listening.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) The unemployment rate hit 10% in the euro area at the start of the year, compared to 9.6% in the EU-27. The figure for young people is more than 21%. Roughly 20 million companies operate in the European Union, excluding the financial sector, with 99% of these being small and medium-sized enterprises. Two thirds of the total workforce in the private sector are employed by SMEs.

I call on the Commission and Member States to draw up a package of measures aimed specifically at supporting SMEs to help them out of the economic and financial crisis. This package of measures should also be targeted at those proposing to set up small or medium-sized businesses. These measures might include, for example, the suitable adaptation of the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund and the Seventh Framework Programme for research, as well as the simplification of the administrative criteria and procedures to facilitate SMEs' access to projects carried out using European funds.

Last but not least, as in the case of the farmers, I propose granting government guarantees for loans taken out by SMEs to help them out of the crisis, obviously for a fixed period of time and up to a certain ceiling.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, the problem of illegal immigration in Greece is far worse than in the rest of the European Union, as we all know. There are various reasons for this, ranging from its geographical location to its long coastal border.

Under these circumstances, the initiative by the Greek Government, which is facilitating the acquisition of Greek nationality by immigrants in an unprecedented manner, is – at best – an improvisation in times such as these and has given rise to the following paradox: the proposal by the government of the country with the most acute problem contains the most lenient regulations, at every level, in the entire European Union.

This is encouraging rather than discouraging illegal immigration, to the detriment of legal immigration. It is undermining social cohesion and taking a fragmented approach to the issue, by only examining the last link in a chain which includes illegal entry, asylum, deportation and leave to remain and work in the European Union. It is opening the window to the acquisition of European nationality to an indeterminate number of illegal immigrants.

From this perspective, it is a European question which we should address intensively in the immediate future.

Ioan Enciu (S&D). – (RO) Respect for the right to privacy has become a particularly topical subject of late, with the introduction of new information technologies. In addition to the beneficial impact of these technologies in numerous areas, the issue of intrusion into citizens' privacy has also arisen and, by extension, the need to regulate access to personal data. I am referring here to the fact that citizens must be guaranteed the right to verify the collection, storage, use and distribution of their personal data.

Current data protection legislation has been lagging behind and is no longer able to resolve all the problems which have occurred. A large amount of feedback from public opinion clearly supports the need for tight regulation of the right to privacy. The European Union's efforts to create a satisfactory legal database in this area are welcome but, in my view, they are still not sufficient to meet the new challenges.

(Applause)

Oldřich Vlasák (ECR). – (CS) More than six months have passed since Canada took the unprecedented step of re-imposing visa requirements on one of the EU Member States, in this case, for citizens of the Czech Republic. Canada justified its move on the grounds that, on the other side of the ocean, Czech citizens, particularly Roma, were applying en masse for asylum. In these circumstances I would like to say that in the Czech Republic, the same conditions apply to everyone, regardless of whether they have Czech, Slovak, Vietnamese or Ukrainian nationality or whether they are of Czech, Afro-American or Roma origin. The Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms, which is part of our constitutional law, declares equal national and ethnic rights for all citizens. The fact that Canada explains its actions with reference to the Roma is, in itself, discriminatory, because it is an admission that visa conditions are being changed because of one ethnic group. Instead of costly and administratively-demanding visas, Canada should, if anything, think hard about these conditions.

Agustín Díaz de Mera García Consuegra (PPE). – (ES) Mr President, as you know, on 11 February, Parliament said no to the Terrorist Finance Tracking Programme, the SWIFT programme. Consequently, the agreement has been suspended, and no data is being transferred.

The Commission does, however, have a new mandate to negotiate. The question that I would like to put to the Presidency of the European Parliament – not to you, but to the actual Presidency – is whether we have an interlocutor, whether the United States is negotiating with the European Union following the collapse, or whether it is negotiating case by case on a bilateral basis with certain Member States.

In any case, Mr President, if these negotiations do take place, I demand that the European Parliament plays a role in the negotiations, a demand that I think all of us share.

Mario Borghezio (EFD). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, on 23 February in Villasanta, Lombardy, an exceptional discharge of hydrocarbons from a tank in a disused refinery resulted in massive contamination of the nearby River Lambro.

The scale of the environmental disaster, in which thousands of cubic metres of oil were spilt, not only undermines the ecosystem of the River Lambro, with consequences for the fauna too, but is also in danger of spreading – in spite of the action taken – to the River Po, which runs across the entire Po Valley until it meets the Adriatic Sea.

The exceptional and urgent nature of the situation, which has already led the Lombardy region to request that a state of emergency be declared, is nonetheless such as to require intervention from the European Union too – and I call for a signal via the Presidency – both from the point of view of coordinating the environmental initiatives in the areas at risk, which certainly include the Po area, and in respect of the amount of financial resources that will be required for the absolutely crucial restoration of the environmental situation of this vast area affected by a huge environmental disaster.

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE). – (PT) Regional disparities remain a challenge in the context of the European Union. For this reason, it is essential that cohesion policy continues to support the less developed regions. I therefore welcome the initiative for an EU strategy for the Baltic Sea Region and the ongoing initiative for the Danube region.

I urge Parliament, for the same reasons, to give some careful consideration to the possibility of new strategies for other regions. In south-western Europe, for example, Macaronesia (the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands and Cape Verde) faces various shared challenges, and so a strategy for this region would improve communication systems, preserve the environment, promote growth, scientific exchange, job creation and security, and facilitate the fight against illegal immigration. This would also be a development for Europe's Atlantic frontier and would establish another bridge between Europe and Africa.

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D). – (PT) I would like to point out that, in island regions, air transport is sometimes the only means of access and that operating conditions depend on the volume of passengers and cargo carried. While there are some island regions where these volumes are large enough to attract many air transport operators – bringing competition and low transport prices, and thus improving accessibility – there are other areas, such as the Azores, where these volumes are much lower, and this makes them unattractive to operators. As a result, air fares are higher, hindering the mobility of people and limiting the area's attractiveness to tourists, which would allow their enormous potential for development and for diversifying their economic base to flourish and become stronger. This constraint is particularly harsh in times of crisis such as the period we are experiencing at present.

This means that temporary assistance is crucial for promoting an increase in passenger and cargo volumes so that the market can begin to function. This would also allow these regions, which have a high potential for tourism, to be included in the objectives of the trans-European networks, which aim at expanding towards the edges of Europe.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE). – (PL) Despite the fact that many economists and politicians have already announced the end of the crisis in Europe, we are still struggling with its negative consequences. Monthly data on the level of unemployment in the Union is increasingly depressing. There are currently over 23 million people in Europe who are without work. This means the crisis has ruined the efforts which have been made over many years to promote employment. An exceptionally detrimental phenomenon is the continually rising number of unemployed young people. Currently, one in five young Europeans is now without work. It should be assumed that this situation will lead to exceptionally harmful social consequences, such as a rise in crime, alcoholism, drug abuse and problem families. As for possible ways to get out of the recession quickly, I think we should make good use of our greatest asset – the Community's internal market. Greater coordination is needed at European level to make full use of the possibilities of the common economic space. We need further simplification of the rules for its operation, and we need to develop true economic union.

Claudiu Ciprian Tănăsescu (NI). – (RO) Due to the expiry of its GMP standard in early February, the Cantacuzino National Institute of Research and Development for Microbiology and Immunology, based in Bucharest, has had its licence withdrawn for manufacturing and marketing injectable products, including vaccines. Following the implementation of the corrective action plan drawn up by the management of the Cantacuzino Institute, along with the National Medicines Agency, and approved by the Ministry of Health, the Cantacuzino Institute is expected to regain authorisation to manufacture vaccines in the second half of April.

However, we should not forget that discontinuation of the operation of an institute of national and European strategic importance, such as the Cantacuzino Institute, entails a high potential hazard. This is why I believe that it is important for European institutions to exert tighter control, which will prevent the recurrence of such a situation at European level in the future.

Georgios Papastamkos (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, with all due respect to you, I hereby request that you provide us tomorrow with a list of all those who asked to speak for one minute based on two criteria: firstly, that they did not speak during the previous plenary and, secondly, the time at which they filed their request.

With all due respect to both you and the Bureau, I do not think that it is the Bureau's privilege to allocate time as it so pleases. There are certain principles and the first principle is the principle of transparency.

We shall await the list tomorrow – and I see that other members agree and approve – with the two criteria, namely: the criterion of the time at which they filed their request and the criterion of whether or not they spoke during the previous plenary.

President. – The criteria that we use, as you know, is equal distribution of the speeches between the different political groups based on the size of the group and also giving preference to those who did not speak during the previous sitting. Those are the criteria that we use.

Michail Tremopoulos (Verts/ALE). – (EL) Mr President, not one person from the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance spoke today, while five or even seven members spoke from other groups. I ask you.

President. – This is what I explained before, Mr Tremopoulos. We had three requests to speak from your Group. All of those Members had spoken in the previous sitting. We therefore used this criterion to distribute the speeches equally.

María Muñiz De Urquiza (S&D). – (ES) Are these criteria chosen by you or by the services for the sitting? Are they written down anywhere?

President. – The list of the Members who requested the floor shows which Members took the floor under Rule 150 in the previous sitting.

Based on this information, the Presidency gives the floor to all the political groups. By chance, the three Members from the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance who asked for the floor had already taken the floor in the previous sitting. We therefore did not give them preference. This is what happens. We try to ensure that everyone can speak, in accordance with the size of the corresponding group and the criterion that I explained to you regarding those who did not speak in the previous sitting.

María Muñiz De Urquiza (S&D). – (ES) This might be a very reasonable criterion, but is it written down in any rules or in the Rules of Procedure of the plenary or of Parliament?

President. – The Presidency uses its powers and interprets the correct way to run the sitting in a fair and balanced way for all the groups.

Chrysoula Paliadeli (S&D). – Mr President, I would like to ask whether I am on the list of those who asked to speak today, and whether I am also on the list of those who spoke at the last plenary. Is it possible to have an answer to this question right now?

President. – I will inform you right now. Mrs Paliadeli, you are on the list of speakers from the Socialist Group. The order of speaking is the order in which you asked for the floor: you are registered in the order in which you asked for the floor. We have given the floor to six Members of your Group.

Chrysoula Paliadeli (S&D). – Mr President, on what grounds?

President. – Chronological order – time order. On this list, you were number nine.

I shall continue with the sitting.

(Intervention from the floor)

I have explained the criteria. What else do you want to know?

Corina Crețu (S&D). – Mr President, the only problem we have is that it would be good to know in advance who will take the floor. It is 10 o'clock in the evening and we are staying for nothing if we do not receive a speaking slot. I think we should have a rule that we should know at least two hours in advance who will take the floor in the one-minute speeches.

President. – We will take your comments into account.

John Bufton (EFD). – Mr President, it is not your fault at all but it is an absolute shambles. We have waited here tonight for many hours to speak. It is now 10 o'clock in the evening. The one-minute speeches come in, we get allocated time but it is pathetic. If we are going to spend our time here on important issues for our own regions, we should certainly be allowed to have our say.

There must be a set-up within your organisation, within this nonsense of a Parliament, so that we can actually say that we are going to be here and we can be given time to speak. To think that we spend all this time here waiting and sitting in the hope of getting a speech is nonsense. Our people back in our country, in the UK, are fed up with this nonsense because we cannot speak up for their rights and their issues.

This is an absolutely travesty. I say to you take it back to Mr Barroso. I have mentioned it to him before that this whole thing is a farce. If I am going to be here at 10 o'clock at night on a Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday and Thursday night, then we should at least be given a chance to speak on important issues relating to our Member States. I ask you, Sir, take it back now to your governors because this is not a democracy, it is a dictatorship.

President. – Thank you. I should remind you that Mr Barroso is the President of the Commission, not of the European Parliament.

Sonia Alfano (ALDE). – *(IT)* Mr President, if, instead of all this squabbling, we had had the opportunity to take the floor, we perhaps could have also done our electorate a good turn, since it is 10 o'clock in the evening and we all knew that we should have taken the floor. Every one of us comes here to voice the demands of our electorate. One minute of speaking time is already very little, and shortening the list is, in my view, also rather arrogant.

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, the situation is very clear. We have half an hour for these speeches, so I have to keep to the half hour. Those of you who ask for the floor would fill much more than half an hour. What the Presidency does is to apply rational, fair criteria, and that is part of its powers.

I understand your frustration. What we will do is, along with the Director of the plenary services, look at a way that we can have an approximate idea – as it will never be exact, but at least an approximate idea – of which of you are going to speak, so that we can minimise the number that are waiting. We will do this willingly and do the best that we can.

Now, with your permission, we are going to continue the sitting, because otherwise we will be here all night discussing the same thing.

That concludes this item.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Tunne Kelam (PPE), in writing. – This is a period for critical decisions in the EU and Belarus relationship. The Eastern Partnership programme has offered opportunities for the regime in Belarus to relax its rigid control of society and open the way for democratic reforms. However, this process needs to be reciprocal. The EU's economic assistance and opening of the cooperation projects can result in reliable progress only if each goodwill step by the EU is accompanied by genuine measures toward the re-establishment of an open democratic society in Belarus. The assessment of the situation by Sakharov prize winner Milinkevich is pessimistic. As he told us, the human rights situation has not improved. In fact, it has worsened. At the same time, bearing in mind that the Lukashenko regime depends more than ever on Western technology, money

and markets, the EU has an efficient leverage over the regime's further behaviour. But first we need to understand that the Belarus dictator is probing to see how serious his EU partners really are about the importance of democratic reforms. Therefore, it is so crucial to send a clear message that the EU's priority is real changes in the human rights situation.

21. Major natural disaster in the autonomous region of Madeira (debate)

President. – The next item is the Commission statement on the major natural disaster in the autonomous region of Madeira.

Günther Oettinger, *Member of the Commission.* – (DE) Mr President, honourable Members, the Commission is concerned and saddened by the terrible events in Madeira, especially by the high number of victims. I would like to extend my sympathy to all of the inhabitants of Madeira affected by the disaster. The Commission extends its condolences to the families of the victims, in particular.

Yesterday, my colleague, Johannes Hahn, as the competent Member of the Commission, was able to talk to the President of the Autonomous Region of Madeira, Mr Jardim, who said that the situation remains serious. However, the regional and national emergency services have it under control. It does not currently require support from the European Civil Protection Mechanism.

That said, the damage is so severe that Madeira is hoping for financial aid from the EU Solidarity Fund. The Commission is currently examining all possible means for providing EU financial aid to Madeira. Back in 2003, following the horrific fire disaster, we were able to grant solidarity aid amounting to more than EUR 48 million to Portugal. The Solidarity Fund was created in 2002 to be able to provide financial assistance at EU level to Member States affected by serious natural disasters.

However, the mobilisation of the Solidarity Fund is subject to certain criteria being met. The most important prerequisite is the submission of an application for assistance by the Portuguese Government. May I remind you that the Regulation establishing the Solidarity Fund normally only permits mobilisation of the fund for large-scale disasters where the cost of the damage exceeds a threshold of 0.6% of the gross national income of the State affected. For Portugal, this currently means that the cost of the damage must exceed EUR 958 million. However, in exceptional circumstances, and if particular criteria are met, assistance may also be granted for smaller, 'regional' disasters, particularly if one of the outermost regions, like Madeira, is affected. As the Commission does not yet have sufficient information about the extent of the damage, it is still too early to say whether these conditions will be met.

The authorities in Portugal should now carry out a swift and thorough assessment of the damage and submit an application to the Commission within ten weeks. My colleague Mr Hahn will meet with Portugal's Interior Minister, Mr Pereira, this Friday to discuss where to go from here. On 6 and 7 March, Mr Hahn will visit Madeira in order to see the damage first hand. The European Commission's Directorate-General for Regional Policy will be available to provide any support that may be required to help Portugal's authorities to prepare the application.

I would like to remind you that financial aid from our Solidarity Fund is not paid out straight away. The Fund is an instrument to help Member States deal with the financial consequences of disasters; it is not an urgent instrument. The resources for the Solidarity Fund are provided by means of an additional contribution from the Member States over and above the normal budget. It therefore requires the approval of the European Parliament, your approval in other words, and that of the Council, by means of an amendment. The whole process, from the time of the application until the aid is paid out, will take several months. However, we, the Commission, will make every effort to keep the process as short as possible.

The Structural Funds are not available for immediate emergency measures. They may be able to provide some help in connection with the long-term reconstruction. The Commission will discuss the options and possible sensible and necessary programme amendments in the short term with the administrative authorities in Portugal.

I would like to assure you that the Commission will do everything in its power to help the people and authorities of Madeira to cope with this terrible natural disaster.

Nuno Teixeira, *on behalf of the PPE Group.* – (PT) I take the floor in this Chamber today with my voice weighed down with the distress of someone who personally experienced and witnessed the tragedy that struck Madeira

last Saturday. Obviously, I join in the feeling of pain and grief that has befallen the families of the 42 victims we now know have died, to whom I offer my condolences and respect for their loss.

The true extent of this disaster has yet to be revealed, given that the search and rescue teams, who have been working without interruption since Saturday in a Herculean effort which I salute, are only now beginning to reach the most isolated populations. It is feared that the number of victims could increase.

The scene is one of large-scale destruction, involving significant material damage to access routes, with roads and bridges totally destroyed, and to essential services such as water and electricity supplies. There are more than 600 displaced persons who have lost their homes and personal possessions. The economic and social impact of this catastrophe is preventing people from returning to a normal way of life. However, it is now necessary to look forwards. We also need to send a message of solidarity, hope and confidence to the people affected. Help needs to be given, and the European Union and Parliament, in particular, have a role to play here, as they are fundamental in the process of mobilising the Solidarity Fund. Whenever we are called upon to intervene, we have to do so promptly because we cannot ask the people affected to wait, especially when they need us most.

I hereby appeal to the Commission and its President, Mr Barroso, and to Johannes Hahn, Commissioner for Regional Policy, in particular. I welcome his plan to visit Madeira shortly, and ask him to take this message of hope, assistance and support for reconstruction, because now is the time to rebuild what nature has unfortunately taken from us once again. I have complete faith that we will do so because, as the anthem of Madeira has taught me, 'the people of Madeira are humble, stoical and brave. They are the people who ploughed the earth among the hard rocks; they are heroes of working in the mountain wilderness. For Madeira, they will honour their history and through their work, they will strive for and attain happiness and glory.'

Edite Estrela, *on behalf of the S&D Group.* – (PT) On behalf of the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, I wish to express our condolences to the families of the victims, and show our solidarity with the people affected by the tragedy that struck the Autonomous Region of Madeira, in Portugal, on the 20th of this month. Torrential rain, strong winds and heavy seas rendered the centre of the tourist city of Funchal unrecognisable and left devastation and death in their wake. There has also been great damage to public and private infrastructure, as well as the natural environment and cultural heritage. Initial estimates, Commissioner, suggest that damage will exceed EUR 1 billion, so this will fall within the criteria for the Solidarity Fund. Unfortunately, there are also dozens of dead to mourn, a considerable number of injured and missing people and hundreds of homeless. The images of devastation and suffering have been shown all over the world and no one has remained indifferent. Expressions of solidarity have come from all four corners of the globe.

The European Union and European Commission must also demonstrate their active solidarity with this outermost island region by urgently mobilising the Solidarity Fund, in order to reduce the high social and economic impacts and to help restore normality to the affected area.

I conclude, Commissioner, by asking the following: this Parliament has already approved changes to the Solidarity Fund. Why are these changes not in force? Why are they not being applied?

Marisa Matias, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (PT) We began this plenary session today with a minute's silence. This minute's silence had two meanings: firstly, solidarity with the victims of the catastrophe which struck Madeira and their families, and secondly, a tribute to all the workers who have been tirelessly providing assistance to those victims.

However, a minute's silence must make us reflect and also lead us to reflect on things that go beyond our immediate concerns here. What we saw in Madeira is a phenomenon which will occur more and more often. Climate change is causing these extreme events to take place again and again, and we must find ways of responding to them. We are not able to avoid natural disasters but, at the same time, we must not simply allow them always to have such tragic effects on the lives of the people. That is why we must fight for planning and development policies which are directed at the public good. However, I wish to conclude, Mr President, with something that is more important and which has brought us all here: the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European institutions must have the capacity to provide an urgent response to emergency situations. Financial resources and the required swiftness of operation are necessary for this purpose.

Nuno Melo (PPE). – (PT) The tragedy in Madeira took many lives, destroyed property and tore through the face of a Portuguese island which was proud of its beauty, which so many visitors from around the world have had the opportunity to see. I suppose no one, not even in Portugal – much less in Portugal, in fact – could have been prepared for the horror of the images that were broadcast into our homes in successive news reports, of people being washed away by the waters, houses caving in, bridges collapsing and an entire landscape being altered by the force of nature.

As can be seen from the statements being made here, despite everything, this is not simply a tragedy which occurred in a region of Portugal. It is a tragedy which violently struck part of the European Union which, in solidarity, should provide assistance without reservation. It should unreservedly help the families of the victims who have died and the people who have suddenly been left with nothing, and it should assist in the reconstruction of the built environment, by restoring to the island of Madeira what nature has stripped away. This, Mr President, is certain: the message of the anthem of Madeira has been mentioned here, but I have also drawn a lesson from the anthem of Portugal, which proclaims, 'heroes of the sea, noble people, brave nation'. These are brave people who, as they have shown on other occasions in their history, have always known how to turn things around during difficult times and how to overcome such misfortunes.

It will happen yet again and, on this occasion, doubtless with the solidarity and help of the whole European Union.

Constanze Angela Krehl (S&D). – (DE) Mr President, this is certainly not a nice reason for this debate. Madeira has been hit by an unbelievable natural disaster and we extend our condolences to the families affected. The European Union must provide support in this situation. The solidarity of the whole of the European Union is required here and I can only reiterate what has already been said. I urge the Commission to mobilise the Solidarity Fund as quickly as possible so that help can be provided. I would like to ask the Council to ensure that the reform of the Solidarity Fund that Parliament adopted two years ago is finally implemented, because this will make it possible to provide assistance more quickly to the regions affected.

We also need to look to the future. In recent years, Madeira has received a lot of structural fund resources and will also continue to do so over the next few years. These resources need to be used to take preventative action so as to be able to reduce the terrible consequences of natural disasters and therefore also the suffering. This is something that, as the European Union, we need to implement in the regions and therefore also in Madeira.

João Ferreira (GUE/NGL). – (PT) The disaster on the island of Madeira requires emergency measures and calls for extraordinary financial assistance to be given to this Autonomous Region. Such assistance should be directed towards the reconstruction of the infrastructure and public amenities which have been destroyed or damaged and should also be made available to people affected by the various aspects of the tragedy, whether economic, social or in terms of the family.

Tragedies are not fair; almost always, those who have the least are those who lose the most. It is important, therefore, to identify and compensate, as far as possible, all those who have lost family members, their homes and their livelihoods. What has happened in Madeira has dramatically shown us the importance of strengthening cooperation and solidarity in the European Union as well as in the area of disaster prevention. It is important at this point to build a suitable financial framework for prevention that strengthens and makes use of mechanisms such as cohesion policy, rural development policy and regional policy, amongst others, in order to assist Member States in the implementation of measures to protect people, the environment and the economy.

Danuta Maria Hübner (PPE). – Mr President, I would like to express the sorrow felt by all members of the Committee on Regional Development at the terrible loss of life in Madeira and our intention to do all we can to assist Madeira in its hour of need. Of course, the national and regional authorities are already doing their utmost to relieve the difficulties encountered by the people and especially those who have been left homeless and we urgently await their request for European assistance through the European Solidarity Fund. I am sure it will be treated with the utmost expediency by all concerned.

We ask the European Commission to mobilise all its resources and review with the Portuguese authorities how the ongoing European programmes can be adjusted to assist the region. Let me emphasise that the existing Solidarity Fund continues to have well-known limitations. Back in April 2005, the Commission adopted a proposal for the revision of the regulation, which was then adopted by the Parliament at first reading in May 2006. Despite the undeniable usefulness of a more flexible Solidarity Fund, despite the necessity of extending its ambit of operations to cover unforeseen man-made disasters and criminal acts as

well as natural ones, the Council has been unable to reach a common position on the review of the fund since May 2006.

In the light of the terrible events in Madeira, we see more clearly than ever that we need a Solidarity Fund which could effectively meet the challenges and allow the Union to deliver prompt and effective assistance when Member States suffer a disaster. I would therefore call on the Spanish Presidency to relaunch the process of amending the Solidarity Fund, proving in this way that the spirit of real European solidarity remains at the heart of the European project.

Paul Rübzig (PPE). – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, disasters are, of course, also a consequence of global warming. We need to endeavour to deal with these developments, which we are faced with on an increasingly frequent basis. The question therefore arises as to whether assistance should not be provided from the Globalisation Adjustment Fund, particularly to workers in Madeira, because many work places will, of course, have been destroyed, and whether we could not support the small and medium-sized enterprises in the reconstruction work. We could provide a significant amount of help to craftsmen and the services sector in particular.

I therefore ask the Commission to examine whether resources from the Globalisation Adjustment Fund could not be made available immediately.

Antigoni Papadopoulou (S&D). – (EL) Mr President, I, too, express my deepest regret at the biblical disaster which has hit Madeira and my undivided support for the Portuguese Government. I hope that the tragic outcome in terms of human lives lost and missing persons will not get any worse.

The planet is sending us an SOS message. Climate change, in conjunction with frantic rates of land use and industrial development, demonstrate how vulnerable the environment is. The catastrophic floods in Germany in the past and in countries in Eastern and Central Europe and the fires in Greece have still left open wounds. Disasters definitely have no national borders.

I therefore call on the European Commission to respond positively to the calls by the European Parliament for more energetic action at Community level in terms of preventing natural and man-made disasters and their impact.

I also call for immediate support for the victims in Madeira. It is very important to have an effective Community policy and special emergency funding and a bundle of measures for immediately restoring damage without bureaucratic processes.

My condolences to the victims' relatives.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). – (PT) The families affected by the tragedy which Madeira is undergoing deserve our profound sympathy and all our solidarity as we pay our respects to the scores of dead and injured persons and the hundreds of displaced individuals. The message of solidarity and hope for the people of the Autonomous Region of Madeira after this terrible disaster requires quick measures and simplified and extraordinary procedures to help those whose lives and property have been destroyed.

It is necessary to mobilise the Solidarity Fund, but it is also necessary to use all other funds possible via emergency measures that must quickly reach the families affected by this catastrophe so that the Autonomous Region of Madeira can quickly rebuild the entire affected area. At this time, the prime consideration is the need for swift implementation.

Georgios Papanikolaou (PPE). – (EL) Mr President, the tragic floods which hit the autonomous region of Madeira remind us that natural disasters caused by climate change, a lack of planning and infrastructures and a lack of information and readiness can develop into a human tragedy, as has happened here.

I would also remind the House that, a few days ago, huge floods hit other areas of Europe, such as Bulgaria and the region of Evros in Greece, causing loss of properties.

I would also remind the House that Directive 2007/60/EC requires the Member States to carry out a preliminary flood risk assessment for each basin and corresponding coastal regions in their territory by 2011.

We have a duty to put pressure on national governments to ensure that the directive in question is taken up by the Member States. However, the European Union also has a duty – and I do not believe that anyone will

disagree – to develop even more intensive action in the field of natural disaster prevention, in the field of the protection, in the final analysis, of human life.

Andres Perello Rodriguez (S&D). – (ES) Mr President, sometimes it is due to fires, sometimes it is due to droughts and sometimes it is due to devastating floods such as this, but the south of the Union has become the most obvious and also the most unfortunate demonstration of the terrible consequences of climate change. If we had a European observatory, it would clearly show that this is the case, which is why combating climate change is so important.

It is, however, also important that we now urgently provide assistance to Madeira in this tragedy, and the Commission is urged to act without delay, with the greatest of urgency.

These are the occasions when the Union has to show that it is effective, that it is supportive and that it is close to its citizens, especially those who need it most.

I, along with the Spanish Members from the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament, will support this resolution to help our dear neighbour Portugal, and Madeira. We urge the Commission to get alongside the Portuguese Government without delay, unreservedly and without skimping on resources, in order to alleviate the disastrous consequences of this tragedy as far as possible.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Mr President, ever since I was a kid, my favourite cake was madeira cake and when I discovered there was a lovely island called Madeira, I have had an affinity with it ever since. So when I heard of the devastation last Saturday, my heart went out to the people there, particularly my friend, Nuno Teixeira, and the other Portuguese colleagues, because in my own area, we ourselves suffered from flooding just prior to Christmas.

I was very pleased to hear both the words and the tone of the Commissioner in extending the hand of friendship to the people of Madeira at this terrible time for them, probably to be known from now on as Black Saturday.

But, in the broader sphere, I think that we need to look at the criteria for triggering the Solidarity Fund. Basing it on 6.6% of GDP and EUR 985 million is too high because many of these tragedies are very local, although they can be very devastating.

We need to look at that. However, in the short term, we will do what we can for Madeira and I welcome the Commissioner's statement to that effect.

Jaroslav Paška (EFD). – (SK) On behalf of the Europe of Freedom and Democracy Group, I would like to express solidarity with the inhabitants of Madeira and to express the firm belief that European aid for those affected will come more quickly in this case than it did for Haiti. I would like to believe that both the European Commission and the Portuguese Government will respond more effectively to the natural disaster in Madeira than in previous instances.

I would also like to support my fellow Members who are demanding improvements in the mechanism for providing EU aid in cases of natural disasters so that the aid can be provided effectively and rapidly.

Luís Paulo Alves (S&D). – (PT) I would also like to offer a message of support to the families and friends of the victims of the tragic events of Saturday on the island of Madeira.

As an Azorean, a Portuguese and a European, I must appeal to Parliament and to the Union for a demonstration of active solidarity with the Autonomous Region of Madeira and its people.

It is in the regions that the presence of the EU needs to make itself felt and it is precisely at such times, when solidarity is more necessary than ever, that it is most important that it makes itself felt.

Franz Obermayr (NI). – (DE) Mr President, firstly, allow me to express my heartfelt sympathy for the victims and the families affected. In Austria, we have a simple saying: he who provides help quickly provides twice as much help. That should not be an issue. We need to quickly find the funds from which to make the resources available and get help to those affected without delay. Analyses will also be necessary.

As someone who lives in a mountainous region, I understand very well what happened here. Similar mistakes were made here to those made in our country. We carried out alignment work and hydraulic engineering work without taking nature into account, and out of small streams and channels, great rivers came. I watched

these events, which were also the order of the day in Austria two or three years ago, with horror, in other words, with heartfelt sympathy and understanding. Immediately after the clean-up, after the damage limitation, we need to work together to rectify these mistakes. We offer our help in doing this. We received international help when we suffered our major avalanche disaster in Galtür. International help was needed to enable us to evacuate a whole village and to rescue the people and fly them out. This is an appropriate time to send out a positive signal and to show international European solidarity, and I for one am prepared to do what I can to help in this regard.

Elisa Ferreira (S&D). – (PT) I also wish to express my solidarity with the pain of the people of Madeira and implore the European institutions, particularly the Commission, to release all the available resources and do everything within their power to provide this assistance. I would also like to emphasise that when misfortunes of this type occur, it is much more difficult to address their consequences if they occur in poor countries and poor regions. In the case of Madeira, however, we must also take account of the fact that the economic base of Madeira has been affected due its dependence on tourism, so it has suffered a double blow. Its natural beauty, access routes and quality of life have been completely destroyed. Therefore, the situation really is different when we have problems of this severity in poor countries and poor regions, especially in mountainous and tourist regions, as in the case of Madeira.

It is therefore absolutely essential that there is no more waiting for all the adjustments to the Solidarity Fund that have been requested and proposed, and which have been brought up again here. They must enter into operation immediately because, given climate change, these events will unfortunately occur again and again, particularly in the poorest regions of Europe, as they are the ones that experience torrential rain and extreme drought during the summer.

Günther Oettinger, Member of the Commission. (DE) Mr President, honourable Members, I would like to thank you for the opportunity to speak to you here in Parliament about the floods in Madeira.

You have made an impressive appeal to the Commission to assist Madeira in its current situation and to show a sign of European solidarity. The Commission is prepared to do that. Precisely how it can do that will need to be worked out in the next few days and weeks in close cooperation with the Portuguese authorities. We must, and will, observe the rules of the Fund. Where they provide some leeway, the Commission will use that for the benefit of Madeira. First of all, the damage needs to be assessed and then an application for assistance has to be drawn up and submitted. That is the order in which things need to be done. The Directorate-General for Regional Policy and my colleague, Commissioner Hahn, will provide advice and support in this regard.

Mrs Estrela called for the further development of the key directive and the rules of the Fund. More than four years ago, the Commission presented a proposal in this regard, which Parliament supported. It is currently still with the Council. However, by way of qualification, I would like to say that the proposals that we made at that time would not provide any better opportunities for assistance in this particular case. It is right that prevention must remain an area of focus for our policy. Cohesion policy is therefore precisely the right instrument to use.

I would like to assure you once again that the Commission will do everything in its power to help the people and the administration in Madeira to cope with this terrible event.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS WALLIS

Vice-President

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place during the March I part session.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Maria Da Graça Carvalho (PPE), in writing. – (PT) I wish to express my profound sadness and offer my deepest sympathy to the families of the victims of the natural disaster which has struck Madeira.

I wish to express my solidarity with all the people of Madeira, its institutions and regional government. I am calling for the solidarity of the institutions of the European Union in terms of the swift and flexible application of the Solidarity Fund, especially in assigning the maximum possible amount of funding, bearing in mind Madeira's special status as an island and an outermost region of the EU.

I call on the European Commission to apply the Structural Funds – the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund – on the basis of swift and simplified procedures.

I also appeal to the goodwill of the European Commission to negotiate the reallocation of the Structural Fund resources with the competent authorities on the basis of the Community framework, taking this disaster into account.

José Manuel Fernandes (PPE), in writing. – (PT) I would like to express my profound sympathy and solidarity with the people of Madeira, their institutions and the regional government in view of the tragedy of *force majeure* which occurred on 20 February in the Autonomous Region of Madeira and which caused several dozen deaths, disappearances, displaced persons, injuries and huge material damage. This situation requires rapid and effective measures of solidarity from the EU. Hence, it requires the greatest possible promptness of all those involved in the allocation of the Solidarity Fund, so that it can be mobilised without delay. It is also crucial that the various funds of the European Union be mobilised in a flexible manner, through advance payments, simplified procedures and a higher rate of cofinancing in order to meet the needs of the Autonomous Region of Madeira. We advocate that the Solidarity Fund should be revised in the manner that has already been requested by Parliament. This fund must function as an emergency fund in which lead times are much reduced and the sums made available are increased.

Krzysztof Lisek (PPE), in writing. – (PL) I would like to offer my condolences to the families of those who have died as a result of the floods and landslides caused by heavy rain on Madeira. Nature cannot be cheated, and since we cannot prevent natural disasters, we should do everything to prevent their destructive effects and come to the assistance of their victims. In the face of natural disasters and other crisis situations, the European Union should be able to react rapidly and efficiently by using appropriate resources. In relation to this, as I have already stressed in amendments submitted relating to the draft report of Mr Danjean on the implementation of the European Security Strategy and the Common Security and Defence Policy, it is essential to ensure the efficient functioning of instruments for reacting to crisis situations by good organisation of command centres, appropriate to the needs of action taken as part of the first and second pillars. Good planning and efficient management of these centres will allow successful action to be taken on the territories of European Union Member States and of other states which need help.

In particular, better coordination of rescue, police, military and fire-fighting forces is needed in the EU. Use of specially trained units, like the Polish Search and Rescue Group of the National Fire Service, which holds UN certification, should be taken into account.

22. Investment projects in energy infrastructure within the European Community (debate)

President. – The next item is the report by Adina-Ioana Vălean, on behalf of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, on the proposal for a Council regulation concerning the notification to the Commission of investment projects in energy infrastructure within the European Community and repealing Regulation (EC) No 736/96 (COM(2009)0361 – C7-0125/2009 – 2009/0106(CNS)) (A7-0016/2010).

Adina-Ioana Vălean, rapporteur. – Madam President, I fully appreciate your presence in the plenary this evening. I would like to thank all the shadow rapporteurs for our fruitful discussions and our work on this report. The entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon is giving the European Union more competence in the field of energy policy. I believe this is an area where, if Member States work together, Europe can ensure secure, cheaper and more efficient energy for its citizens. Together, we can minimise the impact of unpredictable events, such as the gas disruption Europe experienced last winter.

Of course, Europe cannot interfere in gas flow outside its borders or solve such disputes, but what we can do is ensure that our infrastructure is able to cope with supply shortages or failures, and make the market more transparent and efficient. Europe has set this priority very high on its agenda. Last year, we adopted a third energy package which aims to ensure a more competitive and efficient energy market. A regulation on the security of gas supplies is currently on the table in Parliament and tomorrow's vote on the regulation on notification of investments in energy infrastructure will contribute to making the market more transparent and more predictable.

In this context, I think it would be a pity to waste the opportunity this new instrument offers, by not applying the correct legal basis provided by the new Article 194 of the Lisbon Treaty. It is a very important institutional, political and legal point. This regulation is not only a tool for collecting information; it can also give an

overall picture of investments in energy infrastructure as a basis for policy making. So, in the event that the Council adopts this regulation on the wrong legal basis, I consider that Parliament should pursue this matter further at the European Court of Justice, and let me assure you, it will.

On the substance now; I have said this before to Mr Barroso and I will say it again to you, Commissioner Oettinger: Europe is standing at a turning point and our priority now should be more than ever to support our companies and create a positive environment for competitiveness. We therefore need strong policies and especially a stronger reliable energy policy. The aim in the end is to ensure secure and cheap energy for both our citizens and our companies. In this perceptive, I should hope that gathering data will not become a purpose in itself. We have to make sure that this regulation will not create yet another bureaucratic burden on companies and that confidentiality of commercially sensitive information will be reinforced.

On another issue, I can only regret that the PPE and S&D Groups introduced an amendment requiring EU companies to provide data on investments in projects in third countries. I challenge anyone to find the legal basis in the treaties that would allow extra-territoriality in energy policy. Furthermore, I believe we should first start proving that we know what is planned at European level before looking outside our borders. I have also noticed the temptation in this House to include everything in this regulation. I think that this is a mistake. For this instrument to be efficient, we must focus on real consistent information and keep in mind avoiding too much bureaucracy and confidentiality issues for our companies and the Commission. I have tried to achieve this balance by, on the one hand, giving the Commission the opportunity of having an overview of possible future developments but also, on the other hand, ensuring that this picture is as accurate as possible.

We also need some certainty about future investments to ensure proper and solid policy making. I would also need to be reassured, Commissioner Oettinger. I want to avoid a situation where the Commission, having gathered the data, starts imposing investment plans and ends up telling companies not to invest here but there. However, it should provide solutions and incentives for companies to make short-term non-profitable investments which may be needed to ensure security of supply, otherwise the loopholes will remain.

I am stopping here. Thank you for your time and I look forward to hearing your comments.

Günther Oettinger, *Member of the Commission*. – (DE) Madam President, Mrs Vălean, honourable Members, the gas crisis at the beginning of last year showed us how important it is for Europe to have an energy infrastructure in place that not only promotes the functioning of the internal market, but that also enables solidarity between the Member States and the regions affected in the event of a crisis. It is therefore important for the Commission to get an overview of what new investment projects are planned or are under construction and which old installations are to be permanently taken out of service. Thus, our proposal is to develop and rework an information instrument that originated at the time of another crisis, namely, the first oil price crisis.

This proposal aims to extend the area of application of the regulation, in particular, in the areas of renewable energies and CCS. We welcome the proposals that have come from within Parliament to include areas of application such as district heating networks or gas, coal and oil production capacities. We also want to take account of existing reporting obligations, provided the information available within the context of the analyses that are to be carried out by the Commission is useable.

(Loss of sound)

(The sitting was briefly suspended because of technical problems)

President. – We would like to try again and see if it works with the German.

Günther Oettinger, *Member of the Commission*. – (DE) Madam President, honourable Members, I raised the issue of how the Commission wants to evaluate the information that it obtains from the Member States in the context of this regulation. Our analyses will firstly look at the anticipated development of the infrastructure in terms of the expected changes in demand. We will consider whether the new capacities that are expected will match the forecasts of future demand or whether we can expect shortfalls.

In this regard, unlike in the current regulation, it would seem important for institutional talks on these subject areas to be introduced. The Commission therefore proposes, firstly, to publish a report every two years on structural developments in energy infrastructure. This is intended to help to improve transparency for all market operators. Secondly, we also want a political debate with Parliament and the Member States in order to draw conclusions from this. I would like to emphasise that last point, because one thing is clear: the

regulation itself is an instrument for collecting and gathering information in order to show us if any action needs to be taken. How we go about this needs to be dealt with in the context of specific energy policy initiatives.

This brings me to the point, Mrs Vălean, that is of interest to you and to the entire House, namely the new Article 194 of the Treaty of Lisbon and its application. For all of us – Parliament, the Council and the Commission – this article represents both an opportunity and an obligation to shape EU energy policy in close cooperation – in other words, together with the European Parliament in particular. As the new Commissioner for Energy, I would therefore like to involve this House extensively in all future policy measures as far as possible and at an early stage. However, the legal act to which today's debate refers only concerns the collection and evaluation of information in the energy sector and therefore is based, according to the Commission's interpretation, on Articles 337 and 187 of the Euratom Treaty. The content of the regulation complies with both of these articles of primary law and, in accordance with case law, the choice of legal basis for secondary law must be linked to measurable criteria relating to content.

No energy policy is established by the collection and evaluation of information alone, which is why, in my view, a decision is needed here. I beg your indulgence in this regard.

Marian-Jean Marinescu, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (RO) Commissioner, you have attempted to explain the reason why we are not working on a codecision basis. I, too, remain of the same view as my fellow Member, Mrs Vălean, the rapporteur for this report, that it would have been a good idea for this regulation to be discussed on a codecision basis.

The new regulation is a legislative instrument of paramount importance to the European Union energy market. This analysis should supplement national and regional strategies and help consolidate energy security by identifying potential loopholes and risks in terms of infrastructure and investment, with a view to ensuring a balance between supply and demand in the energy sector.

I think that the Commission's proposal contains a number of points that are unclear, but which I believe have been resolved through the amendments tabled, such as the issue of publishing energy data sent by Member States. This data needs to be aggregated at national and regional level. This helps prevent the disclosure of commercially sensitive information.

Another issue is the need to clarify what is meant by 'specific body' or a body entrusted with the preparation and adoption of EU-wide multiannual network development and investment plans in energy infrastructure. There is also the issue of avoiding the double collection of this data and determining when reports need to be submitted for a certain project, for instance, after the authorities have received the construction permit application.

Another particularly important aspect is the issue of monitoring in third countries European investment which has an impact on the European energy market. I believe that investments made in third countries by both governments and national companies, which have a significant impact on the energy market, must be reported as part of this regulation.

Adam Gierek, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (PL) Madam President, European integration, security and energy solidarity require common management of investment in all Member States as part of a broadly-understood energy infrastructure and, in particular, of the transmission infrastructure. Optimal solutions for investment in this area require objective information about the condition of the infrastructure in individual national systems, as well as information which is essential to carry out a central EU study of future integration.

What is important is that the element of competition in the common market for products and services, which is influenced mainly by the cost of energy in each Member State, and the need to maintain trade secrets, should not obscure or disrupt integration processes. Let us keep secret only what must be kept secret – military infrastructure facilities.

This is important, mainly because decisions taken about investments such as this, for example, the construction of a northern or southern gas pipeline, should not be exclusively egoistic measures taken in the interests of just a few EU Member States. Let us establish a complex, long-term energy infrastructure plan for the entire Union, based on the principles of cooperation, trust and solidarity. The current Regulation will, unfortunately, serve this end only to a certain degree and, in my opinion, it should, for example, also encompass the priorities of Member States.

Lena Ek, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (SV) Madam President, I am extremely pleased to see the Commission's commitment to promoting best practice and improving energy efficiency in the European energy market. Energy efficiency is crucial for both jobs and growth in Europe and is essential if we are to achieve the 2 °C objective. The two main prerequisites in this context are smart energy grids and a free, well-functioning internal market in energy. Naturally, both these require the Commission to have a good knowledge of the current infrastructure and market – and that is what this proposal is about.

We also need the bureaucracy that deals with this information to be efficient, however. We must avoid duplication and the information communicated must be that which is required to achieve the objectives set. If we are to achieve a functioning market, it is also incredibly important that the information gathered from European enterprises is protected, so as to avoid any disturbance of the market. I will be supporting the author's report and I call on the House to reject the incredibly bureaucratic proposals tabled by the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance.

As mentioned previously, the proposal's objectives are incredibly important – so important that they have been given a separate legal basis in Article 194 of the Treaty of Lisbon, in which they are practically listed word for word. The full participation of the European Parliament through the ordinary legislative procedure pursuant to this treaty should therefore be a matter of course. Anything else would not be worthy of us and would be an incredibly unfortunate start to the cooperation that we need between Parliament and the Commission for a functioning internal market in energy.

Yannick Jadot, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FR) Commissioner, it is good that you want to debate the result of this tool before the European Parliament, but the main thing to respect with regard to the European Parliament is the ordinary legislative procedure. We will find this tool useful, but it could be more operational, more effective and more transparent.

More effective, in particular, if it took into account all the decentralised energy sources. It is not a matter of counting every single solar panel, but at Member State level we have information that you could gather to see what all the plans for decentralised energy add up to. When we are talking about democracy and transparency, I am surprised to hear our Liberal fellow Member reply 'bureaucracy'. This instrument must be transparent, it must be debated, and the Commission must consult all the stakeholders, unions and associations, among others. Finally, taxpayers are contributing a great deal to the energy transition effort, and it is important that we have information on funding, to know exactly how taxpayers are funding energy transition in Europe. I hope that the amendments that have been tabled will be adopted by a large number of Members tomorrow, by more than there are here this evening.

Evžen Tošenovský, *on behalf of the ECR Group*. – (CS) The proposal for regular information on investment projects in the area of EU energy infrastructure is questionable. It will involve EU bodies in the area of competitive relationships between companies that are mostly privately owned. In my opinion, there are two layers to this proposal. One layer concerns the content of such mandatory information, particularly regarding its scope and details. The second layer concerns the level of confidentiality and the ensuing obligations of the Commission to maintain secrecy.

I firmly believe that the information which has to be communicated should be of a more descriptive nature, giving a rough overview of energy networks and their future development. In this way, the Commission would have a sufficient overview of the links between individual countries and, at the same time, also a sufficient overview of existing networks and the outlook for the future. It also logically gives rise to the question of what the Commission would do if it was convinced that there was insufficient capacity in a certain area, or if, on the contrary, there was excess capacity. With a sufficient level of general information, we would also do away with the problem of awkward discussions concerning the maintenance of secrecy in relation to certain strategic plans of the energy companies.

Jaroslav Paška, *on behalf of the EFD Group*. – (SK) Events in recent years have shown us that the energy security of the EU is more a wish than a reality.

The energy systems of the EU Member States are neither sufficiently compatible nor sufficiently interlinked. That is why many countries found themselves in a situation without heat and gas at the start of last year, despite all the solidarity and goodwill of the EU. It will take extensive initiatives from the European Commission to correct this situation, and it is therefore necessary for the European Commission to be informed in its work in a qualified and detailed way, both by Member States and by the private sector.

For these reasons, we may regard the draft Council Regulation concerning the notification of investment projects in energy infrastructure as a natural and necessary step in the extension of EU energy policy, responding to current developments in the field of energy supply in the EU. The amendment proposals included in the report on this point of the programme improve the wording of the regulation and I therefore consider it right to support them.

Amalia Sartori (PPE). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the excellent report by Mrs Vălean makes some sensible points with which I agree.

Firstly, the requirement to guarantee an optimum level of security with regard to the data and the information requested under the proposal, namely that which economic operators regard as sensitive data. Secondly, the requirement to provide for the possibility of aggregating data at a broader regional level as well, given that the national level is sometimes of no significance. Thirdly, notification should have a practical purpose and should complement the analysis of the development of the European gas system.

For this reason, the Commission should be obliged to discuss its analyses with the Member States and with operators in the sectors; this is a commitment that the Commission made here with us.

We must also successfully avoid a duplication of the work that operators, national regulatory authorities and Member States have to undertake in order to define the national plans aimed at protecting the security of supply, with specific reference to the gas infrastructure, and also guarantee that, if operators decide to change their investment plans, they are not penalised in any way.

I shall conclude by drawing attention to Article 1(2) of the proposal, in which the time limits of notification are discussed. The fact that many projects do not go beyond the planning stage must be taken into account. The best possible result could therefore be achieved if notification concerned only those projects that have obtained the necessary authorisations and permits or those for which a final investment decision has been taken.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (S&D). – (RO) I would like to begin by congratulating the rapporteur on the fine job she has done. The Treaty of Lisbon strengthens the European Union's powers in the area of energy policy. EU energy security and solidarity between Member States in energy crisis situations are vital to the European Union's energy policy. The present regulation sets out a Community framework for notifying the Commission about data and information on investment projects in the energy infrastructure for oil, gas, electricity and biofuels, as well as on the projects involving the geological storage of carbon emitted in the energy sector.

In fact, the Commission will be able to submit proposals on how to make better use of existing capacities and identify solutions in energy crisis situations. The regulation must not significantly overload the administrative burden which energy companies have to deal with. However, I believe that this regulation should also be applied to European companies which invest in energy infrastructure projects in third countries and are directly linked to the energy networks of one or more Member States or have a significant impact on them. This is why I hope that Amendment 74 will receive majority support tomorrow.

Roger Helmer (ECR). – Madam President, some of the amendments that we are considering tonight reflect our manic obsession with renewables. We continue to talk about the importance of reducing CO₂ emissions, even while the theory of man-made global warming is falling apart in front of our eyes.

But if we were serious about reducing CO₂ emissions, surely we should be favouring nuclear power stations and not renewables. We have chosen to put in place incentives that grossly distort the market in favour of renewables and against nuclear power.

Europe needs competitive, reliable, mainstream, base-load, generating capacity which nuclear power can deliver. In the meantime, the pathetic trickle of intermittent electricity from wind farms cannot be relied upon to power Europe's industries.

Many countries in the EU, including my own, are facing the prospect of an energy crunch later this decade, partly as a result of the Large Combustion Plant Directive. Unless we get on and build serious generating capacity, by which I mean nuclear and coal, then we will find ourselves with the lights going out.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE). – (PL) The question of energy and the energy network is a crucial issue for the future of the European economy. The significance of energy security is repeated in a variety of documents, debates and meetings. However, in order for words and declarations to be followed by specific solutions and measurable effects, we should first and foremost ensure an appropriate level of financing for investments

which are being planned. According to a report produced by Exxon Mobil, one of the world's largest fuel corporations, world demand for energy is going to rise by around 1.2% annually, so that by the year 2030, demand will have risen by approximately 35%.

The requirement for gas, which will be the second most important energy source, is going to rise by 1.8% annually. Currently, the world uses a little over 3 billion m³. In 2030, it will need around 4.3 billion m³. A consequence of Europe's growing need for gas will be an increased dependence on imports of this resource, from 45% in 2005 to 70% in 2030. In view of these figures, financial support from the European Community for the energy network should be treated strategically.

In the present economic and financial situation, it is especially difficult to find investors for many projects. Only appropriate support from the European Union will enable these projects to be continued. Priority should be given to those projects which concentrate on cross-border needs and contribute to the development of new technologies which are of fundamental significance for the future energy needs of Europe. These projects will help eliminate differences in connections between systems in the European Union, and will make possible further optimal use of the European Union's own sources of energy.

Seán Kelly (PPE). – Madam President, this question is a very important for at least three reasons: firstly, we must think about energy security, because the day is going to come when fossil fuels run out; secondly, our climate change targets for 2020 or, as some people have advocated, 3020 or even 4020; and thirdly, and very importantly, we must reduce our reliance on fossil fuels that come from sometimes unstable and dictatorial regimes.

So time is not on our side and one of the areas which requires grave attention is that of research and innovation. And I am worried about duplication in that area.

I learned recently there were 45 different groups doing research into salmonella bacteria. Now, if this could happen with salmonella bacteria, you could have 450 groups doing the same research into renewable energies, for example, wind energy, solar energy, tidal energy and wave energy.

So I want to ask the Commission what plans they have to coordinate this research so that the best use is made of resources in terms of getting the technology we need.

Ioan Enciu (S&D). – (RO) I wish to congratulate Mrs Vălean for this report. I would like to highlight some aspects regarding the importance of infrastructure investments. Continuous development of the energy infrastructure is the only way to cope with an ever-changing society. The development of existing networks, along with investment in new types of networks adapted to innovative energy resources, is a vital factor intended to facilitate access to new energy sources, both for the population and industry.

At present, regional cooperation occurs *de facto* in the energy sector. However, it needs to be reinforced with clear regulations. Solidarity between Member States must be translated from an idea into reality. Increasing investment in IT systems for monitoring and reporting on fuel stocks during a crisis is also important.

Finally, I would like to emphasise that investments and the deployment of ICT solutions in the energy sector are key to the development of an energy-efficient, low carbon economy.

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE). – (SK) The Lisbon Treaty, which has strengthened the powers of the EU in the field of energy policy, should be actively exploited in order to overcome difficulties and prevent possible problems on the energy market.

The provision of information on investment projects within the energy infrastructure will help to identify gaps between supply and demand in this sector, and will therefore also contribute to the creation of a better common energy policy in the spirit of solidarity, bringing the Member States closer together on the energy market. For the aforementioned reasons, I agree with the view that it is necessary to gather precise and adequate information on planned investments, in order that the EU can make informed decisions on energy policy, based on an integrated picture and on the situation prevailing in all of the Member States.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE). – (PL) A guarantee of stable and uninterrupted energy supplies has become a priority for the governments of Member States of the Union, as it has for the Community as a whole. Special responsibility for this matter lies with the European Commission which, by its actions, should aim to secure energy supplies for the Community by developing and monitoring the correct functioning of the European energy market.

One of the mechanisms of the Commission's multi-dimensional energy policy should be support for effective investment projects in the energy sector. The Commission should carry out regular analyses and research. The analyses should be based on information about investment projects in the energy infrastructure of individual countries, with an emphasis not only on facilities which are currently in use, but also on analysis of investment projects which aim to increase diversification, both of the sources of the raw materials for energy and the way they are transported and processed. When the Commission has similar analyses from all the countries of the Union, it will be able to select the strategy which is most advantageous for the European energy market.

Paul Rübzig (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner Oettinger, one of the key problems in the energy sector is, of course, the storage of energy. I believe that, in connection with the security of supply, we need to think more about the subject of storage. In connection with renewable energies in particular, this is an enormous challenge.

On the other hand, we also need to create intelligent networks. The more renewable energy we have, the more chances we have of making our environment significantly more energy efficient with intelligent networks and, ultimately, also providing households with incentives to use intelligent metering to reduce consumption as well as costs. The increase in efficiency will play a very important and key role in future, not only in the production of energy, but also, and in particular, in the consumption of energy.

Günther Oettinger, Member of the Commission. – (DE) Madam President, honourable Members, I would like to thank you for your valuable suggestions for improvement. The Commission will take steps to ensure that many of your suggestions are taken into consideration by the Member States in the final version of the regulation.

The Commission is aware of the confidential nature of the information relating to planned projects. For that reason, we agree with the suggestions of this House to publish only data that has previously been collected at Member State level. In addition, the data should be aggregated at European level in such a way that no inferences can be made about individual companies and their business policies. This is important in cases where there is only one company operating at national level in a particular energy sector.

As I have already mentioned, we also welcome the extension of the area of application to cover oil, gas and coal production capacities. I do not wish to conceal the fact that the Member States are less favourably inclined towards this proposal, but promise to review the inclusion of these capacities within five years.

Irrespective of our different interpretations with regard to the legal basis for the regulation, I can assure you that the Commission's aim is to have a broad debate in the area of infrastructure. The new infrastructure and solidarity instrument that is to be developed, which is intended to follow on from the Community financial aid to the trans-European energy networks, will provide the opportunity for this, as will the Commission's progress reports on the implementation of the economic recovery programme in respect of benefits to energy projects.

Adina-Ioana Vălean, rapporteur. – Madam President, I should like to thank the Commissioner and colleagues for their interesting input in the debate.

Just a few words in conclusion – or as my conclusion at least. First of all, I would like to stress again that policies should certainly abstain from interfering with the market. Let us not forget that Europe is a market economy and policies are only here to correct the market weaknesses.

Secondly, my opinion remains firmly that we should not use this regulation to verify the correct application of other regulations or include exhaustive information; it is not an exercise in statistics. We must definitely keep the information gathered to a certain degree of relevance, otherwise it will lose its purpose under a massive amount of data. And this regulation is not about devising a policy on renewables or gas.

Finally, I would like to say to my colleague, Lena Ek, that I only hope the aggregated data that we have as a result of this regulation will help us to become smarter in energy issues and will be in our general interest.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 25 February 2010.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Paolo Bartolozzi (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) I congratulate the European Commission on having submitted to the Council the amended regulation on investment projects in energy infrastructure within the European Union.

The report enriches the contents in a meaningful and up-to-date way, and does so for two reasons. The first reason is to provide transparent information on the security and confidentiality of the sensitive data that the Commission will have to receive periodically in order to manage energy policy effectively. The report is in line with the Treaty of Lisbon, in which particular attention is paid to energy policy by means of the strengthening and coordinating of its methods and of the investments required for the sector.

The Copenhagen Summit's failure to satisfy the world's political leaders means that the policies to be pursued require a change of strategy. The European Parliament is paying particular attention to the problem with the aim of overseeing energy investments in the construction, transport and storage of associated energy products, so as to satisfy the production and distribution industries and hence safeguard consumers' health.

The second reason is that, since the EU has a shortage of energy products and internal demand – like imports – is growing every day, EU energy policy must focus on diversification, security of supply and energy efficiency.

Elena Băsescu (PPE), *in writing*. – (RO) The principle of solidarity must provide the platform for devising the European Union's energy policies. If Member States work together, they can ensure a more secure, cheaper and more efficient supply of energy resources to citizens and companies. It is of paramount importance for the European Union to have an energy infrastructure which facilitates cooperation between Member States in order to reduce the problems which crop up during energy crises. This regulation will provide the European Commission with information about energy structures so that it can obtain an overview. This includes data about oil and natural gas infrastructures, as well as for renewable energy sources. After collecting this information, it will be possible to highlight deficiencies in the European energy system and then propose measures to rectify them. Measures taken at European level must supplement national and regional strategies. I believe that it is extremely important for us to protect the confidential nature of the commercial information which is gathered. Furthermore, it is also important to monitor those European investments in third countries which have a major impact on the EU energy market.

Sergio Berlato (PPE), *in writing*. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the proposal for a regulation on investment projects in energy infrastructure within the European Community is an important instrument for promoting an EU-level energy policy effectively.

I support the rationale behind this proposal, namely the need to define a consistent and comprehensive framework for the development of investment in energy infrastructure within the Union that will allow the Commission to monitor the state of development of the investment projects planned in the energy sector.

Monitoring is certainly crucial to ensuring that the policy pursued in support of the projects is transparent, but this is on condition that the administrative burden placed on small and medium-sized enterprises – the driving force behind the EU economy – is reduced to a minimum.

I consider it positive that a compromise has been reached to ensure that the data of operators in the market will be received and processed by the Commission with the necessary confidentiality guaranteed. Investment projects in energy infrastructure are crucial if a free and therefore competitive energy market is to be established.

For this reason, I call on the Commission to provide periodically, on the basis of the data collected, an analysis of the structural development of the energy sector, with the aim of identifying any areas for improvement in the market and any obstacles that prevent it from functioning optimally.

András Gyürk (PPE), *in writing*. – (HU) Not a day goes by without a Member State or big company announcing major investment plans in the energy sector. Various gas pipelines, off-shore wind parks and power stations by the dozen are at the drawing board stage. At the same time, coordination between future investments leaves a lot to be desired. This in itself would be more than sufficient reason to endorse the regulation on the table now, which would consolidate into a unified structure all energy investment notification obligations on the part of Member States. The regulation to be adopted makes it possible to harmonise regional investment and helps joint planning, thus strengthening the energy market and supply security.

I think it is important for requirements in the proposal regarding notification of investments not to place an excessive administrative burden on the authorities of Member States. We have to ensure that the method for notification of investments corresponds to previously adopted rules. It is worth recalling in that regard

that even now, the EU directives for the internal electricity and natural gas market call for preparing 10-year investment plans.

The original proposal of the European Commission did not extend to investments in district heating. For this reason, the amendment including it among the areas of mandatory information provision, proposed by Parliament's Committee on Industry, Research and Energy, should be endorsed. We must not forget that in new Member States, district heating plays a significant role in serving the population. In Hungary, for instance, this form of heating supplies some 2 million people. District heating investments cannot be left out of consideration during harmonisation of energy investment policies.

Edit Herczog (S&D), in writing. – (HU) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, In spite of the great uncertainties regarding the implementation of investment projects for energy industry infrastructures, added to the serious difficulties caused currently by the economic and credit crisis for investment plans in the energy sector, we must see clearly that the key factor in the new European energy policy, which is aimed at guaranteeing a secure supply while alleviating the effects of climate change and maintaining competitiveness, is to invest heavily in the coming years in energy industry infrastructures in the European Union. This is an important tool for shaping a common energy policy.

Without sufficient information about our energy infrastructure, we cannot give effective support to the European energy policy at EU level. It is for this reason that I consider our mutual goal in the Community to be the provision of precise and regular information about investment projects in the EU energy infrastructure, the lightening of the burden of information gathering, the improvement of useful analysis based on information submitted to the Commission, while at the same time easing the burden on private sector players who perform an increasing role in investing in infrastructure development.

Bogdan Kazimierz Marcinkiewicz (PPE), in writing. – (PL) I would like to offer my sincere thanks to the rapporteur for preparing such a balanced report. The consolidated efforts of the Member States and the European Commission, which are contained in the report, will ensure an integrated and improved system of energy security for the Union, while at the same time achieving better efficiency and reduced consumption of energy. As part of Community energy policy, the Commission and the Member States should identify investments which are necessary to meet the EU's strategic needs in terms of the supply and demand of natural gas and electricity. The regulation establishes common frameworks, on the basis of which the European Commission receives submissions of data and information on energy infrastructure investment projects in the areas of crude oil, natural gas, electricity, biofuels and low emission investment projects for urban heating and cooling systems. It is indisputable that one element necessary for maintaining stability in the energy system is, without doubt, coal, which must not be superseded by renewable energy sources, because they will not meet the needs of the continually expanding and developing economic sectors of the new Member States. In pointing to the advantages of coal as an energy source, it should be pointed out that the use of new technologies will allow us to achieve a greater reduction in pollution and gradual adoption of established CO₂ emission limits.

Rovana Plumb (S&D), in writing. – (RO) In the context of the new energy policy aimed at guaranteeing the supply of energy, alleviating the impact of climate change and ensuring competitiveness, energy infrastructure investments have a vital role to play. The new policy requirements such as targets for the fuel mix will alter Member States' policies so that they will benefit from a new, modernised energy infrastructure.

The proposal from the Commission is to revise the current system of notification on energy investment projects. The aim is to gather suitable information on planned investments in order to enable the Commission to monitor the situation regarding the infrastructure and anticipate potential problems. Given that current EU legislation already imposes reporting and notification obligations in relation to investments and infrastructures, the use of this information must be better coordinated so that duplication of obligations such as reporting and confidentiality can be avoided, while also improving citizens' access to information. Even though the proposal mainly focuses on administrative matters, it gives an idea of the nature and characteristics envisaged for future investments.

It is therefore important to put further emphasis on the environmental impact of the projects in order to provide guarantees and additional incentives for building and decommissioning energy infrastructures in a sustainable way and with due respect for the environment. I congratulate the rapporteur.

Richard Seeber (PPE), in writing. – (DE) Coping with the rising demand for energy while at the same time protecting the environment, in particular, in respect of anthropogenic climate change, is one of the major tasks that the EU will have to deal with in the future. In this connection, it is extremely important for the

European Union to be aware of all energy infrastructure projects in the Member States. This will increase the efficiency of the work to produce a European energy solution. The present text regarding the exchange of information on investment projects in energy infrastructure will provide a good overview of existing energy infrastructures in Europe.

It goes without saying that this report must not provide an opportunity for data abuse. I therefore welcome the cross-party compromise, which lays down clear ground rules for the transfer of data. Central monitoring also enables early establishment of whether Europe is focusing too hard on a single energy source. Overall, the report represents progress towards a modern energy mix.

Vladimir Urutchev (PPE), *in writing*. – (BG) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, until now, we have discussed the need to quickly draft a common EU energy policy only when a crisis occurs, like the one in the winter of 2009. We can say with justified concern that things cannot continue in this manner. This is why I welcome Mrs Vălean's report and regard it as an important step towards creating a common European energy policy. It goes without saying that the adoption of a number of directives and regulations for the energy sector will create the necessary conditions for devising such a common policy. I think that we are close to the point where we can even start talking about an agreement on creating an EU energy community. The introduction of a notification system for investment projects in the energy sector in each individual Member State will enable the Commission to obtain the full picture of how the EU's energy infrastructure is developing, while also guiding the countries towards resolving the weakest, problematic areas. This will help achieve a satisfactory, reliable infrastructure capable of both supporting the operation of the internal energy market and alleviating the consequences of crises which occur. The most important fact is that a satisfactory common European energy infrastructure is a prerequisite for a common EU internal energy policy, which the European Parliament has insisted on in a number of its documents.

23. Amending Budget 1/2010 (Section I, European Parliament) (debate)

President. – The next item is the report by Vladimír Maňka, on behalf of the Committee on Budgets, on the estimates of revenue and expenditure for Amending Budget 1/2010 (Section 1 – European Parliament)

(2010/2014(BUD)) (A7-0017/2010).

Vladimír Maňka, *rapporteur*. – (SK) We all know full well that it is only through joint efforts at the European level that we will manage to meet the greatest challenges of the 21st century, which are climate change, the risks and cost of raw materials and energy, economic globalisation and threats to our security.

If Europe is to confront these problems, it must have effective and complex instruments at its disposal. The Lisbon Treaty will provide such instruments.

In December, we approved the budget of the European institutions for 2010. For reasons connected with the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, our work on the budget was not completed in December and it will continue into April. Today we are in the initial stage of the treaty coming into effect, and the EU will need to have adequate funding at its disposal from the outset in order to implement the new policies. The Lisbon Treaty has an impact on the entire range of services of the European Parliament and other institutions. As far as the European Parliament is concerned, codecision making will increase dramatically, covering up to 95% of legislation. Areas such as freedom, security and justice, agriculture, fisheries, research and structural funds have been added. There will be greater use of qualified majority voting in the Council and the creation of a number of new legal foundations in areas such as tourism, sport, energy, civil defence, administration and cooperation. This will all increase the legislative activities of the EU generally, with a significant overall impact on the powers of the European Parliament and its activities, and therefore also on the need to strengthen the administration.

The main priority of the amending budget proposed by the Presidency of the European Parliament in connection with the Lisbon Treaty is to ensure that the European Parliament has sufficient resources to perform its legislative role. Let us recall that the European Parliament set a limit on its own requirements back in 1988. It defined this limit as amounting to 20% of the overall administrative costs of the institutions. In 2006, in negotiations over the multi-year financial framework for 2007-2013, the European Parliament approved this limit as the maximum of the overall administrative costs of the institutions. Since 2006, the costs of the European Parliament have grown in connection with the Statute for Members, entering into effect, even though on the second page of the very same Statute for Members, funding is set aside in Member State budgets. Today, we also need to cover costs arising from the new role of the European Parliament in

connection with the Lisbon Treaty entering into force. It has to be said that the spending limit of 20% did not take into account the Statute for Members or the Lisbon Treaty. In spite of the Statute for Members being in the Lisbon Treaty, we in the Committee on Budgets insisted on the European Parliament budget for 2010 adhering to the 20% limit from the original multi-year financial framework. We have also achieved this.

When drafting the 2011 budget, however, we will have to set out the new formula carefully, in order to ensure the sustainability of the budget in the subsequent period. I would like to emphasise that the best way to ensure budget sustainability is to create a budget based on actual needs and not based on inflation indices. Only this approach will ensure that the budget reflects only actual needs, thereby increasing its transparency and efficiency.

José Manuel Fernandes, *on behalf of the PPE Group*. – (PT) This amending budget is a result of the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon. Parliament has assumed new competences and new responsibilities, so it must have the means to rise to this new challenge. I would like to emphasise that European citizens demand excellent legislation from Parliament and, to secure this, it is important to provide its Members, committees and political groups with the necessary means.

Legal and budgetary standards and good financial discipline are fulfilled in this amending budget. Furthermore, we believe that budgetary discipline and the pursuit of savings are needed more than ever, and European citizens also expect this, in the implementation of this budget. Therefore, we would like to reaffirm the importance of drawing up a zero-based budget which guarantees more rigour and transparency, and we also request information regarding the real fixed expenses of the European Parliament, as a matter of urgency. We also insist on the need for long-term planning in buildings policy, with a view to ensuring budgetary sustainability.

We would also point out that we have reduced the buildings reserve by EUR 4 million. In this way, the total level of the budget now represents 19.99% of the initial heading, heading 5, which was adopted at first reading.

We are certain that these measures will help us to be able to deal with the legitimate concerns, expectations and demands of European citizens.

Göran Färm, *on behalf of the S&D Group*. – (SV) Madam President, this Amending Budget is primarily practical in nature, its purpose being to adapt Parliament's procedures to the new tasks that it has under the Treaty of Lisbon. One paragraph, however, is a point of principle; it concerns the decision that was made 20 years ago now that Parliament should not take more than 20% of the EU's administrative budget.

This decision will result in us marginally exceeding this limit – but more as a result of technical changes than as a result of a new policy. However, this has given rise to debate concerning the 20% rule. Unless substantial cuts are made, the limit will be exceeded when today's decision has its full impact in 2011. There is good reason to discuss changing this 20% rule, since Parliament's role has changed more than that of other institutions, but we should not abandon this principle without due consideration.

I am thinking mainly of two aspects. Firstly, we must consider the fact that many Member States are currently under extreme pressure to cut staff and salaries. In such a situation, we cannot continue expanding the EU administration regardless. Secondly, we must bear in mind that we allocate the EU's administration budget jointly with the other institutions and that in the 1988 decision, we promised that if we were considering abandoning the 20% rule, then this would only take place following dialogue with the Council. This is especially important in view of the difficult negotiations with the Council that are imminent in respect of the External Action Service, the Financial Regulation, the long-term budget, and so on.

I am voting in favour of the report but, at the same time, I would like to sound a note of warning concerning the future.

Angelika Werthmann (NI). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the Treaty of Lisbon strengthens the EU as a whole. It strengthens the involvement of European citizens and it also strengthens the European Parliament. The increase in the status of the European Parliament also brings with it greater legislative obligations. These must be met by each individual Member to the best of his or her knowledge and belief.

In this context, I would also like to mention the slogan of legislative excellence. My 'yes' to the amendment to the Parliamentary budget is conditional. In view of the ever worsening crisis, we need to manage our finances with greater care. However, as parliamentarians, we are also obliged to conduct our legislative work in the best way possible. This dual requirement must be met.

Salvador Garriga Polledo (PPE). – (ES) Madam President, it is proof of the confidence that the Members of this Parliament have in the Committee on Budgets that we are voting for a substantial increase in Parliament's budget, including the Members' parliamentary assistance allowances, and the four or five members of the Committee on Budgets are practically the only people here. This is a good sign that they have confidence in us.

However, the reason why there are two coordinators here from the Group of the Progressive Alliance of Socialists and Democrats in the European Parliament and the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) is to confirm that we fully agree with this increase in the budget as we consider that it does not infringe the standards of austerity that we have imposed on ourselves.

The European Parliament is a very special institution, as my fellow Member, Mr Färm, is well aware. In Sweden or Spain, if we were continually increasing the size of our regions, the number of members of parliament we had and our functions, any Member State would need to increase its parliament's budget.

This is what is happening to the European Parliament, and we therefore need to vote in favour of it.

It is true that in the coming years, we will have to ensure that this expenditure is sustainable, and this will require us to talk seriously about buildings policy and about future policies for staffing and office equipment. All this will have to be considered in the future in the context of sustainability and effective spending.

The Bureau of Parliament and the Committee on Budgets have adopted some dissenting positions, as the Bureau defends the needs of Members and we in the Committee on Budgets defend austerity and the budgetary reality.

I think, however, that the agreement is a good one and that we will be able to adopt it tomorrow without any problems.

Derek Vaughan (S&D). – Madam President, I speak on behalf of the S&D Group but most Members will recognise the need for extra resources after the Lisbon Treaty. However, there are a number of questions on the timing and the funding of these proposals. Colleagues have raised some of those issues.

There are also other questions. For example, if we are to have extra staff resources, on what evidence is this based? Were figures just plucked from the air? Or, if it was based on evidence, I think we should have been given that evidence.

Also, how will the extra staff for the secretariat be allocated? I think we should have been given that information as well.

I also think that, if we accept the extra assistance allowance of EUR 1 500 per month, we should also look at other costs, costs for extra office space which may be required. In fact, we should be given the global costs for that.

This is going to be a difficult decision for Members tomorrow. It is always controversial when you are asked to give yourselves resources. If we had been given all the information I and my colleagues have been asking for, the decision tomorrow might have been easier for Members to take.

Gerben-Jan Gerbrandy (ALDE). – (NL) Given the late hour at which we are discussing this, you might think that our own budget does not tolerate daylight.

Madam President, the Treaty of Lisbon obviously gives us more obligations, more powers and more work, but does that also mean that we need more staff across the board for committees, groups and individual members? I have my doubts. I think that, if we want to be more politic and efficient in the way we work, we can best do that within the confines of the current budget.

Finally, Madam President, there seem to be a number of steps that we need to take. We are not just talking about a one-off increase this year, because it appears that we will increase the budget next year as well, and my group is not in favour of that. If we now agree to an increase because of the Treaty of Lisbon, then this is the only occasion on which we can use that argument. As far as we are concerned, this has to be a one-off increase, not a further one next year and another one the year after. All that would achieve is to mean we would need more buildings.

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE). – (RO) Legislative excellence is a priority for Parliament, and MEPs, committees and political groups need to be offered sufficient resources for achieving this. The new administrative

expenditure incurred by implementing the provisions of the Treaty of Lisbon is now included in Parliament's budget. In addition, the report also emphasises the importance of the extended legislative role which Parliament has and, therefore, the need for additional financial resources to satisfy this remit. Specific actions need to be taken to ensure a stable budget by drafting a zero-based budget policy and long-term planning for meeting Parliament's requirements in terms of buildings policy.

I think that the overall reference for Parliament's budget should continue to be the original programming of the multiannual financial framework in order to ensure that its interests are safeguarded while also maintaining budgetary discipline. At the same time, I believe that the traditional 20% limit must be maintained and I must welcome that a consensus has been reached on not exceeding this limit in this case. I also support the idea that actions aiming to secure budgetary sustainability in future years should be taken, while reaffirming the importance of drafting a budget policy that will ensure greater rigour. I also believe that transparency is required, which therefore means providing clear information about the overall volume of fixed expenses in the European Parliament's budget.

Paul Rübzig (PPE). – (DE) Madam President, at the end of the procedure, I would like to say that the European Parliament has dealt with this matter in a very responsible way. I would like to thank the Bureau in particular for finding a way to respect the upper limit of 20%. During an economic crisis, it is important for all of us to be as careful as possible with taxpayers' money, but nevertheless to ensure that MEPs are provided with good and efficient resources. The EUR 4 million savings on buildings should not prevent us from using the existing resources to make our building one of the most modern buildings in the world so that we can work as efficiently as possible for our citizens.

Vladimír Maňka, rapporteur. – (SK) At this point I would like to thank all of you, ladies and gentlemen, for your views and speeches, and also for seeking a solution within the committee.

I would like to say that in the 2010 budget, we have established systemic measures that can bring financial savings and reduce the pressure on our spending limits. In October last year, we agreed at the conciliation procedure that an administrative audit would be carried out in the European Parliament this year in the INLO Directorate-General and the security service. The aim is to assess whether resources are being used in the best possible way. The audit results should be a point of departure for further progress and greater efficiency. I see further potential savings in the better use of our own resources within the interpreting services or in the area of teleworking. I am expecting up-to-date information from the European Parliament and the other institutions on how they plan to make use of temporarily unexploited resources, not only in the language services but also in rented office space, copying services, etc. I firmly believe that savings in the budget will be achieved through the medium-term strategy in the area of assets and buildings, which will contribute to the sustainability of the EP budget. The European Parliament administration will present the strategy to us in a few days' time. Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to express my thanks once again for your cooperation and for your responsible attitude to this issue.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 25 February 2010.

I would like to thank you all. My thanks also to our technicians and interpreters for eventually getting us through the evening.

Written statements (Rule 149)

Alexander Alvaro (ALDE), in writing. – (DE) I congratulate Mr Manka on his successful negotiations in view of the very tight framework for the 2010 budget. In addition to thoroughly justifiable and necessary adjustments to the personnel and building policies of the EP, there is the, in my opinion, thorny issue of the planned increase in the secretarial allowance by EUR 1 500. It is unfortunate that, for procedural reasons, it is not possible to vote separately on this, as the increase in the secretarial allowance for MEPs from May 2010 decided on by the Bureau is inappropriate at a time of financial crisis. It is certainly the case that, under the Treaty of Lisbon, which has recently entered into force, Parliament will, overall, need extra capacity for legislative work, but after the introduction of the assistants statute from the beginning of the current parliamentary term, there is still no proof whatsoever that MEPs actually need more assistants. Furthermore, the 'purchasing power' of the additional money is very different in comparison in the individual Member States and this should also be taken into account in a report that is still to be drawn up on the results following the introduction of the new rules for MEPs assistants. In view of the current very limited space and working facilities in Parliament, it is also to be feared that the increase in the secretarial allowance by EUR 1 500

adopted today will already create the conditions for further increases, demands and future working facilities. In light of this, the German Liberal Party (FDP) in the European Parliament will abstain.

Cătălin Sorin Ivan (S&D), *in writing*. – (RO) This budgetary amendment provides a response to a real need. In the wake of the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, the European Parliament's powers have increased substantially in a host of areas. The direct consequence of this expansion is a much larger volume of work, the quality of which must be to the highest legislative standard. It is not a case of us asking for money for ourselves, as alleged by the press. However, we need to provide the institution of the European Parliament with the necessary resources to meet European citizens' expectations of this forum.

Georgios Stavrakakis (S&D), *in writing*. – (EL) I, too, should like to thank the rapporteur for his work. Without doubt, the increased powers granted to the European Parliament under the Treaty of Lisbon enhance the role of the European Parliament considerably and formulate tangible and effective responses to the expectations of European citizens. At the same time, however, the increase in its range of activities has created additional requirements in terms of more personnel, both in the administration of the European Parliament and in the political groups and offices of MEPs. The amendment to the European Parliament's budget was not only expected, but was also necessary if we want the European Parliament to respond effectively to its new responsibilities, which further strengthen its democratic credentials. I would remind the House that a similar amendment was made to the Council's budget in order to meet its administrative requirements when the institution of President of the European Council was created and similar proposals to amend the European Commission's budget are expected. Approval of this amendment will allow both the administration of Parliament and the political groups and MEPs to respond better and more efficiently to the new requirements.

24. Agenda for next sitting: see Minutes

25. Closure of the sitting: see Minutes

(The sitting closed at 23.50)