

## WEDNESDAY, 25 MARCH 2009

### IN THE CHAIR: MR PÖTTERING

*President*

#### 1. Opening of the sitting

(The sitting was opened at 9.10 a.m.)

#### 2. Conclusions of the European Council (19-20 March 2009) (debate)

**President.** – Ladies and gentlemen, we have noted the internal political situation in the Czech Republic. I should like on behalf of all of you to state that this should not affect the work of the Czech Presidency and that we must have the will to ensure that work continues. We support the Czech Prime Minister, the President of the European Council, in his work to make a success of the Czech Presidency.

I should like – and I trust that I can say this on behalf of all of you – to encourage the President of the European Council to pursue the ratification process for the Treaty of Lisbon in his country and in other countries where things still need to be done. We have been working on this treaty for the reform of the European Union for 10 years since the decisions were taken in Nice and we want to be able to take the final difficult steps so that this Treaty can hopefully enter into force in early 2010. We need the Treaty of Lisbon for greater democracy, so that the European Union has more freedom of action and for greater transparency.

*(Applause)*

The next item is the statements by the Council and the Commission on the conclusions of the European Council on 19-20 March 2009.

**Mirek Topolánek, President-in-Office of the Council.** – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to welcome you all on the occasion of the regular report from the European Council President following the Council's Spring Summit. First of all I must apologise for not being able to stay through to the end of the debate as usual. The Deputy Prime Minister, Mr Vondra, will stand in for me in the second part, following the speeches of party representatives. The reason I must return to Prague, as already stated by Mr Hans-Gert Pötering, is the unprecedented obstruction from the socialists which we have been confronting throughout the Presidency and about which I have been quite open. If the government falls it will definitely not threaten the Presidency and the fact that the socialists did not care that the Czech Republic was presiding over the European Council and refused even the most basic cooperation will be damaging mainly to social democracy. The Presidency should not suffer through this because I am certain that what I said here in my opening speech in the European Parliament about how we would try to moderate the discussion and achieve a compromise is something that we have undoubtedly managed. The Spring Council provides proof of that. In my country it is customary when someone is speaking for others not to interrupt but it seems habits are rather different here.

Allow me to proceed – keeping strictly to the conclusions of the European Council – to the issue of why I am actually here today and why we took certain steps at the European Council. Before that, however, I would like to comment on the Tripartite Summit with the social partners which preceded the Council meeting. There was a relatively strong turn-out. Apart from myself and European Commission President José Manuel Barroso the next two prime ministers also participated, in other words Mr Reinfeldt of Sweden and Mr Zapatero of Spain, and following the meeting I was very buoyed up and very surprised at the consensus between the social partners not only over the aims of the Presidency but generally over solutions to the developing unemployment situation resulting from the global financial crisis.

If anyone is interested I will speak more about the Tripartite, but we agreed on three basic principles, which are to enable much greater flexibility in the labour market along with labour mobility and to put much greater efforts into boosting levels of education and skills among the workforce in such a way that they can be brought to bear on the labour market, etc. The Spring European Council was actually the second meeting of Heads of State or Government that we have organised but it was nevertheless the first properly formal summit. The topic attracting the greatest attention was of course the question of how to resolve the current economic crisis. I completely reject assertions that we are doing little in the way of more profound measures. I will quote one figure: EUR 400 billion. This EUR 400 billion amounts to 3.3% of EU GDP and represents

an unprecedented step and together with the automatic stabilisers which the EU has and the US, for example, does not have, I believe that the example quoted today by José Manuel Barroso is highly informative. A worker dismissed from Saab in Sweden enjoys social standards that are completely different to those of a worker dismissed from General Motors somewhere in Chicago and the governments in these two cases have completely different approaches, as the automatic stabilisers multiply the EUR 400 billion to something substantially higher and give us an undisputed advantage over the US in this regard. The fundamental support for the agreement from all 27 Member States confirms the validity of the Lisbon Strategy, as it is one of the four pillars upon which the entire Strategy actually rests.

Gordon Brown was here yesterday and he had an opportunity to explain clearly the approach of the 27 Member States, the mandate for the G20 summit and the three other *de facto* pillars to this Strategy. We agreed that all of the short-term measures must be temporary and that is how we view them. The medium and long-term priorities and the Lisbon Strategy objectives were confirmed and the short-term ones must follow the same line. I would like to say openly that the European Council was more or less horrified by what US Finance Secretary Timothy Geithner had to say about permanent measures. Not only is America repeating the errors of the 1930s in the form of massive stimulus packages, protectionist tendencies and calls for protectionism, the 'Buy American' campaign and so on. The combination of these steps and – what is worse – the initiative to make them permanent measures, amount to a road to hell. We should take a look at the history books, which have clearly been gathering dust. I consider the greatest success of the Spring Council debates to be a clear rejection of this route and this short-sighted approach. I categorically reject the claims of European Socialist Party Chairman Poul Nyrup Rasmussen that the European Council has done little to combat the crisis and that we are waiting for the US to rescue us. Not only is the path taken by the US itself discredited by history but also, as I said earlier, social security levels and the general provision of social needs to ordinary people are strikingly different in the US and at a far lower level. The US path is dangerous because the Americans will need cash to finance their social stimulus packages and they will obtain it easily since there is always someone willing to purchase US bonds. However, this puts market liquidity at risk, taking liquidity out of the global financial market so that the sale of other bonds, possibly European ones and definitely Polish, Czech and perhaps other ones too, will be put at risk as there will be no cash in the system. This approach is causing concern and in my opinion it will be a topic of discussion at the G20 summit. The G20 summit will provide just one of the opportunities for us to talk about this. The discussion may continue later at the informal summit of the 27 Member States with the US administration and Barack Obama in Prague. I firmly believe that we will find a common approach with the US because we definitely do not want a confrontation between the US and Europe. In today's world – and the crisis has demonstrated this to us once again – no economy exists in isolation and the level of interconnectedness is very high, which means that in times of crisis we all share the problem and we can solve it only by acting together.

The second pillar of the agreement, in terms of seeking a solution to the current crisis, is preparation for the G20 summit. The documents drawn up by Gordon Brown and his administration are excellent and you had an opportunity to familiarise yourselves with them yesterday. The three-pillar approach involves a solution for the financial sector and fiscal stimulus packages, regulating and – I would say – correcting the defects within the system and regenerating global trade, which means pressing for renewed discussions with Doha within a WTO framework. This approach coincides precisely with the specific make-up of the solution put forward by the European Council which has won unanimous consent. I would also like to applaud the agreement for the fact that we finally provided a concrete number in respect of increasing the disposable resources of the International Monetary Fund and we set this specific obligation at EUR 75 billion. The 27 Member States share a unified position, a single voice and a common aim ahead of the G20. I regard this as the greatest success of all, because the entire European Council meeting was a test of European unity, European solidarity, European values and the unified European internal market. If any of these were undercut, then we would emerge from this crisis in a weaker state. On the contrary, I believe that if we respect these fundamental attributes we will emerge in a stronger state. There is no reason for pessimism ahead of the G20 discussions, as Mr Rasmussen fears. I believe that we have all understood the need to act in solidarity and to cooperate, as Graham Watson from the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe confirms.

The current crisis, as we all know, is a crisis of confidence. The third key area for resolving the crisis is therefore the restoration of confidence. It is not enough simply to pour money into the system. We tried that and the banks are still not lending. The banks must start lending money but they will not if they do not have confidence. The liquidity that is available to them has not solved the problem. Confidence can neither be decreed nor purchased. Within the framework of restoring confidence we have therefore taken a further step towards strengthening confidence by doubling the guarantee framework for countries outside the euro

zone to EUR 50 billion just in case it is needed. We have agreed even on this. We even agreed that it was necessary to avoid a blanket approach and to proceed on a case-by-case basis for each bank and each country and we considered the one-size-fits-all approach to be dangerous at this point in time. Markets are nervous, reacting immediately, excessively and negatively to every signal. We therefore need better regulation. I would emphasise that 'better' might mean the introduction of regulation where none has existed so far. This is where you step in, ladies and gentlemen of the European Parliament. We would like to reach agreement – and there are signs that this is possible – over legislative acts which in essence would fulfil our vision and our ideas on better regulation of rating agencies, insurance company solvency, capital requirements of banks, cross-border payments, electronic money and so on. I would be delighted if you could approve these regulations during your session and if they could take effect and be implemented immediately. I warmly welcome, as we all do, the Larosière report, which has a brilliant analytical section and a very instructive implementation section, and in this sense the European Council has reached clear conclusions. Perhaps the most important task of the Spring European Council was to assess progress to date on the implementation of the renewal plan as set out by the Council in December. It is precisely here that most of the noise and criticism is centred – in my view undeservedly. The plan is allegedly deficient, slow and unambitious. I would like to set the record straight. I have already mentioned the EUR 400 billion or 3.3% of GDP, not including funds for recapitalising banks and guarantees amounting to more than 10% of GDP, which is all the EU can afford at the moment. This will still make a very significant impact on the Stability and Growth Pact and a very significant impact on public debt and on how matters are settled in the 'day after' period, in other words after the crisis has passed, to put it in simple terms. I believe that even the EUR 5 billion which was finally approved, and which forms only a small part of the enormous sum of EUR 400 billion, is the result of very difficult negotiations affecting many countries. This is firstly because a sum of money does not constitute an anti-crisis measure if it is not drawn down in 2009–2010. It is also true that there is no transparent system for assessing projects, no proper list of these projects and that there are some things missing and others of which we have too much. We finally reached agreement after very complex negotiations and here the Czech Presidency clearly played a dominant role in that it brought about the agreement to approve the EUR 5 billion and to send the money to you in the European Parliament, so that you could deal with it.

The renewal plan has a Community aspect of course, in respect of which about EUR 30 billion is available today, as well as a national aspect, in respect of which every Member State within the framework of the plan is implementing its own fiscal stimulus. In my opinion the key issue agreed on by the European Council is the validity of the Stability and Growth Pact. If we want to come through this crisis with a Union that is intact, undamaged and reinvigorated then we must respect our own rules. In my opinion it would be a great error to create new packages without ensuring that all of the national and Community procedures had been initiated, that we knew what their impact would be and whether or not there was a need for further fiscal stimulus measures and the European Council even agreed to this. If it is absolutely necessary the European Council will take further measures, but at this point we do not know whether or not we must take them as nobody knows when the crisis will bottom out or when it will end. It would be completely absurd for us to take further measures without knowing the effect of the steps taken so far with the EUR 400 billion fiscal stimulus. The plan is ambitious, diversified and comprehensive and it will solve the problems of growth and employment differently according to the situation in each country as well as problems linked to the economic situation of course.

The second major theme of the European Council was the climate and energy question. We made significant progress both in energy security and climate protection. Apart from anything else energy security is one of the main priorities of our Presidency and the need for it was demonstrated in January. The gas crisis has not been resolved. A gas crisis might be sparked off tomorrow, the day after tomorrow, in a month, next year, whenever. The proof of what I am saying lies in the fact that even the anti-crisis package of EUR 5 billion is targeted mainly, if not exclusively, at the interconnections between European countries and includes a very wide range of mechanisms and projects aimed at reducing the dependence on one supply route. We have agreed that an anti-crisis mechanism for handling a collapse in supplies must be ready by next winter in order to respond to any problems that might arise. It is more than clear that we need this. It became apparent in January, particularly in Slovakia and Bulgaria, but also in a number of other countries.

The climate debate: discussions and preparations are already beginning for the Copenhagen Conference. Both Denmark, as the host country and Sweden in the course of its Presidency will handle this matter and the Czech Presidency is already working on it intensively. We are trying to find a joint position at the European level. We are beginning to negotiate with the major players without whom the success of the Copenhagen Conference cannot be assured. These include the US and of course Japan, China and India as well as other big countries and large-scale polluters. The biggest discussion – and I would like to touch on this only briefly

– revolved around whether we should now establish not only the mechanisms but also the shares of the individual EU countries in the funding package that we are providing to help developing countries - third countries - to fulfil their obligations within the framework of the climate protection fight. The decision we took was the right one. In a situation where we are negotiating with all of the major players, who for now are acting more in word than in deed, it would be very poor tactics and very bad if we ourselves established barriers and limits which the others would not respect. The negotiating position is far better if we have a free hand and this was agreed by the countries which actually tabled the last proposal, i.e. Sweden, Denmark, the Netherlands, the UK and Poland. As far as the Polish approach is concerned, of course, we respected the interests of countries that are rather wary of this mechanism as well as the interests of countries which play a leading role in matters of climate change. All countries, even those that view this as an absolute priority, agreed that we have yet to find the actual mechanism, the key and its wording, far enough in advance of the Copenhagen Conference.

The third area concerns external relations. The European Council formally approved the Eastern Partnership initiative as an addition to our foreign policy or immediate neighbourhood policy. Given that there are icebergs to the north and the Atlantic Ocean to the west, then it is in the south and east that our neighbours live and it is there that the countries which could potentially threaten both our economy and our social and security situation are situated. The Eastern Partnership was an objective of the Czech Presidency and I am delighted that it has been approved with a firm commitment of EUR 600 million. I would like to pre-empt questions about the participation of Belarus. We are considering this. Belarus has made some progress and the suspension of the ban on granting visas to members of the regime is being extended. At this moment we are holding the door open to Belarus but no decision has been taken. If the Member States do not agree to this and there is no decision from all of the 27 Member States then President Lukashenko will simply not be invited, although both the opposition and the neighbouring states are recommending that we do invite him. I feel that this is a question I cannot respond to if you ask me at this point in time, and that is why I am pre-empting it.

I informed the European Council about the meeting and the informal summit with President Obama on 5 April in connection with the fulfilment of other priorities, specifically the transatlantic relationship. The organisational details have still not been finalised but you will all be informed in detail. The summit will be arranged around three main thematic areas: discussions upon the G20 summit, cooperation over energy and the climate where the EU wants to remain a key player just as the US does, and external relations and the geostrategic area from the Mediterranean Sea to the Caspian Sea, which means Afghanistan, Pakistan, the situation in Iran and of course the Middle East. The summit with the US is important but we should clearly avoid inflated expectations as there is no coming of the Messiah. The US has a host of domestic problems that must be resolved and that is precisely why it is a good thing that Barack Obama will speak in Prague about his fundamental view of this year, in which he will of course want to send a message to EU citizens about the main positions and the main aims of the new US administration.

There were many other issues at the European Council about which I am ready to respond. If I have left something out I will add it in the discussion following the speeches of the party leaders. We will probably not meet again like this because you are leaving to launch an election campaign, but I would be very pleased if you could resist launching it here and now. I hope that the struggle for seats in the European Parliament will be fair and that you will meet again after the elections and continue your work.

**President.** – Thank you, Mr President-in-Office of the European Council, for your determination to continue the work of the Presidency despite the difficult situation in your country.

**José Manuel Barroso, President of the Commission.** – (FR) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, ladies and gentlemen, the last European Council was a Council of practical results.

I should like to pay tribute to the Czech Presidency and in particular to Prime Minister Topolánek, who kept a tight grip on the framework of discussions by focusing them on concrete objectives. The outcome is there to be seen: a series of important decisions in themselves, but also decisions that speak volumes about Europe's determination today. The reality of our decisions shows the reality of our unity and confounds pessimistic expectations which, once again, have proven to be inaccurate. I am going to concentrate on economic aspects; Prime Minister Topolánek has mentioned most of the issues, so there is no need to go back over them all.

Firstly, the Council has endorsed the Commission's proposal to devote EUR 5 billion to strategic energy projects and to broadband Internet. The agreement reached at the European Council clearly reflects the EU's

determination to use all the tools at its disposal and to do its best to prevent the crisis from jeopardising our long-term objectives, particularly in terms of energy security and the fight against climate change.

The second major decision was to double the maximum amount of support granted for the Member States' balances of payments: EUR 50 billion is a very strong commitment. It proves that, even when times are tough, solidarity is not a hollow word in Europe.

Indeed, the best way for Europeans to curb the crisis and to re-establish growth conditions is to coordinate their positions, take action together and support one another.

The third major decision shows that the Union is fully contributing to the effort to be made to tackle the crisis worldwide. The budgetary stimulus given to the European economy, if we include the automatic stabilisers in this, is now approaching 4% of European GDP. However, to this we added – during the European Council – the commitment to support the IMF with a maximum of EUR 75 billion. The Union is playing its part to the full, both by forcefully combating the crisis and by introducing a programme of ambitious and forward-looking regulatory reforms.

Indeed, the European Union has set an example of unity and leadership which, if followed, will pave the way for more wide-ranging solutions at international level. The debate that we held yesterday with the UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, clearly demonstrated this. The European Union is approaching the London Summit with a solid and consistent agenda, based on four pillars: a substantial and coordinated budgetary stimulus, an ambitious regulatory agenda, a strong message against all forms of protectionism, and a sustained commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, particularly for the most underprivileged in the world.

This is a leadership agenda, and I believe that it is nonetheless important to point out – since it was not obvious at the start – that the position of the Member States, which are going to take part in the London Summit, and of the Commission, is in fact the message of the entire Union of 27 Member States, which want to maintain this leadership position so as to introduce a new approach at international level. This is not a technocratic agenda. The challenge is to re-introduce into the economic system, and especially into the global financial system, ethical values without which the market economy cannot function. People must be re-installed at the heart of the global economy. We are in favour of open and competitive economies, but economies in which the markets serve the citizens. That is, moreover, why I support Mrs Merkel's ambitious proposal to create a charter for a sustainable economy. It points out that we are in favour of a social market economy.

However, the European Council also looked beyond the crisis. In the area of external relations, I welcome the support given by the 27 to the Commission's proposals to develop the Eastern Partnership, which we will have the opportunity to examine in more detail during the Eastern Partnership Summit on 7 May. Working with the Union for the Mediterranean, we now have a consistent framework for our neighbourhood policy, which is without doubt one of the main priorities of the Union's external relations.

Mr President, we now need to keep up the momentum on the work of economic recovery; on the EUR 5 billion there is a real urgency. This investment is critical in these difficult times. We all know that the credit crunch has had a direct impact on strategic projects. There are some challenges, particularly the possibility of a freeze on oil and gas connections. It has put the brakes on investment in renewable energy. It has also put research on clean technology on hold. Therefore, we need to have a clear European response.

I know that this Parliament is committed to moving this dossier forward with speed, and hope that your own examination of the proposals will allow you to enter into swift negotiations with the Council, so that they can pass into law by May.

The same is true of the package of existing and forthcoming measures on the financial system. For Parliament and the Council to secure first-reading agreement on these measures before the election recess would send out a powerful message that the EU knows what it has to do to restore order to the financial system.

This is a key building-block in restoring confidence, and this is why the Commission will continue to adopt the proposals as set out in its communication of 4 March 2009 on hedge funds and private equity, on executive pay and on how to follow up on the ideas set out in the report of the high-level group I have established under the leadership of Mr de Larosière. In fact, this report received a warm welcome at the European Council and it was considered unanimously the basis for further work. I am very happy with that result.

We also need to continue to deepen the work of coordination. Coordination is key – coordination and implementation. The guidelines we have set out on impaired assets and on support to the car sector are already being used to direct Member States' action most effectively.

Now we are in the implementation phase of the recovery plan, the Commission will be stepping up its work to monitor how national stimulus announcements are being carried through into action. We have some instruments. We also have the instruments of the Lisbon Strategy that remain in force. We will also look closely at the various national measures being taken to address the crisis and stimulate demand, to see what can be learned and how we can help.

The same spirit should inspire us as we prepare for the Employment Summit. I have said it before in this Parliament: this crisis is causing real hardship, and this is nowhere more visible than the impact on the jobs market.

Unemployment is rising and most likely will go on rising. This is my number one concern, and I think it should be the number one concern in Europe. Workers all over Europe must know that European leaders care. That is why the special summit devoted to employment in early May is so important: to take stock of the impact of the recovery measures so far, to see what is working and what is not working, and to exchange best practices and agree on further steps necessary.

We need to make sure that all levers are mobilised at local, regional, national and European level to cushion the impact of the crisis and prepare people for the jobs of the future. We must, in particular, make the most of what we can do to complete the Member States' action through the European Social Fund and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund.

As you will know, the European Council decided that the summit should take place in a troika format. To be open and frank with you – as I always am – I was disappointed with this decision. I would have preferred all 27 Member States to devote the time necessary to discuss together the best way forward on what is after all the key issue for European citizens in this crisis: the employment situation.

Of course, we know that most of the instruments are at national level, but that should not be a reason for European leaders not to discuss at European level the way in which they can coordinate their actions. We also know that, when we take decisions regarding the financial sector, or when we adopt a recovery plan, these are also measures for employment.

But I think the subject of employment deserves attention to itself, on its own merits, from European leaders. Be that as it may, the Commission is fully mobilised and set to deliver a strong message on 7 May 2009. I personally believe that this summit, which it was decided to hold in a troika format, should be kept open so that all prime ministers who want to participate should have the opportunity to do so.

I would like to tell you, as Prime Minister Topolánek did, that just before the European Council we had a very important discussion with the social partners, together with the Prime Minister of Sweden, Mr Reinfeldt, and the Prime Minister of Spain, Mr Zapatero. I think we saw the willingness of the social partners to engage with us. It is important to send that message to all Europeans, and specifically to all workers in Europe, that we at European level also care about a social dialogue.

We have invited the social partners to come to the Commission. We have organised a meeting in the College of Commissioners, and I am determined to go on working with the social partners, the European Parliament, the governments of Europe, the Presidency, of course, and also with the Committee of Regions, and the Social and Economic Committee because I really believe that, in facing this problem of employment, we need a European mobilisation not only of governments and the European institutions but also of the social partners and all our societies.

I am determined that we should have all the possible options on the table. That is why the Commission will be devoting special efforts over the coming weeks to working with all our partners, and I would very much welcome the full participation of Members of the European Parliament and of this Parliament as an institution. You have a wealth of knowledge about action on the ground.

In short, this was a European Council that took very important decisions on economic and financial matters – these are very concrete results. But it was in no sense the end of a process. We need to keep up the momentum of the process. We need to be open to everything we have to do in face of a crisis that will have, specifically, more impact on social matters. It is important that we retain this determination and that, through

coordination and implementation, Europe will be able not only to respond to the challenge internally but also to make an important contribution to the global response to this crisis of very great dimensions.

(Applause)

**Joseph Daul**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Mr Topolánek, Mr Barroso, ladies and gentlemen, after leading our US partners and the rest of the world from the start of the crisis in an ambitious, but truly necessary, reform of the financial markets, last Friday Europe established a road map for the G20 of 2 April.

During yesterday's debate on the G20, some Members said that this was not enough; others said that it was too much. The reality is that, in the successive crises that we have just experienced, Europe has been there, has coordinated itself, has worked as a team.

I repeat: in the crisis situation that we are experiencing, as with all the global issues – energy, climate change, foreign affairs, security and defence – national solutions are no longer suitable. If even the UK Prime Minister, whom we heard yesterday, extols the virtues of the European Union, declaring himself, I quote, 'proud to be British and proud to be European', I feel secure in my belief.

The decision taken by the European Council last week to put in place a EUR 50 billion fund to help Member States outside the euro zone in this difficult period is a good thing, since what affects one of us affects us all. This is the meaning of European integration. When added to the EUR 400 billion of the European economic recovery plan, these appropriations will help to re-establish growth conditions and to create wealth and, ultimately, jobs. The same is true of the EUR 5 billion package that we have decided to invest in order to support projects in the area of energy and measures linked to the Internet and other issues.

I call on the Council to do its utmost to ensure that an agreement is reached by the end of this parliamentary term on the three major issues currently on the table: credit rating agencies, directives on regulatory capital requirements and the Solvency II Directive. On this last text, the Council must step up a gear to ensure that it can be adopted at first reading, in April.

Ladies and gentlemen, we do not need any more socialist economic measures. We need more jobs, and this package of measures will allow this. Furthermore, I note with interest that not one European leader on the left or on the right backed socialist measures in Brussels last week. That also confirms my feeling that there is not always a great deal of consistency between what is being said currently by the Chairman of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament and what is being done by socialist-led governments, and, Mr Schulz, you still have a lot of work to do to convince your political friend, Mr Steinbrück, to become more social.

I should also like to mention the preparation for the Copenhagen Conference in December and to ask the Czech Presidency to draft some proposals on international finance mechanisms by June. With regard to the energy and climate change package, Europe has set the tone and must not lose its advantage. Climate change will not wait for the end of the crisis. It is therefore our responsibility to convince our partners to take our lead in combating climate change and to adopt the objective of a 30% reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions.

Barack Obama seems to have decided to accept the helping hand we were offering him by deciding to implement an emissions quota exchange system in the United States. To conclude, I wish to express my satisfaction that Europe is finally taking our neighbours in the East seriously by adopting a strategic partnership with Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. This partnership will be a useful addition to the work of the EURONEST Assembly, the initiative for which came from my group and which will come into existence with the agreement of all the parliamentary groups, from the next parliamentary term.

On the other hand, it is high time the Union for the Mediterranean, which was set up last summer, got its secretariat moving in Barcelona and worked on concrete projects. The 27 requested this last week; we expect to have a road map in June.

**Martin Schulz**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr Topolánek, I find it remarkable that you are here. It does you honour in your difficult circumstances. That you are here this morning shows that you are a fighter, but you have yet to understand the remit of the President-in-Office of the European Union. If you come here to engage in Czech domestic policy, then you should not be surprised if we discuss Czech domestic policy. In my opinion, however, you are here as the President-in-Office of the European Council, which is why I fail to understand your comment about obstruction by the social democrats.

(Applause)

In any case, you were toppled by two Civil Democratic Party votes and two Green votes. So what about obstruction by your own people?

Yesterday we heard a speech by a leading European head of government who, as the host of the G20 summit next week, said the opposite of what you said here as President-in-Office of the Council. What Gordon Brown said yesterday was the opposite of what you said here. You said that the path that the US is taking is historically the wrong path. That is what you said here a few moments ago. You said that Geithner's way is the wrong way and leads to hell. That is not the level at which the European Union can work with the US. You are not representing the Council of the European Union, you are representing yourself. That is the big mistake that you are making here.

(Applause)

Now I also understand why people told us at the beginning that it is hard to engage in dialogue with this man. No, Mr President-in-Office, that is the way to take the European Union back up a blind alley.

The President of the Commission said something very important today. He said that it would be a serious mistake to deny the social summit, the employment summit. At a time when millions of people in Europe are worried about their jobs, at a time when bankrupt banks and insurance companies, including in the US, are being bailed out by public funds to the tune of billions or even trillions, which you describe as the path to hell, in a situation in which people know that ultimately they must pay out of their taxes, be they euros or crowns; in this sort of situation the European Council is saying to these people, we have no interest in your employment problems. We have no time for that. That is a fatal signal. That is the wrong signal.

That is why I say, Mr President of the Commission, that your advice to the Council Presidency is not enough. We do not want a troika; we want a discussion open to everyone. He should re-convene the summit, so that the

Heads of State and Government can assume their responsibility of discussing the employment situation in Europe at the beginning of May.

(Applause)

Mr Topolánek, I want to give you three recommendations from our point of view to take with you over the next few days: if you force the governments of the European Union to mobilise 1.5% of their gross domestic product in 2009 and 1% in 2010 as a package to address the short-term economic situation and so far four countries, if I have followed this correctly, meet these specifications, then that is not enough and it is your job as President-in-Office of the Council to ensure that the states honour their self-imposed commitments.

Secondly, please re-convene the social summit. Show the European public that employment policy and initiatives to protect jobs are at the centre of government action.

Thirdly, please ensure in the Council that clarity finally reigns as to what is to happen on institutional issues after the elections. I personally feel very sorry for you. I know that you have advocated the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, but I also know that your own president is on your case and that everything is being done there to stop you getting it through the Senate. We are here to help you. Where we can, we are talking to your ODS senators, trying to get them to agree to the ratification process. No problem, we are by your side and will do whatever we can.

There is still a very separate issue, however: you must ultimately tell us on what basis you wish to proceed. On the basis of the Treaty of Nice, which is in force, or on the basis of the Treaty of Lisbon, which is not in force? To say, we will start with Nice and then we will add a bit of Lisbon, that is just not on. That is why I also say, as far as we are concerned: consultation after the European elections, absolutely, but only once the European Parliament has been convened. I am not prepared to be consulted after 7 June until this Parliament has been formally convened for its first sitting. We must still be able to demand a minimum of institutional respect. So these three points, Mr Topolánek, and then you will regain some prestige with us.

(Applause)

**Graham Watson**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, for all the real suffering there is a light-hearted definition of recession. It is when you go to your bank machine to withdraw money and a sign flashes saying: 'Insufficient funds available' – and you are not sure if it means yours or theirs!



(Laughter)

For all the dark warnings about splits and strife, this European Council has produced a positive package and I congratulate the Czech Presidency on that achievement.

We have a pledge of more money from the IMF, a promise of more support for Europe's most troubled economies and an agreement on moving ahead with European supervision of the financial system. All these are welcome. And I was particularly pleased to see that the Council has saved Mr Barroso's bacon by transferring five billion unspent euros into the recovery plan. Investment in transport, infrastructure and broadband connections will create jobs now and prepare Europe for the future. Meanwhile, money going to the Nabucco pipeline will ease our troubling energy reliance on Russia.

We need a clear assurance from the President-in-Office that funds from the EUR 5 billion will actually reach that project, but also that investment in gas supply infrastructure will not be a substitute for renewables research. Green growth remains essential for our citizens' security now and in the future, and so do the principles embodied in the Lisbon Strategy: flexicurity, the knowledge-based economy, employment regulations that are fit for purpose – these are key to a competitive economy and a successful single market. It is to the Council's great credit that the protectionist language of the past cast no shadow over its conclusions.

But for all the apparent agreement, a niggling nuance remains over Member States' priorities. On the one hand, we have those who focus on robust regulation at international level, and on the other, those who lay stress on a strong stimulus package. This is a false choice. Of course we need supervisory structures with real regulatory bite, but so too do we need counter-cyclical measures to deal with the realities of recession. The long term and the short term: both must be addressed.

Our leaders must be clear about that at the G20 Summit. If we cannot agree on our common cause then we cannot hope to punch at our collective weight. America will come to the G20 with her own agenda. We must arrive with ours and together reach a deal that delivers for all.

President-in-Office, last week at the Council you barely discussed the legal basis on which the next Commission will be formed, but it is no longer only Ireland which is unlikely to ratify Lisbon. I therefore urge you to convene the leaders of Council, Commission and Parliament before this House rises in May to agree on how to compose Parliament and Commission with legal certainty.

There is a moment, President-in-Office, in the famed melody in Smetana's *Má Vlast*, where cello and bassoon rise in crescendo from lugubrious depths to reach a seemingly impossible high note. That moment has passed for your Government. For Europe it is yet to come. See to it that domestic difficulties do not sap your stride.

(Applause)

**Adam Bielan**, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Mr President, I shall begin by congratulating Prime Minister Topolánek on the excellent preparation of the European Summit and on what has so far been a very good presidency. Several months ago many politicians doubted whether a small country in Central and Eastern Europe would be able to carry the burden of leadership of the European Union. Mr Topolánek and his entire cabinet have proved that it is possible. Once again I congratulate you, and at what is a difficult moment for you because of domestic problems, I hope that you will be able to solve those problems and that you will also prepare the next summit in three months' time.

However, because we are among friends, we must speak sincerely. I would like to talk about several matters concerning the summit which I view critically, although my criticism is not directed at Mr Topolánek personally.

I will start with support for the Eastern Partnership. A sum of EUR 600 million has been made available for this over five years, but we know that of this only EUR 350 million is new money. Together this means barely EUR 20 million annually for each country which is part of the project. Is that really sufficient for the EU to build its influence in the region? While talking about our Eastern partners, I would like to ask what has been decided on the question of visas for them? It seems to me that absolutely nothing has been decided. In fact a decision has been made to refuse any kind of cooperation in this area. We must ask ourselves if we want to deter our Eastern neighbours or to encourage them to work with us? It looks as if some Member States, in order not to make themselves unpopular with Russia, are trying to weaken the idea of the Eastern Partnership.

We can see obstruction for the same reason when we consider construction of the Nabucco gas pipeline. The allocation of EUR 200 million to the project, which has an estimated cost of construction of EUR 8 billion, only brings a smile of pity to the faces of our partners. We should remember that for reasons of our own energy security we should be the ones most interested in building a channel for transporting fuel from the Caspian Sea Basin region to Europe, and that the channel should not be dependent on the will of the Kremlin.

At the summit EUR 5 billion was also allocated to the anti-crisis package. Part of this money will go to large energy projects, including EUR 330 million to my country, Poland. Unfortunately, a condition was adopted which is very hard to meet, namely that the money must be spent by the end of next year. That sum has become virtual money, because knowing the tempo of absorption of EU funds by the Polish Government, the money may not be spent and then will no longer be available. Therefore I propose extending the time frame of availability for these funds.

While I am talking about the summit, I would also like to sum up the earlier informal anti-crisis summit held in Brussels, which was an initiative of Mr Topolánek. The participants of that summit unanimously opposed economic protectionism. Meanwhile, several days ago we were given proof that the resolutions made at the summit have little meaning, when the French motor concern Renault announced that it is moving production from Slovenia back to France. Unfortunately, this shows that at a time of economic crisis the EU's fundamental principle of solidarity is giving way to economic egoism. I appeal to Mr Topolánek to put an end to this.

**Claude Turmes**, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Mr President, I think that only history will judge whether the summit last week was a great summit. This morning I would like a wake-up call. We are in a system crisis, and this system crisis can quickly develop into a societal crisis.

Roosevelt in the 1930s won the political battle against the Fascists; Europe lost it. So, why did Roosevelt win? He won because he had the trust even of those US citizens who lost a lot of economic income in the economic crisis of the 1930s. What are the four elements of trust which Roosevelt won?

The first was reregulation. Roosevelt heavily attacked the oligopolies, the big companies in the US, and reregulated the economy. This is exactly what we have to do at the G20 in London. Even if Gordon Brown were the champion of deregulation, maybe this shows that change can happen.

Secondly, strengthen the social fabric. Roosevelt's programme was: firstly, redistribution of wealth as well as taxing the rich and giving money to the poor; and, secondly, a huge programme for young people in the US. What are we offering young people at European level, so that they do not give their votes to the Fascists in the European elections? Thirdly – and Martin has raised this – the biggest error of your summit was the downgrading of the social summit in May. The only way society stays together is if the multipliers in society function, so we need an upgrading of the May meeting and we need a broadening. You also have to call to the table all the environmental NGOs, the development NGOs and the social NGOs which are preparing, with society and with citizens, the changes we need in society.

Roosevelt's fourth issue was his economic investment. That was the one he essentially lost, because it was only during the Second World War that the economic motor ran again in the US. We do not want to go to war. The war we have to win today is the war against the planet. Our war is green investment – that is where we have to win the war. Therefore, there are two issues.

One is that we need green Eurobonds. Out of the EUR 5 billion we need to park a maximum of money with the European Investment Bank, so as to have leverage for renewables and efficiency. Second, we have to bring the cities of Europe into the game. European citizens do not live in the North Sea, in the dumping areas of CO<sub>2</sub>, you cannot win votes there. We have to win in European cities – and the citizens in these cities – through a smart city programme. That is winning the economy and it is winning the hearts of citizens for Europe.

**Vladimír Remek**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – Ladies and gentlemen, it is generally obvious that we need to find a way to resolve the crisis afflicting Europe and other parts of the world at the present time. It is beyond dispute that our efforts must include confidence building and support for financial stability, as the European Council has also said. However, the problem is one of who can restore confidence and how it can be restored. If we leave it mostly to those who contributed to the current crisis through their insatiable greed and if we do not try to support those who create values but who are unable to influence either the actions of firms or entire economies, then the outlook will be bleak. The Council discussion points which talk of the need to tackle the social impacts of the crisis are therefore extremely important, in my opinion. The sharp rise in unemployment is a problem and measures for stimulating employment and preventing job losses are

extremely important for employees. If support is provided only to the largest firms and their managers, then we could not feel enthusiastic about the plan. I applaud the effort to focus on boosting energy security and linking up Europe's energy grids and the overall emphasis on infrastructure development in this area. Apart from anything else, this is one way to support employment and jobs and to secure benefits in the future. We are certainly going to face further critical moments and the current crisis gives us an opportunity to prepare for them as well. In my opinion the renewed support for the irreplaceable role of nuclear energy is a good thing, despite the diametrically opposing views on this form of energy even within the political group to which I belong.

I would like to comment again on the Eastern Partnership. Generally speaking I am of course in favour of the broadest possible international cooperation, but here we can see a clear attempt – and one which is, moreover, explicitly formulated as such – to draw the states of the former Soviet Union closer to the EU and to distance them from Russia. We are therefore establishing a sphere of influence and thus doing something ourselves which we sharply criticise in others.

**Hanne Dahl**, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (DA) Mr President, last week it was stated in the EU Observer that Jacques Delors had a pessimistic view of the future of the euro zone. So, here we have one of the champions of the euro expressing his concern for the EU and the euro in the run-up to the recent summit. He said, amongst other things, that he was concerned about the lack of willingness to clean up the financial sector and to introduce new rules to regulate it. I have not previously had reason to agree with Mr Delors, but in this case I must say that, unfortunately, he is right to be concerned. The conclusions of the summit in this regard are very vague. Throughout the crisis I have repeatedly questioned the Commission about its desire to regulate and control the financial sector. It has no desire to do so. It continually refers to the right of the internal market to govern what happens.

Mr Delors also said something else that, for a eurosceptic such as myself, almost gives me a sense of déjà vu in relation to arguments that I put forward on a previous occasion. He said that the economies of Europe are too different for the euro. Bingo, Mr Delors! That is precisely what they are. The single currency is part of the problem, not part of the solution. Europe needs a strong common regulation of the financial sector, but a large degree of flexibility when it comes to what economic policy will best tackle the crisis in the individual countries.

**Jana Bobošíková** (NI). – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, I welcome the fact that the Council last week postponed a revision of the unrealistic Lisbon Strategy. I also welcome the postponement of a decision over financing climate moves. In this context I would like to applaud the statement of Commission President José Manuel Barroso, who declared that the EU should not make any commitments on climate matters unless other countries, particularly the US and China, do the same. I would like to point out that these entirely rational conclusions were reached by the heads of the 27 Member States and the Commission in a situation where the EU is facing a sharp rise in unemployment and a decline in the economy and the Lisbon Treaty has not been approved. All of this clearly shows that the Lisbon Treaty is completely unnecessary for the adoption of the sort of fundamental decisions that are clearly good for Member State citizens. It is totally superfluous, and this is proven by the current rational steps taken by the European Council based on the present framework of treaties and under Czech leadership.

Yesterday the government of the Czech Prime Minister and EU Council President Mirek Topolánek lost a vote of confidence. I would like to point out to all of you who have had the arrogance here in this Parliament to criticise the Czech Parliament's action as irresponsible that this was a democratic decision by the democratically elected parliament of a sovereign Member State. It is not the government of the Czech Republic which presides over the EU but the Czech Republic itself, whose citizens I have the honour to represent here. I know that my country has administrative and democratic systems that are strong enough for it to fulfil its duties at the EU level unequivocally.

Following the collapse of the Topolánek government President Václav Klaus has the strongest political mandate in the Czech Republic. As you have been able to confirm in this Parliament, he is a statesman with strong democratic sentiments who understands European integration not as the one-way street controlled by the politico-bureaucratic elites but as a complex process which will succeed only if it arises from the will of the people. Ladies and gentlemen, a few weeks ago President Klaus told us clearly that he saw no alternative to EU membership for the Czech Republic. What is more, the majority of Czech citizens consider their country's membership of the EU to be beneficial. All concerns about the irresponsibility of the Czech Republic are therefore completely unnecessary.

In conclusion I would like to point out to the head of the Sudeten German Landsmannschaft, Mr Posselt, who has publicly deplored the downfall of ministers Vondra and Schwarzenberg and who has called on the Czech Republic to set up a strong pro-European government, that the Czech Republic is not the Protectorate of Bohemia and Moravia but a sovereign state where ministers are appointed by the President of the Czech Republic and the government derives its authority from a parliament elected by Czech citizens.

**President.** – Mrs Bobošíková, democracy also means that all democrats can express themselves on procedures in all countries of the European Union and beyond. That too is democracy.

**Mirek Topolánek, President-in-Office of the Council.** – (CS) To be serious, I suppose we are already succumbing to a touch of pre-election rhetoric. Let us try to look at these matters seriously and find unity among the 27 countries, each of which has its own history and each of which is experiencing different symptoms from the ongoing financial crisis or different impacts on the real economy. If we cannot agree on a joint approach then it will not matter who had what starting position at the beginning of this problem because we will all pay the price through a domino effect. That is point number one.

I did not criticise the US approach for the sake of it, but rather because I wanted to point out the advantage possessed by the EU. This advantage consists in an extensive social programme, making it possible for us to avoid investing such colossal sums in the social stabilisation of people who have got into problems. The system quite simply works. Our one major task is to keep the system in operation and to guarantee for EU citizens the same social standards as they had before the crisis. In my opinion this is definitely not a minor task and it will cost a lot of money. We have decided on some very concrete measures and the figures of EUR 5, 50 or 75 billion demonstrate, in my opinion, the European Council's clear commitment to respond in a concrete way to the situation in hand not just through general measures within this or that framework but through very concrete steps.

There is a great difference between proclaiming fine words on a street corner and putting them into practice. Our common aim now is to implement all the steps we have been talking about, to put them into practice and to look for feedback. No one has a precise idea – and I can state in all seriousness that not even the macro-economists have any idea – what the effects of these various steps might be. However, we do know for sure that someone will have to pay for this rescue and for the party. It would be highly irresponsible of us not to consider the aftermath, even though we do not know how long the situation will go on for, and not to consider who will pay for it all and what effect it will have on the euro zone and on the Stability and Growth Pact, and what chance it will give to countries such as my own to join and adopt the euro. I will not be responding to the comments of party leader Mr Schulz. Berlusconi did that before the last elections and I have no wish to repeat his mistake. I think it is not necessary to respond to some attacks. Nevertheless, it is impossible that banknote printers will be the only ones to profit from this crisis. That would not be a good thing.

The job summit. We proposed a full format to the European Council, of course. José Manuel Barroso and I shared this idea because we feel the same need as you to draw the social partners into discussion at a higher level than the Tripartite and to discuss with them problems connected with employment, with implementing various national packages, with the effect on employment and with the next steps that we take in order to protect EU citizens from the impact of this crisis. It was not our decision that this summit would be a troika. I understand the fears expressed by many Heads of State or Government and I myself was wholly in favour of the full format. On the other hand we should not forget that it was only an informal summit, the conclusions of which are not binding. From this standpoint the reduced format might be an advantage, because it means that the recommendations of the informal summit can be presented at the regular June Council where they can perhaps be unequivocally approved. In my opinion this is not such a grave error and there is no need to make a political problem out of it. The important thing is that we found the courage to call this summit, that we invited the social partners to attend, that we will prepare it with them over the long term – ahead of the job summit there will be three round tables in Stockholm, Madrid and Prague – and that we are trying to reach conclusions that will be valuable for the June Council.

The Lisbon Treaty. I will allow myself one joke today. I think that the telephone number to call for questions about the future of the Lisbon Treaty is no longer that of the Government Office and Prime Minister Topolánek, but rather that of the Parliament and Jiří Paroubek. I have to say that responsibility for moving the situation forwards really lies with those who created the situation. I am doing everything, of course, to ensure that I keep to my commitment in order not to have to erase my signature from the stone in front of the monastery of Saint Geronimo in Lisbon.

The Commission. The December summit of the Council made a clear decision and we are aware of the complexity of the situation. I have to say that our ambition is to achieve political agreement at the June European Council. We will of course consult with you: it is essential to have discussions with the European Parliament. In this context we are even considering that if there is sufficient interest from the European Parliament then we could postpone the June Council by a week in order to extend our 10 days of debate into 17 days. I think that 17 days would give us enough time for the debate. These consultations are essential, but nevertheless before we take a formal decision it will of course be necessary to determine whether we are proceeding under the Treaty of Nice or under the Lisbon Treaty, as this will allow us to anticipate what form the agreement will take, whether the number of countries will be the same, whether all of them will have a commissioner, etc. We must take the results of the European elections into account and all I can say is that we will proceed in accordance with the approved, standard procedure, because we are in a kind of legal vacuum and in a situation that must be dealt with politically and in practical terms.

Further discussions related to questions about regulation versus stimulus measures. I have already said in my introduction that in my opinion the EU has adopted an entirely correct approach by not opting for one or the other but saying only that we have rescued the banking sector and now all that remains is to clean it up. The Commission has drawn up a plan on assessing individual bad assets (impact assessments) and on dealing with the problem. In my opinion the only way to boost confidence in the banking sector and also the confidence of the banking sector is to clean up these banks. The Czech Republic and Sweden know how to do this and the US treasury secretary has submitted his own plan for the US. In my opinion this is the only option for tackling the situation. I have already mentioned the stimulus packages. The second pillar of this structure is regulation, which lies partially in your hands. It is also partially mentioned in the Larosière report, which is a fine piece of work. It will involve the regulation of hedge funds and private equity funds and it will of course sort out the offshore sector. You must surely see the great progress over this matter and we are preparing in these matters for a potential next crisis. We are not under time pressure from day to day to come up with the new regulation. We are under time pressure to limit any possible future problems.

There was also discussion about the role of the IMF. We agreed that the IMF should be the sponsor of these future solutions, but the problem is not that we would have a small number of institutions wielding little power. The problem hinges on whether the largest players on the global financial market will respect these institutions as this was not the case in the past. This is anyway a fundamental debate and it will also be an issue for the G20: the acceptance of an enhanced role for the IMF, the World Bank and the OECD in the system of international global financial institutions and respect for these institutions and their findings.

I think it would be good to say something about the Eastern Partnership. Yesterday I met President Yushchenko again and I welcome this agreement and the signing of the agreement between the European Commission and Ukraine. It marks a significant step towards stabilising the situation. I was recently in Azerbaijan where I spoke with President Aliyev. The EU must remain a sort of lighthouse for these countries. This is not a question of erecting new barriers, it is a question of the EU having a mission and its mission is to expand the area of security, the area of freedom, the area of prosperity and the area of solidarity. There are no borders here, and by that we are not saying that these states will become EU members tomorrow, the day after tomorrow or any time at all. If the light is extinguished in this lighthouse, development in these countries will not be under our control. We must draw these countries into discussion, provide them with unrestricted travel opportunities, provide them with economic cooperation, provide exchanges between educational institutions and schools and provide better governance. I think that this is our duty and in this sense the Eastern Partnership provides clear evidence that we are moving in the right direction. In response to the words of Mr Bielan I would say that it was a major success to get the EUR 600 million approved at all. We did not all agree on it, there was no unanimous agreement, but rather it was the maximum possible compromise to which the 27 Member States would agree.

In conclusion I would like to say something about social impacts. Here I must return to the Tripartite and applaud the role of both social partners. We did not talk about how much money we would give to people. We talked about how to prepare people for this situation or for a potentially similar future situation by boosting skills, boosting education and supporting SMEs which create the bulk of jobs. At the current time, of course, the cost of labour is falling because we want to keep people in employment for as long as possible, because getting them back into employment is several times more expensive than keeping them in employment.

Workforce mobility. I am really looking forward to the debates in the various national parliaments, and especially my own, over how we want to amend labour law in order to achieve a more flexible and more

mobile workforce. This is the barrier to a solution. It is necessary to ensure rapid growth in jobs and a rapid solution to the predicament of people who have got into this situation through no fault of their own.

I would like to say in conclusion something about the EU-US summit. I am enormously appreciative of the fact that after the G20 in London and after the summit in Strasbourg-Kehl the US administration headed by Barack Obama will come to Prague. This has enormous symbolic value for us and we are also inviting the President of the European Parliament as I sense a certain disapproval over the failure of the US president to visit the European Parliament. There will not be much time for discussion but in my opinion we need to know what the US wants, what we want and to reach an agreement. We definitely do not want to erect new barriers – that is after all the main aim of Euro-Atlantic civilisation as a whole.

I would finally like to say something about the remarks of Mrs Bobošíková. The Czech administration is managing the situation very well so far. I simply do not agree that we might make some sort of organisational slip-up, that we might fail to manage one of the most demanding presidencies of recent years, because we have repeatedly been confronted with a wide range of problems that would have been difficult for anyone to predict. Our level of flexibility, our level of creativity, our ability to respond, to act and to look for compromises surely do not merit such harsh criticism. The current situation where the Czech Republic has lost a confidence motion also happened in Denmark and Italy, while in France there was a change of government, albeit as a result of elections. I do not view the situation in such a poor light and I can assure you that the Czech Presidency will not suffer through this in any way and that all of us who have responsibility for managing the EU agenda will undoubtedly do just that.

**President.** – Thank you Mr President-in-Office of the European Council. You take with you our good wishes that you will be able to discharge in full your duties as President-in-Office of the European Council and will do everything to achieve agreement on the Treaty of Lisbon in your country also. With these good wishes we thank you for your presence here this morning.

**Timothy Kirkhope (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, I want to express my support for the impressive way in which the Czech Presidency has dealt with some of the crucial issues facing Europe. From the economic and financial crisis to energy security and climate change, the Presidency has been steadfast and clear in its objectives and it has offered Europe clear leadership in testing times.

In particular, Prime Minister Topolánek has demonstrated clear leadership, above all in warning of the dangers of protectionism. When others flirted with erecting damaging barriers to trade, the Czech Presidency has spoken clearly and consistently for open trade and, crucially, for the vital need to uphold the single market. Earlier this month Mr Topolánek said that protectionism is always harmful and, in the case of the EU, it is illogical. We must learn a lesson from the crisis and say 'no' to isolation, 'no' to protectionism and 'yes' to cooperation.

He was so right to remind us all of the fundamental principle that underlines the EU. This honesty stands in marked contrast to the disingenuous and self-serving speech delivered by the British Prime Minister in this Chamber yesterday. Mr Brown's speech was long on hyperbole but singularly failed to mention the central fact that the United Kingdom will, under his leadership, have the longest and deepest recession of any industrialised nation. He ignored his role in putting in place and operating a fundamentally flawed financial regulatory framework. He ignored the enormous debt burden he has placed on the British people.

Europe needs no lectures from the British Government about what must be done to get out of this crisis. Europe and the international community now need to move quickly to restore confidence in our financial systems, to ensure a properly functioning banking system in which individuals, Mr Schulz, and businesses can place their trust and get banks lending again to boost confidence. We must hold firm to the principles of free trade and the single market, and I have every confidence that the Presidency will continue to work hard to achieve these vital goals.

**Poul Nyrup Rasmussen (PSE).** – Mr President, just a week before the European Council, we asked the Council, here in the European Parliament, to agree on clear guidelines and concrete measures towards safeguarding employment and creating new job opportunities. The Council here today is a Council of silence and a Council of illusions. I am sorry, but I have not seen any concrete measures. Yes, EUR 5 billion, but what is that? That is 0.04% of this Union's gross national product. Investing in broadband is OK, but do not tell me that this is having any real effect on bringing down the free fall in jobs that we have right now.

You have not understood that this crisis is a very deep, serious recession. Business is demanding, workers are demanding, we are demanding: do more! The IMF has proposed that you invest 2% of GDP this year and

next year. Mr Barroso, you said that we are doing well; we are investing 3.3%. That was what you said two weeks ago, but now it has increased to 4%. I ask myself: how is that? Well, the calculation is simple. Unemployment is increasing: when expenditure on unemployment benefits increases, the financial stimulus will increase. I guess that, when the number of the unemployed reaches 25 million in Europe, you will proudly stand here and say that our stimulus is now 5% of GDP. Please, we cannot do it in this way. You cannot do it in this way. What we need is real investment.

Mr Barroso, Paul Krugman has said that Europe is providing less than half in terms of real stimulus compared to what the Americans are doing. Can I appeal to you: please, each time that unemployment rises, do not tell people that you are doing more because the Member States are paying more in unemployment benefit. What you must tell people is that you are committed to a new recovery plan. I thank you for what you said today when you wished that this Employment Council on 7 May could be a true Employment Council. We are on your side and will support you in getting that.

We should look at President Sarkozy of France and remember that there was no limit on how many extraordinary summits the President of France held during his Presidency. Now it is proposed this summit on 7 May should be reduced to a troika.

This unemployment crisis will not disappear because we refuse to have more meetings. It will still be there. That is why I appeal to you: we have a recovery plan here; it is well documented. I know that the Commission President knows it and I am sure when we sit down together we can do more than we have done up to now. This is about the destiny of the European Union's economic, monetary and social efforts.

So, one more time: Commission President, let us hold a serious, broad-based, well-planned Employment Summit on 7 May. If you can do that, we will be with you.

*(Applause)*

**Silvana Koch-Mehrin (ALDE).** – *(DE)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the European Union has proven to be a stroke of luck in the financial and economic crisis and the Czech Presidency has also done a proper job thus far.

The extent and the deeper causes of the global financial and economic crisis prove that global macroeconomic management of the financial markets and the legal frameworks which apply to it need to be revised – at national level, in the EU and worldwide. Supervisory legislation must be amended and precautions for crisis management improved. Legislation governing the financial sector should have the effect of blunting rather than exacerbating economic cycles. However, more regulation does not necessarily mean better regulation; what we need is the right regulation.

The dramatic crisis on the international financial markets and the shifts that it has caused are a challenge to the liberal economic order. Erroneous decisions by governments in economic and financial policy and inadequate financial supervision by governments and the manifest collapse of a number of banks are reason to call for a reformed financial system, not a new economic system. The independence of the European Central Bank and its approach to monetary stability are right and have proven their worth.

We also have proof of how important the common market is to prosperity and stability in Europe. The internal market is playing a central role in shortening and dampening the recession in Europe. The Member States need to take fast, targeted and temporary measures to support the real economy, because we know that the EU can create prosperity if it continues to develop the internal market, but not if it is distributing subsidies.

The European Union must therefore continue to work consistently to complete the internal market and offer a framework for competition that works. However, it is also clear that the test has not yet been passed. The European Union must hold fast to its principles. There must be no relapse into outmoded thinking, into protectionism, into a policy of compartmentalisation or into a race for subsidies. The Czech Presidency stands for this and I hope that we can continue to count on that.

**Inese Vaidere (UEN).** – *(LV)* Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank the Czech Presidency for the fact that under its leadership the Council has taken a significant step towards awareness of the real problems and also their resolution. I would like to highlight a few areas in which we need to continue to work. Firstly, there is the creation and preservation of jobs, with the emphasis not so much on social assistance issues, but chiefly on investment in infrastructure and business recovery, so that these jobs may be created. Secondly, the banks have received generous financial assistance in order to re-establish the stability of the financial system, but

they are not in any hurry to take measures in the lending sphere. Here, what is needed is both European guidelines and also proactive measures by national governments, to make the banks aware of their duties at this time and to ensure that they recommence lending to both businesses and individuals. Thirdly, the Structural Funds are in fact the sole source of funds for businesses that will enable business activity to recover, and on the one hand we must increase both their accessibility and the scope of their activities, and on the other decrease bureaucratic obstacles, and increase the time allowed for the acquisition of funds. Thank you for your attention.

**Ian Hudghton (Verts/ALE).** – Mr President, the UK Prime Minister, Gordon Brown, wants us to believe that he is now suddenly proud of European Union unity and that EU's countries are stronger together and safer together. He says now that banking regulation must be tightened up, tax havens tackled and the IMF reformed.

Mr Brown has not a shred of credibility now. His own record of managing the UK economy is one of negligence and catastrophe. He is an architect of the current economic crisis, not a saviour of the world. He favoured the light-touch regulation that is a direct cause of the problems in banking.

The impact of the downturn is, of course, being felt around the world. The devolved Government of Scotland is doing all that its limited powers make possible to stave off its worst effects, easing the tax burden on business through rates relief, speeding up investment in infrastructure projects, and prioritising training and skills development programmes to help people find work.

Scotland is rich in energy resources with tremendous potential to develop renewable sources such as offshore wind, wave and tidal power. EU support for development of clean energy generation and distribution will help not just the Scottish economy, but will also benefit fellow Europeans, contributing to energy security and climate change mitigation. I hope very much that it will not be long before Scotland can play an even more active and constructive role in the world as a normal, independent Member State of the European Union.

**Gabriele Zimmer (GUE/NGL).** – (DE) Mr President, it surprises me that the President-in-Office of the Council, who lost a vote of confidence in his parliament yesterday, is being so harsh on the failed policy of the past. He says that the path taken by the US has been historically discredited. He clearly means that one should not rely on social stimuli in times of crisis and he has publicly stated that one should not push the managers of AIG into paying back their bonuses. However, he has also publicly stated that the responsibility for the financial crisis, for the economic crisis, can be limited to past action by the US and that he does not need to engage in self-criticism and question whether the strategy of commercialisation and competitive pressure and unbridled globalisation by the EU itself contributed to it.

In my opinion, this is clear from the relevant passages in the conclusions of the summit, which state that, in the current crisis, the renewed Lisbon Strategy, including the current Integrated Guidelines, remains the effective framework for fostering growth and jobs. However, it is then also very clearly noted in the reference documents that there must of course be a connection with the approach of sustainable public finances and, in this connection, with continuing pension reforms. That surprises me. It has therefore been worked out that continuing pension reforms is connected with continuing privatisation of the pension system, with an increase in the proportion of old-age care covered by capital.

This again strengthens two decisive causes of the current financial and economic crisis, namely reliance on the financial markets, despite the fact that the crisis was triggered by turbulence on the financial markets, and further sharpening of social divisions in particular. However, it was precisely the explosion of liquid money capital that led to this social division, to a division by income distribution. This is where the corrections should apply. I therefore fail to comprehend why the Commission and the Council failed to adopt the corresponding corrections during their summit talks.

If one talks of the Lisbon Strategy, one must also refer to the Commission's White Paper on Financial Services Policy (2005-2010), which relies on the integration of the European financial services market into the global financial services market and on the corresponding articles of the Treaties of Nice and Lisbon which, on the one hand, prohibit any form of restriction on the free flow of capital and, on the other hand, are pushing the financial institutions into putting an unobstructed flow of financial services in place. That stands in pertinent contradiction to any form of fight against the causes of crises.

**Johannes Blokland (IND/DEM).** – (NL) Mr President, with the Lisbon Strategy we are ensuring that Europe is able to continue to compete with the rest of the world economically. Clearly, that is only possible if everyone really does participate and if we ensure a good living environment, including in developing countries.



The agreement at the EU summit last week is not strong enough to instigate a new, sustainably-oriented economy. The economic crisis, the climate crisis and the energy crisis demand a new approach and that approach demands the necessary investment. The European Union must take a lead in that regard. We had expected an agreement on the funding of the Bali and Poznań climate deals. It is worrying that no such agreement was reached at the EU summit after protracted negotiations by the Ministers for the Environment and for Finance. Where is the EU's leadership when it comes to tangible funding? Kicking the funding of the climate plans for developing countries into the long grass represents a serious undermining of the climate agreements. That is not the leadership that is needed in the run-up to Copenhagen.

**Andreas Mölzer (NI).** – (DE) Mr President, the big European vision has unfortunately made Brussels deaf and blind to numerous undesirable developments in the EU. As the crisis unfolds, the citizens are now paying the price for this; for neoliberal wrong turnings taken in previous years or for less than solid preparations for enlargement to the east, for which they now appear to be locked into a mortgage. Nor will the accession of Turkey, which is obviously a done deal, bring the required energy security; on the contrary it will only bring political instability, Islamism and a hole of billions in our finances.

The EU needs to emancipate itself at the forthcoming G20 financial summit from the role of vassal which it has played hitherto towards US policy and to implement strict rules and rigorous controls. It was Washington's long-standing refusal to engage in any form of regulation of highly-explosive financial paper that laid the cornerstone for the current financial dilemma.

Cuts need to be made during the crisis. There is sufficient margin for savings, for example in the uncontrolled growth of EU agencies. Increasing the crisis fund can only be a first step; we need far more plans in case a country goes bust and we need concepts for the massive social problems which will arrive as surely as an amen at the end of a prayer.

**Werner Langen (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to congratulate the Czech Presidency. Despite considerable domestic problems, it has managed to advance the European agenda during the worst economic and financial crisis for decades. These congratulations come with a request that the Czech Presidency complete its mandate in as good and targeted a manner as before.

When I listen to the Chairman of the Socialist Group, I think I am on another planet. He praises Mr Brown, who, before becoming prime minister, was Chancellor of the Exchequer and hence responsible for the financial policy and framework conditions of the European Union and the United Kingdom. It has been said here on numerous occasions that only a change in attitude on the part of the United Kingdom will allow us to introduce the necessary regulatory measures. How can someone who has obstructed that for a decade today be declared our saviour? I do not understand that.

The Czech Prime Minister's criticism of the US policy of increasing the money supply is justified from every point of view. You cannot resolve the problems with the very means that caused the crisis, namely an excessive increase in the money supply and too much living on credit. Living on credit is the problem.

The first priority, therefore, is to bring the crisis on the financial market under control, change the global imbalances, jointly address the tasks before us in terms of climate protection and the fight against poverty and implement a new morality in the world based on a social market economy. If we manage to do this in this crisis, then the Czech Presidency will have met all our expectations in full, regardless of what happens with the Treaty of Lisbon and the internal situation in the Czech Republic.

**Libor Rouček (PSE).** – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, the President-in-office of the European Council, Mirek Topolánek, opened his speech today in the European Parliament with an attack on social democracy. I would like to say how typical and characteristic that is for this government. Instead of seeking agreement, cooperation and compromise in matters relating to managing the EU, Prime Minister Topolánek has sought and continues to seek dispute and conflict. These characteristics and this inability to cooperate are the real cause for the collapse of his government. I would like to remind you that it was not the opposition which deposed the government; it was MPs from the government's own party and from its coalition partner, the Green Party.

However, I do not want to focus on Czech domestic politics. I would like only to remind the Czech Republic of its responsibilities to the Union and to EU citizens as the country holding the Presidency. Ahead of us lie many tasks. The economic and financial crisis has of course already been mentioned. A Europe-US summit will be organised in Prague. We have an ideal historic opportunity with our partners in the US to cooperate on all of the issues of today's globalised world, from the economy and the environment to the resolution of conflicts in the Middle East, Afghanistan and so on.

In conclusion I would like to comment once again on the Lisbon Treaty. The Czech social democrats have always supported the European Constitution and have always supported ratification of the Lisbon Treaty. This was the case in the Czech Parliament and it will be the case in the Czech Senate once the vote is taken. I firmly believe that the Civic Democratic Party, whatever position it is in, will continue to be just as constructive and just as pro-European and that it will support this document.

**Margarita Starkevičiūtė (ALDE).** – (LT) Every time we discuss yet another summit of Heads of State or Government to solve economic problems, we recognise that the results achieved are good, but, unfortunately, we lag behind events and the implementation mechanism for these decisions is unclear.

What must we do to avoid these problems?

Firstly, countries must evaluate the effect of integration on their own national economic policy. Now decisions are often taken on the basis of past history, how we behaved in situations of crisis. Unfortunately, we live in an integrated European Union with a common market and most often all those decisions fail to have the sort of effect they once had.

Secondly, some sort of temporary institutional framework must be created for the decision implementation mechanism. Wait until the Lisbon Agreement is ratified? People's lives do not wait, we have to take decisions today. It is obvious that there must be greater coordination between the countries in the Eurozone and non-Eurozone countries. How can this be achieved? I believe that a mechanism for closer cooperation could be based on the so-called exchange-rate mechanism, or in English the ERM II. This would help bring both Europes, new Europe and old Europe, closer together and find a consensus.

**Mirosław Mariusz Piotrowski (UEN).** – (PL) Mr President, during the recent European Summit many subjects were raised. One of these was the question of the Eastern Partnership and alternative routes of gas supply. It was decided for the moment to allocate small amounts to these objectives, but it is without doubt a step in the right direction. Europe is facing a huge economic crisis and must look for effective ways out of it. However, we must not depart from our guiding principle of solidarity. We should be especially sensitive to the problems of new Member States.

Although matters related to climate change were discussed at the summit, it can be seen in practice that the crisis which has hit us is marginalising that extremely expensive pseudo-scientific project. Financial means designated for that purpose should be diverted to an effective, united fight with the effects of the crisis. The domestic situation in the Czech Republic should not in any way interfere with this.

**Rebecca Harms (Verts/ALE).** – (DE) Mr President, I was delighted to see Mr Vondra here in plenary this morning and I am delighted about the signal from the Presidency that it will continue working. In my opinion, we shall be doing Europe a disservice, precisely in these times of crisis, if we do not all pull together and help the Czech Presidency to function. From what I have heard from the Czech Republic, the government will remain in office and at the helm, because the majority which teamed up together yesterday does not suffice to support a new government. I believe that, in the crisis, this type of stability, by which I mean solidarity with the Czech Presidency, is indispensable. I also call on many western Europeans, such as the French, to rein in their malice towards the east, as it was with the referendum in France that the European crisis ultimately started.

I would like to see more courageous leadership as far as the question of climate is concerned and inclusion in what is needed now. We need to dare to try something new if we are to make headway in this crisis. My honourable friend was right; we are living on credit. However, we are also living on credit as far as the environment and climate are concerned. We have endlessly squandered resources. We are not managing the economy in a sustainable manner. The UN, Ban Ki-moon, the World Bank, everyone is telling us that what is happening now in China, what is happening in South Korea, with more than half the national short-term economic programme being dedicated to climate protection and sustainable development, is the right thing and that this is where the future lies. Unfortunately, the European Council is not currently mustering up that much courage. Unfortunately, I do not believe that the Czech Republic alone is to blame.

**President.** – Thank you, Mrs Harms. You are quite right. We are all sinners – some more than others.

**Mary Lou McDonald (GUE/NGL).** – Mr President, in the midst of this economic crisis, a crisis conceived and driven by failed policy at Member State and EU level, the protection of jobs and creation of new employment must be the absolute priority. The haemorrhage of jobs must be stopped. This will require proactive interventions by Member State governments.

Free-market theology must not stand in the way of doing right by workers. The light-touch regulation of the financial markets was always a road to rip-off and corruption. Obsessive deregulation and privatisation of public services will equally end in tears.

So, is the common refrain that we must learn the lessons of this economic crisis genuine? That is the question. If it is, then the case for fundamental change in EU policy, and indeed EU Treaties, is now unanswerable and should be the stuff of EU Council deliberations. The Lisbon Treaty is old hat. It is a charter for the policies of failure. We need a new treaty for a new time.

**Paul Marie Coûteaux (IND/DEM).** – (FR) Mr President, the Presidency conclusions from the last Council make for amusing reading. They resemble a victory statement of routed armies everywhere. They have the pathetic quality of such statements, up to and including where they repeatedly affirm that, with the crisis coming to an end, the EU will build a stronger economy for the future, and where they reaffirm the Lisbon Strategy, while in fact it is going completely off the rails.

It follows that, as they shut themselves away in their glass towers, Eurocrats, Europhiles and ultra-Europeans of all kinds end up no longer having a grip on matters. Everyone is well aware that the euro zone was the first to enter into recession because it had the lowest growth rate in the world for eight years. However, it was also the one that had the greatest difficulties in terms of its competitiveness and employment situation. Above all, it is the euro zone that, due to the general trend of stripping nations of their natural defences, is the worst equipped to react.

In reality, the only virtue of the crisis is that it will wake up populations lulled by financial expectation facilities and anti-national propaganda. Only the Member States will have the legitimate instruments needed for any far-reaching action, and they will have to remove the shackles of the EU and the euro if such action is to be achieved. For the people of France, at least, it is becoming increasingly clear that there will be no safety without France, no France without French policy, and no French policy without national and popular sovereignty.

**Roberto Fiore (NI).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it seems to me that at the centre of this debate there remains the dogma that the banks should be central to the economy and that the process of globalisation should also be a fundamental part of our economic future.

That dogma is completely wrong. We should return to our society's traditional economic vision of social justice and genuine production. Since we all eat, go to sleep at night and dress ourselves, we should concentrate our activities and our efforts on enhancing agriculture, on building houses and on the manufacturing and craft industries.

Without this new vision we will fall into perpetual crises where usury by the banks will continue to control people and injustice will be central to our lives.

**Jana Hybášková (PPE-DE).** – (CS) Mr President, I do not even know to whom I am talking, since the Czech Presidency is not even trying to attend. My congratulations on the results of the summit. The increase in IMF resources, the doubling of the crisis fund, the Eastern Partnership, the support for strategic infrastructure and the support for Nabucco all amount to a fulfilment of the 'Three Es' of the Czech Presidency. It is a pity that preparations for Copenhagen are lagging behind and the Czech Presidency has not made use of our work on the energy-climate package.

However, we are not dealing with any of that today. Your Presidency, just like your government, represents the politics of double standards. When in Europe you pose as sympathetic Europeans and great integrators but at home you talk about how you are going to walk all over them and you talk about the Lisbon Treaty as if it were no more than a scrap of paper. You have failed to integrate your own government. The election of Václav Klaus as President also belongs to the politics of double standards. It is the aim of millions of Czechs and Moravians to cement our ties to Western Europe, which will help us to overcome the worst crises. This aim cannot be achieved without ratifying the Lisbon Treaty. The Treaty is now under serious threat and this is partly also your responsibility. If you continue to govern in any form, you should make a clear stand for ratification. There are social and political elites in the Czech Republic who want ratification and who are ready to support whomever will follow it through. My own party, the European Democratic Party, will do all it can for ratification.

The second serious omission is the euro. You can participate in the G20 summit and represent Europe at the summit. It is important for Europe to defend its regulatory measures against the US and not just to submit

to a policy of excessive stimulation packages which can lead to hyperinflation. It is important to have a European Securities Commission and to maintain the stability pact. However, this also applies to us back home and it is your party that has kept us out of the euro zone for many years.

Mr Topolánek, the proposed measures are excellent. At present they are only proposals. As Mrs Merkel has said, what matters is implementation. What is needed is the political will and unity which will make it possible to translate this into reality. You were talking about a crisis of confidence. That is what we have here. Get the Lisbon Treaty completed, change your position on the euro and facilitate the rapid drawdown of structural resources. Otherwise you will find it difficult to represent the 60 to 70% of Czechs and Moravians who do not want to deal on unequal terms with Europe, but who do want to live in Europe in a normal way.

**Jan Andersson (PSE).** – (SV) Mr President, there is an issue that concerns a large number of European citizens today. It is increased unemployment and the wider gaps that it entails. They must have been extremely disappointed with the results of the most recent summit. Absolutely no strategy for dealing with rising unemployment was established at that summit. They say that they have already done what needs to be done. They also say that the summit that should have taken place at the beginning of May will no longer be a summit. It will now be a troika meeting. This is a clear signal to citizens that the EU's leaders do not see employment and combating unemployment as a priority.

The European Parliament is not involved at all – one month before the European Parliament elections. Mr Barroso has called for discussions today, but the Council's conclusions do not even mention the European Parliament.

I would like to say something briefly about automatic stabilisers. GM, the United States and Sweden have been mentioned in the debate today. It is true that we, in Sweden, have better social insurance systems, but the reimbursement rates have fallen from 80%. Car workers who become unemployed will currently receive a pay-out of something in the region of between 50% and 60% of their pay. Thus, it is not quite so wonderful any more.

Finally, I would like to say a few words about mobility. Mobility is important within the EU and so is the fight against protectionism. However, the Commission and the Council need to take responsibility and ensure that equal pay for equal work applies throughout the EU. Then we can also work to promote increased mobility and to combat protectionism.

**Sophia in 't Veld (ALDE).** – (NL) Mr President, a lot has been said about how much money we actually need to set aside in order to combat this economic crisis. We could discuss that for many hours. I believe that it is also necessary to take account of future generations and not to leave all the problems to them to sort out. Alongside that though, the issue of what we spend that money on is perhaps even more important. It does worry me when I see the reflex reaction of throwing money at the old industries and old technologies yet again, in an attempt to prop up ailing industries.

It is also striking that, in the Council's conclusions, the sections on the economic crisis and on energy and sustainability are just treated as two separate issues, when the time is actually ripe for these two issues to be tethered together. I would not want to be as pessimistic as Mr Turmes was earlier on, but now really is the time to invest in new technologies and in knowledge. It is intolerable that billions are being poured into the car industry while savings will have to be found when it comes to education. We have definitely got things the wrong way round there.

Another point is the solutions for Eastern European countries and countries that are not in the single currency. These countries are being let down somewhat, with a sum of EUR 50 billion being mentioned. I wonder whether the Council and the Commission are also considering the option of accelerated accession to the eurozone for those countries that are not yet members, given that the stability and the strength of those countries are in the interests of Europe as a whole.

Finally, I am very concerned by the use of nationalistic language and the tendency of all the national leaders to lean towards 'our country first' solutions. We all need to take the rise of the far right seriously and we all need to ensure that we tackle it before the elections.

**Seán Ó Neachtain (UEN).** – (GA) Mr President, I would like to give my support and congratulations to the group of European leaders that met last week.

As regards Ireland, it is now very clear that the bottom line is that we want to get support from the European Union in Ireland. Our economy was strong but has been weakened, just like economies all over the world

at present. It is clear to us that we will emerge from this crisis by working together and that the biggest challenge that Europe currently faces is to cooperate and to strengthen the economic unit that we have, so that we will be able to support each other – rather than weakening the Union as is suggested. It is also clear that the fundamental rules laid down in the Lisbon Treaty are needed now more than ever. As an old saying in Ireland goes: 'there is no strength without unity'.

**Jean-Luc Dehaene (PPE-DE).** – (NL) Mr President, at every European summit we really can complain that the European dimension does not come through strongly enough in the decision-making process. I, too, had expected a truer European dimension in the approach to the crisis. That said, however, in the current times it is more important to implement what we have decided, rather than to harp on about additional plans whilst managing to forget to implement what we have decided. For that reason, I think that we, in Parliament, together with the Council and the Commission, must now give priority to actually implementing what we have already decided. In that regard I am entirely behind the Commission's approach.

We must also show that we really are united around the global approach to the crisis, and I do hope that it will be the case, both in Copenhagen and at the G20, that Europe is able to speak effectively with one voice. In order to be able to speak with one voice, however, we have to ensure that we do not jeopardise our achievements internally, that the internal market really does remain an internal market without internal protectionism and that we reinforce the single currency. We must learn our lessons and increase the funding for the European Central Bank, as well as providing funding in order actually to be able to act with a European dimension. We must also ensure that enlargement really does take place and that we also show solidarity with the new Member States in these difficult times. That is what the European Union is for. Solidarity with less-developed countries must also form part of the European Union's global approach.

I will conclude with a quick word about the Treaty of Lisbon. We, Parliament, must set out our position clearly. We must know for certain what is going to happen straight after the European elections. That, however, requires that Parliament really does adopt a single position and it is for that reason that I cannot really understand the Bureau's view that there is no need for us to debate the reports on positions in this House. I urge that we revise this view in order to enable us to negotiate with the Council on the basis of a position taken by this House.

**Riitta Myller (PSE).** – (FI) Mr President, the best way to improve energy security in Europe is to increase energy efficiency and the use of renewable energy sources. All the Member States need to invest in these areas, and they need to do so right away, otherwise we will not reach the targets of our own climate package.

This sort of investment is furthermore especially suited to our times. By investing in energy efficiency and renewable energy we create, as has already been said here more than once, new, sustainable jobs, but that way we also establish a basis for a low carbon economy.

Now we need real action. Unfortunately, the summit was unable to convince people of this. All in all, every cure for the economic crisis should have as its aim the prevention of global warming reaching a critical point. This must also be the outcome of the meeting of the G20 countries. When Europe speaks with one voice, the United States of America will also then adopt this same objective.

**Olle Schmidt (ALDE).** – (SV) Mr President, the Berlin Wall fell almost 20 years ago. In the current difficult economic situation, we have once again been able to discern the construction of a new wall in Europe, this time an economic wall. This must not be allowed to happen!

Even though extra resources have been granted to assist countries in difficulties, the level of commitment of the EU's leaders seems to have been mixed. It is worrying that Renault is moving its production from Slovenia to France. We must not allow the spectre of protectionism to wreak havoc once again. The cost of failing, once more, to keep Europe together is far too high. History will punish those who fail in their responsibility. It was therefore good, yesterday, to hear Gordon Brown's clear message when he declared 'we will not walk away!' The same must also apply to President Sarkozy.

There is every reason to welcome the proposal by the de Larosière Group. It is a balanced proposal that will mean that the EU will avoid over-regulation, but that the monitoring of the financial markets will be significantly strengthened. The European Central Bank will have an even more important role. The national supervisory authorities will also be given a better opportunity to coordinate themselves and exchange information. Policy must be appropriate even in times of crisis. Proposing regulations that hinder rather than help must not be our response in difficult times.

**Charles Tannock (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, the Council's declaration on the Eastern Partnership is most welcome. As rapporteur on the eastern dimension of the European neighbourhood policy, I support closer relations with the six countries to the east. The announcement of EUR 600 million for the Eastern Partnership is excellent and I welcome the proposed European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument spending on improving EU energy security through better storage facilities for oil and gas and building new pipelines.

The Council also rightly supports the newly conceived EURONEST parliamentary assembly, which will encourage the resolution of frozen conflicts, such as the Nagorno-Karabakh and Transnistrian disputes. However, the Eastern Partnership must not be used to stall the EU membership ambitions of countries manifestly entitled to apply for such status, namely Ukraine and Moldova.

The Council has also rightly decided to double the assistance package for financially distressed non-eurozone countries in eastern Europe, from EUR 25 billion to EUR 50 billion. This measure will help stabilise countries like Hungary and Latvia. However, we must not forget Ukraine either, which is suffering severe financial turmoil. A banking collapse in Ukraine could have catastrophic contagion consequences in countries elsewhere in eastern Europe, and also in Italy and Austria, whose banks are the most exposed to the Ukrainian market.

Finally, while I fully accept the right of Turkey and Russia to be observers in EURONEST, neither country should use this position for its own foreign policy ends. The members of EURONEST are sovereign states with the right to decide their own Euro-Atlantic aspirations. The suggestion by Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, that the Eastern Partnership is a means for the EU to expand its sphere of influence abroad is absurd. Such language belongs to the *Machtpolitik* Cold War era, not to modern diplomacy. If anyone seeks a sphere of influence, it is Russia, as underlined by last summer's war against Georgia and the Kremlin's intermittent political destabilisation of countries such as Ukraine and the Baltic States.

**Proinsias De Rossa (PSE).** – Mr President, my congratulations on your pronunciation of my rather difficult name!

The Conservatives here and in Member States are like naughty children. Having stamped their feet for years, demanding deregulation of banks and shadow banking, they are now prepared to swallow strong regulation – but only if we pretend that it was their idea all along. However, they are still childishly demanding deregulation of the workplace, flexibility – meaning no protection, no security and cuts in social services. That, my friends, is a recipe for fanning an uncontrollable forest fire.

President in-Office Topolánek chose Sweden as a comparison to America. Why not the Czech Republic? Why not Ireland? Simple: the Irish Government is tearing the heart out of health services, education, childcare and training. It is deepening the sense of insecurity in Ireland, creating more unemployment – when they should be keeping people in work – and failing to do anything to help small companies to survive. I believe that there needs to be a change of government in Ireland and a change of attitude in the European Council. Let us have an Employment Summit for all Member States on 7 May.

**Marco Cappato (ALDE).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the irony of fate would have it that this stage of the debate is being held without the President-in-Office of the Council, who should have been with us; Mr Topolánek is not here. Yesterday, however, we had the debate on the strategy and future of Europe in view of the G20 with another president, who by contrast had to ask for and was given an invite, it is not clear on what grounds, aside from the obvious reason of the role being played by his national state.

Why do I begin with these perhaps unpleasant remarks? It is because the economic and financial crisis facing Europe is also an institutional crisis, shown clearly by the fact that the President-in-Office of the Council has to leave halfway through the debate due to his internal political problems. The same thing can be seen with the economic crisis; that is to say the response has been a national one only, there has been no response from Europe, no European response, even in terms of the budget. It is all very well to cite EUR 400 billion, but we know that this money is almost all taken from national budgets. President Barroso, I do not believe you have done enough in recent years to make governments and national states aware that there is another Europe, which does more than just coordinate states; that the Union itself has a political function.

Since President Topolánek has spoken of extending the Eastern Partnership to include Belarus, I shall end by mentioning the name of Yana Paliakova, who was driven to suicide by the Belarusian authorities, to emphasise that these partnerships should be more interested in law, democracy and freedom and not only in doing business with dictatorships of the worst kind.

**Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE).** – (RO) The conclusions drawn by the Council are consistent with the crisis which Member States are going through.

We must welcome as an extremely positive result the agreement on energy projects and broadband Internet. The inclusion among these projects of the Nabucco gas pipeline and the interconnections between Member States, such as those between Romania, Hungary and Bulgaria, may help avoid a crisis similar to the one in January 2009.

Using energy sources from the Caspian Sea region and making the most of the Black Sea's strategic location are an essential condition for guaranteeing the European Union's energy security. The policies developed as part of the Eastern Partnership must include without fail the maximum possible use of these areas for the European Union's benefit.

I was surprised that the recommendations made by the ECOFIN Council did not take into account the measures which the new Romanian Government announced through its government programme and has started to implement by adopting the 2009 budget.

Decentralisation with the aim of strengthening local autonomy and the channelling of resources into investments in priority areas like infrastructure or energy in order to preserve and create jobs are two of the measures already initiated by the Romanian Government. The reduction of expenditure through budget allocations and the launch of education system reform as a priority are other measures which can be added to this.

The implementation of the proposals included in the Council's economic recovery programme, particularly with regard to bringing forward the allocation of resources as part of the European programmes, and the approval of state aid, especially in the car industry, would provide real support for reducing to a minimum the effects of the crisis, not only in Romania but in very many other European Union Member States as well.

**Adrian Severin (PSE).** – Mr President, the crisis we are dealing with is not a crisis *in* the system but a crisis *of* the system; an economic system crisis and a crisis of democracy as well. Not only has financial credit contracted but also social credit. We can already see in the streets of our European towns the signs that warn us of the mistrust and unrest at social level, which could lead towards political and social upheaval.

Therefore, a social European Union summit, leading towards a European pact on employment, is a must. A social summit should agree, among other things, that those companies laying off employees should not distribute dividends, that transnational companies must negotiate not only with national trade unions but also with European trade unions, that there cannot be business profitability without social solidarity.

This global crisis is aggravated by a crisis of European integration. There are Member States hosting mother-company economies and Member States with economies of subsidiaries. The former are members of the euro area, the latter are not. Programmes to facilitate the stabilisation and integration of the latter are crucial for the survival of the former. The European Union cannot survive with new demarcation lines.

**Zbigniew Zaleski (PPE-DE).** – (PL) Mr President, we can talk selectively about the summit from the point of view of two time scales. The longer time scale includes strategic measures, in which I include the matter of our Eastern partners, including Belarus. I think this is justified and will be good for the EU, for our Eastern neighbours and also for future relations with Russia. Financial support is essential, and although this may meet with criticism at a time of crisis, I am convinced that it is worth investing in Eastern affairs. If the Eastern strategy is successful the EU will show itself to be a serious player on the global political stage. I am not thinking of the EU as an organisation, but rather that the effects of joint action will argue in favour of the expediency of further European integration.

The second dimension is limited to the present, and thus to the crisis, a symptom of which is, among other things, job losses and the financial helplessness of citizens. There is no single panacea for this, but the broad strategy of governments and the EU should include attention to the needs of small and medium-sized businesses. This is because, firstly, while in the crisis workers only lose their jobs, entrepreneurs who are in difficulty may lose their job, their workers and the whole business. Owners of small businesses are the most flexible and will probably fare best in the current difficult situation, and because they constitute most of the economic strength of Europe they can influence the entire economy.

Mr Barroso, if financial collapse turns into psychological breakdown, then we will be in the midst of a real crisis. As long as motivation and the will to be doing something is alive among the people there is always

the chance that things will start to improve, and in this area EU measures are a very significant element, for which we are accountable. I wish us all success in this matter.

**Edite Estrela (PSE).** – (PT) The summit's response was not ambitious enough. Where is the firm commitment to abolish tax havens and offshore financial centres? Where is the decision to moralise the salaries of banking executives? President Barroso, it is right to say the rich should pay for the crisis, because it was they who caused it.

With regard to the employment summit, this cannot be a mini-summit because employment is not a mini-problem; it is a major problem affecting individuals and families. This is not the way to restore people's trust.

Lastly, I heard someone say that they do not need socialist proposals. That is an arrogant statement. If the defenders of neoliberal doctrine had listened to the warnings of the socialists, we would not now be embroiled in this crisis. Will they never learn? If they have not grasped the gravity and depth of this crisis and if they have not grasped what caused it, then I fear the worst. I fear that the crisis will continue for many years, which is not what we want.

**Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, I think the encouraging result achieved by the Council is that 27 Member States can now go to the G20 with a common position. This is a major achievement, and it is only fair to congratulate Prime Minister Topolánek on his constructive role as a Council. I can share his view that the success of the Council was the EU's refusal to go down the easier route of massive bailouts and nationalisation.

The unfortunate Czech Government crisis now leaves the Commission and President Barroso with enhanced responsibility to steer the Community out of crisis, providing for coherence and stability. At the same time, the Commission has to offer more flexible mechanisms for the timely use of additional money decided by the Council. Implementation procedures can be too clumsy and time-consuming. It is especially important to accommodate framework conditions for small businesses and for innovation. Now it is really time to invest more in research, education and training.

However, economic depression is not a time for moral depression. As usual a crisis provides opportunities for reform. The financial crisis in fact originates in the crisis of values, so the recovery must start with strengthening our common values, starting with an enhanced commitment to solidarity. And, most importantly, the crisis is no excuse for protectionism. On the contrary, we are bound to act together with the understanding that, by supporting each other and committing ourselves to reforms in the spirit of the Lisbon Strategy, the crisis will make Europe stronger.

**Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE).** – (HU) Mr President, the European Commission and the Council have succeeded, in spite of the countervailing forces, in preserving the unity of the European Union. This summit was rather successful: it protected the single market, spoke up against impending protectionism and, last but not least, offered new assistance to the Central and Eastern European Member States, which are struggling with increased difficulties.

I would like first to thank President Barroso, since the financial assistance to the region has been doubled, having been raised to EUR 50 billion. The Prime Minister of Hungary suggested a year ago, and at this summit a decision in principle has at last been taken, to create a supervisory system for financial markets and banks.

Once again, the summit dealt with the point that parent banks are responsible for their subsidiaries, as my colleague Adrian Severin has also emphasised, and a very important step forward has also been taken with regard to energy security.

**Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE-DE).** – (LT) First of all, I would like to pay my regards and thank Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek; we all understand very well what it means to hold the Presidency of the European Union and what it means to hold the Presidency of the European Union faced with the global financial crisis and the economic recession. Therefore, I sincerely wish the Czech Republic success meeting new challenges and leading the European Union up to the middle of this year.

The Brussels European Council: today many of us are repeating figures, reflecting agreements reached at the European Council like a mantra. EUR 5 billion for strategic energy projects and broadband Internet. EUR 50 billion for non-Eurozone European Union Member States for payments and to equilibrate the balance of payments. EUR 75 billion for the International Monetary Fund. EUR 600 million for the Eastern Partnership. Of the EUR 5 billion mentioned, EUR 175 million would go to the energy bridge, linking Sweden with the



Baltic States, which until now have been an island separated from the European Union's energy market. Is this a lot or too little? Is the glass half full or half empty? Under normal circumstances, I would judge the results and agreements achieved by the European Council as satisfactory. Of course, we hoped for more, of course, we hoped that a better funding plan for European economic recovery would be agreed. However, having considered all the manifestations, all the displays of nationalism and protectionism, I think that the agreement reached is undoubtedly a good expression of solidarity, and I would like this to be a starting point, a good beginning for further work.

**Antolín Sánchez Presedo (PSE).** – (ES) Mr President, Mr Barroso, only a united Europe that prioritises world growth and employment will be able to lead international action for economic recovery, strengthen crisis prevention and crisis management, improve the regulation of financial systems and support the most vulnerable countries in this first global crisis.

The G20 represents the majority of the population (two in three people) and 90% of world economic activity. Its responsibility is to provide a concerted, effective and sustained triple response to stimulate demand and the real economy with future investments, to re-establish lending and to promote robust international financial regulation and supervision that provides transparency, stability and appropriate incentives, that eliminates systemic risks and that ensures that we do not go back to square one.

We need a new economic order and a global system of governance for the 21st century that will correct the causes and imbalances at the root of the crisis and that will promote sustainable development through an open economy based on solidarity.

**Péter Olajos (PPE-DE).** – (HU) I welcome the decision of the Council with regard to the position to be put forward at the G20 summit. I am pleased that our political leaders have recognised that measures to address the global crisis and the fight against climate change are closely related.

The essence of the 'Green New Deal' development plan put forward by Prime Minister Gordon Brown and President Barack Obama is to link economic stimulus with environmental investments and with support for increased energy efficiency and environmentally friendly technologies.

I do not, however, share the Council's view that progress in the implementation of the European economic stimulus programme accepted last December is satisfactory. Although it will be some time before its positive effects on the economy are felt, there is no doubt that the large-scale budgetary package, representing 3.3% of the EU's GDP – that is, more than EUR 400 billion – will generate new investments and create jobs.

However, the programme made only a very small contribution to transforming the EU into a low carbon dioxide-emitting economy. Although we speak emphatically of improving energy efficiency and energy savings, yet more attention and funds are directed to the energy providers, to diversifying supply routes and to promoting the EU's energy interests vis-à-vis third countries.

Undoubtedly we need to develop the energy infrastructure, but not at the expense of reducing consumption. The European Union continues to be committed to playing a leading role in the Copenhagen global climate agreement. In order to do so, however, we urgently need to agree on the development of a global carbon dioxide market, on financial compensation for developing countries, on technological support and on capacity building, as well as clarifying at last the principles of burden-sharing among Member States.

**Dariusz Rosati (PSE).** – Mr President, I wish to begin by thanking the Czech Presidency for the successful summit. I think the summit has come up with a number of important decisions, but at the same time I am of the opinion that we need more, and we need to move faster.

When we go to the G20 meeting in London in a week's time, I have the impression that we are still too integrated to act alone and too divided to act together. I see three main priorities that we should focus on.

The first, of course, is jobs. Millions of people in Europe are afraid of losing their jobs and, frankly, I do not understand the position of the French President in opposing the summit: a fully fledged summit is something we need at this moment.

Second, I am happy that we managed to eliminate – partly, at least – protectionist tendencies. Nevertheless, they are still alive, and I think solidarity is the key.

The third point: the key is to restore confidence in the markets. I am not even of the opinion that there is too little money in the market; I think there is enough money. The problem is to transform this money into effective demand, and for that to happen we need to restore confidence among households and enterprises.

**Mario Mauro (PPE-DE).** – (IT) Mr President, President Barroso, ladies and gentlemen, the question of the combination of measures for support and stimulus and regulatory measures is one of the major questions on the international agenda. The tensions that exist, reflecting the different strategies adopted by the large economies to tackle the crisis, will, it is hoped, reach some sort of resolution at the G20 summit.

It is no secret, in fact, that Washington insists on the need for a further collective commitment for the adoption of national measures to stimulate demand and revive the economy, while at the Commission in Brussels, the prevailing belief is that all useful and necessary moves in this regard have already been made and that it is now time to wait and see the results of the anti-recession measures brought in by the Member State governments.

In the same way, it is no secret that Europeans believe we now need to concentrate on the aim of restoring the credibility, stability and reliability of the financial markets, by adopting stricter regulatory provisions and more effective monitoring systems for the banking and credit sector, while in Washington, opinion favours an argument of prudence, based on the idea of incisive reform of the regulatory framework and surveillance mechanisms.

To be honest, I do not think it is helpful to pit these solutions against each other. Instead, we should find a combination of the two, and in this sense, above all, the European vision must prevail, as the European method for which the Commission is guarantor, or prophet even. I have no doubt, President Barroso, that you are the right man to give shape to our hopes and bring us out of the abyss.

**Katrin Saks (PSE).** – (ET) Several important matters were agreed upon in the Council. Energy and broadband projects and the decision to increase the support fund for Eastern European countries are a good sign.

For me, however, one sign of what the European Council did or did not achieve is what our Prime Minister said when he returned to Estonia - namely, that Europe was returning to its fundamental values. He was referring to the fact that Europe was beginning to lose interest in further stimulus packages, and there are signs of a return to conservative budget policies. As a representative of an ultra-liberal party, his view is not surprising, but it reflects the more general problem that government leaders with certain ideological backgrounds are not prepared to take courageous steps that demand vision, and to implement measures that could conflict with their ideological beliefs.

A few days before the meeting of the European Council, we heard from Nobel Prize winner Paul Krugman that the European Union stimulus package is perhaps not enough. We may need not 400 billion, but 500 billion this year, and a total of 3 trillion may be required. Thus we need united action and a pro-active approach, not the invisible hand.

**José Manuel García-Margallo y Marfil (PPE-DE).** – (ES) Mr President, President of the Commission, I will begin by expressing my concern that the Summit on Employment, to be held in May, has been replaced by a troika meeting, however open this may be. I believe that this decision takes us back to 1996, when employment policies were considered to be policies solely for the Member States.

Secondly, with regard to monetary policy, I, along with the whole of my group, am an advocate of radical independence for the Central Bank, but independence does not equate to immunity from criticism.

I would like to say at this point that I would have liked the European Central Bank to have been more daring in reducing interest rates, given their impact on European exports, and for it to have been more generous in setting the deadlines for the repayment of the loans granted: the Federal Reserve makes three-year loans; the Central Bank's loans, however, are for only six months.

Once again, in relation to monetary policy, I would like to make a comment: I hope that the rescue plans for financial entities and the possible plans to purchase toxic or damaged assets do not translate into competitive advantages for the banks that receive aid as compared with those that have conducted themselves more prudently and do not need aid.

With regard to fiscal stimuli, during the course of the morning we have had a considerable debate. Is it enough? Is it too little? Is the United States doing more than us? Whatever the conclusion of this debate, what is certain is that we are seeing the largest fiscal stimuli that our generation has experienced since 1929.

This compels us to coordinate action taken on either side of the Atlantic, and this coordination must be much closer on two issues: completing the Doha Round, to send a signal against protectionism to the whole world and, secondly, a joint examination of world imbalances, which are at the root of this crisis.

With regard to the stability pact, I note certain contradictions in the Commission's position. Today's debts are tomorrow's taxes and the Commission ought to ensure that national measures are linked to the Lisbon Strategy and do not jeopardise the sustainability of finances. In order to do this, it needs to monitor with the utmost attention the plans to regain the correct position of those countries – including my own, since I am Spanish – that have strayed into an excessive deficit situation.

Mr President, I would like to thank you for your generosity with the time, which I have certainly noticed.

**President.** – My dear sir, we are against monetary inflation and we are also against speaking time inflation.

**Pierre Pribetich (PSE).** – (FR) Mr President, in 22 pages of European Council conclusions, only one tiny phrase addresses the problem of the future of the automotive industry, of a European industrial policy. Is this a practical response to the expectations of 12 million workers in the sector and to the concerns of 6% of the European Union's working population? Is it a match for what is at stake? There is no proposal for a European plan, no prospects for the automotive industry, and no will to coordinate national policies.

On 19 November 2008, I took the floor in this House on behalf of the French socialist delegation to question all of the European stakeholders responsible. I expressed my wish for a new car deal and for a solidarity-based, structured, swift and effective industrial policy in the short, medium and long term that would provide a coordinated response from the Member States and the Union.

Four months later, following a joint resolution by several groups, we are again laying emphasis on the future of the automotive industry. What is stopping you from reacting, from acting, from rising to this challenge before it is too late? This is not rhetoric, Mr Topolánek, this is a call for action.

**Harlem Désir (PSE).** – (FR) Mr President, it is difficult not to hide one's disappointment at the end of this summit.

If self-satisfaction and fiction were instruments of economic recovery, then we might call it a success. I know that the economy is largely about psychology, and that we must try to restore confidence, but, ultimately, when the crisis worsens to the point where all the Member States are plunging further into recession and unemployment is dramatically rising, hearing the Council declare that it is confident about the EU economy's medium- and long-term prospects and that it is determined to do everything it takes to revive employment and growth, is all the same rather astounding.

Determined to do what? The agenda for this Council has already been expurgated of any proposals that might have related to employment. That was postponed until May. In the end, the May employment summit has itself been transformed during this Council into nothing more than a meeting of the troika. It appears that it was President Sarkozy who succeeded in convincing the other Member States that there was no need to draft proposals making employment a priority of the European Union's operations. This calls to mind an opt-out that had already been requested previously by other governments, by a UK conservative government, in relation to the entire employment strand of the European treaties.

So, today, Mr Sarkozy is calling for an opt-out from employment policies. What would be worrying is if this approach were to rub off on all the Member States. I am not overly surprised that your Commission, Mr Barroso, which has in some ways sidelined the European social agenda during its term of office, which has created an opt-out in relation to the European Union's social and employment priorities and which has yielded by obeying that order given just now by a member of your majority, the conservative European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, but I do believe that it is truly disgraceful and that, when it comes to coordinating not only recovery policies but also employment policies, it is the workers who are ultimately going to pay the price for this non-Europe.

A work of fiction, too, are these EUR 400 billion that you are adding up, as they are the sum not only of national recovery plans but above all of policies that are not even national recovery policies since they are just infamous economic stabilisers, that is, the increase in social expenditure linked to the increase in unemployment. You have put a further EUR 5 billion on the table, but it has pained you to do so.

I therefore believe that, on the contrary, we now need a real recovery plan like the one being introduced by the United States, which has put more than USD 780 billion on the table, and coordination of the efforts

made to support workers coping with the crisis. We also need demand, which is another factor that will prove far more effective than self-satisfaction when it comes to reviving growth, and to restoring confidence and the dynamism of our economy.

**Elmar Brok (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Mr President of the Commission, you will see that it was better that I sat over here.

Firstly, unlike Mr Schulz, I should like to say that the Czech Presidency under Prime Minister Topolánek has so far been an excellent Presidency.

(Applause)

I am proud that this was and is the first Presidency from a former Warsaw Pact country and it deserves all possible support in that it symbolises the unity of Europe.

The second point I should like to address is that we are now in a difficult situation in relation to the Treaty of Lisbon. I should like to endorse the request that Prime Minister Topolánek and the opposition leader Mr Paroubek sit down together and negotiate responsibly, because domestic policy problems cannot influence the fate of the whole of Europe.

My final comment is to Mr Schulz: My final comment is to Mr Schulz: Gordon Brown obstructed regulation of the financial markets and Gordon Brown and German Minister of Employment Scholz from the SPD are obstructing a compromise in the Working Times Directive in keeping with the resolution by the European Parliament. Mr Schulz should not try and tell us that he alone advocates social Europe. Precisely the opposite is true.

**Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE).** – (RO) The economic crisis is taking a serious toll on Europe's enterprises and citizens. Member States' economies are showing a significant downturn, SMEs are going under and employees are losing their jobs.

Along with other fellow Members, I gave a letter to President Barroso about the situation of employees in the metallurgy industry in Romania and France, who are becoming technically unemployed, while receiving 70% of their salary. We have requested a review of the terms for accessing the European Social Fund and the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund in order to support more employees who are seriously affected by the economic crisis and job losses.

The European Union needs economic development and Europe's citizens need jobs and decent wages. The European economic recovery plan introduced in November 2008 has remained just words. Unfortunately, energy efficiency, which can create jobs, does not feature in January's regulation.

**Paul Rübig (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I too should like to congratulate the Czech Presidency. Yesterday's deal on roaming was sensational and the citizens of Europe stand to gain from it.

The energy and gas package has been sorted out and numerous other points have been negotiated exceptionally well by the Czech Presidency in our opinion. The same applies to the motivation of the European people, especially in times of crisis, to praise those who make a superhuman effort. That is why we should also support Commissioner Kovács in tabling more proposals for progressive depreciation. If we assume that more than a thousand billion euros are to be invested up to 2030 in order to build new power stations, then we need to make a start today. That would trigger jobs and growth.

**Alojz Peterle (PPE-DE).** – (SL) I would first like to pay my sincere compliments to the President-in-Office of the Council for the success which the Czech Presidency has achieved, under extremely demanding circumstances.

We have heard some harsh words today, but I firmly believe that the citizens of the European Union are not as interested in how far we might turn to the left or the right, as in to what extent we are going to act in the European spirit, i.e. what we can achieve by working together efficiently.

We are faced with two tasks, in particular: expressing social sensitivity to, and solidarity for, those most affected, while at the same time investing in the vehicles that can best help pull us out of the crisis. The crisis should be used as a catalyst for economic restructuring, and not just in the car industry. The economic crisis has shown that what we badly need is better economic policy coordination and stronger Community institutions, as envisaged by the Lisbon Treaty.

In this spirit, I welcome the constructive proposals put forward in the de Larosière report, as regards financial institutions.

**Christian Rovsing (PPE-DE).** – (DA) Mr President, I would like to say something regarding the large subsidies that are paid to undertakings that may not survive. There is no point in asking a number of workers to remain in an undertaking or in paying their wages with public money if the undertaking closes down later. They should have the opportunity to embark on further training or new training or to move to undertakings that have a chance of survival. I think, with regard to the car industry, that we have placed far too little importance on the development of completely new types of car, cars that run on hydrogen, battery-powered cars and cars driven by fuel cells. I believe that a large proportion of the workforce could be transferred over to such areas, where they would still have a job in 10 years' time.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – Mr President, let me make a brief summary from the perspective of the Council and the Czech Presidency.

(CS) I think we have now reached a kind of notional half time in the Czech presidency and I would like to thank those of you – and you are not few in number – who have shown your appreciation for our work to date. It is of course gratifying to have a show of respect for the constant work – seven days a week and 20 hours a day – and for what we achieved at the European Council last week. The decisions we took there were fundamental and important. I would like to say one thing to those of you who have specific doubts and questions. Give those measures and those decisions time to work, let them prove themselves once they come into operation, because I firmly believe that they have their strengths, they have their scope and they will pay dividends as we grapple with the worst economic crisis ever to afflict the EU.

The actual decisions on the EUR 5 billion for energy projects and broadband Internet are important. They are important in the context of the gas crisis because we are showing here that the EU is capable of acting quickly and responding to the needs of many European countries. The decision on the EUR 25 billion for increasing the limit in order to assist EU countries that are experiencing problems is also highly important. The decision on the EUR 75 billion that we are taking to the G20 meeting in London also gives a clear signal that the EU is prepared to take its share of responsibility regarding the reform of global financial institutions. I would also like to emphasise something that has been mentioned by some of you outside the context of the European Council meeting, and that is the intensive work which has been going on over recent weeks on a number of legislative proposals. This did not happen by chance, but thanks to the constant work of the Council under the leadership of the Czech Presidency, we have managed to reach agreement in the dialogues on quite fundamental reform proposals. The energy package on the internal energy market for gas and electricity, the aviation package on revising the Single European Sky, the roads package modernising access to the road transport market including the sensitive issue of cabotage, the roaming regulation and finally also the pesticide package as well may be the concrete results of the work of the past two to three months. I would also like to thank the European Parliament here, because this has been a joint effort between us, the Commission and the European Parliament.

Another example: negotiations have been going on for 10 years without producing any results whatsoever on reducing VAT rates for some sectors involving highly demanding manual work or a high proportion of manual work. It was only under the leadership of the Czech finance minister in Ecofin that an agreement was reached and confirmed at the European Council. Many of you ask how we will tackle the problem of unemployment. I would like to emphasise once again what our Prime Minister has already stated here: an agreement is in place between the Presidency and the Commission and on 7 May a job summit will take place under the format agreed on at the European Council. The summit will put forward concrete measures for the June European Council. This means there will be further talks.

Many of your comments were concerned with the issue of EU openness. I would like to emphasise that under our presidency, on the occasion of the fifth anniversary of the EU's major expansion, a conference called 'Five Years Later' was held in Prague in cooperation with the European Commission. The conference clearly demonstrated in actual figures compiled by economics experts that the expansion was perhaps the most successful project ever in the modern history of the EU and that these five years show clearly that it has been a benefit both for old and new Member States.

The Eastern Partnership: we have agreed on a declaration that the founding summit will take place on 7 May and we are working with its future members, such as Ukraine, in order to make it a genuine success for the EU. Finally, a further example of successful work was the Monday conference on the gas infrastructure which took place thanks to the European Commission in Brussels and which resulted in a declaration on the

modernisation of gas infrastructure in Ukraine in order to prevent the future reoccurrence of a crisis such as the one in January this year.

I would like to reassure those of you who have any doubts concerning a certain matter. Yes, we do have domestic problems and we know full well who initiated the confidence motion. It was Jiří Paroubek, leader of the Czech social democrats. However, we are a responsible government, we are dealing with the situation and there is no cause for concern. The Czech Presidency at its half-way point can state with certainty that its second half will be just as good as the first and just as responsible and in the end we will undoubtedly be celebrating the same successes as you have spoken of here today in the context of assessing the work of January, February and March. In this way I would like to reassure you that we have a serious and responsible approach and there is absolutely no cause for concern.

**President.** – Mr Vondra, many colleagues have thanked the Czech Presidency for its contribution. I did so at the beginning, in the presence of Prime Minister Topolánek. I would like to thank you for your very committed personal contribution. We want to encourage you to continue as you have just said, so that the Czech Presidency will be as successful in its second half as it was in its first half. Good luck for the continuation of your work.

**José Manuel Barroso, President of the Commission.** – Mr President, let me once again underline the excellent cooperation that we have had with the Czech Presidency. The Czech Presidency is making a great effort for Europe in a very difficult situation and I think they deserve our full support.

Let me conclude. Whenever I conclude, I see crowds coming in to listen!

*(Laughter)*

Let me conclude by welcoming the broad support for the results of the European Council. There is not unanimity, but I think it is a fair assessment to say that by and large there was a recognition that it was an important set of conclusions, and I am encouraged by what I see as a shared sense of commitment by all three institutions – Parliament, the Council and the Commission – to join forces in order to pull Europe through the crisis.

We can be proud of what we have decided, but there should be no room for complacency. More has to be done, and we should keep our focus, but we will gain, we will succeed in these efforts if we show our confidence.

Confidence has to be the key word: confidence in our capacity to deliver what we have promised; confidence in action and implementation, and, as I said earlier, implementation, not gesticulation. Frankly, I do not believe that confidence will improve by announcing a new plan every month or every week. Confidence is improved if we concentrate on the implementation of what was collectively agreed and also on the effective coordination of these efforts.

Confidence is needed in our ability to push our regulatory agenda: without regulatory form we will not create the confidence that change will have a lasting effect.

Confidence is needed in the validity and the solidity of the euro area and our ability to mobilise the necessary support for every Member State in the euro area or outside the euro area which needs it.

There is also a need for confidence in our shared commitment to preserve our particular brand of social market economy, and in our long-term agenda for a low-carbon economy. I really believe that it is not with self-defeating speeches and some kind of inferiority complex regarding the United States of America that we will succeed.

In fact, what I see today is that the Americans are coming closer to what have been traditionally European positions. Americans are coming closer to our position regarding the fight against climate change, and we welcome that. Americans are coming closer to the need to reinforce the welfare system.

Therefore, I really do not believe that the debate I sometimes hear – suggesting that Americans and Europeans are coming with very different approaches to the crisis – is a helpful debate. On the contrary, what we are seeing is increased convergence between Europe and the United States and hopefully others – because it is not just for us and the Americans – and that is why I am confident about a positive result of the G20 Summit.

I think it is important to believe that it is with ourselves and not with others that we will solve the situation. It is important to have confidence in what are the European instruments, and this enlarged Europe, with our

coordinated action in fighting this recession, will be in a position to respond to the most important concerns of our citizens, including, of course, the one that is my first concern, i.e. rising unemployment.

To conclude, that is why I think we should build on what was already agreed and focus now on implementation, with strong coordination and a strong commitment to concrete results.

(Applause)

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

#### **Written statements (Rule 142)**

**Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) I wish to express my support for the decisions adopted at the recent European Union summit held in Brussels. What is particularly welcome is the necessary decision to increase the emergency fund from EUR 25 billion to EUR 50 billion. This is a fund created specially for Member States in Central Europe which are faced with a balance of payments crisis.

Based on the measures adopted to protect states in the euro area against the global crisis, this decision provides concrete proof of the EU's solidarity and its ability to help states outside the euro area to overcome the economic crisis. After Hungary and Latvia, Romania has become the third EU Member State to resort to the emergency fund as it was affected by a significant current account imbalance and an inability to obtain new loans from foreign creditors.

EU institutions have a duty to meet the expectations of European citizens who are deeply affected by the crisis. Only European solidarity, transatlantic cooperation and effective measures can help overcome the global crisis.

**Genowefa Grabowska (PSE), in writing.** – (PL) My country, Poland, is especially interested in good management of the new EU Eastern Partnership programme. It concerns our neighbours, and includes our closest neighbours, like Belarus, Ukraine and Moldova, as well as more distant ones like Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia.

I think that the programme will strengthen the external policy of the EU, bring about true economic integration between the EU and its Eastern partners and ensure cooperation based not only on the principles of a market economy, but also based on respect for shared values, such as democracy, law and order, and respect for human rights. After all, we have specific, joint objectives: to create free-trade areas, promote the mobility of citizens of partner countries, improve administrative abilities, and cooperate on energy security and especially on the long term supply and transit of energy.

We have, therefore, a clear vision of partnership on the part of the EU. Now we are waiting for a response from the six countries which have a direct interest in the programme. I would like to express the hope that on 7 May this year the Council will officially initiate this undertaking, which is as important for the EU as it is for the citizens of all the participating countries.

**András Gyürk (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (HU) The fact that the European Union has set aside EUR 3.5 billion of its economic stimulus package for key energy investments is a welcome development. I consider this an important step towards a common energy policy. The final list of the funded projects clearly indicates that the European Commission and the Member States have, after the gas crisis in January, understood at last the advantages of joining up the networks. Strengthening the connections is important first of all because it allows Member States to assist one another rapidly in the event of disruptions to supply.

I would at the same time like to draw attention to the fact that there are contradictions surrounding the final list of the investments receiving financing. First and foremost, a crack has appeared in the principle of regional balance. For it is precisely the Member States that were most affected by the gas crisis in January that will receive less funding. Secondly, in proportion to the entire economic stimulus package, relatively little funding will be devoted to strengthening alternative supply routes. I believe that the debates around the Nabucco issue were unseemly. The gas pipeline in question would strengthen the energy security of the entire European Union, and thus its construction is a common interest. Last but not least, investments relating to energy efficiency do not figure on the list of the investments receiving financing. The EU is thus skirting the original aim of the package itself, namely job creation.

For the above reasons, the position of the European Parliament must give a greater role to the principle of regional balance, as well as to alternative supply routes and energy efficient investments.

**Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) The European Council's decision on providing funding for Nabucco and its designation as a priority energy project are appropriate and timely solutions to this problem.

Before the Council meeting we submitted a proposal for a resolution so as to draw attention to the danger posed by reducing the financing for Nabucco. We must be aware that the Nabucco gas pipeline project is of strategic importance to the security of Europe's gas supply as it is the only project guaranteeing diversification of both suppliers and distribution routes.

**Esko Seppänen (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – (FI) The decisions of the EU summit included altering the nature of the extraordinary summit this spring on social dialogue, so that EU leaders would just be represented by the Presidency Troika, instead of the leaders of all the Member States. I believe the decision indicates the apathy that is felt towards the future of a social Europe in a way that cannot be acceptable to the labour market organisations that have prepared for the meeting. It is to be hoped that as many Heads of State or Government as possible will attend the meeting.

**Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – (EL) The debate in the European Parliament confirms that the political forces of capital and of the European one-way street support faster capitalist restructurings and more flexible contracts of employment within the framework of the Lisbon Strategy and the completion of the internal market. They are promoting the strategic choice of capital and of the EU to shift the burden of the crisis on to the workers' shoulders.

The Treaty of Maastricht and the Stability Pact are the springboard for an all-out attack on labour rights and on the income of working-class families, on the pretext of reducing deficits. The recent decisions by the Commission on permanent spending cuts will have painful consequences on public health and care and workers' insurance rights and pensions which, in conjunction with the demand for higher taxes, will drastically reduce the standard of living of the grassroots classes.

The aim of the proposed way out of the crisis into a green economy, namely energy, broadband networks and innovation, is to extend big business into new profitable sectors, not to protect the environment and satisfy grassroots needs.

The workers should not accept any sacrifice for the profits of the plutocracy and should go on the counter-attack and organise their fight, condemn the parties which support Maastricht and the European one-way street and send out a message of disobedience to the EU by supporting the Greek Communist Party in the European elections in June.

#### IN THE CHAIR: DIANA WALLIS

*Vice-President*

**Jean-Marie Le Pen (NI).** – (FR) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, our fellow Member, the chairman of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, Mr Schulz, intends to have the Rules of Procedure of this House changed, on the pretext that I could be the oldest Member in the next Parliament. However, to support his ....

*(The President cut off the speaker)*

**President.** – That is not a point of order.

**Jean-Marie Le Pen (NI).** – (FR) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, on this occasion Mr Schulz has made some defamatory statements and has accused me of the crime of blasphemy. I wish to say that this argument is ill-founded and that I merely said that the gas chambers were a detail in the history of the world war, which is a fact.

*(Mixed reactions)*

I would point out that, on this occasion, Madam President, I have been fined EUR 200 000 in damages, which just goes to show what state freedom of opinion and freedom of expression are in in Europe and in France. Your cries will not hide your responsibility in the crisis, the crisis of euro-internationalism, of which you are the proponents. Therefore, please, let me speak.

Madam President, I would ask the Chairman of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament to kindly apologise for making a false accusation.



**Martin Schulz (PSE).** – (DE) Madam President, it is perfectly simple. Anyone who does not want this man to chair the formal opening sitting of the European Parliament should support my motion for a change to the Rules of Procedure.

*(Applause)*

### **3. Voting time**

**President.** – The next item is the vote.

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

**3.1. Common consular instructions: biometric identifiers and visa applications (A6-0143/2009, Sarah Ludford) (vote)**

**3.2. Community guarantee to the European Investment Bank (A6-0109/2009, Esko Seppänen) (vote)**

**3.3. The performance and sustainability of the European aviation system (A6-0002/2009, Marian-Jean Marinescu) (vote)**

*- Before the vote:*

**Marian-Jean Marinescu, rapporteur.** – (RO) Parliament reached an agreement with the Council and this agreement is supported by five political groups. I am referring to the two reports which follow.

Thanks to the amendments submitted by two of our fellow Members – incidentally, the content of these amendments has already been included in the compromise agreed with the Council –, we must vote today on a number of articles.

Rules which I regard as incorrect have meant that the order of vote includes in some articles the text from the Committee on Transport and Tourism first and then the compromise text. I would like to request for us to vote on the compromise text today as it is actually supported by the five political groups, so that the two regulations come into force by the end of this legislature.

**President.** – Thank you for your comments. We will in fact get to where you would like to be by following the voting list and voting on the amendments.

**3.4. Aerodromes, air traffic management and air navigation services (A6-0515/2008, Marian-Jean Marinescu) (vote)**

**3.5. Novel foods (A6-0512/2008, Kartika Tamara Liotard) (vote)**

**3.6. Substances that deplete the ozone layer (recast) (A6-0045/2009, Johannes Blokland) (vote)**

**3.7. The ABB-ABM method as a management tool for allocating budgetary resources (A6-0104/2009, Kyösti Virrankoski) (vote)**

**3.8. Mid-term Review of the 2007-2013 Financial Framework (A6-0110/2009, Reimer Böge) (vote)**

**3.9. EC-Cariforum States Economic Partnership Agreement (vote)**

*- Before the vote on Amendment 13:*

**Ignasi Guardans Cambó (ALDE).** – Madam President, regarding Amendment 13, to be added after paragraph 22, I would like to have this amendment considered as an addition instead of as a replacement of the original text. On that condition, we could support it.

In fact, if you allow me, this same amendment and exactly the same proposal from my group would apply to one amendment in almost every report we need to vote on. I do not know whether I can read a list of those amendments, or if you want me to stand up in each case with exactly the same request. It is up to you.

**President.** – Mr Guardans Cambó, we will take this as a test case. I have to ask those who proposed the amendment if they are in agreement with your addition.

**Caroline Lucas (Verts/ALE).** – Madam President, the answer is 'yes'.

*(The oral amendment was accepted.)*

– Before the vote on Amendment 2:

**Ignasi Guardans Cambó (ALDE).** – Madam President, I have an oral amendment here to Amendment 2, namely the deletion of the last sentence for the sake of accuracy, because it is not accurate any more. We would delete the sentence 'Considers that this monitoring should start after the adoption of each interim EPA'. This does not apply in this case. This is a full EPA, not an interim EPA, so for reasons of factual reality we would like to delete this sentence.

*(The oral amendment was accepted.)*

### **3.10. EC-Côte d'Ivoire stepping stone Economic Partnership Agreement (vote)**

### **3.11. EC-Ghana Economic Partnership Agreement (vote)**

### **3.12. EC-Pacific States Interim Partnership Agreement (vote)**

– Before the vote on Amendment 8:

**Glyn Ford (PSE).** – Madam President, to save time the Socialists are prepared to accept Amendments 8 and 10 as additions, but we will vote against if they are not accepted as additions by the PPE-DE Group.

**Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE-DE).** – (FR) I agree to this procedure.

*(The proposal was accepted.)*

– Before the vote on Amendment 19:

**Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE-DE).** – (FR) Madam President, in paragraph 39, compromise amendment 19 would be acceptable to our group if, in relation to the non-state actors, we could add 'the participation'. This would give the following amendment: '39a. Stresses in particular the crucial role of ACP parliaments and the participation of non-state actors in the monitoring and management of EPAs'; the rest would remain unchanged.

I believe that the rapporteur, Mr Ford, is in agreement.

*(The oral amendment was accepted.)*

### **3.13. EC-SADC EPA States Interim Economic Partnership Agreement (vote)**

– Before the vote on Amendment 13:

**Kader Arif (PSE).** – (FR) Madam President, if Amendment 4 was an addition, then 14 and 8 should not lapse, and thus we would have voted on 14 and 8.

**President.** – The feeling is that the amendment with the addition covers the whole of the text. If you really want to vote on the original text, we can go back, but the general mood seems to be to carry on, I think.

**Robert Sturdy (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, I am quite happy to carry on. I think it is covered.

**President.** – We will therefore keep going.

### **3.14. EC-Eastern and Southern African States Economic Partnership Agreement (vote)**

### **3.15. EC-EAC Partner States Economic Partnership Agreement (vote)**

### **3.16. EC-Central Africa stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement (vote)**

### **3.17. Economic Partnership Agreement between the EC and Cariforum (A6-0117/2009, David Martin) (vote)**

– *Before the vote:*

**David Martin, rapporteur.** – Madam President, I know how attached colleagues are to their lunches – or should that be the other way round, I am not sure – but I want to take just two minutes.

On Monday evening we had a very important debate on whether or not we can give assent on CARIFORUM. The Commission and the Council – and it is important that both institutions made these commitments – promised us that, in terms of aid promises, they would deliver on the quality of the aid and in a timely fashion. They assured us that nothing in the EPA would affect the Caribbean countries' access to medicines. They assured us that the application of the most-favoured-nation clause would not in any way impact on South-South trade and that the five-year review at the end of the first phase of this EPA would be a genuine review that would take into account development objectives.

On the basis of these promises – and on the condition, of course, that these are now written into the record of this Parliament and that both the Council and the Commission promise to honour and obey these commitments – I believe that this House, with a massive majority today, can now give assent to the Caribbean EPA.

I would like to thank Commissioner Ashton for her immense cooperation on this, the flexibility that she has shown, and her commitment. The fact that she is here for this vote says much about her. This vote was scheduled for Tuesday. I know she gave up vital commitments to be here today and she has made vital commitments to this Parliament. I want to thank the Commission for their cooperation, and ask Members to vote for assent.

**Helmuth Markov (GUE/NGL).** – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, this is a point of order. I should like to quote from the letter which President Pöttering sent to me as chairman of the Committee on International Trade. Have no fear, I shall not read the entire letter.

'The interpretation of Rule 47 by AFCO to which you refer was announced at Parliament's sitting of 18 February 2009, and, in the absence of objections, was deemed adopted. [...] The proposals concerning the two EPAs [i.e. the reports by David Martin and Erika Mann] were formally announced and referred to your committee [i.e. the Committee on International Trade] only at the sitting of 19 February 2009. In the light of the above interpretation, it will no longer be possible to apply Rule 47 in relation to those two procedures, nor to any further procedures.'

(DE) Therefore, all references in official documents to Rule 47 have to be deleted. This relates both to the cover sheet of the document and to the table of contents, to the opinion page and to the procedure page, the last page of the Committee on International Trade. I should like this to be recorded in the minutes.

**President.** – Thank you Mr Markov. In fact I had to inform the House that there is a corrigendum to all language versions of this report deleting the reference to Rule 47. What you have stated will therefore be dealt with. As we seem to be in agreement, we can proceed.

### 3.18. Stepping-stone Agreement towards an Economic Partnership Agreement between the EC and Côte d'Ivoire (A6-0144/2009, Erika Mann) (vote)

– *Before the vote:*

**Erika Mann, rapporteur.** – Madam President, I will be very brief. I would just like to thank my colleagues and to recommend a positive vote in the assent procedure. However, I would love to have Commissioner Ashton's confirmation again on the points we raised during our debate on Monday – specifically, Commissioner, when you committed yourself to giving the same preferences to Côte d'Ivoire that you had already accepted for SADC. You are nodding – perfect! Thank you so much.

**President.** – We have agreement, so we will continue with the vote.

### 3.19. EIB and EBRD annual reports for 2007 (A6-0135/2009, Gay Mitchell) (vote)

### 3.20. Future of the car industry (vote)

– *Before the final vote:*

**Martin Schulz (PSE).** – (DE) Madam President, I refer to Rule 146 of our Rules of Procedure and thank you for having given me the floor. I ask my fellow Members from the Federal Republic of Germany in particular for their indulgence of my having asked to speak now.

At the beginning of this vote, Mr Jean-Marie Le Pen took the floor. Mr Le Pen repeated in his leave to speak that the existence of the gas chambers in Auschwitz was a detail of world history. With reference to Rule 146 of our Rules of Procedure, which describes how members of this House must behave here, I ask Parliament's Bureau to check if such a statement is permissible in a chamber of deputies, which is bound by a spirit of reconciliation and understanding and respect for the victims, especially of Hitler's Fascism. I would be grateful if Parliament's Bureau could advise on the necessary measures.

(Applause)

**Joseph Daul (PPE-DE).** – (FR) Please, show a little respect for the victims who died at Auschwitz and elsewhere. We still have two minutes left. Show a little respect.

All I wish to say is that I completely agree with Mr Schulz and that what we have heard today, in this House, is uncalled for.

(Applause)

– *After the final vote:*

**Bruno Gollnisch (NI).** – (FR) Mrs Wallis, I find it extremely regrettable that you have given the floor to Mr Daul and Mr Schulz, but not to me. It is true that you testified in a report that you were the expert in interpreting the one-rule-for-one-and-one-rule-for-another Rules of Procedure.

Therefore, just to follow on from what Mr Schulz said, I should like to propose that we rename the Winston Churchill building, since in his 12 volumes of memoirs dedicated to the history of the Second World War, Winston Churchill wrote not one line on the history of the gas chambers.

## 4. Explanations of vote

### Oral explanations of vote

#### - Report: Sarah Ludford (A6-0143/2009)

**Daniel Hannan (NI).** – Madam President, defined external frontiers are the essential attribute of nationhood. All sorts of other functions can be devolved to local government, or indeed delegated to international associations, but a state that no longer determines who can cross its borders and settle on its territory is no state at all.

Euro-federalists – including the author of this report, the good Baroness Ludford – well understand this point, which is why for the past five years their chief endeavour has to been harmonise justice and home affairs. Under the splendidly Orwellian, Ministry-of-Truth-style title, ‘the area of freedom, security and justice’, they have harmonised immigration and asylum, they have created a European public prosecutor, a pan-European magistracy, a single system of criminal justice and even, in Europol, a common police force. Of course, from their point of view – the view of those who want a single European state – so far, so logical, but I wish they would have the courage and the courtesy to ask the people first and to put the Treaty of Lisbon to a vote. *Pactio Olisipiensis censenda est!*

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**Alexander Alvaro (ALDE).** – Madam President, I would ask the President of the House to consider, in spite of what Martin Schulz said, that we should follow Voltaire, especially as I come from a Liberal group: even if I did not share an iota of what this person had to say, I consider that he has the right to express his view – as those two had. I believe in equal treatment, and we can deal with an opinion. We should not take away the right of free speech on this issue, even if I do not agree at all with what he has to say.

**President.** – Thank you, Mr Alvaro. I made it clear that I had every intention of giving Mr Gollnisch the floor, but I wanted to conclude the vote.

**- Report: Esko Seppänen (A6-0109/2009)**

**Daniel Hannan (NI).** – Madam President, we have just voted to double the capital of the European Investment Bank. It is worth standing back and asking, ‘What is the European Investment Bank for?’ In theory it is there to make soft loans available to struggling businesses, but who are, in fact, the recipients?

In the 1990s, the single largest beneficiary of EIB largesse in the United Kingdom was British Airways, which is hardly a small firm operating within tight profit margins. I cannot help noting parenthetically that, throughout this period, British Airways was also a chief sponsor of the campaign to get Britain into the euro.

I stand back and ask again: what is the purpose of the European Investment Bank? I think the answer to that question is that the purpose of the EIB is the employment of its own employees. It has become part of the Brussels racket, this massive mechanism for taking money from the taxpayer and distributing it to those fortunate enough to be employed within the system. The EU may once have been an idealistic – or at least an ideological – project, but it has long since become a handy way to make a living, which of course is what makes it so wretchedly hard to dislodge.

**- Report: Marian-Jean Marinescu (A6-0002/2009)**

**Michl Ebner (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Madam President, I should like to say to Mr Hannan that the European Central Bank is also a good thing because we had no currency depreciation such as that regrettably experienced by the British pound over recent months. That is perhaps a sign that he should reconsider his position.

On the Marinescu report, I deliberately voted for the Marinescu report. I believe that functional airspace blocks are the right response to today's challenges. They are late coming, but at least they are coming. They offer an important advantage in reducing holding stacks and congested corridors, and they will benefit the environment and keep the cost of air travel down. For that reason, I think that the air navigation services will do a good job here.

**- Report: Marian-Jean Marinescu (A6-0515/2009)**

**Michl Ebner (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Madam President, may I take this opportunity not only to explain that I voted in favour, but also to raise an issue which is of great concern to me, namely the problem of taxation of aviation fuel. This issue is still regulated on the basis of the 1944 Chicago Convention. I fail to understand why we still need to abide by this regulation and why the United States are forcing us into something here or not letting us change something that should have been changed a long time ago, because it is unfair that petrol for cars, transportation systems and so forth should be taxed, while aviation fuel is not. It is a distortion of competition and we could introduce a tax on aviation fuel and achieve better competition in the Union of 27, at least in a transitional phase.

**- Report: Kartika Tamara Liotard (A6-0512/2009)**

**Anja Weisgerber (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Madam President, the regulation on novel foods brings harmonisation of the approval and use of these novel foods and ingredients to the European Union. That is an important step for a comprehensive guarantee of food safety. Without this regulation, we would have had no control over and no restrictions on approvals. We have ensured in this regulation that there are strict criteria which serve consumer protection. In granting approvals, the European Food Safety Authority will ultimately decide on the safety of novel foods, thereby giving us harmonisation throughout Europe.

In addition to safety concerns, ethical questions in relation to novel foods are also very important. This includes the question of avoiding animal testing or preventing the use of cloned foods. I therefore welcome the fact that these ethical aspects are taken into account during approval. We wanted an opinion by the European Group on Ethics in Science and New Technologies to be taken into account where there are ethical reservations.

I am grateful that this was included and I was therefore able to vote in favour of the report as a whole.

**- Report: Reimer Böge (A6-0110/2009)**

**Antonio Masip Hidalgo (PSE).** – (ES) Madam President, taking advantage of the fact that we are talking about the budget, I think that we should prepare ourselves for negotiating a continuation of support for coal next year; it is a vital domestic source of energy.

I am saying this with an appropriate amount of advance warning because some high-up official improperly allowed himself to express his opinion to the contrary, leaking it to an economics publication; this has confused public opinion.

This is by no means the case. After 2012 we will have to continue to support coal from my country and I would like the report of parliamentary proceedings to state that fact. Officials, please restrict yourselves to implementing the plan in force and then, from 2012, the instrument which we will begin to negotiate with the sector next year.

**Mario Borghezio (UEN).** – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the European Parliament, in its capacity as budgetary authority, must make its assessment to contribute to the review of the 2007-2013 financial framework.

For the purpose of this assessment, I would like to ask the rapporteur, but also, and most importantly, the Presidency, to shed light on an emerging concern; that of the default, whether full or partial I do not know, of the voluntary supplementary pension fund for MEPs.

Is it true that funds are lacking, that investments have been made in Luxemburgish funds, God knows which? Is it true that the bodies responsible for the fund, which should be monitored by the European Parliament, invested in funds that are in the same financial mess that we are trying to sort out?

I hope not, but my concern is not with my pension or that of other Members, my concern is that European taxpayers will in future be forced, via the European Parliament, to request additional funds from the European Union to fill a hole that should be paid for by those who made it and who must take responsibility for it. We are a supervisory body; let us first put our own house in order and consider the funds paid by the European Parliament and its Members.

**Christopher Heaton-Harris (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, it is always a pleasure to be present with you in explanations of votes. People will start to talk soon.

The current financial crisis has highlighted the problems of having such a long period for a financial framework. Who, a couple of years ago, would have foreseen the extent of the damage caused by the credit crunch and its consequences? I believe that this review gives us in this House a big opportunity and exposes a problem. The problem exposed is one that, actually, we have created.

There is now a new industry that has been built in Brussels. It is not a manufacturing industry, although it does create some jobs. It is an industry driven by lobbyists and especially NGOs. It is quite a sinister trade. It is essentially self-perpetuating. The Commission consults NGOs on a subject, the NGOs call for action, they lobby MEPs to give political support for this call, the Commission eventually runs a programme in the subject area and – yes, you've guessed it! – the NGOs who told the Commission this programme was needed bid to

run the programme itself. This was an opportunity wasted because we could have said that we are not going to do this in the future.

**Philip Claeys (NI).** – (NL) Madam President, Mr Böge's report is one big appeal for more funding for the European Union, something which obviously does not come as a surprise. What particularly disturbs me, however, is that we are once again dealing with a report here that explicitly makes reference to the Treaty of Lisbon, a treaty that was rendered void by the referendum in Ireland. So, since the Irish clearly got it wrong the first time, they will be voting again in a new referendum in the autumn. Well, you would think that the European Parliament would at least have the decorum to wait for the voters' verdict before approving texts that make reference to the Treaty of Lisbon. Yesterday we approved another report about dialogue with the citizen in Europe. Well, if we really want that dialogue to work, we must at least show respect to the verdict of the voters.

**Jim Allister (NI).** – Madam President, I voted against this report for two reasons. Firstly, because of its imprudent and reckless demands for even more funds for wasteful EU expenditure – which for the United Kingdom, of course, means demands for an even higher annual net contribution, driving us into further deficit.

The second reason I voted against this report is the presumption it makes on the implementation of the Lisbon Treaty, with no regard to that Treaty's failure to meet the ratification test set for it. Moreover, Lisbon itself would of course ratchet up expenditure through pursuit of new competences and new ventures, such as lavish waste on the space policies which would come within its ambit and further policies linked to climate change. So for those reasons I voted against this report.

**Neena Gill (PSE).** – Madam President, I welcome this review of the financial framework, although I was disappointed that the amendment calling for a radical reform of the common agricultural policy was defeated in the vote today. I believe there is an urgent need to reform the EU's financing system, and it is regrettable that many of the funding streams are old and historical commitments with little value added.

We do not prioritise new issues which do not have sufficient resources. We urgently need to finance energy and climate-change programmes and invest significantly in green technologies. My biggest concern, however, is for heading 4, which has been chronically underfinanced for many years. Whilst the European Union aspires to be a major global player, this is totally undermined by the lack of resources to meet those objectives. I am also concerned that there is a policy of outsourcing all external funding programmes. As a result, this has a detrimental impact on the EU's role as a global player in developing countries. Nevertheless, I did support this review.

#### **- Motion for a resolution: B6-0141/2009 (EPA - Cariforum States)**

**Marian Harkin (ALDE).** – Madam President, I want to comment on Amendment 9 to the resolution on CARIFORUM and, indeed, Amendment 4 to the resolution on Côte d'Ivoire. It appeared in the following six resolutions.

The amendment calls for the phasing-out of export subsidies without delay. I could not support that amendment as our policy in the EU is to phase them out by 2013. Right now the Commission is increasing export refunds in the dairy sector because the world price for milk has fallen below the cost of production.

The amendment also states that EU export subsidies represent a serious obstacle for ACP producers in the agricultural livestock and dairy sector.

We all know that this is a vast overstatement of the case. In fact, if we were to phase out all kinds of export subsidies without delay, we would decimate our own dairy industry and food security in this sector, and I seriously question if that is what Parliament really wants to do.

**Syed Kamall (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, before I begin, may I just pay tribute to the previous speaker, Jim Allister. I may not always agree with his views when they are forcefully put but I have to say that, if I were a Northern Ireland voter, I would probably say there is no truer friend to Northern Ireland than Jim Allister in this House.

On the vote in hand and the EU-CALIFORUM deal, I think we should recognise that even though there were many concerns over the deal, in terms of the EU being aggressive in trying to open up its markets, at the same time it does set a deadline for liberalisation and it makes many of the Caribbean countries recognise

that they have to seek to diversify. For far too long they have relied on British and other ex-colonial masters' guilt to rely on preferential treatment for bananas and sugar.

You cannot continue to be so-called 'dessert economies' if you are going to compete in a globalised digital world, and I welcome that aspect of the Economic Partnership Agreement.

**Neena Gill (PSE).** – Madam President, I voted in favour of the EPAs resolution because only through equal partnership can we help other countries experience the benefits of economic progress. I welcome the reassurances received from our new Commissioner, Cathy Ashton, to allay the fears many had about EPAs. She is to be applauded for finding consensus on this issue.

This resolution suggests much to counter the negative provisions of the original text. Clauses regarding intellectual property rights will make access to generic medicines easier and safer, and suggestions that countries choose their own rate of development will prevent sudden and damaging liberalisation.

Europe must also undertake partnership with ACP countries, if they do not threaten to impoverish those countries, intellectually, socially or economically. A recent ACP mission to Guyana demonstrated that trade, if harnessed for good, can have a remarkably powerful effect, but trade agreements must be frank, have open dialogue and be based on mutual respect.

**- Motion for a resolution: B6-0148/2009 (EPA - Côte d'Ivoire)**

**Syed Kamall (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, as in the case of most of the other economic partnership agreements, there was a great deal of concern over the EU's approach to opening up markets asymmetrically. Particularly in the case of Côte d'Ivoire, there was concern over the fact that, actually, there was not really a stable government in the country, and there were concerns over whether you could make a deal with a country in that position.

But, once again, we have to recognise that the advantage of economic partnership agreements is that for the first time there is the possibility of listening to consumers and entrepreneurs in these countries rather than listening to the governments. And, when you speak to entrepreneurs in many of these countries, they say: please give us the access to goods and services that you currently enjoy in the North or the West so we can then create wealth, we can create jobs and we will no longer be dependent on aid in the long term.

It is only by helping the entrepreneurs, the wealth-creators, in these countries that we can take these countries out of long-term poverty.

**- Motion for a resolution: B6-0143/2009 (EPA- Pacific States)**

**Martin Callanan (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, I am sorry we are keeping you from your lunch with our explanations of votes.

As the chairman of the Political Affairs Committee of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly, I have had many discussions with many of these small, peripheral – and extremely remote – states in the South Pacific. They are not blessed with an abundance of natural resources and of course they are extremely remote and inaccessible, which makes it extremely important that we should facilitate access to our markets for their products and allow our own products to help and develop their own markets in their locations. We should take account of their unique geographical status and put in place measures to mitigate their situation and help them along the road to economic development and to enjoying the prosperity enjoyed by the rest of us.

There are a lot of good things in these economic partnership agreements and I was delighted to be able to vote in favour of the report.

**- Motion for a resolution: B6-0142/2009 (EPA - Ghana)**

**Syed Kamall (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, on the Ghana agreement, I would like to say that there is an important point, because it is quite often argued, particularly the by Socialists in this House, that we should not support the lowering of import tariffs in many of these countries.

If you look at the example of Ghana, the country only produces 30-35% of the rice its people consume. If we continue to support import tariffs on rice, what we are really saying to the very poor people in the country is that you will pay more for your food and you will pay more for your medicines.



I consider it shameful that the Socialists in this House continue to support import tariffs that keep the very poor even poorer. They should support the opening up of the markets and make sure that we support the entrepreneurs and support poor citizens.

**- Report: Gay Mitchell (A6-0135/2009)**

**Marian Harkin (ALDE).** – Madam President, I want to support the Mitchell report, particularly where the rapporteur states the need for greater cooperation between the two banks to ensure that there is no overlap in their operation. But in particular I want to welcome the increase in lending by 50% to SMEs. The EUR 5 billion that was initially announced is now set at EUR 7.5 billion each year for a four-year period. The EIB has signalled that more monies are available.

This is very good news for SMEs in Ireland because we can expect a EUR 300 million investment over the following weeks in SMEs. It is crucial that the money finds its way to SMEs – that was mentioned by an earlier speaker – and as soon as possible because they are struggling and many of them cannot wait.

**- Motion for a resolution: RC-B6-0152/2009 (Future of the car industry)**

**Martin Callanan (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, I did a lot of work with the car industry when I was fortunate enough to be the shadow rapporteur on the Sacconi report on CO<sub>2</sub> emissions from cars and that convinced me more than anything of the huge strategic and commercial value that the car industry offers to us in Europe. I say that particularly as I represent the North East of England where we have the huge Nissan manufacturing plant in Washington, in Tyne and Wear, the most productive and efficient car plant in Europe.

But over the last decade the car industry has been assailed by very many additional rules, regulations and burdens from this place. It is more than a little ironic now to find the Commission lamenting the terrible financial plight in which the industry finds itself. Nevertheless I cannot believe that protectionism is the answer, not least because there would be many other industries also queuing up for financial aid from the taxpayer.

In particular I want to mention the quite disgraceful actions of President Sarkozy in France in giving state aid to his own manufacturers on the explicit assurance that they should withdraw production from other Member States. That is a terrible road to protectionism and in the end will help nobody in Europe.

**Christopher Heaton-Harris (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, as you can see, my colleagues are jealous of our relationship, which is why they have acted as our chaperones here this afternoon. I hope my words meet with your seal of approval.

We all know that the car industry is having some serious financial problems. They are documented on a daily basis in all our national newspapers. In the region I represent, there is a large Toyota plant at Burnaston in Derby, where various measures to cut costs have already been enacted to meet the new financial environment. In the excellent new UK parliamentary constituency of Daventry, the McLaren Formula 1 precision engine plant is based, employing over 600 people.

So all of us here know or represent some part of the car industry and we know of the financial problems that there are. But we have actually managed to compound them in this place by passing regulation after regulation after regulation in the good times, not looking forward to when times might be slightly leaner. The car industry cannot cope with the regulations that we have enforced.

Thank you for my extra time. I know the bit at the beginning perhaps cost me some seconds.

**President.** – And you managed to get Daventry in there. I could say that I think you and your two colleagues will probably owe me lunch after this.

**Syed Kamall (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, my two colleagues and I will be very happy to buy lunch for you, and for your two colleagues on either side, though I am not sure whether you would enjoy our company any more than you enjoy our speeches.

We all know what a serious situation many industries are facing at this time in trying to get hold of credit. There are many viable businesses which, before the credit crisis, would be making fantastic profits. Really it just comes down to the accessibility of credit rather than any serious problems with their business models. On the other hand, there are plenty of companies that have for many years been very close to failing, propped up by state aid or making losses.

Looking at the example of America, where they have given aid to some of the most inefficient producers, producers who have not taken account of the times, let us make sure that we do not repeat those mistakes and give state aid or any aid to companies that have no long-term viable future. Of course we must make sure we have long-term viable jobs, but let us make sure that we are not propping up failing companies.

**Neena Gill (PSE).** - Madam President, it will come as no surprise to you that I supported the report on the future of the car industry, an industry that is sometimes maligned by some but, for me, a crucial sector of manufacturing in regions like mine, the West Midlands.

Across Europe it represents over 20% of manufacturing. The industry is a model, I believe, of the way a sector can transform itself, as I saw for myself on my recent visit to Jaguar Land Rover in Castle Bromwich, where I was really impressed by the forward thinking of trade unions and their partnership with management to ensure continued research and development into green vehicles.

I have also been urging the Commission to approve the UK Government's support for the car industry, and I welcome that this has happened. But we also need better regulation and principles for future EU legislation when it comes to motor vehicles.

Our approach to industry during this economic downturn must be holistic. The components of cars are just as important as the car industry itself, so the supply chain's future also has to be ensured. Last week I visited the Michelin tyre plant in Stoke, and again I was impressed by the research and development fund and efforts to improve the efficiencies of tyres, with a view to providing environmental and social sustainability. There is little point in protecting the biggest industries without ensuring proper support for the small businesses down the supply chain.

#### **Written explanations of vote**

##### **- Report: Sarah Ludford (A6-0143/2009)**

**Guy Bono (PSE), in writing.** - (FR) I voted in favour of this recommendation, presented by a British member of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, Baroness Ludford, on Common Consular Instructions: biometric identifiers and visa applications.

This agreement at second reading enables us to confirm our will to introduce biometric data into the European visa information system. Thanks to the Common Consular Instructions, we finally have a guarantee that all the Member States will issue visas to the nationals of almost 100 countries, on the basis of similar criteria and characteristics.

This text therefore has the merit of introducing fundamental measures for the protection of European citizens, as well as provisions that ensure respect for private life and for the personal data of third-country nationals.

**Andreas Mölzer (NI), in writing.** - (DE) Biometric data can make passports and travel documents more difficult to forge and thereby help to combat organised crime and illegal immigration. However, this is only possible if the biometric data are recorded correctly. There still appear to be problems here. With hackers currently boasting on the Internet about how easily fingerprints can be forged on German registration forms and pointing out that, if identity cards are reduced to credit card format, the photos can be digitally mastered, making biometric readability difficult, doubts about this technology could easily arise. In all events, data protection for normal citizens must be guaranteed during the use of biometric data. In this sense, I agree with this report.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** - (IT) Having carefully examined the recommendation for second reading concerning biometrics and visa applications with regard to Common Consular Instructions, I have decided to vote in favour. Indeed, I believe that the aims of Mrs Ludford's report - facilitating the organisation, reception and processing of visa applications - are very commendable.

##### **- Report: Esko Seppänen (A6-0109/2009)**

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** - (IT) I do not feel able fully to support Mr Seppänen's report on the Community guarantee to the European Investment Bank against losses under loans and loan guarantees for projects outside the Community, but nor do I intend to vote against it. I have therefore chosen to abstain.

**- Report: Marian-Jean Marinescu (A6-0002/2009)**

**John Attard-Montalto (PSE)**, *in writing*. – Although Malta and Gozo are territorially the smallest EU state they have control over extensive air space. I think it is important to address the performance and sustainability of the aviation system. The idea, as the Committee on Transport and Tourism pointed out, is that the most effective and most efficient way of creating a Single European Sky is by means of a top-down approach. However, as it has never been possible to secure political approval for such an approach, the aim must now be to speed up the processes initiated on the basis of the bottom-up approach.

We must ensure that the planned reform of Eurocontrol should take place before the entry into force of this regulation. Also, efforts should be made to create the Single Sky in alignment with the development phase of SESAR (the Single European Sky ATM Research Programme).

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (IT) I support the Marinescu report because the EU's enlargement policy, together with an active neighbourhood policy, has extended the European aviation market to 37 countries.

The expanding single aviation market is turning the EU into a global player. The Single European Sky (SES) initiative was launched in 2000 and brought air traffic management under the common transport policy. The competitiveness of European air transport industry needs a full system approach: common vision, objectives and technologies, based on a solid regulatory framework.

In this respect, the Commission has put forward a package of proposals, some elements of which could be improved, however, for example guaranteeing functional independence for the national surveillance authorities and enhancing the involvement of all parties. Cooperation at political, social and technical levels is essential in order to achieve the objective of the SES.

Like the rapporteur, I believe the Commission should centre its attention primarily on setting quantifiable, achievable Community-wide targets. These targets should focus on addressing all sensitive areas such as safety, the environment, capacity and cost-effectiveness.

**Guy Bono (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (FR) I voted in favour of the report on the performance and sustainability of the European aviation system, presented by my Romanian fellow Member Mr Marinescu.

This text is part of the 'Single Sky II' package and aims to improve the performance of the European aviation system.

It makes it possible to respond to several concerns: environmental concerns, through the implementation of measures enabling a reduction in CO<sub>2</sub> emissions; operational concerns, as it aims to rationalise air traffic by means of increased capacities and optimal planning of air routes; and, finally, concerns for the safety of the European public, by calling for cooperation and coordination between the various actors.

Following the 'Single Sky I' package, this report has the merit of presenting a dynamic vision of the current challenges by proposing long-term solutions for the effective modification of the aviation sector.

**Nicodim Bulzesc (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of the report from my colleague, Marian-Jean Marinescu, as this legislative package is intended to improve the performance and sustainability of the European aviation system. More efficient regulation will mean shorter flights, shorter delays and lower fuel consumption.

**Jörg Leichtfried (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (DE) I am voting in favour of the performance and sustainability of the European aviation system. Air traffic management has been included in the common transport policy since 2004 on the basis of the Single European Sky Regulation. Following enlargement, the European aviation market has grown to 37 countries and has made the EU a global player. An update to reflect this was therefore urgently needed.

One core element of the Single European Sky is the creation of functional airspace blocks (FAB) based on traffic flows rather than national borders. It should be possible to reduce the current 60 blocks and control centres to between 15 and 20.

This not only corresponds to the concept of a common Europe, it also saves time, money and fuel. In the past, each flight has been an average of 49 km longer than necessary due to the fragmentation of airspace. The Commission expects savings of between 7 and 12% of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions. Functional airspace blocks are

essential because they allow the air traffic control systems of several Member States to be integrated into one European transport system. An FAB coordinator should also be introduced along the lines of the TEN coordinators.

**David Martin (PSE)**, *in writing*. – I support the recognition that flight efficiency needs to be improved and air traffic delays minimised contained in this report. I welcome the introduction of performance targets for Air Traffic Management which should provide a more efficient aviation network to safeguard environmental and economic progress.

**Nicolae Vlad Popa (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of the report drafted by my colleague, Marian-Jean Marinescu, aimed at improving the performance and sustainability of the European aviation system.

Thanks to the Single European Sky initiative, the single aviation market has grown and evolved over recent years. However, very little progress has been noted in the overall efficiency of the design and use of the European route structure and, consequently, airspace users and passengers are paying unnecessary costs.

I welcome the Commission's proposals aimed at setting binding performance targets for air navigation service providers, a European network management function to ensure convergence between national networks and clear deadlines for Member States to improve performance.

I congratulate Marian-Jean Marinescu on drafting this report.

I welcome the rapporteur's proposals on developing an initiative for a full system approach in the field of safety in order to keep air transport safe and sustainable.

I support the rapporteur's initiative which considers full transparency of charges. The established costs should be consistent with the convergence criteria based on the performance improvement scheme.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI)**, *in writing*. – (IT) I voted in favour of Mr Marinescu's report on the performance and sustainability of the European aviation system.

I share the rapporteur's view on the need to review the legislative framework of the Single European Sky (SES) initiative, because since it was launched in 2000, it does not appear to have delivered the expected results; I refer, in particular, to improved flight efficiency, cost reduction and 'de-fragmentation', and the general inefficiencies that still exist in the air transport system. These inefficiencies unfortunately result in high costs in terms of money, time and fuel burn for those who use the Single European Sky.

I also believe we need to push for review of the legislation in line with the Commission's proposals, which are aimed, among other things, at the independence of national surveillance authorities, the harmonisation of safety requirements, a Single European Flight Information Region, and last but not least, enhanced involvement of social partners in the system approach. I say this because, in my view, only by reaching broad consensus at the base can the current technical and political obstacles be overcome to meet the ambitious objectives of this initiative.

**Carl Schlyter (Verts/ALE)**, *in writing*. – (SV) The report emphasises that an integrated system will provide increased safety and a more efficient use of airspace and will therefore reduce queuing times. At the same time, the system is based on an assumption of constantly increasing air traffic, but I am nevertheless voting in favour of the report, as the positive aspects outweigh the negative ones. We in the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance will take vigorous action against air traffic by other means, for example by means of proposals for various environmental and transport duties.

#### **- Report: Marian-Jean Marinescu (A6-0515/2008)**

**Jaromír Kohlíček (GUE/NGL)**, *in writing*. – (CS) The Single European Sky is an attempt by European states to improve the traffic-carrying capacity of air space for civilian aviation. In 2000 came the first attempt to create individual functional blocks of air space above Europe that would be jointly controlled. The Czech Republic came under the Convention on Managing Medium-height Air Traffic above Central Europe and at the time I was the rapporteur for the convention in the Czech Parliament. As rapporteur Marinescu states in one of his reports, these treaties failed to fulfil their purpose. The treaty for which I was the rapporteur was scrapped with the agreement of the various parties on grounds of obsolescence. Within the framework of the 6<sup>th</sup> Framework Programme an extensive programme for developing air traffic control over all of Europe was inaugurated under the name of SESAR and the results of this project are to be brought into

operation gradually, starting in 2014. The reports dealing with the 'Single European Sky' initiative are therefore following the same timetable. Besides the pressure to liberalise services in the area in question (air transport) the GUE/NGL group is particularly critical of the prioritisation of operating profitability over safety in the reports.

We also disagree with the exclusive concentration on air traffic managers, since the changes will affect everyone working in air traffic control. Finally, it is necessary to carry out broad consultations ahead of the changes with employee representatives.

**Jörg Leichtfried (PSE), in writing. – (DE)** I am voting in favour of the report on aerodromes, air traffic management and air navigation services.

Air traffic management has been included in the common transport policy since 2004 on the basis of the Single European Sky Regulation. Following enlargement, the European aviation market has grown to 37 countries and has made the EU a global player. An update to reflect this was therefore urgently needed.

The second report in the package extends the scope by harmonising controls of aerodromes and their operators. Austrian aerodromes also come under this new rule.

What is positive, precisely in times of economic crisis, is that a series of proposed amendments in Parliament allows advance payments for infrastructure investments where other sources of investment are available in addition to user fees and under strict conditions. This will help significantly in seeing us through this economic crisis.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT)** Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am in favour of Mr Marinescu's report on aerodromes, air traffic management and air navigation services, since it fits into the wider framework of the Single European Sky initiative, to which I have already pledged my support.

I agree with the rapporteur that in order to address future challenges in the aviation market, above all in the field of air safety, a system of harmonised rules needs to be introduced at European level. At present there are numerous differences between state safety procedures that it would be desirable to eliminate, bearing in mind the Commission's proposals, in particular those concerning the responsibilities of the European Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), which is clearly an important instrument for improving the safety of air transport in Europe.

I do however wish to join Mr Marinescu in pointing out the need to ensure proportionality with regard to these measures by safeguarding the use of local knowledge and expertise and also to guarantee cooperation between the EASA and Eurocontrol in order to avoid excessive red tape and inefficient duplication of tasks and responsibilities.

#### **- Report: Kartika Tamara Liotard (A6-0512/2008)**

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing. – (IT)** I am in favour of the Commission's proposal to amend Regulation (EC) No 258/97 on novel foods and novel food ingredients with the aim of simplifying and centralising the procedures for authorising novel foods and placing them on the market.

The introduction of the new regulation will protect consumers by establishing a high level of food safety, environmental protection and protection of animal health, while at all times observing the precautionary principle as laid down in Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 28 January 2002, laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down procedures in matters of food safety.

The Commission proposal seeks to make the authorisation procedure more effective and transparent and to implement it better. This will contribute to better implementation of the Regulation and give consumers greater power and more options because they will have more information at their disposal.

**Edite Estrela (PSE), in writing. – (PT)** I voted in favour of the European Parliament legislative resolution on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on novel foods, as it simplifies the procedure for authorising novel foods and placing them on the market. It also makes the authorisation procedure more effective and transparent, thereby giving consumers more chance of making an informed choice.

It should be underlined that novel foods must be placed on the market only if they are safe for consumers and do not mislead them. Furthermore, where novel foods serve to replace another food, they must not be nutritionally inferior.

**Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL)**, *in writing*. – (PT) We voted in favour of this report as it takes a positive view of the issue of novel foods and did not entertain the worst proposals of the Right, which tried to insist on GMOs.

As we argued in the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, genetically modified organisms must be excluded, and novel foods must not pose any risks to health or mislead consumers. Also, when consumed as replacement foods, they must not be nutritionally disadvantageous for the consumer.

In the rapporteur's view, the objectives of the new regulation on novel foods are to attain a high level of food safety, consumer protection, environmental protection and protection of animal health, while at all times observing the precautionary principle, as laid down in Regulation (EC) No 178/2002 laying down the general principles and requirements of food law, establishing the European Food Safety Authority and laying down procedures in matters of food safety. All other objectives are of secondary importance.

Furthermore, novel foods must not endanger or mislead consumers. Where novel foods serve to replace another food, they must not be nutritionally inferior from the consumer's point of view.

**Jörg Leichtfried (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (DE) I am voting in favour of the report by Kartika Tamara Liotard on greater safety for novel foods.

We need stricter requirements for approving novel foods, such as products from cloned meat and the use of nanotechnologies.

The term 'novel foods' now includes numerous foods manufactured using novel methods which are currently only marginally represented on the European market, if at all, as well as foods simply unknown to European consumers. However, they also include products from cloned animals, the long-term consequences of which have barely been researched at present. Over 100 applications for approvals of novel foods have been made since 1997 and over 20 have been approved.

I am in favour of a separate regulation for products made from cloned meat and for new approvals to be suspended until such time as it enters into force. Foods containing nanomaterials should be banned until such time as an animal-friendly and safe method of evaluation is found. If such products are placed on the market, they must be labelled so that all information on their origin is directly brought to the consumer's attention.

**Andreas Mölzer (NI)**, *in writing*. – (DE) It should now be clear to everyone that the documents submitted in approval procedures are often embellished and that there are no long-term findings. At the very latest when we hear how rigorously and scrupulously attempts are apparently being made to build up a gene monopoly for genetically modified seed, the alarm bells should ring when there is talk of cloned meat.

In any event, the consequences of cloned meat, including interactions with genetically modified fodder or pesticides and atomic radiation, cannot be predicted. Apart from that, clones would appear to be incompatible with EU animal welfare legislation. Overall, the cloning of animals for food production should be rejected, but if it is used, then there must be appropriate labelling, so that citizens are free to decide. For these reasons I voted in favour of the Liotard report.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI)**, *in writing*. – (IT) I have voted in favour of Mr Liotard's proposal on novel foods. I agree with his assertion that a high level of food safety, consumer protection, environmental protection and the protection of animal health should be guaranteed, while considering the precautionary principle at all times. I would also argue that it is essential that novel foods must not endanger the lives of consumers or mislead them, since the health and protection of citizens would be dangerously threatened.

**- Report: Johannes Blokland (A6-0045/2009)**

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (IT) If the Montreal protocol, which entered into force 20 years ago and was signed by 193 nations, had not banned products that contributed to the reduction of the ozone layer, planet earth would have faced a catastrophic scenario.

The main substances attributed to the depletion of atmospheric ozone are halogenated hydrocarbons, chemicals invented in 1928 as refrigerants. In the 1980s, when the hole in the ozone layer was discovered, researchers found that these chemical compounds, virtually inactive at the level of the earth's surface, were able to interact with the ozone molecules in the atmosphere, destroying the layer that acts as a protective screen against dangerous UV rays. In order to remedy this situation, the Montreal Protocol was signed in 1987 and entered into force two years later.

One thing is certain; we did everything to make our air unbreathable. Progress played an important role in that phase, providing us with a series of goods and services that in the course of the last few decades have contributed to a progressive deterioration of our climate system's condition. The greenhouse effect, the hole in the ozone layer and climate upheaval are just a few of the phenomena that must become the centre of our attention as soon as possible, since they represent our fellow citizens and future children in Europe. That is why I am in favour.

**Šarūnas Birutis (ALDE)**, *in writing*. – (LT) As the main goals of this revision are to simplify and set out the regulation in a new edition and at the same time reduce the unnecessary administrative burden, thus implementing the Commission's obligation to achieve better regulation, ensure compliance with the Montreal protocol, amended in 2007, ensure that problems arising in the future are solved with the aim of regenerating the ozone layer in time and avoid negative impact on people's health and ecosystems, I voted for this legislative act.

**Edite Estrela (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (PT) I voted in favour of the European Parliament legislative resolution on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council on substances that deplete the ozone layer. This recast regulation is the main Community instrument for ensuring compliance with the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer. It ensures not only greater protection against the destructive effects of UV radiation, but also a reduction in the greenhouse effect. The European Union should maintain a leading role in the world, as it has done in the past in this area.

**Jörg Leichtfried (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (DE) I am voting in favour of the report on substances that deplete the ozone layer.

This is a recast of the Regulation on substances that deplete the ozone layer, which is the main EU instrument for transposing the Montreal Protocol requiring ozone-depleting substances to be phased out. The main objective is to comply with the provisions of the 2007 protocol, thereby ensuring that the ozone layer can recover and harmful effects on human health and ecosystems are avoided.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI)**, *in writing*. – (IT) I have voted in favour of Mr Blokland's report on substances that deplete the ozone layer. I agree with the draft's aims to protect the stratospheric ozone layer and to avert climate change, since the banned substances have not only an important Ozone Depleting Potential (ODP) but equally have a Global Warming Potential (GWP).

Furthermore, I concur with the tabled amendments, which set out to improve further the regulation in view of the issues, so that the EU can set itself more ambitious targets and take on a leading role in the world.

**Flaviu Călin Rus (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of the draft European Parliament legislative resolution on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and Council on substances that deplete the ozone layer (recast) (COM(2008)0505 – C6-0297/2008 – 2008/0165(COD)), because I believe that emissions of ozone-depleting substances must be cut or even stopped to allow life on Earth to evolve in normal conditions. By taking this kind of action we are fulfilling our duty to both the current generation and future generations.

#### **- Report: Kyösti Virrankoski (A6-0104/2009)**

**Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL)**, *in writing*. – (PT) Without questioning the need to ensure that Community financial resources are being used appropriately and in a timely fashion (which is far from the case), the report makes a few somewhat mistaken and overly ambiguous points.

For example, it should be clarified that the 'scarce' resources are defined by the EU. More specifically, they are imposed by the so-called 'Letter of the Six' countries, which set the Community budget at around 1% of GDP.

It should also be clarified what is to be understood by 'negative priorities' and 'positive priorities', without which it is impossible to accept a principle that advocates that these 'negative priorities' should be 'scaled down in order to give way to the most crucial priorities'.

If 'negative priorities' mean, for example, the so-called 'new priorities' such as realising the neoliberal policies of the 'Lisbon Strategy', the security policies of 'Fortress Europe' or the militarisation of the EU, we would say that we could not agree more. However, if these are the so-called 'positive priorities' and the 'overall multiannual and strategic objectives' (as they effectively are), then we are decidedly against.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI)**, *in writing*. – (IT) I have decided to abstain from the vote on Mr Virrankoski's report on the ABB-ABM method as a management tool for allocating budgetary resources.

I wholly agree with the rapporteur on the absolute necessity of clear information on the results obtained and the resources needed to obtain them, and on the need for citizens to be completely informed on the cost of the European Union's policies. I am not certain, however, that the system in question can resolve this issue, and for that reason I will not vote for or against it.

#### **- Report: Reimer Böge (A6-0110/2009)**

**Richard James Ashworth (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – British Conservatives support the Böge report and we particularly welcome the rapporteur's proposals to make the Budget more flexible and better equipped to respond to changing circumstances. We believe his proposal for a 5-year financial perspective will be a positive development. We also welcome his acknowledgement of the '1% GNI' limit; and stress that, should this formula reflect declining GNI in the Member States, this will of necessity be reflected in the EU Budget.

However, we repeat our reservations with regard to the Treaty of Lisbon, which we oppose, and the proposed increases in funding for the CFSP. We regret that the rapporteur did not take this opportunity to remind Council and the Commission of their obligations, as agreed in the Inter-Institutional Agreement of 2006, to provide timely and satisfactory certification for EU money spent under Joint Management Agreements.

**John Attard-Montalto (PSE)**, *in writing*. – The mid-term review of the Financial Framework 2007-2013 is not practical or realistic because of the lack of certainty linked to: the ratification process of the Treaty of Lisbon; the end of the current parliamentary term; the outcome of the European elections; and the setting-up of the new Commission in the current economic context.

I can fully concur that an ambitious review of the budget should be an urgent priority for the new Parliament and Commission.

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (IT) I am voting in favour.

The European Union's institutional future was re-launched by the European Council in June 2007, when the 27 Member States decided to call an Intergovernmental Conference to draft a new treaty on the basis of the draft Constitution. If the ratification procedures go ahead as planned, the new treaty could enter into force in mid-2009, at around the same time as the European elections. If the ratification process comes to a standstill, it will have unforeseeable consequences for the European project. The review process must therefore take account of this new context.

If the timetable set out in the European Council's conclusions is met, the entry into force of the new treaty, the election of the new Parliament (June 2009) and the appointment of the new Commission should take place in the second half of 2009, in which case the interinstitutional debate on the review could be postponed in order to avoid confusion.

I believe that this Parliament has made a significant investment through the work of its Temporary Committee on Policy Challenges and Budgetary Means of the Enlarged Union 2007-2013, as well as through the annual budgets and the consequent legislative work. Therefore the INI report, a legacy of the outgoing Parliament, should reflect the success achieved thus far, but also highlight deficiencies that still exist.

**Katerina Batzeli (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (EL) The mid-term review of the Financial Framework 2007-2013 has been seen as a compromise with the 2005 decision and may be considered necessary in the current situation due to the economic crisis. Under no circumstances, however, can it be used as an alibi for redistributing resources between Member States and policies, such as the structural fund policies and the common agricultural policy, policies which, among other things, safeguard cohesion, employment, territorial convergence and the activation of public- and private-sector spending.



Our priority must be the deepening and improved management of current policies, such as Structural Fund policies, which have been also delayed due to a lack of funds, and obviously the promotion of investments in green growth, which will give current Community policies another development dimension.

However, what must be avoided and cannot be accepted is the introduction of new policies to protect the environment and climate and policies to address the economic crisis without any increase in the resources of the Community budget, which has remained stable even after the latest enlargement of the EU. Europe must dare to increase its resources for single Community policies and not to confine itself to redistributing resources between old and new policies.

**Charlotte Cederschiöld, Christofer Fjellner, Gunnar Hökmark and Anna Ibrisagic (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (SV) We have voted in favour of the report on the Mid-Term Review of the 2007-2013 Financial Framework, as it clearly calls for more transparency and a clearer link between the priorities we have set and the outcome.

Unlike the report, we believe that the one-percent model is a good one. We believe budget restrictiveness to be of the utmost importance.

**Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – (PT) This is an important own-initiative report of Parliament, which aims to set out the debate not only on the current but above all on the next Multiannual Financial Framework. It raises a large number of questions that cannot be tackled in this explanation of vote.

As we have said, albeit in a very moderate manner, the report makes some relevant points, which are in line with what we have been saying for a long time: the current Community budget is less than what is needed, and every year significant amounts are unbudgeted for (about EUR 29 billion short between 2007 and 2009). However, those responsible for this situation are covering it up, namely the European Commission, Parliament and the Council as budgetary authorities. That is why Parliament cannot now refuse to accept responsibility.

Parliament also stresses that 'additional policies should not change the balance between the main categories of the current MFF nor jeopardise the existing priorities', although it has removed – due to our vote against – the reference to the 'two main policies of headings 1b and 2', respectively convergence and agriculture and fisheries. On the other hand, it has emphasised 'new priorities': in other words, the neoliberal objectives of the 'Lisbon Strategy' (including the so-called 'public-private partnerships'), 'climate change' and the militarisation of the EU.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) I have voted against Mr Böge's report on the Mid-Term Review of the 2007-2013 Financial Framework.

I am disappointed that not all the new generation programmes connected with the 2007-2013 Multiannual Financial Framework have been adopted, especially as regards the important Galileo programme, which has not been allocated sufficient funds, and the framework programme on Fundamental Rights and Justice. A greater commitment would in fact have been required in order for them to be adopted within the time allowed.

I also believe that Parliament should exercise stricter control over the European Union's budget through more regular and stringent checks to ensure that public money is being properly managed.

#### **- Motion for a resolution: B6-0141/2009 (EPA - Cariforum States)**

**Bruno Gollnisch (NI), in writing.** – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we did not vote for any of the texts on the new partnership agreements with the African, Caribbean and Pacific states, the poorest countries in the world.

Our vote is not directed against these countries, which deserve a proper cooperation and development policy that will help them to bring their populations out of poverty, their territories out of their under-equipped state and their economies out of difficulty. They also deserve trade relations that take into account their individual situations but also our own interests, and particularly those of our outermost regions, which are overlooked in your policies.

What you are proposing to them are agreements that conform to the sacrosanct rules of the World Trade Organization, the aim of which is to make them part of ultraliberal globalisation. You are condemning them to export crops, which starve them, and to the exploitation of their wealth by multinationals, which for a long time have not been at the service of any individual country, but are stateless, anonymous and moved only by their own financial interests.

These countries have the right to choose the rate at which their borders are opened up and their economies liberalised. Why not choose another way: that of reasonable protectionism and relationships that are mutually beneficial because they are based on reciprocity. That is the way that we are demanding for France and for Europe too.

**Filip Kaczmarek (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (PL) I voted in favour of the resolution on the Economic Partnership Agreement between the EC and Cariforum. The allegations made according to which the Caribbean countries were put under pressure and forced to sign the Agreement are false. I saw this when I attended the first regional meeting of the ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly with countries of the Caribbean region.

Representatives of the negotiators and of the authorities of the Caribbean countries stated unequivocally that they signed the Agreement of their own free will in the conviction that it is beneficial to all parties. They were aware of a certain pressure, but it was pressure of time, and this affected all the parties to the Agreement. In addition, the necessity of signing new agreements on economic partnership was the result of decisions made independently of the European Union. Besides, this had been common knowledge for many years.

**David Martin (PSE), in writing.** – I welcome the promise of flexibility given by the commission in moving from interim to full EPAs and the promise that negotiations will be driven by development concerns.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) I have voted against the motion for a resolution on the Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and the CARIFORUM States, of the other part.

I believe that EPAs should support the sustainable development of African, Caribbean and Pacific states and encourage them to participate in international trade and diversify their economies. However, I do not think the agreement in question is on the right lines, since it does not help the countries concerned to create a self-sufficient economy able to sustain itself without depending on external aid.

Furthermore, in my opinion, the instruments set out in the agreement help neither the authorities nor the local private sector to participate, meaning they will not be sufficiently involved in the process of development in their regions.

**Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM), in writing.** – It is incredibly important that the unique needs of every ACP country are taken into account in EPA agreements. For this reason, I have voted against this agreement. The CARIFORUM EPA has been discussed here, while the Parliaments of the CARIFORUM nations have not yet been allowed to discuss this. Out of respect for these Parliaments, I believe that we need to hold off on passing this resolution.

It is also important to note that many ACP governments were pressured by the European Commission to sign the interim agreements before the expiry of the waiver.

It is truly important that these issues be carefully considered and debated by each ACP state before they are approved by the EU.

**Margie Sudre (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (FR) According to the EPAs, sugar and bananas sourced from ACP countries will not be able to enter the markets of the French outermost regions (ORs) for 10 years, on a renewable basis, thus preserving the production of these two pillars of overseas agriculture.

The specific safeguard clause, which allows imports to be blocked where they harm or disrupt the ORs' market, should be further clarified so as to reduce its implementation period.

The appeals launched by our Parliament have therefore enabled the ORs' demands to be taken into account during negotiations.

Socio-professional actors in the ORs feel that they are being penalised by production constraints that conform to European standards, making them less competitive than their direct competitors. I understand them, but I am nevertheless encouraging them to commit themselves fully to a cooperation process with their ACP neighbours, so as to enable complementary and supportive relationships to be built around common aims.

Rather than sticking rigidly to a defensive position, the ORs have everything to gain by putting themselves on an equal footing with their competitors. This is provided that the European Union really guarantees that proper monitoring and arbitration methods are in place, to prevent any kind of unfair competition.

**- Motion for a resolution: B6-0148/2009 (EPA - Côte d'Ivoire)**

**Philip Claeys (NI), in writing.** – (NL) This Parliament wants to bring up the issue of working visas for Ivorians valid for at least 24 months at the negotiations on a stepping stone Economic Partnership Agreement with Côte d'Ivoire. The affected Ivorians would then be able to work as carers and in similar professions. Whichever way you look at it, this, once again, is an additional channel for immigration, which, as far as I am concerned, is in itself more than enough reason to vote against this resolution. Europe already has millions of unemployed people and an additional import of labour from outside the Union will only make the existing problems worse. The professions in question can be perfectly well filled by our own workers.

**Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing.** – (SV) We believe that our primary contribution to promoting continued development in the world's poorest countries should be to open up EU markets to imports from those parts of the world. Aid, when judged to be compatible with the desire to increase free trade, must be initiated and decided by the individual Member States, not by the EU. Where the EU nevertheless persists in distributing and controlling aid, it must under no circumstances be made conditional upon trade with the recipient countries. Provisions that are designed to protect sensitive industry in the developing countries for a transitional period may, however, be acceptable. However, in principle, we should avoid all protectionist regulations that run the risk of undermining free market access.

These views have guided us when adopting a position with regard to the present motions for resolutions in connection with the trade agreements that the Commission is currently preparing.

We are opposed to the unfortunate wordings that aim solely to increase the European Parliament's influence on trade policy. Nevertheless, we have chosen to vote in favour of all of the resolutions, as they all illustrate the importance of continued free trade at a time when the sharp winds of protectionism are gaining in strength.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) I have voted in favour of the motion for a resolution on the stepping stone Economic Partnership Agreement between Côte d'Ivoire, of the one part, and the European Community and its Member States, of the other part.

I agree that a customs union among the countries of western Africa could be of great benefit to Côte d'Ivoire, which is the economic and trading leader of that area: moreover, in light of the fact that intraregional trade represents only a small part of Côte d'Ivoire's total trade, it would be desirable to increase regional trading links in order to develop sustained and sustainable growth in the long term.

It is also desirable for the European Union to provide more and better technical and administrative assistance to Côte d'Ivoire, to ensure that its economy is adapted to draw the maximum benefits from the stepping stone Economic Partnership Agreement.

**- Motion for a resolution: B6-0142/2009 (EPA - Ghana)**

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) I have voted against Mr Fjellner's report on the stepping stone Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and Ghana, of the other part.

This is because I believe that an agreement of this kind with Ghana could threaten cohesion and weaken the regional integration of ECOWAS, which we should be supporting, since it is most capable of producing positive effects for the local economy in the medium to long term, through its greater possibilities for participation by local bodies.

**Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM), in writing.** – It is incredibly important that the unique needs of every ACP country are taken into account in EPA agreements. For this reason, I have voted against this agreement. Each ACP country has different needs, and many would rather not negotiate about intellectual property rights and Singapore issues. Many of these nations also desire a strengthening of the provisions surrounding food security and infant industry. Finally, these agreements are in need of a revision clause that would require an assessment of the sustainable development impact and the possibility to amend the agreement based on the findings of this assessment. We need to work to ensure that these agreements actually accomplish what is best for the needs of each of these nations and should avoid putting pressure on them to sign agreements that do not accomplish what is right for them.

**- Motion for a resolution: B6-0144/2009 (EPA - CADC)**

**Luca Romagnoli (NI)**, *in writing*. – (IT) I have voted against the motion for a resolution on an Interim Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, on the one part, and the SADC EPA States, on the other part.

I do not think that the Economic Partnership Agreement has brought great advantages for those who export from ACP countries to the European Union since the Cotonou trade agreements expired at the beginning of 2008, even if goods from ACP countries can enter the EU market without being subject to customs tariffs or quotas.

In particular, the agreement does not help to promote the autonomous development of these states; to create those capacities that in the future will enable the countries concerned to continue to develop even without outside help. What is more, I feel that they often do not meet the conditions of good governance, transparency of political positions and respect for human rights, without which there is a risk that damage to the population of those states would outweigh the aid they receive.

**Georgios Toussas (GUE/NGL)**, *in writing*. – (EL) The EU is endeavouring, at a time of capitalist crisis and escalation in imperialist infighting, to strengthen the position of the European monopolies and acquire new positions on the global market. It is using a combination of open imperialist interventions throughout the world, with military or non-military means and economic intervention by the monopolies in international trade and economic transactions.

Interim economic partnership agreements are the most savage form of agreement which the EU has required of developing countries to date. Their aim is to impose the power of capital and the overexploitation of their manpower and wealth-producing resources. Oppressive terms require liberalisation of markets and the privatisation of all services, especially energy, water distribution, health, education and culture.

The cases of the South African Development Community (SADC) and the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA) are typical. Divide and rule. Pressure and coercion by the EU to accept the timetables and the content of the agreements, with separate agreements and different terms for each country.

We are voting against the interim economic partnership agreements because they are signed for the benefit of the profits of capital and to the detriment of the people. They are proof once again that global trade under the sovereignty of imperialism and the monopolies cannot be conducted on a basis of mutual benefit.

**- Motion for a resolution: B6-0145/2009 (EPA - Eastern and Southern African States)**

**Luca Romagnoli (NI)**, *in writing*. – (IT) I have voted against the motion for a resolution on an Economic Partnership Agreement between Eastern and Southern Africa States on the one part and the European Community and its Member States on the other part.

I am persuaded that this economic partnership agreement is unsuitable for achieving the aim of promoting the development of the countries involved, because there are controversial matters yet to be addressed and resolved, such as the Most Favoured Nation clause and tariffs on exports, which do not encourage the creation of a real market capable of bringing benefits to all the populations concerned.

**- Motion for a resolution: B6-0146/2009 (EPA - East African Community Partner States)**

**Luca Romagnoli (NI)**, *in writing*. – (IT) I have voted against the motion for a resolution on an Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, on the one part, and the East African Community Partner States, on the other part.

I believe that the development of a genuine regional and intraregional market in these countries is important in order to create the conditions for sustainable growth that is not wholly dependent on external aid; however, this agreement does not generate the necessary prerequisites for this to happen, given that in many cases the measures planned foresee very little involvement of the authorities and the local private sector.

Furthermore, despite the existence of control mechanisms, I do not feel that these countries often meet the conditions of good governance, transparency of political positions and respect for human rights, without which we run a greater risk of harming the majority of the population of those states rather than providing real help.

**- Motion for a resolution: B6-0147/2009 (EPA - Central Africa)**

**Luca Romagnoli (NI)**, *in writing*. – (IT) I have voted in favour of the motion for a resolution on the stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement between the European Community and its Member States, of the one part, and Central Africa, of the other part.

I firmly believe that the stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement has created great advantages for exporters in Central African countries, above all since the Cotonou agreements expired in January 2008, by increasing their opportunities to export to the European Union. Global EPAs should in all cases be considered as complementary rather than as alternatives to the agreements based on the Doha Development Agenda, on which subject we call for the negotiations to be resumed as soon as possible.

I also agree with the creation of transition periods for small and medium-sized enterprises in order to give them time to adapt to the changes resulting from the agreement, and, more generally, I welcome the support to be given to SMEs by the states concerned.

**- Report: David Martin (A6-0117/2009)**

**Marie-Arlette Carlotti (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (FR) For years now, alongside our African colleagues, we the socialists have joined forces to make the EPAs real development instruments.

We have negotiated strongly and determinedly with the Commission to obtain fair agreements that promote the Millennium Development Goals.

We have done so by opting for selective regionalisation conducted by the ACPs themselves.

We have done so by fulfilling our commitments in relation to the trade-related assistance pledged in 2005, rather than by 'pillaging' the EDF.

Today our fight has largely borne fruit, since the Trade Commissioner has made a commitment on behalf of the European Commission in relation to:

- the crucial objective of developing the agreements,
- the renegotiation of the contentious points of the agreements on the basis of an open and flexible approach,
- food security and the protection of the fragile industries of ACP countries.

Obviously we would have liked more guarantees with regard to how the national parliaments and the ACP-EU Assembly will be involved in monitoring the implementation of the agreements.

However, the progress made in just a few weeks is considerable.

I hereby acknowledge it.

I do, however, intend to keep an extremely close eye on its implementation.

So there will be no 'blank cheque': I abstained.

**Richard Corbett (PSE)**, *in writing*. – Today I was able to vote in favour of the Parliament giving its assent to the EPA and the interim EPAs only because of the assurances and undertaking of the new Commissioner, Cathy Ashton, and because the governments of the countries concerned largely see this as a step forward, albeit insufficient.

Economic Partnership Agreements should become tools for poverty reduction and eradication whilst incorporating the aims of sustainable development and the gradual integration of the ACP countries into the world economy.

We must ensure that the trade agreements which we undertake with the ACP countries are favourable to their interests and, crucially, that they are undertaken as tools for development.

**Mikel Irujo Amezaga (Verts/ALE)**, *in writing*. – (ES) I voted against the reports on the EPAs with the Caribbean islands, and also against the Côte d'Ivoire interim agreement, among others. Parliament has voted for the interim agreement with the Côte d'Ivoire, for example; it is a country plagued with internal conflicts and without a legitimate government.

In these circumstances, I simply feel that it is not the best time to enter into an international agreement with long-term consequences. Under pressure from the World Trade Organization, the European Union has withdrawn from the cooperation agreements with the ACP countries and has replaced them with economic partnership agreements with individual countries, in many cases damaging the power of the regions.

The first agreements, imposed by Europe, have been strongly criticised by NGOs and investigators in those countries, and today Parliament has reviewed them.

**Glenys Kinnock (PSE), in writing.** – I gave assent to the CARIFORUM EPA and the Côte d'Ivoire Interim EPA in response to the guarantees which Commissioner Ashton gave this week.

There has been a change of style and tone since Commissioner Ashton replaced Commissioner Mandelson and now we are receiving clear signals that there is a change of substance too.

In the case of the CARIFORUM EPA, the Commissioner gave clear assurances to rapporteur David Martin on his concerns about access to generic medicines, the review clause, and flexibility on how the MFN clause would operate.

Before giving assent to the Côte d'Ivoire Agreement, we were given clear and unequivocal confirmation that Côte d'Ivoire would be free to take what they wanted from any other EPA. It is significant that, in the case of the SADC EPA, the revision of a number of contentious clauses was agreed. This includes the protection of infant industries, the possibility to introduce new export taxes to assist industrial development, and export quotas.

The decisions I took were not taken lightly, but were taken after careful consideration of the commitment to ensure that EPAs could be a tool for development, and reflect our partnership and mutual respect with the ACP.

**Bernard Lehideux (ALDE), in writing.** – (FR) Our position on the Economic Partnership Agreement is still critical. We believe that the negotiations have got off to a very bad start, with no respect shown for the specific circumstances of our partners. We are also still convinced that we should not rush negotiations with them, and, above all, should not impose on them sudden reforms that could prove disastrous for their social cohesion and their economies.

However, our vote does take account of the very encouraging positions adopted by Commissioner Ashton in the plenary session of Monday 23 March. That is why we abstained and did not vote against, as we certainly would have done only a few weeks ago.

Nevertheless, our abstention is a warning: we intend to judge the Commission's action on the basis of actual evidence, and do not want to give it a blank cheque for the future.

**David Martin (PSE), in writing.** – The assurances I was given concerning generic medicines, the review clause and flexibility on how the Most Favoured Nation clause would operate meant that I was able to support this report, for which I was Rapporteur. The report should strike a balance between securing a fair deal for the EU but also ensuring that development is integral to the agreement so that Cariforum states can prosper and reap the benefits of fair trade with the EU.

**Rovana Plumb (PSE), in writing.** – (RO) I voted for this report in the belief that, based on the assent given by the EP to the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the CARIFORUM countries, of the one part, and the European Union and its Member States, of the other part, this will guarantee that:

- the implementation of commitments in areas not yet regulated under the CARICOM Single Market and Economy (CSME) or fully implemented, including financial services, other services, investment, competition, public procurement, e-commerce, intellectual property, free circulation of goods and the environment, will be deferred pending completion of the single market and economy in these areas;

- an independent monitoring mechanism will be established within the CARIFORUM States, equipped with the necessary resources to undertake the analysis required to determine the extent to which the EPA is achieving its objectives;

- there is an early determination and provision of an equitable share of the Aid for Trade resources. These funds represent additional resources and not merely repackaging of EDF funding;

– they comply with CARIFORUM priorities and that their disbursement will be timely, predictable and in line with the execution schedules for national and regional strategic development plans. These funds should be used efficiently to compensate the loss of customs revenues.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) I have voted in favour of Mr Martin's recommendation on the EC/CARIFORUM Economic Partnership Agreement. Indeed, the European Parliament has a duty to conclude this agreement, provided that the Commission and the Council agree to review such agreements every five years, the Most Favoured Nation treatment is abolished for the European Union, and, most importantly, different amounts of Aid for Trade resources are promptly defined and allocated.

**- Report: Erika Mann (A6-0144/2009)**

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) I have decided to abstain from the vote on Mr Mann's proposal for a recommendation on the EC/Côte d'Ivoire stepping-stone Economic Partnership Agreement. There are in fact several points of the proposal with which I disagree. On the other hand, the aims and objectives it pursues are laudable; therefore I do not wish to vote against this recommendation.

**- Report: Gay Mitchell (A6-0135/2009)**

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing.** – (IT) I voted in favour of the report.

This is the first time that Parliament has drawn up a single report on the work of the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). The two banks are increasingly financing operations in the same geographical regions outside the European Union, for example Eastern Europe, Southern Caucasus, Russia, the Western Balkans and Turkey.

Cooperation between the two banks has grown up on a regional basis and therefore the way in which it takes place differs according to the area in question. In countries of common operation, there are three different types of cooperation between the EIB and the EBRD: the Memorandum of Understanding in Eastern Europe, the method applied in the Western Balkans, and flexible methods of cooperation.

This is not a satisfactory development. Instead, it would be more useful if a comprehensive review was organised, to consider how the cooperation between the two banks and other relevant parties could be improved, taking into account the interests of the EU and the beneficiary countries. Furthermore, the division of activities and cooperation between the two institutions cannot simply be managed on a regional basis or by drawing a line between lending operations to the public and private sectors.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) I voted against Mr Mitchell's report on the 2007 Annual Reports of the European Investment Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development. Rather than talking about cooperation between the banks and other interested parties, I think it would be appropriate first to ensure checks are performed before, during and after funding is granted, both banks having lent very significant sums in 2007. Providing financial support without the involvement of civil society in the countries concerned can only worsen the situation in those countries, rather than improve it.

In this sense I welcome Mr Mitchell's proposal that the Commission report annually to Parliament and the Council on the assessment of the impact of the financing operations. However, this element is not enough to induce me to vote in favour of the report.

**- Motion for a resolution: RC-B6-0152/2009 (Future of the car industry)**

**Guy Bono (PSE), in writing.** – (FR) I voted in favour of this joint resolution concerning the future of the automotive industry.

This text emphasises the need to define at European level a clear and coherent policy to cope with a crisis that is affecting all of the Member States of the EU. In fact, it is estimated that 12 million jobs in Europe are directly or indirectly affected by the automotive industry. Sales are down, stocks are increasing, and redundancy announcements are multiplying. There are no miracle cures for the social disaster that is emerging; only coordinated measures will be able to save the sector.

That is why I voted in favour of this joint resolution, which calls on the European authorities to work with the Member States to introduce measures that will make it possible to ensure the future competitiveness of the European automotive industry and continued employment in the sector.

However, the resolution has come a little late and does not meet all expectations. The debate is therefore far from being over and promises to be lively, especially if one considers the current social issues at stake and the reaffirmed need for a social Europe that protects its citizens.

**Nicodim Bulzesc (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO)** I voted for this resolution on the future of the automotive industry as it calls for consistent, harmonised initiatives from EU Member States for the European automotive industry and for the creation of a proper European framework for action.

**Edite Estrela (PSE), in writing. – (PT)** I voted in favour of the joint motion for a resolution on the future of the car industry. As the EU is the world's biggest producer of motor vehicles and as the car industry is one of the largest private employers, support for this sector is vital to respond to the current financial and economic crisis.

I therefore support coordinated political action at European level to encourage the adoption of measures in support of the industry, such as: securing access to credit for car producers and suppliers; stimulating demand for new vehicles, including the granting of incentives to scrap old cars and buy 'green' cars; financially supporting skilled workers by fully using the Globalisation Adjustment Fund and the European Special Fund; and encouraging research and investment.

**Bruno Gollnisch (NI), in writing. – (FR)** We voted in favour of the resolution on the automotive industry, but we have not forgotten that those who are today pretending to want to save it are really the ones responsible for this disaster.

They are responsible for extending a finance-driven globalised economy that is disconnected from reality, where the guarantee of high shareholder returns takes the place of industrial strategy, and where shares rise following the announcement of social plans, while bosses who are not always capable grant themselves bonuses and golden parachutes. They have created this system, where the jobs and salaries of workers have become the only balancing variables. They are responsible for the household impoverishment that is seriously affecting demand, keeping the vicious circle going.

Even now, when hundreds of thousands of jobs are at stake, the Commission is spouting the dogma of competition, hindering national measures designed to prevent job losses, and demanding explanations from Renault in order to satisfy itself that the increase in production in a factory is not the result of a relocation of operations.

If only you had shown so much indignation when European businesses were relocating worldwide, in search of the lowest costs and the most non-existent social legislation.

It is time for a change of policy – for the good of Europe and, above all, of Europeans.

**Małgorzata Handzlik (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PL)** The automotive industry has found itself in an exceptionally difficult situation because of the current economic crisis. Forecasts for this year are not optimistic either. They point to a further fall in sales of new cars.

The European Commission and European Parliament think that industry should manage largely by itself in the crisis. In particular, it is industry which has to find an answer to the structural problems connected with efficiency of production and the use of production power, so as to improve competitiveness and stability in the long term.

Action taken by the EU and Member States can only support action taken by the producers themselves. This is true in particular of measures which are intended to restore access to finance on reasonable conditions, to stimulate demand for new vehicles, to maintain standards of qualification and protect jobs, and to minimise social costs.

A number of countries have adopted plans to help the automotive sector, but as the Commission has observed, these plans must be in accord with EU law and prevailing principles on competition, and in particular with the principles for awarding state aid, in order not to disrupt the functioning of the European internal market. All measures related to financing, taxation or scrapping must in addition support and accelerate essential technological transformations in the sector, especially in the area of fuel efficiency of engines and reduction of emissions.

**Marine Le Pen (NI), in writing. – (FR)** The European Parliament is going to endorse the European Commission diktats that fiercely oppose any effort by the Member States to protect their national automotive industries.



The people must all understand that the ultraliberal policy of the Commission and of Parliament is a fantastic means of speeding up the relocation of French businesses to more economically 'viable' states.

At a time when thousands of jobs are directly under threat in the automotive industry and subcontracting sectors, this anti-national choice is morally obscene and economically suicidal.

Those Members who lend their support to such industrial and social destruction will have to answer for it to the workers and their families, who are the direct victims of their ideological blindness.

**Luís Queiró (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT)** Given the importance of the car industry to the European economy, the commitment by European governments and the European Union as such to respond to the current situation is understandable. They are trying to prevent the consequences of this crisis, which they hope and are fighting to ensure is temporary, from making this industry unrecoverable. This concern has our support. However, there must be some safeguards. While the primary objective is to save jobs, this must respect the ultimate objective of ensuring the survival of viable industries. This means that the extraordinary investment in this sector must be utilised to update, modernise and prepare it for increased competition. The idea that it is possible, or desirable, to isolate and protect an economic sector from competition, where this competition is healthy and fair, is an economic error and a political deception.

Despite all its failings, overcoming the crisis in the car industry, as well as the crisis in general, and preparing for the next stage is at the heart of the Lisbon Strategy: more competitiveness, more innovation, more jobs. We should help the car industry to recover, but we should not try to reinvent the wheel.

**Peter Skinner (PSE), in writing. –** Car manufacturing within the EU depends upon reaching standards which can facilitate stronger environmental rules. This is not a contradiction to the idea of a competitive industry, but rather a contribution to its very survival. There are many European instruments which can be used to assist the car industry and its workers in particular. Among them are funds to assist training through lifelong learning.

Having the right workforce which can believe in a sustainable manufacturing future is essential. I know that car manufacturers in the South-East of England now have the opportunity to take advantage of financial facilities which can promote car manufacture of the future. This must be balanced with environmental and social conditions.

**Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), in writing. – (NL)** Green politicians are convinced that we cannot view the economic and environmental crises separately. To help the economy back to its feet we need a Green New Deal. In the automotive sector there is an enormous potential for moving in a green direction. In order to exploit that potential, however, governments must force and assist car-makers to invest in innovation. A majority in this House decided that the European Union must pump a substantial amount of money into its automotive industry. Yet writing a blank cheque is, of course, no solution. We must not subsidise old technologies that are on their way out. Instead, we must take direct action to force car-makers to invest in innovation. By doing that, you future-proof the sector and you do the millions of Europeans working in the motor industry a real good turn.

The Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance proposed that money should be made available only on condition that the car industry substantially improves its environmental performance levels. Transport is responsible for around a third of all CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the EU. I voted against the majority resolution because it failed to stipulate the improvement of environmental performance as a precondition for receiving public money.

## **5. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes**

(The sitting was suspended at 2.15 p.m. and resumed at 3.05 p.m.)

**IN THE CHAIR: MR MAURO**

*Vice-President*

## **6. Approval of the minutes of the previous sitting : see Minutes**

## 7. The state of transatlantic relations in the aftermath of the US elections (debate)

**President.** – The next item is the report (A6-0114/2009) by Mr Millán Mon, on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, on the state of transatlantic relations in the aftermath of the US elections (2008/2199(INI)).

**Francisco José Millán Mon, rapporteur.** – (ES) Mr President, firstly I would like to thank the shadow rapporteurs, particularly Mr Severin, Mr Lambsdorff and Mr Lagendijk, as well as the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the draftsmen, Mr García-Margallo and Mrs Quisthoudt-Rowohl. I thank them all for the cooperation they have given me in drawing up this report on relations between the European Union and the United States.

In this way, we have managed to produce a report with a broad consensus on an important subject. The report that we will vote on tomorrow therefore constitutes a strong and convincing message from the European Parliament at a very appropriate time. The reason I say that this is an important subject is that it is clear that the European Union and the United States are two very significant actors on the world stage, which need to work together closely, as is right for those sharing the same principles and values, and many of the same interests.

The key message of the report is that we find ourselves at a very opportune time for strengthening the transatlantic relationship. There are three fundamental reasons for this. The first is the new administration in the United States, which is pragmatic, which knows that no country can tackle the global challenges alone and which has aroused great expectations in the general public in Europe and around the world. The second is a stronger European Union that is more able to act externally than the EU of 1995, when the New Transatlantic Agenda was agreed; furthermore, soon it will be an EU buttressed with the Treaty of Lisbon's instruments on foreign policy and defence. The third reason is a new context, featuring global challenges such as the economic crisis and climate change, and no longer only military challenges, as used to be the case.

In facing the new challenges, cooperation with the European Union will be very useful to the United States. This transatlantic relationship should be strengthened in two dimensions: the institutional dimension and the physical dimension, involving cooperation in practice. We should make use of the Treaty of Lisbon in order to strengthen institutional structures: two annual summits, not just one, which the new permanent president of the European Council will attend; the creation of a transatlantic political council, bringing together on a quarterly basis the High Representative – and Vice-President of the Commission – and the Secretary of State; the upgrading of legislators' dialogue by creating a transatlantic assembly; and improvements to the Transatlantic Economic Council. All these improvements will enable coordination to be more intensive and effective; they should be combined in a new transatlantic association agreement, and negotiations should start when the Treaty of Lisbon enters into force.

The report's second objective is to strengthen cooperation in practice. This means setting an agenda to tackle jointly many challenges and conflicts, as well as bilateral issues. In order to produce this joint agenda, the Council and the Commission should in the coming months step up their contacts with the new government in Washington. I am therefore pleased about the summit in Prague on 5 April with President Obama, as pointed out by the amendment tabled by my group.

The report lists several global challenges to which the United States and the European Union should seek a common approach; for example, the economic crisis, effective multilateralism to include emerging powers, the Millennium Development Goals, climate change, the promotion of human rights, etc. It also mentions various regional issues on which we should act in a coordinated manner; these are conflicts such as the one in the Middle East, and the nuclear programmes in Iran and in Afghanistan; relations with Russia and the countries of Latin America are also mentioned. Disarmament and security are further areas in which improved coordination is needed, including the fight against the serious threat of terrorism, which should be conducted in full compliance with international law and with respect for human rights.

Ladies and gentlemen, the report also refers to certain bilateral matters in the sphere of justice and internal affairs, including the problem of visas. It also stresses the need for the transatlantic partnership to enjoy wide support from civil society, particularly from young people. Economic and trade relations are also included in the report, which emphasises that we need to make progress on the integration of the transatlantic market. On these subjects, of course, I have incorporated many suggestions from the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs and the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

In conclusion, ladies and gentlemen: I believe that if this report is adopted tomorrow, Parliament will be sending a clear message. We are calling for strengthened European Union/United States relations, including on the institutional level. I believe that this strengthening will benefit both parties and also the international community as a whole.

**Alexandr Vondra**, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Mr President, I apologise for being a bit late due to a meeting of the Conference of Committee Chairs here. In fact I arrived only this morning from Washington. I would like to thank you for your invitation to participate in this important and timely debate on transatlantic relations and to thank in particular the rapporteur, Mr Millán Mon, for the valuable and wide-ranging report that I read during my trip with great interest. There is much in the report with which the Presidency, and the Council, can agree.

Whatever our political background, we all know that the transatlantic relationship is vital to our future, to the future of Europe. For six decades, the solid transatlantic partnership has been the leading force for peace, stability and prosperity for Europe and North America, and for the entire world. I claim that this is not just history. This is the best possible agenda for the 21st century, too. The transatlantic relationship allows us to achieve together results which neither partner alone can deliver. I would quote here Vice-President Joe Biden during his first trip to Munich, when he clearly said that America needs Europe and Europe needs America. I think that we can fully understand this kind of statement. When we agree, we can set the terms of the global agenda. When we disagree, it is difficult to take forward any agenda, so the transatlantic relationship allows us to achieve together results which we cannot achieve alone.

Last November's US Presidential election generated an unprecedented degree of enthusiasm, expectation and interest here in Europe. This is because the choice of US President matters to Europeans. President Obama has indicated a new approach to the challenges we face. Many in Europe were attracted to this change and the spirit of change. High expectations were created on both sides of the Atlantic. These expectations represent an opportunity for our mutual cooperation at times when we most need it. But they need to be carefully managed because nothing would be more damaging for our relationship than unfulfilled hopes – and the higher the hopes are, the harder it is to satisfy them.

The new Administration has made an energetic start. As expected, much of the President's agenda has focused on the economic and financial crisis. It was encouraging to see early decisions on Guantánamo – we were talking about that here just a few weeks ago – a renewed commitment to engage on the Middle East, and the convening of the conference on Afghanistan, which will be held on 31 May in The Hague. All these initiatives are what many in Europe have been calling for.

The dialogue with the US has been reinvigorated. From my contacts with the new Administration, including the meetings with Vice-President Biden and Secretary of State Clinton here in Brussels, it is clear that the US wishes to set a new tone with the EU and our partners. I welcome the pragmatic approach which has characterised these early contacts.

While the change of tone is important, it does not of course in itself deliver concrete outcomes. If we are to work constructively together we must review together our policy priorities, and reassess the way in which the transatlantic partnership functions. Your report is a valuable contribution to that process. It is, of course, a process which began on the EU side last year when the foreign ministers discussed transatlantic relations at the two informal meetings in Avignon and Marseille. I think some thanks are due here both to the French Presidency for initiating that and to Portugal, which also played a role. It is a process which will need to continue to be developed over the coming months. An excellent opportunity will present itself next week at the informal meeting of heads of state and government with the US President in Prague. The transatlantic relationship is rich and varied and includes a number of policy areas. I cannot touch on all of them but I would like to highlight those that we would like to address in particular at the forthcoming meeting in Prague.

Firstly, energy security and climate change. These interconnected topics are of concern to a great many Europeans. Energy security is a key priority which needs to be pursued via a comprehensive strategy covering energy efficiency and the promotion of renewable energy resources as well as the diversification of energy supplies, sources and routes. Wherever possible and necessary the EU and US should cooperate in these areas and promote a common agenda. On climate, this year will be critical. The United Nations Climate Change Conference in Copenhagen in late December presents a historic opportunity to revise and widen the application of binding international targets to address climate change.

The EU has established ambitious energy and climate change commitments in advance of the conference. President Obama's statements and appointments in relation to climate change appear to signal an important

policy shift, but much hard work lies ahead here. Of course, support from the US on this issue is vital, but it is not enough. We must also secure backing from advanced developing countries such as China.

Secondly, the economic and financial crisis. The current crisis is both severe and global and requires a strong policy response at all levels and across the world. The EU and the US have a particular responsibility in this context, both in terms of the measures they take at home and in terms of international coordination. We must cooperate with the US to ensure that we deliver a coordinated response to the current global crisis and financial problems. We must work together to address the issue of the supervision of the financial system and the reform of international financial institutions. We must also coordinate our policies for enhanced growth and employment. We must make sure that the approaches we choose are compatible and do not give rise to distortions of competition in the transatlantic market place. Much of this will take place in groups such as the G8 and G20, in particular during the G20 summit in London with which President Obama's visit to Europe will start. But it is clear that the transatlantic relationship will be key in setting the wider global agenda.

Thirdly, Afghanistan is a key issue for both Europe and the US. This is a joint problem – terrorist attacks in both the US and Europe have their origins in the region. It is an important, and uneasy, challenge for all European political leaders to explain to their citizens that their own security must be defended in Kabul. Afghanistan was also the main subject of an informal meeting of the EU Troika with Vice-President Biden in Brussels on 10 March. The Vice-President expressed the hope that Afghanistan would remain at the top of the EU agenda. He was clear that the US was looking not just for our support for the overall strategy in Afghanistan, but also for commitment to match that support with concrete resources. Knowing that the question of security of Afghan citizens is of major concern, we have undertaken to increase the size of our police mission in the country. In addition to the EUPOL civilian mission, military police are needed, the 'gendarmeries' which we are talking about. In this respect, sending gendarmerie trainers on site, as an EU contribution to the NATO mission, is an option which the Presidency has been discussing with the freshly appointed Special Envoy for Pakistan and Afghanistan amongst EU countries. I have met Pierre Lellouche from France, for example, and we are also discussing this with Dick Holbrooke. We must also ensure that the conditions are in place for the Presidential elections in Afghanistan to be a success and we must keep the regional aspect in mind, in particular by giving further assistance to the development of sustainable civil government in Pakistan. So this regional dimension is very important and we are taking account of this in addition to the national dimension and then the global one.

Fourthly, a multilateral response will be crucial to address the risk of proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction. The EU and the US have expressed growing concerns about the nuclear activities of Iran in particular and its failure to comply with its international obligations in the nuclear area. The EU and the US together need to ensure that the development of nuclear technology is limited to legitimate, civilian purposes. The best way of achieving this is to establish strong, internationally binding rules, backed by credible verification mechanisms. At the same time the EU and the US are ready to engage with Iran in constructive approaches to this and other problems in the region.

A further challenge that we face is how to work together to strengthen the practical applications of rules-based multilateralism based on our shared values. There is much that we can do together here. I agree with President Obama's sentiment, underlined by both Secretary Clinton and Vice-President Biden, that any choice between security and ideals is a false one. In this respect I welcome President Obama's intention to move towards closure of Guantánamo.

We also welcome President Obama's early engagement in addressing the Arab-Israeli conflict, including the appointment of George Mitchell as the special envoy for the region. A lasting peace that addresses the aspirations of both Israelis and Palestinians is of vital importance to the people of the region and remains a key objective for both the EU and the US. A peace deal also has the potential to deliver wider benefits, not least greater understanding between the West and the wider Islamic world.

I have read with interest the many recommendations in your report regarding the institutional structure of the transatlantic relationship. I very much agree that the institutional links between the EU and US should reflect the importance of the relationship. The initiatives taken by the Czech Presidency serve to underline this point. We have engaged with the US, and the new Administration, at every level from the outset. And in 10 days' time the Presidency will welcome President Obama to Prague for an informal summit with EU heads of state and government. As I have said, this will be an opportunity to assess a number of dimensions of the transatlantic relationship and to confirm our willingness to work together. These discussions will

continue, for example, by holding regular informal meetings of the EU and US foreign ministers. I also believe that there is a merit in more regular and close contacts between the European Parliament and the US Congress.

I am grateful to this Parliament for its continuing support for the development of the transatlantic relationship, and in particular for your report. We have a new opportunity this year to develop the relationship further. For this Presidency, and for the Council, the transatlantic partnership has always been of strategic importance to Europe as a whole.

I can assure you that the Czech Presidency is committed to ensuring that it remains at the heart of our wider external strategy and will play a determining role in addressing the many challenges and problems which confront us globally today.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, EU-US relations have had a positive, fresh start under the new Administration of President Obama. In the Commission we are all working very hard to contribute our fair share to our common reinvigorated agenda. That is also why I appreciate this timely debate. I am pleased that Parliament and the Commission seem to see eye to eye on many priorities here.

We are looking forward to a busy EU-US calendar. My opening remarks will focus on our immediate 'to do' list, but I would also like to stress at the beginning two points with regard to EU-US institutional structures. Firstly, I believe that stronger links between the EU and US legislators are vital for a successful transatlantic partnership. Secondly, I will be following up on the report's recommendations with regard to an overhaul of the New Transatlantic Agenda of 1995.

Like many others, I have already met Secretary of State Clinton on various occasions and I also spoke to Vice-President Biden when he was in Brussels very recently. One thing is clear: this US Administration will look for reliable partners in tackling all the global and regional challenges, and they identify Europe as their partner of choice on reliability. We must seize this opportunity.

But, at the same time, they will also be looking for the European Union to bring specific 'deliverables' to the table – not least on difficult issues such as Afghanistan and the closure of Guantánamo. We must therefore develop clear positions based on our own common interests, and speak with one voice. Let me be clear: this crucial transatlantic friendship is not a one-way street. Europe and the European Union need to deliver.

A strong EU is thus an important partner for the US in tackling global challenges. I believe we should focus initially on a limited number of priorities.

The very difficult state of the world economy is of course the backdrop to all that we do. The prime goal is greater cooperation between the European Union, the United States and other major players on macroeconomic policy and reforming regulation of the financial sector. We must coordinate better to promote a recovery in demand and employment, and we have to ensure that our policies are mutually supporting and do not distort trade. Protectionist elements on both sides of the Atlantic need to be resisted. The European Union and the US should work closely together to implement the outcome of next week's G20 Summit, including developing compatible approaches to reforming the regulation of the financial sector. The last European Council in Brussels made a great step in that direction.

We must also look after the transatlantic economy, which accounts for half of the world's output and trade. Your report very rightly places a heavy emphasis on this issue. We should boost the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC) to make it more effective in removing regulatory barriers and promoting growth, while at the same time making it more strategic in outlook. The TEC – as it is called – should be able to discuss, for instance, how to avoid a beggar-thy-neighbour policy in national recovery plans.

On climate change: for the first time in a decade, EU and US policies are starting to converge. We should concentrate on getting a deal at Copenhagen in December. We need to lead jointly by example, to get China and India on board in a multilateral agreement and to launch an integrated carbon market as part of the future global market. We both need to promote the message that clean, efficient technologies and 'green jobs' can play a role in economic recovery. President Obama has already rightly emphasised this point. This also means bringing our energy research programmes into closer cooperation and reinforcing our dialogue on energy security – as our President has also said.

With regard to foreign assistance and development policy, both President Obama and Secretary of State Clinton have highlighted their importance as part of a full-scope foreign policy. This plays very much to the EU's strengths as the world's largest donor. We should seek renewed US commitment to the Millennium

Development Goals and relaunch EU-US dialogue on development cooperation, with a focus on issues such as aid effectiveness and policy coherence.

The economy is at the top of President Obama's agenda, but the US has also been quick to review the main foreign policy issues.

On Afghanistan and Pakistan: the new Administration agrees on the importance of a more comprehensive policy – to add a civilian surge in parallel to a military surge. The new US emphasis on civilian capacity-building and the regional approach focusing on Pakistan converge with longstanding EU policies. The Commission's efforts in Afghanistan include support for police training, reform of the judiciary and promoting alternative livelihoods in rural areas, for instance to combat drug cultivation. I have also received clear signals of US support – including from Vice-President Biden himself – for our active work in preparation towards a possible EU election observation mission in Afghanistan, provided that security requirements are met. I am actively looking at whether we can provide additional funding in all of these areas. The other day we also discussed it with Richard Holbrooke, the Special Envoy for both Afghanistan and Pakistan. We are looking forward to being at the regional conference in The Hague and also at the conference on Pakistan in Tokyo.

Similarly, in the Middle East we have been asking for closer US engagement from the very outset. We were encouraged by Secretary Clinton's presence at the Sharm el-Sheik Conference and also her active involvement through the first Quartet by her presence. We should discuss how best to engage both the new Israeli Government – and hopefully also a Palestinian national unity government – in order to build a two-state solution. We are encouraged that the Obama Administration wants to engage with the rest of the region, including Syria. We should also work with the US on engaging in Iran – as has already been said – as part of preventing nuclear proliferation in the region, reinforcing our work on both the incentives and sanctions track.

The EU also plays a major role in our eastern neighbourhood. We will stay in close touch with the US on our work to promote democratic and market-oriented reforms in the region, including via the new Eastern Partnership, which pursues the objectives of political association and economic integration with our six neighbours to the east.

We will speak with the US more than in the past about how to engage with strategic partners such as Russia and China, as well as Latin America. Most immediately, I want to ensure that the EU's meeting with President Obama in Prague on 5 April takes the relationship forward in a tangible way, already focusing on concrete results. This will then set the scene for a successful EU-US Summit in Washington, probably in June.

June will also be the occasion to elaborate a renewed transatlantic agenda and a sustainable programme of practical EU-US cooperation.

**Albert Deß**, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on International Trade*. – (DE) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to start by thanking the rapporteur, Millán Mon, for tabling this excellent report, in which all points needed for fair transatlantic relations have been addressed. This draft resolution on the state of transatlantic relations in the aftermath of the US elections indicates how important these relations are.

According to the Commission's figures, nearly 14 million jobs in the European Union and in the US depend on these transatlantic economic and investment relations. I hope that the new President of the United States, as he said in his pre-election speech in Berlin in July 2008, will set a high value on these relations. As he said at the time, America has no better partner than Europe.

We note in the motion for a resolution that this partnership is also the most important strategic partnership for Europe also. This partnership is indeed the precondition, especially in the current global financial and economic crisis, for meeting global challenges. However, the precondition for a viable transatlantic partnership is that the Americans also acknowledge Europe's justified concerns in transatlantic trade.

We have particularly high standards in the European Union, for example in consumer protection, animal welfare and environmental protection. We also want these standards to be met by products supplied by the US to Europe. I hope that the new president and his new administration will work on introducing these standards in the US. Then we too shall have no problems.

I am convinced that this motion for a resolution will be adopted tomorrow, because I am of the opinion that it contains everything needed for good relations.

**José Manuel García-Margallo y Marfil**, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs*. – (ES) Mr President, I would like to begin by thanking the rapporteur for the work he has done in order to present today to the House a complete, rigorous and extraordinarily timely report.

The Presidency and the Commissioner have referred to the next appointments we have, starting with the London meeting, and followed by Prague, when the European Union and the United States will begin a new relationship, following the election of President Obama.

I would like to focus on the report by the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, which has produced a good piece of work, unanimously adopted, and which is directed towards the following aims.

The first aim is to recover from the crisis. Either we recover together, or we will not recover. At the moment we are seeing the largest fiscal packages that our generation has known since the crisis of 1929. They will have a greater impact and a lower cost to the taxpayer if we are able to coordinate our efforts.

The second aim is to reform the institutional financial architecture – which has shown itself to be unsuccessful in the current crisis – and to reinstate transparency for products, entities and markets. Either we do this together, or we will not be able to do it. As the Commissioner reminded us, we make up the largest economic bloc in the world and we share – as the rapporteur said – values that will allow this rapprochement.

The third aim is the integration of financial markets in order to withstand competition from the emerging markets. In order to do this, it is necessary to bring closer the regulatory markets that make it possible to apply in practice the principle of mutual recognition and better supervision by the authorities on both sides of the Atlantic.

The Commissioner referred to the fourth aim, and put it better than I can: we must jointly resist the temptation of protectionism and it would be a good idea to adopt a common position in the Doha Round.

Finally, Commissioner, but no less importantly, together we must resolve the global imbalances which have been, in large part, at the root of this crisis.

We must create a new international monetary system and it would be a shame if, through not coming to an understanding with our main ally, our voice were to be lost in the global debate.

**José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, the partnership between the United States and the European Union is fundamentally based on values and on enormous economic potential.

The combined product of the two regions amounts to EUR 23 billion, representing 60% of the world's gross domestic product. The two regions account for 60% of world trade and have been able to mobilise 75% of the world's net investment.

The rigorous and balanced report submitted to us by Mr Millán Mon, the rapporteur, could not come at a more timely moment – as he has just said – coinciding as it does with the first visit by the recently elected President of the United States to Europe to participate in the G20 meeting, the 60th anniversary of NATO and the extraordinary summit between the European Union and the United States.

The European Union and the United States must be able to act to consolidate a leadership three aspects of which, in my view, need to be renewed.

Firstly, we should safeguard the principles and values that reinforce this transatlantic alliance.

Secondly, we need greater ambition in the transatlantic dialogue in relation to subjects to which both the rapporteur and the Commissioner alluded: Iran, Iraq, the Middle East, Afghanistan, etc.

Thirdly, we should try to spark a new dialogue on strategic aspects relating to global issues, such as combating poverty, food and energy security, combating climate change, etc.

Mr President, it is very clear that the Europe we wish to establish as a 'power' will not be able to shore itself up against the United States, but instead alongside the United States, as two partners who share a certain vision of the world, some values, and have a mutual respect for each other.

This does not mean, Mr President, that the European Union should issue a blank cheque: it must defend its positions when necessary, as on the issues of the death penalty, the International Criminal Court, the Kyoto

Protocol, Guantánamo and laws with extra-territorial effect, and the United States will have to respect the European Union as a factor for stability and balance within the world.

Mr President, the new Secretary of State, Hillary Clinton, summed it up very well – and I am just finishing – when she said, before the Senate's Foreign Relations Committee: 'America cannot solve the most pressing problems on our own, and the world cannot solve them without America'.

**Adrian Severin**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – Mr President, the United States of America needs a strong United States of Europe. The European Union needs a strong American Union. Together, the United States and the European Union could be a guarantee for the world's security and stability and offer a pattern for the global order.

This report is not only about enhancing transatlantic relations but also about balancing them. There are asymmetries between the two shores of the Atlantic that negatively affect transatlantic cooperation. Therefore, the strengthening of the political European Union is essential for future cooperation with the United States. It will allow better burden-sharing in observing both parties' international responsibilities.

Between these two objective strategic partners, there is a need for deeper and better-structured relations, as well as the institutionalisation of those relations. The report we are dealing with today recommends a strategic enhanced partnership and the process leading to it. Along those lines, we should look towards establishing a true confederative transatlantic body between us and the United States of America.

At the same time, the consolidation of the transatlantic strategic partnership should offer a new opportunity for advancing cooperation with the third major player in the northern hemisphere, namely Russia. United States-European Union relations should not be seen as a transatlantic alliance against Russia, but as a starting point in establishing a formula for trilateral cooperation with a view to maintaining world security and stability.

To conclude, our priority is not to express our expectations in a self-deceiving way, but to build on realistic assumptions of what the European Union and the United States could deliver, while increasing our capacity to deliver. In this light, we support the recommendation of the report. Allow me, on a personal note, to thank Mr Millán Mon for the great and kindly cooperation he offered us in order to shape these recommendations.

**Sarah Ludford**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, I would like to speak on the justice and security issues covered in this report, not because I am not interested in the economic aspects but because I only have three minutes.

Clearly there is a vital need for transatlantic cooperation to combat terrorism and major crime, but it must be done in full respect of the rule of law – domestic and international – and of fundamental rights. For data-sharing, though, it must be a robust and binding legal framework of data protection.

The clearest demonstration of the change in approach from President Obama is the intention to close Guantánamo Bay. That is very welcome, and this House has called on Member States to respond positively to a formal request from the US to resettle about 60 low-risk or no-risk former detainees who will not be charged. That request was officially delivered last week on the occasion of the visit of Vice-President Barrot and Minister Langer, and I hope that we see a result soon. I understand it is helped by the willingness now by the Americans to resettle some themselves, such as the 17 Uighurs.

It would also be good if President Obama could go further than his January executive orders and announce the closure of all CIA detention centres and a total end to extraordinary rendition. Full disclosure of what has happened in the last seven and a half years, including the shameful use of the outsourcing of torture, is necessary to ensure that there is no repeat, and especially no repeat of the collusion from Europe.

This report, adopting an amendment I tabled, urges the new US Administration to ratify and accede to the Statute of the International Criminal Court. This would obviously strengthen that court. US abolition of the death penalty would similarly represent global leadership.

The prompt entry into force of the EU-US extradition and legal assistance agreements would boost criminal law cooperation, as well as eliminating the grey area which made extraordinary rendition flights possible. But such cooperation can only be supported if it delivers fair treatment. I have a constituent who is under threat of extradition and decades in a supermax prison because he hacked into the Pentagon computer. It is



alarming that he succeeded, but he is a computer anorak, not a terrorist, and he has Asperger's syndrome. The US should drop its extradition request and let him be prosecuted, if at all, in the UK.

Finally I would like to address the subject of the ALDE Group amendments which concern online gambling. It is important to get a swift solution to this dispute, which concerns bans and prosecutions by the US affecting only European Internet gambling operators in illegally selective prosecutions. The US asserts in front of the WTO that all Internet betting is forbidden there, but that is not true. US-based online betting on horse racing, and indeed official state lotteries, are tolerated, but only foreign providers are prosecuted.

I have no particular love for Internet gambling – indeed, it worries me – but discriminatory treatment in brazen defiance of WTO rulings has no place in a healthy transatlantic relationship. By the way, nor do visas, so I hope we will have visa waiver for all EU citizens very soon.

**Konrad Szymański**, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Mr President, there is probably no important international problem which we could solve on our own. I am not only talking about Iran, Iraq or Afghanistan. The very principles of international order are wavering because of international terrorism. The Geneva Conventions need to be reformed, in order to enable a better response to threats not associated with a particular state.

In spite of optimistic declarations, the future of NATO is in question today. If the alliance is to remain the guarantee of our security, European countries must revive their political and military commitment. Our cooperation should, however, be pragmatic – we should admit that America represents a different, but equally valid, model of democracy, and exercise moderation when giving advice about international law, the International Criminal Court or the death sentence.

**Joost Legendijk**, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (NL) Mr President, we are on the verge of new relations between the European Union and the United States. We all know how badly those relations were damaged by eight years of George W. Bush in the White House. That is why so many Europeans were pleased to see the election of Barack Obama and his promise of approaching a number of areas in a fundamentally different way. Mr Millán Mon's report brings up all these important issues. Examples of this include the joint approach on climate change and the financial and economic crisis. There are other examples, too, such as the need to follow a new strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan and the closure of the Guantánamo Bay detention camp. That last issue, Guantánamo Bay, was one of the wrongs that badly damaged the moral authority of the United States around the world. The same applies to issues such as torture and rendition. President Obama intends to bring an end to such practices and that is something that my group, too, warmly welcomes.

There is one other decision, perhaps one that is less obvious, but one that, in my eyes, is also shameful and that needs to be reversed, and reversed as soon as possible. What I am referring to is the refusal by the United States to cooperate with the International Criminal Court (ICC) in The Hague. Worse still, the US Congress took revenge by passing the American Service-Members' Protection Act just a month after the ICC came into being in July 2002.

What exactly does that Act state? The Act prohibits US institutions and citizens from cooperating with, or passing information to, the ICC. It obliges Americans to obtain an international guarantee of immunity before participating in United Nations operations. In other words, it makes it impossible to prosecute them. Countries that are signed up to the ICC can be punished for it and the United States does punish them. Finally, there is the element that caused the most fuss in my own country, the Netherlands, which is the fact that the Act grants the US President all means necessary – the option of using all means necessary – to bring about the release of any US personnel being detained by the International Criminal Court. That is why we in the Netherlands know the Act as the 'Hague Invasion Act'.

We could make a lot of jokes about this, and indeed we have done, and quite rightly so. That can lead us to underestimate the significance of this all, however. This Act was an extremely antagonistic and very symbolic reaction on President Bush's part to the advent of the ICC. What we need now is an equally symbolic but, I hope, very friendly reaction from President Obama. I urge him to revoke this Act and cooperate with the ICC, and I call on the Commission and the Council to also bring this issue to the President's attention when they meet him next week.

**Jiří Maštálka**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (CS) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I read the report with great interest and I can frankly state that it caused me a certain amount of confusion. The report is made up of 61 points and it is exhaustive but in my opinion very opaque. It completely loses or even fails to include issues which most affect ordinary people in the Czech Republic and in Europe. I can find no definite opinion

on the current global economic crisis and the approach of the EU and the US. I can find no position on the war being waged very unsuccessfully by some EU states alongside the US in Afghanistan. The position taken in the report is unaccountably circumspect. What is meant by the call to 'come up with a new strategic concept'? The assertion that 'we welcome the appointment of Richard Holbrooke as the sole special envoy to the Pakistan-Afghanistan region' is wholly inappropriate in a report of this kind and is nothing more than a manifestation of back-scratching among the small group of politicians who made the decision to bomb Yugoslavia 10 years ago. There is also a complete lack here of a clear standpoint on the plan to construct elements of the US national anti-missile defence system in Central Europe, which by the way has become a bone of contention in international relations and is sparking off a militarisation programme in space.

Even though the report contains a noticeable shift away from the policy of double standards in relation to Eastern Europe and includes greater emphasis on international law, overall the report looks like a defence document for EU High Representative Javier Solana. The job was well done and there is no need for fundamental changes. The document includes calls to set up two new combined EU-US bodies and a proposal on this. In my opinion literary creations of this sort should not be submitted to the European Parliament. Instead we need a resolution on how to proceed over the fundamental issues affecting the world today.

**Bastiaan Belder**, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (NL) Mr President, I very much share the spirit that pervades Mr Millán Mon's report in relation to the ultimate importance for the European Union of sound transatlantic relations. He is right to refer to truly shared political and social values.

As well as this praise, I also have some critical comments to make. I think it is a shame that it is only in passing that the rapporteur recommends, in paragraph 35, a common transatlantic approach to China. There are no specific proposals, and that during these times of global crisis and in the run-up to the G20 in London, where all eyes will be on the financial reserves and power of Beijing. True, in paragraph 47 the rapporteur does highlight common transatlantic trade interests, such as the enforcement of intellectual property rights. What of the common area of concern – China – Mr Millán Mon?

My second comment relates to the putting into perspective of multilateralism, an idea that has been professed so often in this House. It is only the United States, on the basis of its political will and military capability, that is willing and able to ensure global stability and security. Let us just do a quick comparison with Europe. Europe's task is simply to support Washington in a responsible and dependable way. For me, that is just real transatlantic cooperation, as, while the United States does need Europe, we need to be aware that Europe needs the Americans much more than they need us. Let us take that point on board.

**Jana Bobošíková (NI)**. – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, I congratulate Mr Millán Mon on a useful and inspirational report on the state of transatlantic relations. As there is no time here for a detailed analysis, I would like to make just a few comments. Firstly, the text of the resolution in point B should not state with such certainty that the Lisbon Treaty will come into force. We still do not know that. Secondly, in the sections which talk correctly about the need to reform the international financial system, the World Bank and the IMF, the requirement for reform and strict regulation of rating agencies is missing. These agencies gave banks and insurance companies the maximum positive rating of Triple A even at a time when they were full of toxic assets, *de facto* bankrupt and paying out billions to their managers. Thirdly, in point 24 a reference is made to the report from a US panel of 16 news agencies on global trends in the period to 2025. I should point out that similar analyses have also been produced in Russia and China but the report does not take sufficient account of these reports. China should anyway receive more attention. I would like to point out that according to the Financial Times last week, the three biggest banks in the world, measured by market capitalisation, are Chinese. China's GDP is catching up with that of the US. The EU should adapt its behaviour accordingly. Fourthly, in points 31 and 32 there is a series of precise plans concerning Russia. There is talk of the need for constructive cooperation, but already in point 33 the EU and the US are called on to develop a joint strategy in respect of six countries of the former Soviet Union where Russian is widely spoken and where there is also a Russian population. Ladies and gentlemen, according to the report, this strategy is to be implemented without the Russian Federation. If so then I fear we are unfortunately not talking about constructive cooperation but about planting the seeds for a series of conflicts and I hope we do not want that.

**Elmar Brok (PPE-DE)**. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, ladies and gentlemen, the European Union and its Member States and the United States of America are forces for freedom and democracy. They set greater store by values than almost anyone else in the community of states on this planet.

The United States once again proved during the last elections that they have the capacity for renewal and rejuvenation in this process based on values and democracy. In this global order, as the credit crunch has again shown, it is paramount that we Europeans work more closely with the Americans and link our interests, because only then can we lay down standards and deepen relations between our states.

That is why I consider the report by Millán Mon to be extremely important at this juncture. We must endeavour to push ahead with the Transatlantic Economic Council and apply a policy which removes non-tariff trade barriers, so that we can thus ensure that interests are linked, a transatlantic market is achieved and political relations are thereby also permanently deepened.

We must acknowledge here that this will only happen if the parliaments are involved, because it is only through the parliaments that the majority of regulations can be suitably adapted, and that this process and the proposals in connection with the Transatlantic Legislators' Dialogue and the Transatlantic Assembly are of paramount importance.

Furthermore, it is of decisive importance that we are today developing long-term strategies, that we are in a position to make joint plans and that both sides know what our common interests will be in 10 or 20 years' time, so that we can base our practical policy on them. I also believe that this will give the Czech Presidency a starting point for highlighting this at the meeting with the Americans on 5 April, so that we can achieve a stronger link in the common interest.

One final comment: all this will only work if the European Union is a stronger and more creditable partner, if it has something like the Treaty of Lisbon and acquires freedom of action in foreign policy. I should therefore also like to ask that we protect our interests at this hour and remember that we need to take these steps forward so that we can enter into true partnership with the United States of America eye to eye.

**Erika Mann (PSE).** – Mr President, I should like to say a few words about our economic relationship. I should like to thank my colleague Mr Millán Mon for his excellent report.

We need to remind ourselves of what we want to achieve. I mean, it was the European Parliament, with support much later from the Council and the Commission, which came up with this idea of having a stronger economic relationship and creating a transatlantic market. This idea of a transatlantic market was followed by the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC). Each of those initiatives can only survive if there is strong support from both sides. Having a new government in the United States does not automatically mean that we will have strong support for the Economic Council, since we are occupied with an enormous economic and financial crisis.

Therefore, I would urge both the Commission and the Council to ensure that the Transatlantic Economic Council will be given all the support necessary, because this is not automatically given.

I would just like to remind you of three items on the agenda that are highly important and which we somehow need to solve. One is the trade dispute agenda. This agenda is still very broad, but I would like to concentrate on one subject that is important and this is the Airbus-Boeing case, which is before the WTO and is being postponed continuously. I would urge you to find a solution. It is not on the TEC agenda, but we need to find a solution soon, otherwise we will have difficulty in a major sector.

My second plea is for you to ensure that we will finally have a road map and that we will have transparency on what kinds of items are debated in the TEC. We have asked for this many times. I know the Council is working on it, but we still have not made good progress. We would like to have a hearing on container security on both sides very soon. This was agreed at our last TEC meeting, but a follow-up will be needed.

My last point is: make sure that, on energy-intensive industries, you will bring to the attention of the TEC the idea of identifying a benchmark together. That is the only way the problems in the energy-intensive industries will be solved.

#### IN THE CHAIR: MR DOS SANTOS

*Vice-President*

**Anneli Jäätteenmäki (ALDE).** – Mr President, next week the President of the United States, President Obama, will travel to Europe on his first visit overseas to show his commitment towards a transatlantic alliance and dialogue.

With his election as President, he brought hope and change, not only in the United States but for the whole world and also in Europe. It is imperative that the EU set up networks of communication to keep a strong dialogue with the United States on many key issues, like the conflict in the Middle East, the economic crisis and climate change. These issues are global problems and, therefore, they must be discussed with international cooperation, with the United States, the European Union, European states, China, India and all the states in the world.

**Bogusław Rogalski (UEN).** – (PL) Mr President, the presidential elections in the United States brought in a new era in the history of relations with the country, and a new era in the country itself. I hope that for the United States this will be an evolutionary change, and not a revolutionary one.

I am, however, filled with anxiety by the strange, strengthening relations between the United States and Russia at the cost of international agreements made with some countries in Europe, such as Poland or the Czech Republic, for example on the question of construction of an anti-missile shield, where the United States has gone back on earlier commitments made to these countries. Let us also remember about visas, which the United States still requires in relation to some Member States. This should not be happening in transatlantic relations between the EU and the US.

Strengthening transatlantic cooperation must be a matter of special importance in the fight against terrorism, which must above all be based on respect for international law. As Barack Obama has said, 'No one nation, no matter how large or powerful, can defeat such challenges alone'. Let us also remember this in this Chamber, because often it seems to me that we think the European Union will be able to face this global challenge alone.

**Zbigniew Zaleski (PPE-DE).** – (PL) Mr President, in his document, our colleague Mr Millán Mon, and also the Commissioner and the Minister, have presented possible solutions, strategies and objectives which should guide us in our cooperation with America. I would like to come back to another thought and share it with you.

I think that Barack Obama's election slogan – 'The change we need' – concerns us, Europeans, as well. I am thinking about a change in our attitude towards the USA. On one hand we admire the wealth, economy, science, film, music and freedom of what is historically a young society. On the other hand, there is dislike, and even hostility, especially from many Left-wing Members, to American policy, to American religiousness, and to American capitalism. Paradoxically, Russia is a constant friend, no matter what it does, including the worst attacks, as for example the killing of journalists, and America is a partner dressed in the clothes of an enemy, an enemy which, it is true, did help to liberate Europe from the Nazis, and which was not obliged to make such sacrifices, but did so of its own will. It is perceived as an enemy which helped to rebuild Europe, but in spite of this it has not earned the title of permanent coalition partner.

I am, therefore, talking about appropriate standards and judgments, based on common sense, and not on the only correct and fair ideology, as if it were an echo rebounding from Moscow. Whatever is bad or faulty about the USA must be assessed accordingly, but whatever is good and could help us to realise the objectives of the EU should be appreciated. Cooperation must be based on realities, and at the same time on a stable will to solve problems together. The many statements, the applause, the amendments and entire resolutions proposed by the Left in the last four years and which I have had the opportunity to witness, were often underpinned by a negative, generalised attitude, not necessarily backed up by facts. Allow me one last sentence, Mr President – Barack Obama only became President by the will of the nation, a nation which is worth working with, a nation which protects values that are also important to us.

**Libor Rouček (PSE).** – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, Europe and the US are facing a whole series of global problems and global challenges. The financial and economic crisis, the problems of global warming, terrorism, nuclear arms proliferation, unresolved problems and conflicts in the Middle East, Iraq and Afghanistan and many other problems. Neither the EU nor the US can solve any of these problems without the necessary cooperation, such as strategic cooperation and a strategic partnership of the kind that has already been talked about here. A partnership based on shared values of freedom, human and civil rights and democracy, values which have proved their worth over the past 60 years.

With the arrival of the new administration in the US there is an enormous willingness here to cooperate. Some weeks ago a number of us had the opportunity to visit Washington and to speak not only with under-secretaries at the State Department but also with our counterparts in the Congress, the Senate and various scientific institutions. There is a will here to cooperate, to do things together and to resolve matters

jointly. So I too would like to join the call for MEPs to enter into much closer and more intensive cooperation with US counterparts.

However, the strategic cooperation of Europe and the US should not be turned against third countries, against partners such as Russia or China. For example, problems of disarmament or nuclear arms control cannot be resolved without the cooperation of Russia. I therefore welcome, for example, the renewal of talks over the START Treaty, and I also welcome the discussions with our Russian partners over the issue of US anti-missile defences in Europe. All of this is important. I would like to conclude by wishing the Czech Presidency success in the forthcoming summit in Prague and by thanking Mr Millán Mon for this report.

**Ignasi Guardans Cambó (ALDE).** – (ES) Mr President, recently Gordon Brown said in a speech in the United States, in Washington, as the first European leader to speak in that capital, that there was no political memory of a time in which Europe was so well-disposed towards the United States. That is certainly true. There has never been so much pro-Americanism, so much Americanism, we could say, within our societies as a whole and, obviously, also within our political, cultural and social elites as a whole.

We ought to take advantage of that fact. This is a common feeling that goes beyond personal sympathy for the new government and which is combined with a broad common agenda on which we can work, and which is here, and is explained very well in the report that we are to vote on tomorrow.

It is also very important, however, to be very aware of the fact that, even though we share many things, our interests are not always the same and that, therefore, in certain spheres, as friends who are now speaking to each other face to face, looking in each others' eyes and able to work together, there are certain areas in which we will continue to differ. This is especially true because we have different societies to serve, and I am talking very specifically about the economic and trade spheres; here there are pending issues that will have to be resolved with the best possible cooperation, but without forgetting the position of each side.

In this context, the European Union must be self-critical about what it should do and what it should improve in order to be credible. We know that once Lisbon is adopted we will have clearer instruments and we will then be able to implement them. Starting right now, however, we must realise that if we wish to earn respect and appear on the United States' radar we must also reform our own way of operating.

**James Elles (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, I think this is a very important report we have in front of us given the fact that our rapporteur, Francisco Millán Mon, has been able to bring this report from the Committee on Foreign Affairs almost unanimously. I have not known that in the past: all groups actually combining to show that they are in favour of a stronger transatlantic partnership. Indeed, I have noted that, in this report, we now, for the first time, call it the most strategic partnership that we have. We have lots of other ones, but this one is the key one for us in the European Union.

As was mentioned earlier, there is a new tone, but I sense too that this is a tone from the Americans looking to what Europe can do to be a partner in the global system and that we then have to think what we are going to be able to contribute to this process.

I think that the highlight in this debate was you, Madam Commissioner, saying that what we are looking for is a more strategic dialogue, the ability to look at long-term trends, like the NIC report 2025 does; to be able to look further down the road to see that we can share a common analysis together, to be able to come to common action together as a result of that. I suspect this will need some generation within the European Union, perhaps our support in the 2010 budget, to be able to formulate our own long-term thinking – because there is very little long-term thinking, either in the Commission or indeed even in our House, about long-term trends such as is found in the NIC report.

In doing so, we are going to have to find a way to establish a more even playing field for the involvement of Europeans and Americans in these debates. In the past five years we have seen a huge influx of US think tanks into Brussels telling us what we should be doing on particular aspects of policy, but there is very little about Europeans in Washington being able to communicate to the Americans what our ideas are on the shaping of European policy. We need to focus on that to provide the right budgetary input to give that kind of impact, so that we get an even input and feed-in into our transatlantic discussions.

**Ana Maria Gomes (PSE).** – Mr President, saved from the ashes left by the Bush Administration by the election of Obama, the transatlantic partnership is no longer sufficient to solve the main challenges faced by humanity, but it is still necessary.

Europe must take advantage of this opportunity and articulate with the US the exit strategy for the current global crisis, upholding human security – and that does not only mean reforming the international financial system but regulating the whole globalisation process and investing in a sustainable economy at the global scale.

We need more and stronger Europe to help Obama close Guantánamo, end the secret prisons, and to define an alternative strategy for the security challenges in Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Sudan, and put in place justice and peace for Israelis and Arabs.

We need a stronger Europe and a genuine partnership with the US to achieve the Millennium Development Goals. Only with an EU capable of sharing the burden and assuming its global responsibilities, an EU which is not just the sum of its parts, will we be taken seriously in Washington, be able to influence the policies of the Obama Administration and be in a position to enable the genuine transatlantic partnership that the world still needs.

**István Szent-Iványi (ALDE).** – (HU) In the speech Barack Obama delivered in Berlin last year, he stated that America has no better partner in the world than Europe. It is high time for us to state as well, that we have no better or more important partner in the world than the United States of America. We need to seek allies among those with whom we share common values and common interests, and not among those who are very far from us.

Europe has no alternative to transatlantic relations. The entire western world is faced with major challenges; international terrorism, proliferation, climate change and the economic crisis. In the face of these, we can only succeed and attain results if we stand together.

As far as the economic crisis is concerned, the temptation of protectionism can be felt in every country. In the United States as well, since as we know, they have announced a 'Buy American' programme. We need to act together against protectionism, for in the end protectionism does not protect us, but is harmful to all.

Great expectations lie ahead of Mr Obama's first visit and tour of Europe. We expect the G20 summit to lay the foundations for a common institutional response, to set out common rules that will enable us to overcome the global economic crisis.

Europe's ambition is to be a significant international actor. The Lisbon Treaty creates the institutional prerequisites for this, but nothing can take the place of political will. We need to assume a greater role in international life, for only then can we achieve our ambitions.

**Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE).** – (RO) I would like to thank Francisco José Millán Mon for his excellent report on transatlantic relations.

As Members of the European Parliament, we must insist that the European Union and the United States of America develop a common strategy for six states in Eastern Europe: Moldova, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan and Belarus, which are the focus of the European neighbourhood policy, so that specific, long-term results can be achieved in implementing the new Eastern Partnership and with regard to Black Sea synergy. I welcome the inclusion of my amendment on this subject in the report and I would like to thank my fellow Members for supporting this idea.

Another item of particular interest is the rapporteur's proposal to lift visas for all European citizens who want to travel to the United States. All European citizens must be treated equally. It is unacceptable for some of the European Union's citizens to be treated as second-class citizens.

I would like to highlight the specific, important progress that has been made with the aim of obtaining a visa waiver. For example, new biometric passports have been introduced in Romania in January 2009, equipped with chips which store citizens' personal data, containing 50 security elements, 18 more than in current passports. However, I think that biometric passports do not need to be a condition for not being included in the visa waiver programme.

Inclusion of all European Member States in the Visa Waiver Programme must be a priority in the dialogue between the European Commission and the United States.

**József Pinior (PSE).** – (PL) (*microphone initially switched off*) (...) as President Barack Obama entitles his message at the G20 Summit in London. The economic crisis has become a challenge for the whole world, but is also an opportunity to deepen and to reformulate transatlantic relations. Mr Mon's report shows the strategic

aspects of partnership between the European Union and the United States. It gives clear testimony to the importance which the European Parliament attaches to transatlantic relations.

This new chapter in relations between the EU and the USA should also be used to increase the activity of EU institutions in the United States. I am thinking of European institutions, European universities and European foundations. This is the time to reformulate our partnership, for Europe to show in Washington itself and in the United States the potential of today's European Union, the potential of European science, European culture and European civilisation. We should take advantage of the fact that the United States has a new president – a president who is presenting America as Europe always saw it, as a symbol of democracy and liberty.

**Toomas Savi (ALDE).** – Mr President, President Obama said: 'America has no better partner than Europe'. I believe that I speak on behalf of many of us when saying that this notion is mutual. The election of President Obama started a new chapter in transatlantic relations that has suffered serious setbacks. As Vice-Chair of the Delegation for relations with Canada, I even had to witness, at one point, a situation where Canada acted as a mediator between the European Union and the United States.

My second point: I welcome President Obama's commitment to diplomacy with the Islamic Republic of Iran. However, as a supporter of the Friends of a Free Iran, I hope that the democratic opposition of Iran will also be involved. The negotiations with Iran must be transparent in all aspects. This new era in EU-US relations will hopefully extend also to US relations with third countries. Europe's high expectations of President Obama must now be backed by action.

**Alojz Peterle (PPE-DE).** – (SL) The New Transatlantic Agenda was new in 1995. Many things have changed in the years since, which is why we need a new partnership agreement.

Twenty years have passed since the collapse of the Berlin Wall and that event was followed by the historic enlargement of the European Union. During that period we have borne witness to the tragic upsurge in terrorism and to the new threats to peace in the region. Furthermore, we have grown aware of climate change and have faced financial, economic and energy crises. It would be useful if we took stock after the collapse of Communism and viewed the condition of the world with greater sensitivity to the interdependence of global actors. Our closer partnership with the USA should be developed in the context of new challenges and new insights.

We are not dealing with a financial or economic crisis alone. We are also dealing with a global leadership crisis. We need to advance on a number of fronts simultaneously. We will fail to reform the international financial system unless there is progress in the Doha process and unless we are more successful in working towards peace and eliminating poverty.

If we are talking about efficient multilateralism, it needs to be developed in ways that ensure everyone is a winner. 'Yes, we can'.

In that spirit, I am in favour of regular political consultations between the two partners and, in particular, of strengthening the parliamentary dimension of cooperation by establishing a Transatlantic Assembly. As far as the report is concerned, I am particularly pleased by the emphasis placed on eliminating restrictions on investment and transatlantic financial services.

In conclusion, I also welcome the will expressed in the report for closer cooperation as regards space programmes, particularly between the European Space Agency and NASA. This is not to say that I wish to become an astronaut but, rather, that I am interested in new technologies.

**Helmut Kuhne (PSE).** – (DE) Mr President, the large majority of people in the European Union, probably the majority of governments in the European Union, and almost certainly the majority in this House, hoped in November that Barack Obama would be elected president. That is a good thing, even if perhaps a little scepticism has crept into some of the speeches during this debate as to whether all this was such a good thing.

Of course Europe must consciously represent its own positions in the future, but the time for malicious comment about the United States is past, because we can no longer conveniently shift everything on to George Bush, and that sets us a task. Policy on transatlantic relations on the part of the European Union, on the part of this Parliament, can no longer consist simply in tossing demands in the direction of the United States; now we must also reply with what we want to contribute in order to make this partnership efficient.

Take for example Afghanistan, which several Members have mentioned. What do we want the European Union to do in order to enhance and strengthen police missions, in order to push ahead with civil support and civil reconstruction in this country? That would be our task as the EU; NATO can take care of the military side. This is something that we must discuss very specifically. What do we have to offer?

**Janusz Onyszkiewicz (ALDE).** – (PL) Mr President, for 50 years after the War, the foundation of thinking on security in western Europe was a close alliance with the United States and the principle that security is indivisible, that the security of the United States is directly connected with the security of Europe. It seems that the end of the Cold War and the indefinite, one would hope, postponement of a possible great conflict in Europe still requires, however, that this principle should not be discredited. On the contrary, it should be upheld and should be the foundation of our thinking on our common security.

Secondly, I would like to refer to what Mr Kuhne said a moment ago. The United States has ended the era of unilateral political action and is ready for dialogue with Europe, and is ready to make joint decisions in partnership with Europe. The question is, are we ready for this, and are we ready to be dependable in implementing those jointly made decisions?

**Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, Mr Millán Mon has presented an important and excellent report. Now the question is how to implement it without losing time.

The global economic crisis offers a practical incentive for the world's two largest democracies to join forces on the basis of shared values and similar economic systems, because more than half of the world's GDP is produced by the United States and the EU together. Mr Severin has noted very well the strategic reciprocity that Europe needs a strong United States and the US needs a strong Europe. If these two partners could coordinate their activities better and more efficiently, this would exercise a profoundly positive effect on world stability as well as on so many specific regional problems.

Yes, more interest towards Europe, more flexibility and openness offered by the new US Administration is a welcome opportunity to be used. But it is necessary to remember at any time that relations with the US continue to be the EU's most important strategic partnership. But it is not time for declarations; it is time for implementation and there are three concrete priorities this report is stressing. We call to agree on a common agenda of short- and long-term goals, on global as well as regional issues. We call to replace the 14-year-old relationship with a new transatlantic partnership agreement that should also include an Economic Council, and we call for the creation of a Transatlantic Political Council as well as upgrading parliamentary relations in the form of a transatlantic assembly.

**Martí Grau i Segú (PSE).** – (ES) Mr President, President Obama's election has ushered in a historic time for the United States, the special importance of which is widely felt and shared in Europe.

President Obama is today on completely the same wavelength as Europe in relation to political action based on the key words of 'reconstruction' and 'recovery'.

The speech given yesterday by Prime Minister Gordon Brown in this Chamber provides clear proof of the mutual understanding that exists. Without a doubt, these words 'reconstruction' and 'recovery' deserve all the proactive leadership possible in view of the current crisis, in the face of which we plan to develop towards a green economy where growth and environmental protection are not at odds with each other, but complement each other perfectly.

We are also, however, seeing a 'reconstruction' and 'recovery' of the bridges between Europe and the United States which had in the last decade suffered damage.

The return of the United States to multilateralism is a very good sign for Europe and makes our objectives of worldwide peace, justice and prosperity more viable. Recent years, however, have also entailed a rift between civil societies on either side of the Atlantic.

We, as the European institutions, should foster interaction of all kinds between organisations, the academic world, communication media and those active in the social sphere to ensure that this breach can be healed.

**Luís Queiró (PPE-DE).** – (PT) Unlike Mrs Gomes, who spoke a moment ago and said that the transatlantic relationship has been reborn with the election of President Obama, I believe that the news of the end of this relationship was clearly exaggerated. This report once again proves this, and I therefore congratulate the rapporteur.



For a long time Europe and the United States have been allies vital to prosperity, development and globalisation. For a long time Europe and the United States have shared common challenges and even common enemies, although some, particularly on this side of the Atlantic, would hesitate to acknowledge this. For a long time both Europeans and Americans have known what must be done to meet the needs of a world which continues to be unfair, unequal and dangerous and which is now in global crisis.

However, this crisis should not make us backtrack, nor lessen our diplomatic firmness or the political and military commitment consistent with our obligations as allies, nor turn our backs on the collective economy nor allow the reappearance of protectionism, which would be fatal to the recovery of our economies.

At the mercy of an economy that has been opened up on a global scale, Europe and the United States now have firm allies in Japan, India, Brazil and various countries in Asia.

Despite the current crisis, there are many nations in the world that are still looking to our countries and hope one day to live like us. For all these nations, Europe and the United States must once again become the alliance that leads, shares and globalises the economy of prosperity.

That is also why the next G20 Summit is so important, not because it is an opportunity to find out who is closest to Barack Obama, but because it is an opportunity to prove that we can provide answers and leadership: we will cooperate with the new powers on the necessary reforms, but we must be aware that only the economic model based on the creative strength of humankind will allow wealth – and I mean wealth, not greed – jobs and development to be created and the crisis to be overcome.

Mr President, there is no other way, if we want a lasting solution, to generate new jobs or to stand in solidarity with those most in need at this difficult time.

**Dushana Zdravkova (PPE-DE).** – (BG) Commissioner, I would like to thank the rapporteur, Mr Millán Mon, for his comprehensive report and for the definitive position expressed on dropping the visa regime.

Four years after negotiations started on lifting visa requirements between the US and the European Union, 80 million Member State citizens still need to queue up and request an American visa in their passports. In spite of the fact that significant results have been achieved so far, the US administration refuses to take the final step and apply the reciprocity principle to the remaining five Member States, and include them in the Visa Waiver Programme.

In our resolution of 22 May 2008, we called for the negotiations on the inclusion of all Member States in the Visa Waiver Programme to be completed before the European elections in June. The lack of progress on this issue until now is concerning, as well as the numerous indications in the press that there will be no real change in US policy.

I would also like to highlight the visit to Washington made last week by Commissioner Barrot, where the negotiations on lifting visa restrictions continued. It is not clear yet what the specific results will be following this visit. I fear that, regardless of the efforts made by the Commission, the objectives we set will not be achieved by the end of this parliament's mandate.

However, I want to mention that unfortunately, some of the actions taken by individual Member States are rather helping our American partners not to view the European Union as a united whole. This is why I am taking the opportunity to call on all European governments to change their policy and take specific steps providing real support for the representatives of the European Commission.

In addition to this, I urge all fellow Members to support the declaration which has been initiated by certain fellow Members, including myself, in favour of the United States lifting the visa regime for citizens of all European Union Member States.

**Urszula Gacek (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, the election of President Obama was met with enthusiasm in both the USA and in Europe, but a great deal is expected of the 44th President of the USA. He faces a range of challenges which no peacetime leader of that nation in living memory has been expected to tackle. He has a financial and economic crisis at home, bordering on a meltdown of financial markets, that has impacted the world economy and is still a long way from being resolved. He has committed himself to finding a solution for war-torn Afghanistan and for the spill-over effect it is having into Pakistan. He faces the danger of an Iran which is coming ever closer to being a nuclear power.

We believe in a strong transatlantic relationship based on our common values of democracy and the free market economy. We respect the priorities that President Obama and his new Administration have set themselves. We are not offended if the US sees that some of these aims will only be achieved with the cooperation of the US and Russia. Europe is extending an open hand to the United States. Just a few weeks ago in this Chamber we declared our openness to work together to close Guantánamo Bay and resettle former inmates.

Member States from the former Eastern bloc have a particular debt of gratitude to the United States. We were brought into the transatlantic community several years before becoming members of the EU. Poland, for its part, has reflected this gratitude by a willingness to support the US whenever needed, including military engagement in Iraq and Afghanistan. I appeal to the new administration not to take this support entirely for granted. A younger generation of Poles raised in a democracy has quickly forgotten this debt of gratitude. In realising its wider aims, the US should not forget that these loyal allies have sensitivities, especially when it presses the US-Russia reset button.

**Geoffrey Van Orden (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, I wish to offer some cautionary words, particularly to the new Obama Administration. Over the last 60 years, the United States has had a range of attitudes towards European integration. Naturally, it sees this from the perspective of an outsider and may even imagine – erroneously, I believe – that it is similar to America's own historical experience. This is the view encouraged by the dominant federalist tendency in the EU institutions. The danger is that US interlocutors accept the EU's own narrative as fact, rather than as a story presented as a documentary but with a lot of misleading and fictional content.

The US should understand that many of us believe that the EU is heading in the wrong direction and that its aspiration to create a state called Europe does not reflect the wishes of our citizens, rightly attached as they are to the sovereignty of our nations and their ability to elect and remove governments.

Neither is it in the interests of the United States for the freely given commitment of many European countries to coalition to be usurped by a differently minded European Union.

I have to say that I have much respect for Mr Millán Mon and I can approve many of the sentiments in his report, but not its main thrust, which is to elevate the role of the EU as an institution as our unique spokesman in dealings with the United States.

**Ioan Mircea Pașcu (PSE).** – Mr President, even if Western unity helped us win our independence and end the Cold War, by the time our countries joined both NATO and the EU, transatlantic relations were not in their best shape.

The current crisis and its common challenges – the deterioration of the security environment, the global issues like energy, climate change, nuclear proliferation and the new power centres, the regional issues like the Middle East, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran and Africa – require maximum intensification of transatlantic cooperation.

In context, the report makes a positive contribution by primarily suggesting ways to institutionalise those relations, to commonly approach Russia and the six eastern European countries, to achieve the unified transatlantic market, to gradually integrate our financial markets and to extend the US visa waiver programme to all EU Member States.

We cannot fail. The cost for the West would be the loss of initiative in world affairs, possibly for a long time to come.

**Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE).** – (RO) Bearing in mind the developments over recent years in the European Union, at US administration level and globally as a whole, I think that now is the time for us to review the transatlantic partnership and adapt it to the new realities.

In this respect, I welcome the report from my colleague, Mr Millán Mon, and would like to take this opportunity to congratulate him. This report consolidates in a very useful document Europe's main priorities in its relations with the United States. I am also pleased that the amendments which I suggested have been included in the report.

I would like to make a few observations.

First of all, cooperation in the area of security must continue. The time has come for Europe to make a larger contribution to the theatre of war in Afghanistan where a crucial war is being waged for the future of the region. I would also like to mention that my country, Romania, has provided support to the United States' efforts in both Iraq and Afghanistan.

Secondly, with regard to the energy dossier, I believe that joint action is required to coordinate research efforts and identify new clean energy sources.

As regards relations with Russia, I feel that it is a good moment to adopt a consistent approach in relations between the United States and Europe, on the one hand, and Russia, on the other.

Finally, I would like to welcome the particularly constructive proposals on setting up transatlantic consultation bodies, including for foreign and security policy.

**Luis Yañez-Barnuevo García (PSE).** – (ES) Mr President, we ought to shout out 'good news! Good news!'. There has been another miracle by President Obama, who has managed, after many years, to unite this Parliament and the European Union in a common goal, which is to strengthen transatlantic relations.

There was a similar moment in the past when Bill Clinton and Felipe González signed the Transatlantic Agenda in 1995; at that time there was great optimism about the future. Then came the eight black years of Mr Bush's presidency. He fundamentally divided European governments, although public opinion not so much. His government continuously abandoned principles that were fundamental for the European Union, such as multilateralism, support for the United Nations and international legality.

All this is now being rebuilt and we have well-founded hopes for the future of relations between the European Union and the United States. I therefore congratulate Mr Millán Mon on this brilliant report, which comes at such a good time for this strengthening of relations between the two continents.

**Íñigo Méndez de Vigo (PPE-DE).** – (ES) Mr President, I would also like to join in the cries of 'good news!' voiced by Mr Yañez-Barnuevo García because I believe that this report marks a turning-point in relations with the United States.

A good friend said to me recently that she had been in the United States and she had been surprised by the lack of knowledge regarding the new institutions and the new procedures created by the Treaty of Lisbon.

If I had to praise something, to give a very positive assessment to one thing in the excellent report produced by Mr Millán Mon, it is precisely this: that it places transatlantic relations within the orbit of the Treaty of Lisbon for us and sets out all the major mechanisms provided by the Treaty of Lisbon so that the European Union can maintain relations on first-name terms with the United States.

It grants us, as Europeans, the tools we need to be able to articulate this European wish, which was so necessary in the past, continues to be so today and will doubtless be so in the future.

I would like to give my congratulations too to Mr Millán Mon on the excellent report that he has produced.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – Mr President, I am grateful for all your contributions and comments in this debate. I am delighted that the European Parliament, the Commission and the Presidency very much share the same view on the most important issues for the strategic dialogue between the EU and the US. I am pleased to have heard strong support for the topics we chose for our first informal meeting with President Obama, namely: firstly, energy security and climate change; secondly, economic cooperation; and, thirdly, cooperation on security and external relations.

I listened carefully to other comments made, such as the need to build a new transatlantic agenda, to deepen cooperation in foreign assistance and development policy, to pursue cooperation in justice and home affairs, to keep up the momentum on the Transatlantic Economic Council, to explore setting up the Transatlantic Political Council etc. We will take them into account as we prepare for the regular EU-US Summit to be held in June.

Those of you who raised the other issues, such as the visa waiver – because not all the EU countries are taking part in that – can remember how, a year ago, my country led efforts on that. It was also the subject of a debate in this Parliament, so I can assure you that we will continue to raise this issue with the US Government as well.

In conclusion, I would like to add the following reflections. It seems clear that the new US Administration has taken on board many of the messages that we have been sending them over recent months and years about the transatlantic relationship. They are now responding. For example, we are now being asked to provide greater strategic input on Afghanistan. It is also clear that strategic input is expected to be matched by a very practical commitment, so I believe that you will remember this when we are discussing our practical contribution to the future Afghan mission. It should come as no surprise for us once we are really engaged in a deep and serious debate. When President Obama said in Berlin last year that America has no better partner than Europe, he was not just making a statement of principle, but also inviting Europe to provide the proof.

Secondly, it is clear to all of us that the challenges we are facing are getting more numerous and more complex. To return to one of my opening points, when the EU and the US agree, we can help set the global agenda. That also means taking our share of leadership and leading others to lend their support and provide means towards the goals set. But to be able to do so and be a credible partner to the US, the EU must speak with one voice to the greatest extent possible.

The Czech Presidency will continue to ensure that the transatlantic partnership remains one of the cornerstones of the EU's foreign policy. I look forward to developing this relationship further as we face new challenges together and I look forward to continued cooperation with this Parliament in doing so.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, as many have said, this debate has shown that it is a question of how we can implement the most important issues together with such a crucial strategic partner as the United States of America.

Since I made quite a number of very clear and practical remarks at the beginning, I will just make a few concrete remarks now.

First, the role of legislators in, and the institutional set-up of, EU-US relations is very important. In principle, we unequivocally support stronger links between the EU and US legislators. Obviously, the primary impetus for this must come from the law-makers themselves. I know that the European Parliament is ready to do so, and this should also come from Congress. Nevertheless, I suggest that it would be worthwhile for EU legislators also to cultivate more intensive contacts with the Senate, which has a longer electoral cycle, and with Congressmen whose sectoral expertise could advance the agenda of the Transatlantic Economic Council.

The Lisbon Treaty, as and when it enters into force, will then, as has been said, also give the EP a reinforced role in shaping EU-US dialogue, especially on regulatory matters; as has been mentioned, think-tanks will certainly also be very important not only from the US side to us but also from the EU side to the US.

Concerning EU-US institutions, I would caution, first, that the transatlantic agenda should be driven by substance rather than by process. In our first meetings with President Obama, therefore, as I have said before, it will be important to demonstrate the capacity to focus on results.

However, I have taken careful note of your call for an overhaul of the current arrangements under the new transatlantic agenda. I intend to initiate a review of the structures to help them deliver better, and the Commission will come up with due proposals.

Let me also speak briefly on the Transatlantic Economic Council (TEC). Mr Verheugen has already had a meeting with his new US counterpart, Mr Froman, on 23 March 2009. The main issues of the TEC under the new Administration are as follows. Firstly, raising the profile of political strategic issues, while at the same time relieving the burden of more technical matters on the summit agendas. Secondly, the time horizon for a future work programme – here Mr Verheugen wants to set a very long-term perspective, but this has to be weighed against the mandate of this Commission and we need to have some short-term results. Finally, how to deal with pressure from the Member States – to whom we have promised, but not yet delivered, a mid-term programme – to be more involved in the work of the TEC.

Second, I would like to point out that we are a Community which shares values with the US, but there are still things that have to be done. Therefore we will need to continue to encourage the US to sign up to core UN human rights conventions, including those on discrimination against women, and the rights of the child – to name but a few. This includes our position on the ICC, as has been stressed on several occasions with the Bush Administration, but that will be taken up again.

Third, concerning visa waiver and visa reciprocity, which many of you mentioned: we know that, owing to substantive efforts by Member States and at EU level, seven Member States were admitted to the visa-waiver

programme in November/December 2008. However, there are still five Member States which do not yet enjoy visa-free travel to the US. We will, therefore, continue to raise this issue.

I can tell you that Vice-President Barrot and the Czech Minister Langer raised the issue again last week in Washington and the US side has generally shown understanding of our position, while stressing at the same time that the action of the Federal Government is based on statutory requirements, which clearly set the framework of future enlargements of the programme and are being monitored closely by Congress. Secretary Napolitano informed us that one additional Member State is getting very close to entering the visa-waiver programme.

Finally, concerning Afghanistan: not only have we already delivered a lot in the past, but, as I have said before, we are ready to contribute to the civilian search, and there will be some additional funding that we will find from our Asia budget for the elections, the police and, most probably, for agriculture because it is important to have additional alternative livelihoods.

I am always open to new ideas, and one example, which is taken up in your report, would be to upgrade the Foreign Ministers' meetings into a Transatlantic Political Council with a heavier focus on strategic themes. As I have said before, we intend to look at revamping the existing transatlantic agenda in that perspective, against the background of the 15th anniversary of the New Transatlantic Agreement in 2010.

**Francisco José Millán Mon, rapporteur.** – (ES) Mr President, I would like firstly to express my thanks for the speeches and congratulations I have received. What I see as the most important element in this debate is that there is a broad consensus on the importance of relations between the European Union and the United States, as well as on the need to strengthen them, not only through a joint agenda to tackle serious challenges and serious conflicts, but also through new institutional mechanisms.

With one exception, I have not seen any major objections either to the two annual summits or to the establishment of a transatlantic political council, nor, of course, to the improvement or upgrading of the level of dialogue between legislators to a more structured dialogue, a sort of transatlantic assembly, as recommended by the report.

On this point, I also welcome the fact that the Commissioner believed this strengthening of dialogue between the legislatures to be very useful and that neither she nor the Council representative are opposed to this other strengthening of other institutions which I believe is rendered necessary, in large part, by the Lisbon Treaty. This will be very advisable and beneficial for both sides.

I cannot reply within one minute to all the comments that I have heard, but I would like to say, with regard to Russia, that as Mr Severin knows, the report recommends constructive cooperation, but naturally without prejudice to human rights and international law. On China, there are explicit and implicit references, when I speak of involving the new emerging powers in global governance. Naturally – and this is a comment that also refers to a large extent to the amendments which I have received, fortunately few in number – the report cannot deal with every subject.

The report must prioritise; it is already too long and prioritising means choosing, selecting and, at times, discarding. I cannot mix up subjects which are very important with others that, although still important, are less so. The report must be readable. Therefore, as we say in Spanish, it should not 'fall out of your hands' when it is being read, because it is so heavy.

Ladies and gentlemen, I believe that cooperation with the United States is of crucial importance; Prime Minister Gordon Brown reminded us of the fact here yesterday. I believe that by adopting this report tomorrow, Parliament will be doing its duty: to send the signal that we desire and we call for a yet stronger strategic relationship with the United States. The report reminds us – and Mr Elles said this a few minutes ago – that the most important strategic relationship that the European Union has is its relationship with the United States.

I am certain, I hope and I trust that the Commission and the Council will do everything possible in the months and weeks to come, which are so significant, to strengthen this relationship, including through the institutional dimension.

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

The vote will take place tomorrow.

### **Written statements (Rule 142)**

**Corina Crețu (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (RO) The election of President Barack Obama may mark the start of a new era in relations between the United States and the European Union, provided that both sides turn good intentions and friendly declarations into more concrete steps aimed at strengthening ties and establishing more effective cooperation.

The economic crisis and current geostrategic climate make it a greater concern to improve transatlantic cooperation as we are jointly faced by serious challenges. The US and EU are linked through a partnership which is fundamentally important to both sides, covering every area of activity, from trade to military alliance.

In these circumstances, I believe that it is paramount to eliminate the final vestiges of discrimination which exist in US-EU relations. The fact that visas for entering the US are still compulsory for citizens from six European Union Member States must be a priority in the dialogue which the Commission and European Parliament conduct with the US authorities in order to achieve equal treatment for all citizens from EU countries, based on complete reciprocity. In this respect, I welcome the inclusion in this report of a request made to the United States to lift visa requirements for the six countries which have not yet been included in the Visa Waiver Programme.

**Daniel Petru Funeriu (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – "America has no better partner than Europe", declared President Obama in Berlin in July 2008. Europe, on its turn, has no better partner than America. This is the main conclusion and motto that can be drawn from this excellent report.

In the global world of the 21st century, Europe and America face common challenges, but also share the same values and fight for the same ideals. Therefore, all the recommendations of the report to step up EU-US relations are not only welcome, but also strongly needed.

Among them, I find people-to-people contacts to be the true key to lasting relations and cooperation. Therefore, I insist time and again and give my full support to the call on the American administration to entirely lift the visa regime for EU nationals as soon as possible. It is unacceptable that nationals of five EU Member-States still face obstacles and need visas to travel to America. Europe is a united entity, and so should be the approach towards all its citizens, towards all their rights and freedoms.

Let people interact, researchers cooperate and businesses find joint solutions to the current economic crisis. Freedom of movement between the two continents has thus become urgency and should constitute a priority topic already at the Prague meeting on 5th April 2009.

**Csaba Sógor (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – In the last 18 years the USA had a lot of vituperation to put up with – and, maybe in the case of the previous Republican Administration, under President Bush, on many occasions for very good reason.

I would like to remind you that without American support and involvement some problems on the European continent would be still hanging in the air. Very often in the previously mentioned period it has turned out that the European Union can become powerless and incapable to solve conflicts that happen at our back door, on our continent.

Without American involvement and the Dayton agreement, maybe there would still be war in Bosnia. And I am sure I do not have to underline enough that the status of Kosovo would be still unclear and therefore highly frustrating not just for the people of Kosovo, but for European powers as well.

In spite of the many shortcomings of the American democracy, they have achieved something that at this point we can only dream of: they have a black president. I put high hopes into transatlantic relations, and I sincerely hope that things will improve for the benefit of both the EU and the USA.

## **8. Interim Trade Agreement with Turkmenistan - Interim Agreement with Turkmenistan (debate)**

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

- the oral question to the Council by Jan Marinus Wiersma, Erika Mann, Daniel Caspary, Robert Sturdy, Cristiana Muscardini and Eugenijus Maldeikis, on behalf of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, and the Union

for Europe of the Nations Group, on the Interim Trade Agreement between the EU and Turkmenistan (O-0024/2009 - B6-0019/2009);

- the oral question to the Commission by Jan Marinus Wiersma, Erika Mann, Daniel Caspary, Robert Sturdy, Cristiana Muscardini and Eugenijus Maldeikis, on behalf of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, and the Union for Europe of the Nations Group, on the Interim Trade Agreement between the EU and Turkmenistan (O-0025/2009 - B6-0020/2009); and

- the report (A6-0085/2006) by Mr Caspary, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the proposal for a Council and Commission decision on the conclusion of the Interim Agreement on trade and trade-related matters between the European Community and the European Atomic Energy Community, of the one part, and Turkmenistan, of the other part (05144/1999 - C5-0338/1999 - 1998/0304(CNS)).

**Jan Marinus Wiersma, author.** – (NL) Mr President, it is good that we are today debating the European Parliament's position on the Interim Trade Agreement with Turkmenistan, something that this Parliament and the European Union have long kept on the back burner. The Council and the Commission are looking for progress on this issue and they want the European Parliament to give its blessing or a positive verdict on the advent of this interim agreement, as that could help improve relations with Turkmenistan.

This has been on the back burner for a long while, and there is a reason for that. Parliament has hitherto been very hesitant to vote on this agreement because we are really quite dissatisfied with the human rights situation in Turkmenistan, especially under the previous president/dictator Turkmenbashi, who closed the country off from the world and treated his own population in a pretty inhumane way. The question, of course, is whether the new regime that took office after Turkmenbashi's death has brought change to that situation – and I would like to hear from the Council and the Commission what changes and improvements they have observed over recent years – and whether that is reason enough now really to set about concluding and signing the trade agreement.

The Commission and the Council, of course, have two strong arguments for a reappraisal. The strategic context has changed. We look at Central Asia differently than we did a few years ago. The Commissioner herself has put a lot of energy into the region, but I am also aware that the Presidency is of the opinion that the European Union must not leave this region to the Chinese or the Russians. We have interests there, too, and the region itself does recognise them. I was in Kazakhstan not so long ago, and it was very noticeable that there was a lot of interest there in better relations with the European Union.

The second important argument put forward by the Commission is that, at present, we have no sound legal basis for our relations with Turkmenistan. We are still using a treaty dating from Soviet times, and that is just not acceptable. Without a better treaty, so the argument goes, we are also unable to set up any decent dialogue on human rights.

The question remains unresolved – has the human rights situation improved to such a degree that we should take this important step and advise Parliament to endorse the trade agreement? I believe that this question is still pretty unresolved and I am also awaiting the reactions of the Commission and the Council in that regard. I will continue to have my doubts. I have discussed this issue extensively with Mr Caspary of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, who is the rapporteur on this subject. On a number of points that he will also mention, we are still seeking clarification from the Council, namely in relation to the media situation in Turkmenistan, education, prison access for the Red Cross, and so on. We believe that there must be real improvement in these areas and a trade agreement of this kind and human rights dialogue with Turkmenistan could help to achieve that.

I have one final point, and it is one that is also clearly expressed in the resolution that we have produced together with the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats. We also want a strong guarantee that, if we do agree to issue a positive opinion in relation to this trade agreement, there is a fall-back position. We want to be in a position whereby, if we do end up coming to the conclusion that the methods proposed by the Commission and the Council are not working and the human rights situation in Turkmenistan does not truly improve, Parliament can ask the Commission and the Council to suspend the treaty. If we do not get a commitment to that effect, I would find it very difficult to convince my own group, in our group meeting tonight, to vote in favour of this trade agreement. We would probably then move for a postponement of the vote. For us, it is truly a very important point that we should get this commitment that, if the situation in Turkmenistan deteriorates or fails to improve significantly, we can then have another debate on the issue of

whether the trade agreement should be suspended. Parliament must have the right to petition the Council and the Commission to that effect.

### IN THE CHAIR: MR MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ

*Vice-President*

**Bogusław Rogalski**, *author*. – (PL) Mr President, the question of ratification of the Agreement with Turkmenistan is a contentious issue because of violations of democratic principles and basic human rights in Turkmenistan. In spite of this, talks should be conducted with this country and the Agreement should be signed. Particular attention in relations with Turkmenistan should be paid to the fact that if there is no economic cooperation between the EU and Turkmenistan the standard of living in that country will fall. However, ratification of the Agreement can certainly help to raise the standard of living of the population.

Let us remember that certain positive social signs have appeared there. The recent adoption by Turkmenistan of legislation introducing a ban on child labour is one of these signs. Of course, Turkmenistan still has to ratify and implement many of the conventions of the International Labour Organization – that is not in question. However, the fact that changes in Turkmenistan have been introduced at a tempo slower than we had expected remains disturbing. Only a few enterprises have been privatised, the government remains in firm control of many sectors of the economy, and foreign direct investment has remained at a very low level. Despite the fact that Turkmenistan has one of the largest natural reserves of gas and is one of the largest exporters of cotton, around half of the population – and let us remember this here – lives in poverty, I might add in extreme poverty. The political system is also far from satisfactory, especially concerning the continued repression of political parties other than the governing party, and also the repression of various religious groups.

In spite of all this it seems to me that the Agreement with Turkmenistan should be made and ratified, because only by talking and by giving Turkmenistan a certain example can we give them a helping hand, so that in the future this country might at last join the family of democratic countries.

**Robert Sturdy**, *author*. – Mr President, I do apologise – I did not realise that I had speaking time on this particular subject. I would just like to comment on what the previous speaker said. I think it is important that we support the legislation coming out to bring Turkmenistan closer to us. As for all these countries, we need to make sure that they are secure in a very difficult environment.

At this point I would like to thank Daniel Caspary, who has worked tirelessly to get the legislation through. I know he is speaking in a minute or two, but he has worked in the Committee on International Trade on this particular legislation.

At a time when the world is suffering from huge constraints on financial services and other problems, we need to ensure the security of these countries, as well as just making sure that they join in with the present legislation that Daniel is proposing. I have no further points to make and I do apologise for being late.

**Daniel Caspary**, *rapporteur*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, we have been addressing the Interim Agreement with Turkmenistan here in the European Parliament for nearly three years. Almost three years ago we had reached the point where the Committee on International Trade had adopted a report, but it was rejected by plenary, one of the reasons being that the Council and the Commission stopped working on this issue and Parliament said that, if the Commission and the Council are not pushing ahead here, then there is no need for us to either.

I am particularly pleased that we are in a different situation today, even if the situation in Turkmenistan is still a long way from meeting our standards. Human rights are still disregarded in many areas and there is still a great deal of justified criticism in terms of the lack of democratic structures in this country. Individual freedoms are very restricted. Freedom of information in this country leaves a great deal to be desired. At the moment, according to information channelled to us by non-government organisations, a campaign is under way to remove satellite dishes and hence further obstruct access to the free media.

The education system still fails to come up to the standard that we want in order to educate people in an enlightened and, more importantly, informed manner in terms of democracy and human rights. Also, the situation in the prisons and the question of political prisoners and Red Cross access to these prisons is still totally unsatisfactory and unexplained.



On the other hand, there is also a great deal of unjustified criticism which keeps being passed on to us. There have been numerous false reports by so-called non-government organisations over recent years. Several non-government organisations have given me the impression that they are perhaps fronting for companies from other countries which have an interest in doing what they can to prevent talks from taking place between the European Union and Turkmenistan.

It is my impression that behind many of the statements and much of the false information leaked to the European Union there was a very deliberate interest in obstructing talks between the European Union and Turkmenistan. I am thinking here of reports that all the hospitals in the country have closed with the exception of two in the capital, that all but two libraries have closed, that there has been an outbreak of plague because medical conditions are allegedly so appalling. These reports have all proved to be false.

So what is the main problem? It is absolutely impossible to get a realistic picture of this country, mainly because its government does not let us take a proper look at it and because we, as the European Union, unfortunately have no foreign office to take the necessary action there.

However, we can see that the new president has started numerous reforms. The European Union's Central Asia strategy adopted a while ago here in Parliament focuses on the Central Asian countries. This Interim Agreement could possibly be a first small step to show the Turkmens that we are taking up the reins of dialogue, are pushing ahead with dialogue and also want to help them follow the slow – but hopefully constant – path towards human rights and democracy.

Our resolution, which was tabled here in Parliament as a resolution by numerous groups, clearly addresses many of the causes for criticism. It also clearly addresses some of the positive developments which we can see, but the point for us is that we do not want to give out any free tickets to ride, we most certainly do not want to sell out on values that we hold dear to Turkmenistan; we want to defend and maintain our values. That is why the partnership and cooperation agreement should not be a foregone conclusion and, as the previous speaker said, the Commission and the Council must make clear statements about the possible suspension of the Interim Agreement if Parliament should so demand at some point in the future.

Parliament has set out numerous questions in writing to the Commission and the Council. I would be delighted if you could examine them and give us very emphatic answers, so that hopefully we can together get this Interim Agreement under way tomorrow.

**Alexandr Vondra**, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Mr President, I certainly welcome the interest of Members of Parliament in the issue of the EU's relationship with Turkmenistan, and I am pleased to have the opportunity to respond on behalf of the Council to the various questions and issues which have been raised in Parliament.

Turkmenistan is in many ways growing in importance. For a long time it has been a very inward-looking country. But, over the last two years, it has taken a number of significant steps to open up to the outside world. The Government is increasingly open to cooperation. This is reflected in a greater effort to work more constructively within the framework of the EU's Central Asian strategy.

Despite these changes, our contractual relationship with Turkmenistan has remained unchanged for 20 years. As Mr Wiersma stated, it is still based on the outdated Trade and Commercial and Economic Cooperation Agreement with the Soviet Union.

Against the background of positive developments in Turkmenistan, we have an opportunity to strengthen our bilateral relationship. The Interim Agreement, which was signed in 1999, provisionally applies the trade-related parts of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, also signed in 1999, for which only three Member State ratifications remain outstanding.

There are many aspects to the Union's relations with Turkmenistan. The promotion of human rights and democracy is, of course, at the heart of the bilateral relationship, as it is key to the wider Strategy for Central Asia. The fact that Turkmenistan borders Afghanistan makes it also a strategically important country. At the same time, Turkmenistan is participating in the reconstruction of Afghanistan and provides logistics background for operations or activities of many EU Member States in the framework of the ISAF (overflights) as well as on a bilateral basis. Turkmenistan is critical to regional security and the fight against drug trafficking. Its growing economy provides opportunities for EU companies. In addition, Turkmenistan is a key partner in the diversification of the EU's energy relations and energy security. These are all important areas which we need to develop in our own interests.

In addition, since the presidential elections in February 2007, Turkmenistan has engaged in a number of significant reforms, including constitutional changes. Many of the new provisions in the constitution, as well as other reforms which have been announced, underline that the country is moving in the right direction, even though it is a long-term process and much more still needs to be done.

On the question of human rights, Turkmenistan has engaged constructively in a human rights dialogue with the EU on a wide range of issues. This dialogue has also been matched by some important developments within the country. In particular, some political prisoners have been released, and there has been increased cooperation with the UN. Turkmenistan has also permitted the UN rapporteur on freedom of religion to visit, it has participated fully in the UN Periodic Review, and a UN Centre for Preventive Diplomacy has been established in Ashgabat. In addition, internal travel restrictions have been eased, a dialogue with the ICRC has begun, and education reform has restored ten-year secondary and five-year university-level education. Turkmenistan has acceded to international conventions such as the Second Optional Protocol to the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the Convention on the Political Rights of Women.

All this is evidence that Turkmenistan is moving ahead. Of course, much remains to be done in the field of human rights and respect for the rule of law and democracy. We will continue to push in particular for the release of all political prisoners, for free access by the ICRC to prisoners, for a lifting of the restrictions on foreign travel, and for freedom for the media and civil society.

The Presidency is convinced that the best way to ensure that Turkmenistan delivers on these issues is through constant engagement. We have to be able to have an open dialogue, and, when necessary, send clear messages, if Turkmenistan is to move towards full respect for international standards.

This is precisely why we need to upgrade our relationship and our own instruments and tools. The current contractual arrangement with Turkmenistan provides for only a rudimentary bilateral dialogue. The only treaty-based dialogue consists of a meeting of a joint committee at officials level once a year.

The Interim Agreement would make human rights an essential element of relations, and would therefore strengthen our ability to influence future developments in Turkmenistan in this area. The PCA, once in force, would go further by providing for a fully-fledged political dialogue.

The EU Strategy for Central Asia, adopted in June 2007, states that, 'in order to intensify cooperation with Central Asian states, the EU will make full use of the potential of Partnership and Cooperation Agreements'. Such agreements already exist in the case of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. And in the case of Tajikistan, an interim agreement is in force pending the ratification and entry into force of the PCA.

For the successful implementation of the EU Strategy for Central Asia it is important to have all Central Asian countries involved, and that is why it is important to create conditions for involvement of Turkmenistan as well. Without it the implementation of our goals and interests in Central Asia would be very difficult.

The Presidency is convinced that we need now to establish an appropriate legal framework for our relations with Turkmenistan, beginning with the Interim Agreement. This will enable us to build on the developments taking place in the country, and to strengthen our wider engagement with Central Asia.

The Interim Agreement is the most effective way of ensuring that Turkmenistan makes progress in the various key areas which I have outlined, not least in respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. I know that you share these objectives, and therefore hope that we can count on your support for taking this forward.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, honourable Members, since the election of President Berdymukhamedov, Turkmenistan has effectively entered a new phase of its development, and several positive signs of change have emerged.

Indeed, the new leaders are demonstrating a more open attitude. For example, they have lifted certain restrictions on freedom of movement within the country, they have amended the constitution so as to strengthen the role of the parliament, they have created an institute of democracy and human rights, they have hosted the United Nations Centre for Preventive Diplomacy in Ashgabat and, for the first time, they authorised international observers to monitor the legislative elections held last December. Furthermore, as you know, reforms in the education and healthcare sectors are now priorities for the government.

In 2006 the European Parliament proposed to the Turkmen authorities that they take undertake a number of measures so that Parliament could finally approve the Interim Trade Agreement. Moreover, in the last two years, since the new president was elected, several of the proposed measures have been adopted – I do

not wish to repeat those mentioned by the President-in-Office of the Council, particularly those concerning the ICRC. Reforms have also begun in the field of education, with the modernisation of the teaching system, the training of teachers abroad, the extension of the education period and the introduction of the Internet in schools.

Some prisoners have been freed, including recently, ladies and gentlemen, Valery Pal, whose release we had demanded. Furthermore, in September 2008 – again, for the first time – a visitor's permit was granted to the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion or Belief, who concluded, I quote, 'individuals and communities still face a number of difficulties, although the situation has much improved since 2007'.

The launch of new structured dialogues such as that which we have heard on human rights is another positive point. Of course, you may rest assured that, during these meetings, we will still address issues of concern, notably the situation of political prisoners, the freedom of assembly, of the media, of worship, and the rights of minorities, and on each occasion we will stress our commitment to respect for human rights and their importance for long-term economic and social development.

Due to these fears – which are quite legitimate – about the situation in Turkmenistan, Parliament has postponed its decision on the Interim Agreement. In principle I share some of these fears, and I also recognise that Turkmenistan still has some way to go before it is fully compliant with international standards on democracy and human rights.

However, although it may be limited, this is a positive development that testifies to a desire to make progress and to open up to change. We regard it as an opportunity that we should seize in order to engage with the Turkmen authorities and to encourage them. I am firmly convinced that the European Union must commit itself further in order to pave the way for positive developments to be made.

Applying the Interim Trade Agreement, by which I mean the trade-related provisions of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement, would be a positive first step that would enable us to engage more with Turkmenistan and more vigorously to promote cooperation, reform and modernisation as a whole. Furthermore, the Interim Agreement contains a crucial clause on human rights, and I am aware of your concerns about the possibility of suspending the agreement.

In this regard, I should like to point out that Article 1 of the Interim Trade Agreement and Article 2 of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement contain clauses referring to respect for democracy and fundamental rights as essential elements of each agreement, but above all that both agreements contain clauses enabling each party to take appropriate measures in the event of a serious breach of their terms, and this even without prior consultation of the joint committees, in cases of special urgency.

Suspension of the agreements in the case of an established, continuous and serious breach of the human rights clause is therefore possible. However, the Interim Trade Agreement is clearly not a cure-all. It will certainly not resolve all of the human rights problems in Turkmenistan, but it will help to ensure that international standards are complied with more fully, particularly in the areas of the rule of law and human rights.

There are two more important reasons why we should strengthen our relations with Turkmenistan to protect our own interests: security and energy. Indeed, Turkmenistan is located at the crossroads of Europe and Asia and counts Iran and Afghanistan, among others, as neighbours. It is important for it to be actively neutral in a very tense region that is ripe for destabilisation.

To this end, we are working successfully with Turkmenistan in the area of border management and in the fight against terrorism, Islamic extremism, drugs trafficking and human trafficking. This collaboration is all the more important given the recent renewed engagement of the international community in Afghanistan and in Pakistan, and, in fact, regional conferences are due to be held very soon in the Hague and in Tokyo.

As we all know, Central Asia could play a very important role where energy security is concerned. Since the regime change in Turkmenistan, we have increased our cooperation in this area. The European Union is making every effort to have the Southern Gas Corridor built as part of a broader policy of diversifying our energy sources and transit routes. Clearly, Turkmenistan is crucial to the success of this project.

To conclude, our relations with Turkmenistan must be shaped as much by our values as by our interests. That is why I remain convinced that, by engaging with Turkmenistan, we will be in a better position to put forward our arguments in favour of a more open society in that country.

We shall continue to encourage the authorities to make progress in other areas, such as the reform of the penal and civil code, the legislation on religion, the freedom of the media, the releasing of political prisoners, the authorising of international observers to enter prisons, and the increased presence of NGOs in the country.

It is for all of these reasons that I ask you, please, to approve the interim agreement with Turkmenistan.

**President.** – Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, before giving the floor to the various speakers for this debate, I am going to allow myself – being, as I am, responsible for multilingual issues in Parliament's Bureau – to read you some advice from a leaflet prepared for new MEPs on how to speak so that the interpreting can be correctly done, and so that this miracle, without compare or precedent in any other institution, can continue to operate daily.

These are not the tablets that Moses brought down from the mountain, but this is what it says: 'Speak at a regular speed, and not too fast. Speak in your mother tongue, if this is possible. Avoid changing language when you speak. Speaking is better than reading, but if there is no alternative to reading, make sure that the interpreters have the text. Clearly give references to documents. Articulate clearly any figure that is mentioned. Explain abbreviations that you use in what you say. Remember that jokes are difficult to translate, and talk to the interpreters. Also, when you are chairing a meeting, wait a moment before giving the floor to the next speaker so that the interpreters can finish the speech and change to the appropriate channel.'

Thank you very much for your interpreting, and I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the interpreters, who make our work possible through their own, which is so complicated and so effective.

**Alexandru Nazare**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.* – (RO) First of all, and it is no coincidence in the context of this debate, I would like to welcome the compromise reached at the last European Council meeting on the financing of the Nabucco gas pipeline.

I am pleased that the Nabucco project has been declared a priority energy project and that our efforts as Members of the European Parliament in support of this project have yielded results.

However, returning to today's debate, I believe that among our concerns with regard to Turkmenistan there are clearly two which stand out of equal importance: economic cooperation, specifically in the area of oil and gas, as well as social progress and human rights in this country, as also mentioned by the Commissioner.

I welcome this report and congratulate Mr Caspary on it.

I also believe that the agreement being discussed provides a better framework for interaction with Turkmenistan than the current one. However, I would like to highlight that it is not too early for us to discuss specific paths of cooperation with Turkmenistan and its inclusion in the European Union's energy projects. The agreement being discussed today is more than welcome as a means of accelerating economic cooperation between the EU and this country.

We understand from this report that the authorities in Ashgabat are prepared to negotiate on the topic of human rights and civil liberties. Based on the EU's experience so far, it should be obvious that progress is made on these topics quickest when they are part of a broader discussion touching on other subjects, including the prospect of long-term economic cooperation.

Turkmenistan's energy and foreign policies are closely linked. We can deal with them at the same time by strengthening economic cooperation and adopting specific measures, as well as by expressing constant interest in human rights.

I welcome the evaluation criteria regarding Turkmenistan's progress, as well as those concerning the EU's intellectual property standards. I wonder whether it would not be useful to have similar ones too for the level of economic integration, but of a realistic, long-term nature, or some which relate to progress on civil liberties.

**Erika Mann**, *on behalf of the PSE Group.* – Mr President, I thank the Commissioner and Mr Vondra, for the Council, for their explanation, but I am certain they felt that there is still some hesitation on our part in giving them our full support. I think it is easy to understand, because we have a very simple case. The difficulty arises because for the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA), Parliament will have to give its assent, whereas this is not the case for the Interim Trade Agreement because of our legal obligations.

Because of this, when it comes to the Interim Trade Agreement, in our resolution we can only highlight our points and raise our concerns and give support with regard to certain topics; but because of this Parliament, and specifically my political group, is hesitating in giving its full support for the Interim Trade Agreement.

I hope this is understandable to you and I hope you can solve the problem. I know that, because of the legal process and, because you have already signed the legal basis, it is very difficult, if not impossible, for you to renegotiate. We are fully aware of the facts, but I am certain you can find some form of commitment and look into further developing and exploring legal bases on which you can help our side to be on your side, because we all recognise how important Turkmenistan is and we have already given support with regard to other agreements. So it is not that we are not fully aware of what has happened and it is not the case that we are not aware how important Turkmenistan is, but it is a very problematic case.

I would like you to look into this again and that is why I specifically ask you to do me a favour: look into our paragraph 11, where we raise our concern with regard to the legal obligation and the differences between the Interim Trade Agreement and the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement.

Please recognise paragraph 9 of our resolution, which talks about the inclusion of the human rights clause in the PCA agreement. Commissioner, I am aware of and took note of your points, but I am certain there is something you can do to further explore how we can strengthen this particular point.

The same is true for paragraph 10, and this is important for the Council as well. We would like to see a revision clause. I know it is not included but, again, please do us a favour, look into it and see what you can do when you continue to negotiate.

If you could do something about paragraph 8, this would be more than helpful for us; it relates to monitoring which we always like to have and which we are constantly asking for. Monitoring does not mean that we want to sit at the negotiating table. We have done this under other circumstances, so look at what you can do here, how you can be helpful in defining what monitoring means, but do us a favour and look at the case.

By the way, I think you have done great work. All the points are covered in the new EU-Central Asia Partnership Agreement for the 21st century. You even covered the ILO recommendation. You covered human right issues so I am certain we can find a compromise, but a little bit of work still needs to be done.

**Hélène Flautre**, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, I believe that we must try not to fool ourselves but realise that, although Valery Pal has been released, the Turkmen Government will continue to abduct, imprison and torture other people in Turkmenistan for thought crimes.

Although the United Nations Special Rapporteur on Freedom of Religion has travelled to Turkmenistan, nine other special rapporteurs are still awaiting their permits, and these are people who cover such important areas as torture, defence of human rights, independence of the judiciary, education, health, freedom of expression, and so on.

Several speeches really seem like exercises in self-persuasion. We continue to be faced with one of the world's most repressive and closed regimes, even if there has been some progress and even if we do need to find the right strategy to support this. It is important for us not to be naïve, either, or obviously to demand that Turkmenistan become a model of democracy and human rights before reaching any agreement with it in advance.

So, between these two extremes, what should we do? I propose quite simply that we have a real foreign policy, and that we meet criteria which are extremely precise, which are measurable, which are realistic and which are those of the European Parliament. I am thinking of entry permits for independent NGOs and United Nations special rapporteurs, and for the International Red Cross. We know that negotiations are under way, but they are not completed. I am thinking of the realignment of the education system with international standards – which is under way but still very far from satisfactory – of the release of all the political prisoners and of their freedom of movement – in short, of the ABC of human rights. My group's proposal is both ambitious and realistic. It can be reduced to a simple formula.

*(The President interrupted the speaker to ask her to speak more slowly, at the request of the interpreters)*

We cannot sabotage our own policy by renouncing our values. It is not a question of advocating Turkmenistan's isolation, but of engaging with the country. So, how should we do this? Well, we should take two pencils, one in each hand. With the first pencil, we are going to sign a road map, which will set out the stages required to meet the criteria laid down by Parliament. These stages will be marked out over time, with precise timelines, and will be discussed at the human rights sub-committees held with the country.

Once we have signed this road map, with the other hand and the other pencil we will be able to sign the interim agreement that is before us. I believe that, when the time comes for the Commission and the Council

to discuss the future of the human rights clauses, it is imperative that these clauses be systematic and be systematically accompanied by a consultation mechanism that can result, where necessary, in the suspension of this agreement.

**President.** – Mrs Flautre, the President does not measure the speed at which speakers talk. The President has a light in front of him through which the interpreters send him an SOS when they stop interpreting because they are not able to keep up with the speaker. I am not measuring anyone's speed; I am sent this emergency signal and I pass it on to the Members, so that everyone is able to follow the debate.

Thank you, as always, for your understanding.

**Helmuth Markov, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.** – (DE) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner, it is already a year since this Parliament said very clearly and plainly what progress it considered necessary in order to be able to agree to the trade agreement between the EC and Turkmenistan. They were demands that are relatively easy to satisfy: free and unimpeded access for the International Red Cross, the release of political prisoners and conscientious objectors, the abolition of all state travel restrictions, easier access and working conditions for NGOs and UN agencies and comprehensive reform of the education system. I freely admit that the government under President Berdymukhamedov has made progress. That is uncontested. However, in my opinion, it is in no way sufficient for us to approve this agreement now. Both you, Mr President-in-Office, and you, Commissioner, have missed a huge opportunity.

I do not necessarily share their views, but as the social democrat Members said, we – Parliament – want a guarantee from you that, if Parliament demands that this Interim Agreement be withdrawn, you will accede to our request. Mr Vondra said absolutely nothing about this and you, Commissioner, have explained to us that it states in the contract that this can be done. The fact that it states that it can be done is not the point; the point is that you are prepared, if Parliament so demands, to accede to that request. That is the point.

I ask all my honourable friends, if we want to take ourselves seriously, not to agree tomorrow, unless the Commission agrees in writing and reads out here that this demand will be met. This was a package deal that was ultimately demanded, but you have said nothing about it. I must say here that I get the feeling that you are not taking us seriously. At the very least a position statement should have been made on this.

I therefore say to you that, under these circumstances, agreement on this Interim Agreement is not possible. I hope that we shall together unanimously document this tomorrow.

**David Martin (PSE).** – Mr President, like the two previous speakers, I fear that the Commission and the Council have both painted rather a rose-tinted view of what is now the situation in Turkmenistan.

The current President may be marginally better than the President he replaced in February 2007, but is he sufficiently better for us to agree to an interim trade agreement as a precursor for a partnership and cooperation agreement? As Mr Markov and Ms Flautre said, in the Committee on International Trade we set five very clear tasks for Turkmenistan that we would want to see met before we gave our agreement.

Firstly, we said that the International Red Cross had to have free access to Turkmenistan. Unless the Commission and the Council can tell me differently, I understand that up until now the Red Cross has not been able to visit one single prison or prisoner in Turkmenistan.

Secondly, we said that they had to realign their education system with international standards. The Council is right to say that it has expanded the secondary education system by one year, but my understanding again is that, despite minor improvements in the education system, this has not been aimed at the mass of Turkmens but at the elite and preparing those who wish to work in the oil and gas sector.

Thirdly we have asked for the release of all political prisoners. Some have been released, but not many, and there are literally hundreds, if not thousands, of political prisoners languishing in jails in Turkmenistan, still awaiting a fair trial.

Fourthly, we said that we wanted the abolition of all restrictions to external travel. It is interesting that both the Council and Commission concentrated on internal travel. We said there had to be external travel freedom as well. That has not been delivered.

Finally, we said there had to be free access for independent NGOs, free access for the UN human rights bodies and freedom of the press. Well, there is no press freedom, there is no free access for NGOs, and, while the

UN inspector on religious tolerance may have been allowed in, Turkmenistan has the longest queue of UN-requested visits of any country in the world.

Is this really a country that we can do business with? Well, I suspect for the majority in this House and in other institutions the answer is clearly 'yes'. Why have things changed since the Trade Committee passed its resolution in 2007? Cynics might say that it is because gas and oil have been discovered in Turkmenistan, because we want to build a new pipeline, because we suddenly find it in our strategic interest. If that is the case, let us not pretend it is to do with an improvement in human rights. It is to do with self-interest at European Union level.

*(The President cut off the speaker)*

**Søren Bo Søndergaard (GUE/NGL).** – (DA) Mr President, I, too, totally disagree with the proposal that the European Parliament should unconditionally approve the trade agreement with Turkmenistan, which is, after all, what we are talking about here. We can write whatever we want in our justification, but once we have pressed the green button the matter will be out of our hands if we do not get a guarantee from the Commission that we will have the opportunity to cancel the agreement.

What, in fact, is the reason for agreeing to the agreement with Turkmenistan? We have heard about all manner of improvements and it is true that the dictatorship has indeed implemented some improvements and has made a number of promises. However, as Amnesty International, after all, has told us, these improvements have only been implemented to a very limited extent. What has been given as justification for this? The justification given was the fact that the absence of an agreement has not produced any results either. In my opinion it is an absurd justification that indirectly invites all dictators to hold out, for in that way we will come to heel at some point down the line. I think that it should be said loud and clear that there can be too high a price for gas and if the price of gas is agreements with the dictatorship in Turkmenistan, that price is far too high.

**Justas Vincas Paleckis (PSE).** – (LT) It is regrettable that the actions taken by the European Union and other international organisations to defend human rights in Turkmenistan have yet to produce positive results. Journalists and defenders of human rights there have been gagged. Women and children continue to be raped and trafficked.

I am nevertheless convinced that policies of suspending relations and isolation in respect of Turkmenistan show little promise. Not because this country is rich in gas, but simply because only the promotion of links with the outside world can bring about democratic change.

Therefore, I support the European Commission's position and the interim agreement, which can be suspended if necessary in reaction to events in the country. Undoubtedly, the European Union's attitude towards energy in relations with Turkmenistan should not be separated from any changes in the area of human rights.

**Charles Tannock (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, there is a lot more to mysterious Turkmenistan than just oil and gas. That is not to say that the country's hydrocarbon resources are not important. In fact they are of vital strategic value to the EU, given the Union's wish, and Turkmenistan's apparent desire, to move out of Russia's shadow when it comes to energy supplies.

Turkmenistan's immense and clearly accessible gas resources are enough on their own to demand a closer relationship with the EU. Nevertheless there are other reasons as well for which I believe we should be seeking an interim trade agreement with Turkmenistan. The country is a prime example of a peaceful and stable Muslim country with a secular government committed to fighting Islamist terrorism in Afghanistan, where we have a war going on.

Of course there are still serious concerns about human rights, democracy and political freedoms, but such concerns also exist with regard to Russia and China, and I do not remember the Socialists raising this over the Tibet debate recently. Yet we maintain strategic relations with both these large countries.

We will encourage further change in Turkmenistan through dialogue and partnership, not by isolation. Therefore I generally support better relations between the EU and central Asian countries.

*(The President cut off the speaker)*

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I hope that this debate on the interim agreement can serve as an opportunity to begin a thorough examination of the situation in

Turkmenistan and to demand more practical measures to improve what is at present a very negative state of affairs.

The Ashkhabat government recently rejected a series of recommendations including the release of political prisoners, reviewing past cases of political imprisonment and lifting the travel ban arbitrarily imposed on human rights activists. Up to now, without hypocrisy, it is a state closed to monitoring by international organisations, which have not been able to enter the country for 10 years. Journalists and activists are unable to work freely and all opponents are threatened on a daily basis.

The European Union and the international community are now demanding a change of heart in relation to respect for human rights; purely economic agreements will be very difficult to accept.

**Marie Anne Isler Béguin (Verts/ALE).** – (FR) Mr President, Minister, Commissioner, I think that we need to stop being hypocritical regarding this issue.

In 2006 I myself was part of a European Parliament delegation that travelled to Turkmenistan, and we made a number of proposals at that time which you have taken up, Commissioner.

Clearly, I understand your arguments and those of the Council, but when I compare what has been proposed and the report on Central Asia – which we voted in favour of in this very House a few months ago, on 20 February 2008 and in which we repeated our demands concerning the release of prisoners, the Red Cross, and so on – has there really been any progress? No.

Personally, when I read ‘Turkmenistan report’, I actually read ‘Nabucco report’ because, at the end of the day, we are interested in the energy, in the gas of this third biggest gas-producing country in the world. Furthermore, I know – it was explained to us very well when we were in Turkmenistan – that, were the European Union not interested in Turkmen gas, then the country had other customers, not least China. So let us avoid being hypocritical, let us make it plain ...

*(The President cut off the speaker)*

**Christopher Beazley (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, I just wish to agree very much with my colleague, Dr Charles Tannock. His concluding remarks, had he not been cut off, were to the effect that the EU should be encouraged – and indeed the Commission and Council should finance – trans-Caspian pipelines to Central Asia in order to reduce the danger of being reliant on a monopoly source, so that we are able to avoid possibly falling prey to the foreign policy objectives of one of our neighbours.

**President.** – Thank you, Mr Beazley. It is always important to add to the thoughts of Mr Tannock, who is always constructive and a source of inspiration for Parliament.

Now the final speaker, Mr Martin, has the floor.

We are going to examine within the Bureau whether, in this section, the floor may be given to speakers who have already participated in the debate, because what they usually do is to reopen it. However, in this case, as we have reached the fifth speaker and five speakers have the right to speak, I give the floor to Mr Martin.

**David Martin (PSE).** – Mr President, thank you for giving me the floor. I wanted to come back because I wanted to put a very specific question to the Commission before they take the floor again. I want to know precisely how any human rights clause that we agree would be invoked and implemented. Would it be the Commission that decides whether there has been a breach of human rights and, if the Commission so decides, will it be agreed in the Council to suspend agreement by unanimity or by qualified majority? How practical will a human rights clause actually be? We have human rights clauses in many of our international agreements and to date – with the exception of the next debate – we have hardly ever invoked any of them, Belarus being one of the rare exceptions.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – Mr President, I think it was a useful debate. The debate concentrated mostly on human rights and that is not surprising for us. I would like once more to stress that the current human rights clause in the agreement allows for suspension in the case of breaches of human rights; on suspension itself, I think that, if the situation in Turkmenistan deteriorates, we will have to take very seriously whatever Parliament proposes.

Of course the final decision will be made by the Council looking at all options of restrictive measures, including the possibility of suspension, and here we have precedents regarding some other central Asian countries.



Some of us also touched on cooperation with the Red Cross. For us it is not easy to judge on cooperation between the Red Cross and Turkmenistan simply because the Red Cross applies a fundamental principle of discretion here. So, based on the information available, we have to admit that there is much to be done and improved, but at the same time we can see positive things and development.

In general and in conclusion, the human rights situation in Turkmenistan of course leaves much to be desired, but continued isolation is not an option. A conditional approach to the conclusion of the Interim Agreement negotiated 11 years is not an effective means of securing progress on human rights and democracy.

We have, of course, to engage in a dialogue with Turkmenistan on human rights, and that is what we are trying to do. The Czech Prime Minister was there just recently. He engaged the President in Ashgabat in exactly that kind of conversation.

The Presidency is convinced that there is an opportunity now to engage with Turkmenistan, and that approach is the only effective means of establishing a frank dialogue on issues such as human rights.

None of the Turkmenistan key partners – Russia or China, which are currently increasing their influence in the region – are likely to put these issues high on their agendas.

So the establishment of appropriate contractual relationship starting with the Interim Agreement is a key step in such a policy of engagement. A negative opinion from Parliament would be damaging to our nascent dialogue with Turkmenistan and would undermine our ability to secure progress in important areas such as greater respect for human rights.

I would therefore encourage Parliament, as suggested by the rapporteur, Daniel Caspary, to offer its full support for the conclusion of the Interim Agreement.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, Eleanor Roosevelt once said that instead of cursing the darkness one should light a candle. This also applies to Turkmenistan. Promoting human rights and supporting democracy in the country must of course continue to be our priority. Many of you have rightly said – for instance, Mrs Flautre who is no longer here – that changes are slow. Yes, they are but they are changes and these changes must be acknowledged and they must be encouraged.

So we have to help Turkmenistan to help itself. We therefore have to engage with the country in a constructive, continuous and strategic manner. We need to create a proper framework for our contractual relations, yet the Trade and Cooperation Agreement currently in force, being so limited, does not allow for that.

Let me also say a few words about suspension, or possible suspension. As you are aware and as the President-in-Office has just said, it is the Council – unanimously, by the way – that decides on such matters. The Commission can make a proposal to that effect.

May I just remind you that, after the events in Andijan, for instance, the Council did decide to impose restrictive measures on Uzbekistan, including an arms embargo as well as travel restrictions on Uzbek officials found to be involved in the events. In addition, technical meetings under the PCA, the Cooperation Committee and the subcommittees, were suspended. These measures were kept under constant review and renewed or amended as appropriate on an annual basis.

In this regard, should such a similar incident – or just a grave deterioration – occur, the Council could take similar measures or even consider a suspension, and the Commission would certainly consider all available options, including suspension.

The inclusion of a specific human-rights-related suspension clause in the PCA would require amending the PCA. In our view, this seems quite difficult as it would imply reopening negotiations with Turkmenistan – which already signed and ratified the PCA in 2004 – as well as with the EU Member States, 12 of which have ratified the agreement as well.

Insofar as this aims at establishing whether a breach of human rights can lead to a suspension of the PCA, I would like to reiterate that both the PCA and the Interim Agreement have a clause declaring respect for human rights as an essential element – as I mentioned very clearly before. Both the PCA and the Interim Agreement have a clause to the effect that, if either party considers that the other party has failed to fulfil an obligation under the agreement, it may take appropriate measures, which in cases of special urgency it can do without even first consulting the joint committee.

Both the interim agreement and the PCA also contain a joint declaration clarifying that cases of special urgency mean cases of material breach of the agreement by either party, both clarifying that the material breach consists in the violation of an essential element.

Therefore a material breach in urgent cases does give the parties the right to take appropriate measures. In our view, these measures could also include the suspension of the agreement. Therefore, honourable parliamentarians, I ask you again – as I did before – to give your assent to activating the Interim Trade Agreement with Turkmenistan.

I would be absolutely agreeable to a political commitment from my side – from the Commission's side – to monitoring the human rights dialogue and reporting to the Parliament regularly. This would be, in the trade agreement, a stepping stone for increased cooperation, and would take us a step further in bringing the framework for dialogue with Turkmenistan on to a par with the ones we have already established with other countries in the region. Let us not forget that either.

Only through enhanced commitment will we be able to influence positive developments and improvement of the human rights situation.

### IN THE CHAIR: MR DOS SANTOS

*Vice-President*

**Daniel Caspary**, *rapporteur*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much for today's debate. It has taken us much further down the line. I should like to thank all my honourable friends who worked on this issue with me over recent months.

One core statement by the Council, my dear Mr Vondra, has particularly stuck in my mind: the people of Turkmenistan will certainly not learn what democracy and human rights mean from China, Russia or even Iran. Over recent years Parliament has laid down clear conditions under which we can agree to this Interim Agreement, most recently in the Central Asia strategy report by Mr Özdemir.

It would be a huge concession by the European Parliament, if we now basically ignored the specifications which we set about three months or six months ago and said that, nonetheless, we approve my report on the Interim Agreement. On the other hand, it is also clear to me that we are talking about the Interim Agreement today. It would not have been a good idea to postpone the vote. I am also clear about the fact that we should not use Turkmenistan and the Interim Agreement as a hostage in order to shift the balance of power between the European institutions.

I am also clear about the fact that it would set a precedent if the Commission and the Council were to agree to the demands which many of us have made today, even – and I say this quite clearly – though, in my opinion, these demands by Parliament are totally justified. I therefore await – preferably this evening – an undertaking from the Commission that, if this monitoring shows that the situation in Turkmenistan has deteriorated and if Parliament passes a resolution asking the Commission to propose to the Council that this Interim Agreement be suspended, it will table a proposal to that effect before the Council. I think that this should be possible within the framework of the current agreements.

I would be delighted if we were, in any case, to receive an undertaking from the Council that it would immediately include and discuss this issue at one of its forthcoming meetings at the Commission's proposal. Both institutions can certainly give these two undertakings without addressing the overall arrangement of institutional cooperation within the European Union. I would be grateful if you could make this statement today or, at the very latest, before the vote tomorrow. I have no interest in having to recommend to my honourable friends before the vote tomorrow that the vote on my report be postponed.

**President.** – I have received two motions for resolutions, pursuant to Rule 108(5) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow.

## 9. Bi-annual evaluation of the EU-Belarus dialogue (debate)

**President.** – The next item is the statements by the Council and the Commission on the bi-annual evaluation of the EU-Belarus dialogue.

**Alexandr Vondra**, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Mr President, I am grateful to the Members of this Parliament for the opportunity to provide an update on developments in Belarus, and in particular to report on the outcome of last Monday's discussion on this issue in Council.

As many of you will be aware, following the Council's decision last October to suspend temporarily and partially the visa-ban list, we have seen a number of positive developments in Belarus. I would point in particular to the registration of the 'For Freedom' movement and of the Centre for Chernobyl Initiatives, the printing and distribution of independent newspapers such as *Narodnaya Volya* and *Nasha Niva*, the round table on regulation of the Internet with the OSCE Representative on the Freedom of the Media, the ongoing expert consultations with OSCE/ODIHR on improving electoral legislation, and the establishment of Consultative Councils, including one on human rights issues, which brings together representatives of civil society and even the opposition.

These steps, whilst they might appear relatively minor to some, are significant in the Belarusian context. This has been acknowledged by some representatives of civil society in Belarus.

However, there have also been incidents which are a cause for our concern. The important human rights NGO, Viasna, has been denied registration, there are problems with the accreditation of some of the independent media, and, while there is less harassment against civil society and opposition activists than earlier, short-term detentions continue to take place. We are also following closely complaints from the opposition over 'forcible conscription' to the army.

So we cannot deny that the picture is mixed. Nevertheless, we are convinced that there is a need to continue with a policy of engagement and to support the positive developments. This should be the way forward in our relations with Belarus. We must keep in mind our wider strategic interests in the region as well as the impact of the financial crisis when we consider our future policy direction.

These were the considerations which lay behind our decision on 16 March. This decision, while extending for one year the restrictive measures, maintains the suspension of the application of the travel restrictions imposed on certain officials of Belarus for nine months.

The in-depth review foreseen by the end of this nine-month period will concentrate on the five areas set out in the Council's conclusions of October 2008. These are electoral reform and other concrete actions towards respect for democratic values, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, including freedom of expression and of the media, and freedom of assembly and political association.

We firmly believe that the continuation of the suspension agreed last week will enable us to pursue our policy objectives. It will provide us with the opportunity to continue to raise with our Belarusian partners developments which concern us in the field of human rights. The launching, in the coming month, of a human rights dialogue will be particularly important.

Following the lifting of the ban on bilateral political contacts, a number of high-level visits have taken place, including a ministerial troika at the end of January. The aim of these various contacts has been to encourage Belarus, and to create understanding over differences in expectations. We hope that the dialogue will continue over the coming months.

We are convinced that we need to be constructive with Minsk. We remain realistic and do not expect any dramatic changes. Transformation takes time, and it is in our shared interest to take every opportunity to encourage further positive developments.

It is important that our policy of engagement has been openly supported by representatives of civil society in Belarus, who took part recently in a very helpful discussion with Members of this Parliament. We also maintain regular contacts with the representatives of Belarusian civic society and we intend to continue this dialogue as well as our support to civic society and the independent media in Belarus.

Let me close with a few words on the Eastern Partnership, which was endorsed last week by the European Council, and will be launched at a summit-level meeting in May. Belarus is one of the six Eastern Partnership countries. We strongly believe that Belarus should be involved in this new initiative from the outset. But the extent of its participation in the bilateral track will depend on a number of factors, in particular progress in some of the areas to which I have just referred.

I am grateful to the public support which Parliament has given to the outcome of the Council last Monday. Clearly the in-depth review to be conducted in nine months' time will be a key to any further decisions, and

will have an important bearing on our future relations with Belarus more generally. The Council is very ready to continue to keep this Parliament informed of developments, and welcomes the opportunity for you to continue to contribute to this debate.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, Belarus is at a crossroads.

We find ourselves in the wake of a Council decision confirming the temporary suspension of the visa ban until the end of the year, and on the eve of the adoption of a resolution by the European Parliament. It is time to perform an initial review of our policy on Belarus after six months of suspended sanctions – since October 2008 – and to reflect on what lies ahead for the next nine months.

Personally I am convinced that the decision taken by the European Union last October to suspend the sanctions was the right one, and, in fact, this suspension has given rise to a positive process.

Belarus has taken measures that are unquestionably along the lines of more democracy. I am thinking in particular of the return of two independent newspapers to news-stands, of the fact that even Mr Milinkevich's organisation has finally been legalised, of the cooperation with OSCE/ODIHR on electoral law, and of the various congresses of opposition parties or NGOs – such as the Union of Poles in Belarus – that have been able to take place. Admittedly, this progress is limited and insufficient, but it is also unprecedented and, in general, we can still conclude that progress has been made.

That is why this mixed review received a mixed response from the European Union, with the balanced decision taken during the last GAERC. Suspending the sanctions for longer enables us to maintain a dialogue, just as the civil society itself expressly asked us to do, including at the forum held at the European Parliament, as recently as 4 March.

At the same time, we are holding on to the tool at our disposal, since the sanctions may be reintroduced at the end of the year if we consider that the progress made by then is insufficient, and we are going to continue our examination by paying ongoing attention to the situation on the ground with regard to whether progress has been made in the five key areas identified in the GAERC's conclusions of last October. Furthermore, thanks to our delegation in Minsk, the Commission is playing an active part in analysing the situation on the ground.

Ladies and gentlemen, I welcome the European Parliament's initiative to send a delegation of members of the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the European Parliament Delegation for Relations with Belarus, which will travel to Minsk in 10 days' time to meet with the authorities and the various parties and to get an idea of the situation on the ground.

I shall also be sending my director responsible for this region at the same time, and he will be sure to cooperate closely with the European Parliament delegation. Setting up a new dialogue on human rights with Belarus is another, appreciable step forward that will enable us to structure our demands better and to give more depth to our discussions.

The first session of this dialogue should take place in the next few days in Minsk, and the European Union will put all the issues on the table. We shall meet with members of civil society before and after this dialogue, to benefit from their expertise.

Ladies and gentlemen, developing our relations with this neighbour located at the heart of Europe requires us to take the time to reflect on a response, including in the longer term, to the progress made by Belarus. A response that enables us to bring Belarus closer to our European family and its values, and to do this, in fact, as our President-in-Office said, the European Council took the decision last Friday to admit Belarus to the Eastern Partnership, and, more specifically, to its multilateral component, the platforms. This Partnership will provide Belarus with an opportunity to develop new support and exchange networks with all its neighbours, including on behalf of Belarusian civil society, which wants to end its isolation and take part in the forum on civil society.

With regard to Belarus's participation in the bilateral strand of the Eastern Partnership, the text of the Commission's proposal is unequivocal: the development of bilateral relations between the European Union and Belarus is, and will remain, dependent on the development of the political situation in the country.

Finally, in the light of the financial and economic crisis that is also seriously affecting all of our neighbours in the East, I am personally in favour of economic support measures for Belarus. An important first step has been taken by the IMF, with the active support of its European members, and that was to grant a USD 2 billion

loan to tackle the immediate effects of the crisis, by which I mean putting an end to the balance of payments. The second stage should enable Belarus to gain access to EIB loans and to more substantial EBRD loans in order to fund projects linked to the trans-European networks, while also helping to diversify the country's economic links.

At the same time, the Commission is in the process of strengthening its technical dialogues with Belarus in sectors of common interest such as energy, transport, customs, standards, and, in the longer term, the economy.

To conclude, in order to strengthen these dialogues, ladies and gentlemen, next week Parliament will adopt a resolution on Belarus, and the Commission will genuinely pay very close attention to your recommendations. I for my part sincerely hope that we continue to cooperate closely over the coming months in our assessment of the situation and in our dialogue with Belarus, its authorities and its civil society, and I hope that this first step will lead us to make an in-depth mutual commitment based on concrete progress.

**Charles Tannock**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Mr President, the EU's relations with Belarus are rightly now being driven by pragmatic considerations on both sides. Years of isolationist policy led nowhere, as the Council has somewhat belatedly now realised. It certainly did nothing to loosen the grip on power enjoyed by Europe's last self-isolating dictator, President Alexander Lukashenko.

Two weeks ago, here in Strasbourg, I had the privilege to meet two prominent dissidents from Belarus to discuss political developments in their country. One of them, Alexander Kazulin, had recently been released as a political prisoner, which is one of the reasons why the EU has begun to look at Lukashenko in a more favourable light.

But political repression still remains a serious problem in Belarus. It is therefore open to question whether this apparent thaw in relations between the EU and Belarus will lead us anywhere, as Lukashenko may well be playing a game with Russia as he leans more towards the EU. But it is better than our sticking with the failed boycotting policy of the past decade.

It is essential that the Council maintains a carrot-and-stick approach to Belarus: if Lukashenko is offered clear incentives for internal political reform he may well respond favourably. But, equally, he needs to know that he cannot carry on as before and that any sign of increased authoritarianism and repression will cause rapprochement to cease and reduce support by the EU for Belarus's WTO membership ambitions. At this stage, inviting Lukashenko to Prague for the May Summit to launch the Eastern Partnership, to which Belarus belongs, could be a step too far in my view. We need to link closer relations to tangible commitments on the regime's part to change its ways.

Belarus must also be persuaded that recognition of the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states – as at present is the case only by Russia – is unacceptable. I believe that Belarus is seeking to distance itself from Russian control and we need to take advantage of this window of opportunity. Undoubtedly, promoting genuine change in Belarus demands patience and commitment on the part of the EU, but the prize – Belarus back in the European family of nations – is well worth aspiring to.

**Jan Marinus Wiersma**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (NL) Mr President, we, too, are happy to support the continuation of the European Union's policy of bringing about dialogue and closer cooperation with the Belarusian regime. We have been working on this for six or seven months already and we need to see whether what the European Union is aiming for also bears fruit over the coming period. That does not change the fact that we will continue to have our doubts about the intentions of a government that is not known for being democratic. I have personally had the honour of being in contact with the regime on a number of occasions and, believe me, Mr Lukashenko has not become a democrat overnight.

The fact that he wants more involvement with the European Union has to do with other factors, but the fact that that is what he wants is something that we can use in order to put pressure on him to move further along the path that he has now embarked on by taking a number of positive steps in the area of human rights. Like Mr Tannock, I think that it is still too early to speculate whether he should be rewarded with an Eastern Partnership. A real dialogue on human rights still needs to be brought about and violations of human rights are still taking place.

When it comes to dialogue on human rights, we believe that the opposition must be allowed to play a fully-fledged role. We have supported the opposition in all kinds of ways in recent years, including by means of awarding it two Sakharov prizes. Minsk thinks that it is not acceptable to support the opposition like that.

There are precedents, however: for six or seven years I was personally involved in an attempt, along with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the Council of Europe, to bring about dialogue involving the government of Belarus and the then opposition. That attempt did not succeed, but it does represent a precedent for that kind of gathering.

The European policy that we want must clearly contribute to greater freedom and openness. The points that we think are important are also mentioned in the resolution that is currently on the table. If progress is made on these points over the next few months, we believe that further EU restrictions can then be lifted.

There are a couple more points I would like to add. Firstly, we believe that the Commission also needs to take account of the fact that there is so little knowledge about the European Union in Belarus and that a satellite TV station will not change that. More must be done from the country itself and in the country itself. Secondly, I urge that the authorities in Minsk be asked whether it is not finally time to lift all the restrictions on travel by the children of Chernobyl.

My final comment is on a somewhat more personal note. The new situation has, at least, delivered one thing, and that is that, for the first time in six or seven years, I have been granted a visa, making it possible for me and a delegation from Parliament to travel to Belarus for a few weeks, an opportunity that I will be happy to seize upon.

**Janusz Onyszkiewicz, on behalf of the ALDE Group.** – (PL) When sanctions against Belarus were lifted we hoped that the process of softening the system would go a little further. It turns out, however, that this has not happened. Those who have already spoken today have mentioned this, but I would like us to remember that no other political parties have been registered, the threat to cancel the registration of parties which already exist has not been lifted, newspapers which might have been granted the right of distribution have not been granted that right, and web-based attacks on Internet sites, such as the Radio Free Europe site, have been renewed. Furthermore, President Lukashenko decided to leave Minsk and so Mrs Ferrero-Waldner's visit could not go ahead. I do not think this was a friendly gesture, and neither does it show that he respects and understands the significance of contacts with the European Union.

It is true that President Lukashenko has not recognised Abkhazia and Ossetia, but he has visited Abkhazia and it seems that there is to be close economic cooperation between these two partners – I will not say states, because of course for us Abkhazia is not a state. As for the opposition, President Lukashenko calls it a 'fifth column', and we cannot see any readiness whatsoever to recognise it, as is the case in every country, as an important element of political opposition.

I think that in this connection we should, however, maintain some kind of dialogue. I agree with what Mr Tannock said, that President Lukashenko should not be present in Prague. That would clearly be going too far, but really we should make significant and more effective use of another instrument which we have at our disposal, namely a financial instrument in the form of the funding for democratic and economic development. In connection with this I would like to ask a question – not what sums were allocated, but what sums were spent on support of democracy in Belarus last year and in 2007, not including support for radio?

**Konrad Szymański, on behalf of the UEN Group.** – (PL) Commissioner, the experiment with suspending sanctions against Belarus must continue, so that we can try every possibility of dialogue with that country. The Belarusian authorities must, however, be aware that the time allowed for this experiment is limited, and that we are not going to wait with our proposals indefinitely.

We must also be very careful. The first months have given us only a vague picture of the intentions of the authorities in Minsk. At the same time repression continues against the Association of Poles in Belarus, Catholic priests are being expelled, and Belsat Television, the only independent television which broadcasts to Belarus, has been refused registration of an office in Minsk. This is sufficient cause not to invite Alexander Lukashenko to the EU summit, in response to the appeals of the Belarusian opposition.

**Jacek Protasiewicz (PPE-DE).** – (PL) Mr President, Prime Minister, Commissioner, I agree with the Commissioner that the Council decision to extend sanctions against Belarus by a year and simultaneously to suspend them for nine months was a sensible solution. We are inviting Belarus to cooperate with us, but we have not forgotten that it is still the last undemocratic country in Europe.

Despite the positive changes which have taken place recently in Belarus and which Mr Vondra spoke about, it cannot be said that fundamental human rights are respected there, such as freedom of speech, the right to

express political views, or respect for national and religious minorities. In spite of this we are offering Belarus participation in the Eastern Partnership, because we believe that this will bring benefits, first and foremost to the people of Belarus.

The Eastern Partnership means the chance for cheaper visas, better economic cooperation and financial support for civil society. These are ways in which Belarus can profit from the new policy, after many years of isolation. On the cost side, however, there is undoubtedly a cynical abuse of our good will in order to lend credibility to undemocratic rule. The Belarusian Government, which controls the main mass media and uses them not for information but for propaganda, is already announcing triumphantly that the European Union accepts the 'Belarusian model', in which democracy and freedom can be restricted. In this Chamber we must state unequivocally that Belarusians have the same rights as the citizens of other free European countries, and this includes the right to demonstrate freely in Minsk today, on the 91st anniversary of Belarusian Independence. Participation in the Eastern Partnership is intended to help them realise those rights, and if the Belarusian authorities stand in the way of this they will not be able to count on partnership and good relations with the West, especially not at the high level which Mr Vondra mentioned, and especially not when we are thinking about the Prague Summit in May, which is about the Eastern Partnership.

As long as political activists remain under arrest in Belarus, as long as young democratic opposition activists are forcefully conscripted, and as long as demonstrations are forcefully broken up by the militia and independent journalists are fined for their words and publications, the leaders of Belarus do not have the right to expect partnership and a conciliatory approach from European leaders, from the Council, the Commission and our Parliament.

**Justas Vincas Paleckis (PSE).** – (LT) Belarus is at the centre of Europe and I believe it should be interested in having good relations both with the European Union and its other neighbour Russia. Participation in the European Union's Partnership Programme offers such opportunities.

An independent, stable Belarus, which is taking steps towards democracy, the spreading of human rights and a social market economy, is in the interest of the European Union and in particular Belarus' immediate neighbours, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland. I am convinced that the people of Belarus increasingly want this.

The policy of isolation with regard to Belarus was unjustified, and this must be said loud and clear. On the other hand, as long as there are restrictions on freedom of speech and opinion, the activities of parties and the opposition, there can be no true dialogue or understanding between Brussels and Minsk.

I am not sure whether the time has come to roll out the red carpet in Brussels for all the leaders of Belarus.

Belarus is the only state in Europe which still carries out executions, although the number of these, according to calculations by organisations defending human rights, has fallen dramatically. I believe that all Members of the European Parliament, regardless of the group they are working in, are very unhappy about this situation and would demand that Minsk abolish the death penalty at the earliest opportunity.

In seven years time Belarus is planning to build a nuclear power plant quite close to the Lithuanian border. I would like to remind you that the European Commission pledged to follow carefully how the Belarusian government adheres to the rules of the IAEA and other international organisations, and to ensure that the nuclear power station complies with all the latest safety requirements.

**President.** – Next is the 'catch-the-eye' period.

I have too many requests to speak, a large number of which are from the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats. I will give the floor to just three Members.

**Christopher Beazley (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, the 'catch-the-eye' procedure agreed by this House does not lay down that the President may select Members according to which group they belong to. The 'catch-the-eye' procedure, as I understand it, is for each individual Member to catch the eye of you, the President. I think it is regrettable that you have just said you will only allow three members of the PPE-DE Group to speak. That is not in accordance with our Rules of Procedure.

**President.** – Mr Beazley, this has always been the procedure, and always will be while I am in the chair.

As there are simultaneous requests, because virtually all the Members are asking for the floor at the same time – and as I am limited to five requests to speak – I cannot extend this period without encroaching on

other debates. Moreover, this is the practice that has been followed in the past, and to change it now would be to create differences from previous sittings.

Mr Beazley, the point of order has been clarified. There is no point in insisting as I will not give you the floor. I will not give you the floor. The point of order has been clarified.

**Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE-DE).** – (LT) Today the people of Belarus are marking Independence Day. I would like to remind you that Belarus declared itself a republic on 25 March 1918. Right now, as our discussion is taking place, in Minsk in the square opposite the Academy of Sciences, there is a demonstration initiated by the democratic opposition. Five thousand people have gathered in the square. I hope that repressive measures will not be used against them. Therefore, as before, and especially today, I would like to show solidarity with all Belarusians throughout the world, and above all with the Belarusians who have gathered in one of Minsk's squares, those who hold dear the spirit of independence and freedom.

As for dialogue with Belarus, this is necessary, but not at any price. What we, the European Union, can do without making concessions to the regime, but by encouraging dialogue with civil society, is to solve the question of the price of Schengen visas as soon as possible. The Schengen visa, which costs EUR 60, is too expensive a treat for many Belarusians. I would like to remind you that for Russian citizens the Schengen visa is half this price.

**Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE).** – (PL) It is important to keep working on building new relations between the European Union and Belarus. It is undoubtedly necessary to bring about a situation in which the fundamental rights of Belarusian citizens are respected, and it is not acceptable today that rights such as freedom of expression, freedom of opinion or the right to elections or an independent judiciary are not respected.

Therefore I agree with the philosophy of encouraging Belarus to make every effort to move towards democracy, and I am pleased with the decision to include Belarus in the new programme for strengthening the EU's Eastern policy through the European Neighbourhood Policy. I believe this will help Belarus to achieve stability and security, and to raise the standard of living of its citizens. The Community should continue to give financial aid to the deprived in the region, and to intervene when citizens' rights are violated. I repeat: intervene when citizens' rights are violated.

**Árpád Duka-Zólyomi (PPE-DE).** – (HU) European policy on the Belarus issue was unambiguous. Human rights and the process of democratisation were the most important. We did not reject rapprochement, but our conditions were also unambiguous; today, however, the situation has changed significantly.

It is true what the Belarusian political activists and independent experts state: that the regime has not altered fundamentally, only cosmetic changes have been made. Although a few political prisoners have been released, new ones have taken their place, and the young activists are sent not to prison but to the army. Other things have changed, not the regime.

Many in the EU believe that the success of the Eastern Partnership depends on Belarus as well. Brussels needs to fill the gap left by Ukraine's uncertainty, and for this purpose even President Lukashenko may prove acceptable. The EU institutions have succeeded in killing off their own set of conditions. The Commission's work over many years has been torn down by a single visit by Javier Solana. President Lukashenko thought he was strong enough to cancel the visit of Mrs Ferrero-Waldner. Instead of accepting the conditions, Minsk has found a partner in the compromise-loving Javier Solana.

**Elisabeth Schroedter (Verts/ALE).** – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Commissioner, Mr President-in-Office, I have listened to you very carefully. The Greens are in favour of dialogue, but we are only in favour of critical dialogue, in other words dialogue which does not pay a dictator lip service.

Dialogue must be used to achieve progress in human rights policy in this country, for example so that the European University for Humanistics can legally return or so that freedom of expression is no longer restricted or so that demonstrations such as today's can take place unimpeded. Dialogue must strengthen the democratic forces. Only then does it make sense. It should not stab the democratic forces in the back. Human rights issues must be addressed as the core issue at this point and the EU's human rights instruments must be permitted in this country.

I too believe that a partnership is premature. That notwithstanding, visa costs should be reduced.



**Erna Hennicot-Schoepges (PPE-DE).** – (FR) Mr President, all the measures listed by the Council and the Commissioner have been approved because they improve the situation of the people.

Is it right to let a dictator take his place at the top, however? Is it not an affront to those who have been imprisoned again recently and who are still being imprisoned? Commissioner, Minister, I should like to ask you a very frank question: might there have been some pressure put on the European authorities by Belarus so that it could secure this invitation to the Prague summit, an invitation that I consider to be disproportionate and inappropriate?

**President.** – Ladies and gentlemen, as there is some spare time, I can give the floor to some of the other speakers on the list. This has nothing to do with what was said earlier. It is simply a case of the balanced management that I always practise during this ‘catch-the-eye’ period.

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, (...) with satisfaction of Belarus’ new willingness to collaborate with the European Union and the international community. We are very cautious in our dealings with President Lukashenko, but a new direction in this area is welcome. We will not tire of pointing out the need for a comprehensive and substantial shift in relation to respect for human rights.

On one point I believe that the Commission could require clearer and more consistent behaviour from Minsk: I refer to the situation of the tens of thousands of children who stay with European families for a few months. For many years, the Belarusian Government has acted absurdly, sometimes incomprehensibly, often cancelling children’s visits at the last minute, mortifying the host families and giving another loud slap in the face to children who, often orphans from somewhat complicated family backgrounds, resented the whole affair. Let us try and come to a change of course on this as soon as possible.

**Zita Pleštinšká (PPE-DE).** – (SK) Slovakia is today commemorating the 21st anniversary of the Bratislava Candlelight Demonstration. On 25 March 1988 Christians who had been demonstrating peacefully for a free press and freedom of religion were brutally dispersed by the police and the army. The candlelight demonstration marked the historic beginning of Slovakia’s long-awaited freedom and I therefore well understand the fears expressed by my colleagues regarding the EU’s changed attitude towards President Lukashenko.

I firmly believe that President Lukashenko should not come to Prague. Based on my personal experience with the totalitarian regime in Slovakia, I do not believe that a totalitarian leader is capable of transforming himself into a democrat in heart and mind. This can happen only when he is motivated by pragmatic reasons to do so. Ladies and gentlemen, we should listen more to the Belarus opposition, to Alexandr Milinkevich, and only if we can be sure that Belarus has become genuinely democratic should we lift all sanctions against Belarus.

**President.** – Mr Beazley is also on the list, but apparently he has left the Chamber in a huff with me. I am therefore unable to give him the floor.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – Mr President, I should like to thank you for all your contributions. As I said in my introductory remarks, in the last months we have seen steps made by the Belarus authorities that go towards the expectations formulated in the October 2008 Council conclusions. These steps are significant in the Belarus context. At the same time, the picture is mixed, and I think the debate here confirmed that. We would like to see further steps, such as the changes to the criminal court, registration of other media outlets and NGOs in Belarus.

During the future review of the restrictive measures, the situation in Belarus and steps made by the Government will be taken into account. The progress in areas listed in the October 2008 Council’s conclusions will be evaluated; we are already doing this on a permanent basis, and also discussing progress with the members of the opposition – for example, I met Alexander Kazulin in Prague just a week ago.

Subject to progress made towards democracy, human rights and the rule of law, we remain ready to deepen our relations with Belarus. I believe that we can offer Belarus concrete incentives within the Eastern Partnership, but not only.

Now let me turn to the lively debate here on the Eastern Partnership launching summit and in particular the level of participation of Belarus. Listen carefully: no decision has yet been taken on this issue, which requires consensus within the EU. It will be addressed closer to the summit and I do not want to speculate at this stage. But the pressure itself is simply the fact that no invitation has yet been issued.

I should like to thank you once again for this interesting debate and your valuable input. We very much appreciate the interest and active involvement of the European Parliament on Belarus. We are also encouraged by your support for the EU's policy of engagement. Belarus is an important neighbour of the EU and, therefore, developments there are of concern to all of us. It is important that we send a clear and consistent message to Minsk and I am pleased that Parliament has been able to support us on this.

Engagement is important since it offers us the best way of securing the sort of changes which we wish to see in Belarus and which are important to the EU's wider interests. As I said in my opening remarks, I stand ready to keep this Parliament informed of developments, and I am sure that also goes for the future presidencies, not least in relation to the future in-depth review agreed by the Council last week.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, *Member of the Commission*. – (FR) Mr President, honourable Members, once again I will be very quick.

As we know, Belarus has made some progress but, naturally, much remains to be done. It is also clear that the policy of isolating Belarus has had its day, and that dialogue is the only effective way in which we can influence this country's democratic future.

Of course, Mrs Schroedter, this is a critical dialogue; that is absolutely clear. The European Union has made a commitment in this regard to monitor very closely developments concerning the following five key issues: political prisoners, electoral law, freedom of the media, freedom of NGOs and freedom of assembly. Regular reports are currently being drafted and will be instituted by our heads of mission, in Minsk, and the human rights dialogue will supplement this process.

Naturally, other issues remain, not least the university issue. We have asked to assess the progress made in relation to the aforementioned five points, and I believe that this is necessary. It is also important that we give our word, by which I mean, if we see progress being made, then we will also take some first steps.

From our perspective, in fact, this is a necessary process that is still in its infancy and that requires our ongoing attention. To that end, monitoring is required.

I should also like to say at this point – and I hope we have realised that this is absolutely fair and genuine – that bilateral agreements have been concluded in the meantime between Belarus and certain countries, in particular Italy, on child-related matters. I believe that this is very important, and we are all the same observing some progress.

On the issue of visas, the situation is equally clear. Individual Member States can reduce the cost of visas for specific categories, including citizens. However, a general visa facilitation agreement cannot be created as yet because it would require the entire Eastern Partnership or Neighbourhood Policy to be implemented.

Lastly, on the issue of nuclear energy, I can tell you that, last November, a Commission delegation travelled to Belarus. We held a dialogue on energy and exchanged views on the issue of international safety and security at the highest level. Naturally, we shall maintain this position.

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

The vote will take place during the next part-session.

## 10. European conscience and totalitarianism (debate)

**President.** – The next item is the statements by the Council and the Commission on European conscience and totalitarianism.

**Alexandr Vondra**, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Mr President, I am very grateful to you for the opportunity to speak to you on a subject which has particular significance both to the Presidency and to all of us. It is also a subject which touches the heart of what it means to be part of the European Union.

Twenty years ago, much of Central and Eastern Europe, including my own country, succeeded in throwing off the shackles of Communist rule. It was a turning point for us and for Europe. It opened the way for the rediscovery of individual freedom: freedom of speech and freedom of action – and also freedom to improve the quality of our lives.

The Czech Presidency considered that the 20th anniversary of this event should be commemorated as an important milestone in European history. It is an opportunity not only to remember the fall of the Iron Curtain, but also to draw lessons from the totalitarian past across Europe as a whole.

It was subsequently agreed that 2009 be designated as the 20th anniversary of democratic change in Central and Eastern Europe. The Czech Presidency is particularly pleased that this has been included as one of the communication priorities agreed between the institutions for 2009. In fact it was our proposal. The Member States have been encouraged, and have agreed, to include this theme as appropriate within their communication activities for the year.

I am grateful to this Parliament for its support for the Czech Presidency and its willingness to participate in a number of events linked to this theme. I would like in particular to thank many Members for their support in organising a public hearing on the issue of 'European Conscience and Crimes of Totalitarian Communism' last week in Brussels, where we were together with Commissioner Figel'.

This Parliament has proposed that a day be set aside to remember the victims of Nazism and totalitarian Communism. It is for individual Member States to decide whether and how they might wish to associate themselves with such an event. Speaking for the Czech Presidency, I can assure this Parliament that we are willing to give our support to such an initiative.

The Presidency has also launched an initiative to establish a Platform of European Memory and Conscience, with the aim of raising public awareness about European history and the crimes committed by totalitarian regimes. I am pleased that this initiative has given rise to considerable interest among Member States, many of whom have underlined the importance of focusing on democratic values and respect for fundamental rights as key principles underpinning the European Union.

There are several reasons why there is value in commemorating such an event and in establishing a permanent communication and research project such as the platform proposed by the Czech Presidency.

Firstly, we owe it to those who suffered as result of totalitarian crimes not just to remember their experience at the hands of overbearing and unaccountable state regimes, but also to confront the past collectively. Only by reconciling ourselves to history can we truly break away from the bonds imposed by the regimes of the past.

Secondly, it is only by appreciating fully the suffering brought about by such regimes that we can fully understand the present. The European Union stands for everything that is the opposite of totalitarianism. For those of us who emerged from the grip of Communism, membership of the European Union is one of the main guarantees that we will never again revert to totalitarianism. This is a guarantee which we all share. It is something to be valued and never taken lightly. A collective conscience and memory of the past is a way of reinforcing the value of the present.

Thirdly, we owe it for the sake of our children. There are lessons to be learnt from our totalitarian past. Perhaps most important of these is the need for respect for human rights and fundamental values. Human rights and freedom cannot be taught in a vacuum. The seeds of human rights violations lie in history, sometimes in distant history. Knowledge of history, and an understanding of the dangers of totalitarianism, are essential if we are to avoid repeating some of the more terrible events of the past. It is not just cynicism and manipulation which have to be avoided: apathy and insensitivity have also to be overcome.

The European elections will be taking place in a few months' time and I hope that they will be marked by lively and vigorous debate. That is the hallmark of democracy. It is something we should value. I very much believe that the subject of our debate today rises above party politics. It is about values more important than party differences. It is about how we organise our societies in a way which ensures that everyone has a voice and an opportunity to express their views.

Given the recent history of my country I have focused in particular on the tragedy of totalitarian Communist rule. But there are relatively few countries represented in this Parliament today which have not been touched by totalitarianism in one form or another over the past century. Any system which places the state above criticism and challenge, any system which places the creativity of people at the mercy of the regime, any system which diminishes the individual has no place in the sort of societies which we seek to build within the framework of the European Union.

I therefore offer my support, and that of the Czech Presidency, for the initiatives presented by this Parliament, and look forward to working together in supporting them through greater public awareness and recognition.

## IN THE CHAIR: MRS KRATSA-TSAGAROPOULOU

*Vice-President*

**Ján Figel**, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, a year ago, in April 2008, a hearing was held for the first time in the European Union on the crimes committed by totalitarian regimes. The hearing, organised jointly by the Commission and the Slovene Presidency, marked the start of a process, and the Commission is determined to pursue this process step by step.

This is a difficult but necessary process, as it is not just an important issue which will help us to understand the European Union's common history, the past, better, but also one which affects the future of European integration – a process which is not just economic but of course also has cultural and historical ramifications.

It is of course for the Member States to find their own way forward in taking decisions to deal with victims' expectations and promote reconciliation. The European Union's role can only be to facilitate this process by encouraging discussion and furthering the sharing of experiences and best practices.

The Commission regards Parliament's written declaration on the proclamation of 23 August as a European day of remembrance for the victims of Stalinism and Nazism as an important initiative, which it supports in the interests of preserving the memory of totalitarian crimes and raising public awareness, particularly among the younger generations.

The hearing of 8 April 2008 showed that the Member States in Western Europe need to be more aware of the tragic history of the Member States in the East, which is also part of our shared, common, European history. We must respond to this lack of sensitivity if we are to avoid the Union being divided on a serious issue which should instead unite us.

The Commission hopes that the parliaments of the Member States, to which this declaration is addressed, will implement this declaration in the manner most appropriate in the light of their own history and sensibilities.

The Commission is now focussing its attention on the report which it will submit in 2010 – next year – as the Council has requested. This report will provide the opportunity for further political debate on the need for new EU initiatives.

To prepare the ground for this report, a study has been launched with the aim of providing a factual overview of the various legal instruments, methods and practices used in the Member States to safeguard the memory of totalitarian crime. The study will be completed by the end of this year.

We are also drawing on the contributions made at the hearing and published by the Slovene Presidency.

The Prague Declaration of 3 June 2008 on European Conscience and Communism contains a number of ideas and propositions that will also be taken on board when preparing this report. The Commission is willing to examine what scope it has to contribute to projects such as a European Memory and Conscience Platform, which was just mentioned by Deputy Prime Minister Vondra, which is designed to promote information exchanges and networking between national organisations active in this field.

More generally the Commission will examine how Community programmes, for example, the one I am responsible for – Europe for Citizens – might help heighten European public awareness on these issues.

I am looking forward to the debate.

**Jana Hybášková**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (CS) Madam President, Mr President, Commissioner, it is a great honour for me to have the opportunity to speak today. In 2005 we adopted a resolution on the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War. We discovered that the European Parliament and the EU lacked the political will to pursue a common understanding and evaluation of European history. While the victims of Fascism and Nazism have received decent compensation, millions of victims of Communism have been forgotten. I am therefore delighted to announce that the resolution on the European Conscience and Totalitarianism, on which most political families in this house have been working this afternoon, is almost ready. Europe will not be united as long as West and East do not agree to joint studies, recognition, dialogue and understanding of the shared history of Fascism, Communism and Nazism. Therefore, in order that we in Europe can live with a common understanding in the future, we have drafted a question for the Council and the Commission. The question is based on the Council of Europe resolution and the Council Against Racism and Xenophobia's framework decision and it is also based on the Prague Declaration process.

I would therefore like to ask the Council and the Commission: 'What concrete steps will you be taking to set up platforms of scientific institutes in the East and in the West for studying the crimes of Communism, Nazism and Fascism? Is the Commission providing funding from the Europe for Citizens instrument? How are you supporting the establishment of 23rd August as 'Victims of Totalitarianism' day? How are the Council and the Commission approaching the question of equal symbolic acknowledgement for the blameless victims of totalitarian Communism? What steps are the Council and the Commission taking to reconcile us with the inheritance of totalitarian Communism as a crime against humanity that is comparable in its consequences with Nazism and Fascism? Finally, will the Czech Presidency pass on its special task to the Swedish Presidency?'

**Jan Marinus Wiersma**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (NL) Mr President, my group is not against the debate that is being held today per se, but we do have a great deal of difficulty with summarising the result of this debate in a resolution. It gives the impression that we can lay down in a resolution how we should deal with Europe's history, and specifically with the totalitarian past. As was apparent in the negotiations that have just taken place, they were all too quickly bogged down by what wordings we could or could not use in such a resolution.

Let us, please, leave it to historians to decide how precisely our history should be interpreted, knowing that objectivity is impossible. Obviously, politicians can help ensure that sufficient attention is paid to the past, and that certainly also applies to the crimes perpetrated by Hitler and Stalin. Those crimes must never be forgotten and we must honour the victims. We must also all be aware that our fellow Europeans in Central and Eastern Europe suffered under two totalitarian systems and that that is not the experience of people like me, born, as I was, in the Netherlands. Mr Geremek, a former Member of this House, quite correctly once commented that we have not yet achieved the reunification of our memories.

As politicians, we have a responsibility when it comes to organising what it is that we want to commemorate specially, but let us do that in collaboration with historians. A day of commemoration for all the victims of the totalitarian systems in Europe in the 20th century is a good suggestion in itself, but let us work with historians to consider what the proper format and the right date for such a day should be so that everyone can support it. I, myself, am a historian. I think that if we were to link the day solely to the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact it would not do justice to everything that happened in the 20th century.

It is important to debate this. What are the dividing lines between politicians and historians? What do we want to commemorate, and how? The debate will undoubtedly rumble on. We, as a group, will certainly get involved. As an example of that, I want to show you this book, which will be coming out in two weeks' time under the title *The politics of the past, the use and abuse of history* and in which we especially left the floor to historians, and we hope that this will really contribute to the quality of the debate in this Parliament and, of course, elsewhere.

**István Szent-Iványi**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (HU) The European Union was born in the shadow of two totalitarian regimes. It was a response to the horrors of World War II and the atrocities of the Holocaust, but just as important was its mandate to halt the territorial expansion of Stalinism and Communism, and to keep alive the hope that Europe may one day reunite in democracy and peace.

The European Union, as one of the most successful ventures in human history, has been able to fulfil both of these mandates. There followed a long period of peace and prosperity such as has never been seen before. It is no coincidence that Greece, Spain and Portugal, emerging from authoritarian rule, chose to join, and neither is it a coincidence that after the collapse of Communism, every Central and Eastern European country opted for the European Union and not for a third way.

Another sign of success is the fact that the Balkan states are also looking to the EU for their future, as are certain countries in Eastern Europe or the South Caucasus that in many cases are still living under oppressive regimes.

When we talk of totalitarianism, we do so not because we want to live in the past. No, we wish to look ahead, but we can only escape the errors and sins of the past if we familiarise ourselves with the past, if we process the past. Pacification is not possible without processing the past and acknowledging the truth. This is one of the most important lessons of the history of the past decades, and this is why it is important that we remember the horrors of totalitarianism.

There is still much to be done. In certain Member States – unfortunately my country, Hungary, is one of these – there still is not complete access to the archives of the secret services of the oppressive Communist

regimes. It is simply outrageous that people cannot get to know their own past. The European Union has an important task, namely, to call upon these countries to rectify this unacceptable situation.

Secondly, unfortunately in quite a few Member States, including my home country, those holding extremist positions are increasingly gaining ground. Today it is mainly the extreme right, at least in our country, but there are other states where it is the extreme left that is pushing forward. It is important that we make clear to them as well the horrors of both regimes.

Among our closest neighbours as well there are oppressive regimes – one of these, Belarus, was just discussed – and thus talk of oppression is not at all limited to past history.

Europe's conscience cannot be clear without fully examining and remembering the past. When we remember the victims, then we are truly fulfilling our obligations, because it is our common obligation and responsibility to make the 21st century different from the 20th, so that the terrors of totalitarianism may never return to Europe.

**Hanna Foltyn-Kubicka**, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Madam President, in the discussion on the subject of the crimes of totalitarian regimes a great deal of time is devoted to the victims, while surprisingly little is said about those who sacrificed their lives fighting against Nazism and Communism.

I would like once again to recall a man who should become a symbol of an unshakeable attitude and resistance to totalitarians – Cavalry Captain Witold Pilecki. He voluntarily entered the Auschwitz extermination camp to organise the resistance movement and gather information about mass murders. He managed to escape, only to die several years later from a bullet in the back of the head, dispatched on the orders of Soviet butchers. I therefore also appeal once again for 25 May, the date of his execution, to be designated the International Day of the Heroes of the Fight Against Totalitarianism, because many unknown people, who just like Pilecki lost their lives in the fight for fundamental rights and freedoms, deserve to be remembered.

I should like to add one further comment. Yesterday in Parliament we celebrated the European Day of home-made ice cream. I repeat, we celebrated the European Day of home-made ice cream. I do not therefore understand why 25 May cannot be the day when we remember the heroes of the fight against totalitarianism.

**László Tórkés**, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (HU) It is 20 years ago that the uprising of Temesvár (Timișoara) began that would lead to the collapse of the ignominious Ceaușescu dictatorship. We cannot think back without emotion or subjectivity to the enthusiasm with which Romanians, Hungarians, Germans of Temesvár, people of diverse ethnic groups, religions and communities, joined together bravely to resist tyranny.

It is no arbitrary party political option but above all a moral question for us to condemn unambiguously the disenfranchising, oppressive Communist dictatorship. It is intolerable and unbearable that in twenty years this has not happened.

Last week Romanian, Hungarian and Bulgarian speakers took part in the public hearing that, in connection with the Prague Declaration, placed the crimes of Communism on the agenda. The resolution subsequently adopted states the following: the European Community must abandon the double standard that is evident in the different ways in which Nazism and Communism have been judged. Both inhumane dictatorships deserve equal condemnation.

I ask the European Parliament to stand in solidarity with the victims of Fascist Communism and to help defeat the enduring legacy of Communism in accordance with the aforementioned moral, historical and political exigencies. Only in this way can a divided Europe be truly unified and become that which Prime Minister Gordon Brown spoke of yesterday, in relation to the 20th anniversary, as follows: 'My friends, today there is no Old Europe, no New Europe, no East or West Europe, there is only one Europe, our home Europe'. So be it!

**Vladimír Remek**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (CS) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the efforts to assert that Communism equates to Nazism or Fascism and to create new so-called institutes or platforms for research smack of political opportunism. The radical right needs it also because of the forthcoming elections. It has nothing to do with objective, genuinely independent assessments. There are already enough historical institutes and centres dealing with that. I am not blind of course and under so-called Communism there was repression, injustice and coercion. Yes, it is necessary to investigate and justly condemn the crimes. Yet even Jan Zahradil of the ODS commented at the hearings: 'The identification of Communism with German Nazism is and is not correct. It has to be done in a way which takes account of relationships and

analyses them'. If someone does not want to see the difference between Communism and Nazism, between Communists in the past and Communists in the present, who like myself represent significant numbers of Communist voters here in Parliament after democratic elections, then they are perhaps simply trying to lump me together with the Nazis.

**Philip Claeys (NI).** – (NL) Madam President, it is good that a number of initiatives have been taken to pay due remembrance to the victims of totalitarian systems. However, there is no sense in remembering the victims of defunct regimes such as those of Communism and National Socialism, of course, whilst disregarding the victims of current totalitarian threats such as that of Islamism.

Condemning totalitarian Islam does not in any way imply condemnation of individual Muslims in Europe who observe the rules, values and standards of a democratic state under the rule of law, and for whom faith is a private matter. Yet we do have to have the courage to recognise that political Islam, totalitarian Islam – not only Islamic states, or some such states, but also terrorist organisations such as Al Qaeda and related movements – continues to claim many victims worldwide.

The appropriate course of action, therefore, is for the European Union to take a number of strong initiatives to remember those victims, too, and to ensure that the number of victims of such totalitarian Islamic organisations and countries is reduced as far as possible, preferably to zero. After all, we must have the courage to admit – and this, too, is a problem in the European Union – that criticising totalitarian Islam is not always welcome because the spirit of political correctness prevails here. What is more, totalitarian Islam was not even mentioned in the Commission and Council statements just now, when what we should in fact be doing is having the courage to contemplate that problem, too, and to take the necessary measures.

**Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, in 1948 President Truman wrote, 'Now we are faced with exactly the same situation with which Britain and France were faced in 1939 in dealing with Hitler. A totalitarian state is no different, whether you call it Nazi, Fascist, Communist or Franco's Spain. The oligarchy in Russia is a Frankenstein dictatorship worse than any of the others, Hitler included'.

So the question is why, 61 years later, we still have to argue about the same problems. I think that today what we need is not only the economic and political enlargement of Europe but the enlargement of European awareness of the massive crimes against humanity which occurred everywhere in Europe in the 20th century. We need the integration of European historic perception – the integration of prejudices and different views of history – as only in this way can we proceed to the better Europe of the future.

No, we have to deal with, not argue about, the question of dictatorships. We must start with the victims – with the equality of victims – because every victim of any totalitarian regime is to be considered equal in human dignity and deserves justice and remembrance as well as Europe-wide recognition and guarantees of 'never again'.

Therefore I would say that it is hypocritical to shun or postpone this debate on these questions and the reaching of conclusions. It is not a matter for academic study. We have enough testimonies of mass crimes. We need political and moral will to proceed. I am very thankful, both to the Czech Presidency and to Commissioner Figel', for their statements, which give hope that we can reach an all-European understanding.

**Józef Pinior (PSE).** – (PL) Madam President, Commissioner, I would like to begin my speech by quoting from a poem written by Osip Mandelstam, one of the greatest Russian poets of the 20th century. I will quote the words in the language in which they were written, and so in Russian:

*(the Member then spoke in Russian)*

They are terrible words. For that poem Osip Mandelstam was sent into exile. He died near Vladivostok, on the way to his destination. In December 1938 his body was placed in a common grave. Osip Mandelstam symbolises the millions of victims of 20th-century totalitarian regimes in Europe.

The Europe of today should remember the victims of 20th-century totalitarian regimes worldwide. Those victims are today the foundation of our memory, the lasting spiritual basis of European democracy. At the same time we see the entire history of the 20th century. We remember the victims of authoritarian systems, the victims in European countries, in nationalistic and militaristic regimes, in Spain, in Portugal and in Greece.

I would like to draw attention to a seminar held in our group, the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, and to a book devoted to problems of history and politics which our group is going to publish. We want to face up to this problem seriously. We are opposed to the manipulation of that memory, and to the insulting

of that memory, where it is used today in an ideological battle, in a party fight in the European political system. We remember the victims. The victims of 20th-century totalitarian regimes must be the foundation of today's democracy in Europe.

**Ģirts Valdis Kristovskis (UEN).** – (LV) Ladies and gentlemen, unfortunately, Europe's common values still do not contain a requirement to make a comprehensive and truthful assessment of the crimes of various totalitarian regimes in Europe and their consequences. Half-truths, one-sided interpretations and the denial of historical truth weakens Europeans. The framework decision on racism and xenophobia imposes criminal liability only for the gross trivialisation of Nazi crimes, but remains silent about the crimes of totalitarian Communism in Europe. It is high time to apply an objective method to the assessment of totalitarian crimes. We can make use of the experience of the European Court of Human Rights. It bases itself on universally recognised infringements of international rights and principles, which are well-known to all and have been applicable at least since the Nuremberg trials. We must, at last, truthfully reflect Europe's recent totalitarian history in the name of Europe's future and Europe's common values!

**Gisela Kallenbach (Verts/ALE).** – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, nearly 20 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, this is the first debate in this House on an issue which could drive a wedge between people in the East and in the West, even in our European Community. Why? The view of a totalitarian regime from the outside is very different from the view from the inside. The way in which 20th century European history was dealt with and retold differed greatly, especially in the individual Member States. Moreover, in some Central and Eastern European Member States, people who disregarded human rights or sent people to camps or to their death without following the legal procedure are still in office and held in esteem. It poisons our common future if we fail to acknowledge this properly. Europe should therefore not remain inactive.

I welcome the fact that we have now given this issue a European platform. I trust that it will not stop with today's debate and that we and the Commission shall together begin a process to implement the projects which you mentioned. I hope that we shall manage through this process to bring perpetrators who are still alive to book and to commemorate the victims, in order to develop greater understanding for each other in the interest of a common future.

**Athanasios Pafilis (GUE/NGL).** – (EL) Madam President, the escalation in the European Union's wretched anti-Communist strategy is a brazen insult to the people: with the counterfeiting of history, slander and lies, Fascism is being equated with Communism. The most reactionary and barbaric regime to which capitalism gave birth, namely Fascism, is being equated with the most progressive idea conceived by man, namely Communism and the abolition of the exploitation of man by man.

It is an insult to the memory of twenty million Soviets who sacrificed their lives to conquer Fascism. This vulgar anti-Communism is targeted not so much at the past; it is targeted mainly at the present and at the future. Its aim for today is to reduce grassroots resistance and to shift the burden of the capitalist crisis on to the workers and its aim for tomorrow is to anticipate the inevitable general challenge to and overthrow of the capitalist system. That is why it is hitting out at Communists and ruining socialist/Communist prospects. It also wants to coerce the Communist parties, who stand firmly by their principles, into abandoning them and integrating.

You deceive yourselves. Communists have no intention of bowing their heads. They have defended their ideology even with their lives. We will not be signing any declaration of repentance for the imperialists. Their overthrow is a social need and we shall serve it consistently. We are not afraid of you. The social evolution will continue; that is what terrifies you and why you are waging this campaign.

**Roberto Fiore (NI).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I think that today we can in fact identify those who practise totalitarianism. The first country that comes to mind is China; China is at present a country where forced abortions are performed, a country containing Laogai, a real concentration camp where people work for the big multinationals or the Chinese state and where priests and political opponents are incarcerated. China is therefore the first country of which I think.

The second I would say is Islamic totalitarianism, above all in connection with Sharia law. Here, Islam effectively becomes totalitarian law, so that the rights of other religions or of women or of all are in fact suppressed. Then there is a resurgence of a certain kind of totalitarianism even in Europe, and I would like to take a moment to look at this.



Hungary was mentioned before – I was personally present at demonstrations in Hungary at the remembrance of the national uprising in 1956 and I saw acts of repression by the police towards demonstrators and I myself was searched and asked for identification when they knew perfectly well who I was.

There is therefore a kind of totalitarianism emerging there, but there is also another emerging totalitarianism in the declarations made by Prime Minister Zapatero, but also Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy, on the subject of the Pope's statements in Africa and other events connected with the Catholic Church. These Heads of State or Government have never spoken out against other religions, but are quite radical when it comes to intervening to attack the Catholic Church. This results in an atmosphere of intolerance in certain countries, as we saw the other day at Notre Dame for example, when worshippers were attacked by anti-Catholic activists.

**József Szájer (PPE-DE).** – (HU) Christianity and the doctrine of universal human rights presents us with a single measure, that of human dignity and unconditional respect for human life. For this reason we must condemn all attempts, so fashionable today, to calculate which inhumane dictatorship killed or humiliated more people.

A democrat, a European cannot accept the fact that even today, even in this Parliament, there are people for whom the crimes of the Communist dictatorship are excusable and forgivable. A double standard distinguishing between victim and victim, crime and crime, suffering and suffering, death and death, is unacceptable.

Those who try to justify the crimes of Communist dictatorship argue that all those horrors were committed by those regimes in the name of noble ideals, in the name of equality and fraternity. Ladies and gentlemen, Madam President, this is an enormous lie, and all they have done is to be counted not in their favour but against them, for it was with the promise of noble aims that they deceived people, as the writer István Örkény said on Hungarian Radio at the time of the 1956 Revolution: 'We lied by night and we lied by day, we lied on every wavelength'.

For this reason, in the name of freedom, democracy and a common European principle we ask, we demand that there be a common European day of remembrance and a monument to the victims of Communism, that a European museum, archive and research institute be established to document the crimes of Communism. Let us exclude from the ranks of democrats those who continue to this day to justify the actions of Communism and let Europe back wholeheartedly the condemnation of every inhumanity. May as many of us as possible support the Prague Declaration.

**Katrin Saks (PSE).** – (ET) I am certain that no one in this hall – not even those who have something better to do at the moment – would condone what took place 60 years ago in the Baltic States, when nearly 100 000 people, mostly women and children, were deported to Siberia. This is made all the more regrettable by the fact that in the context of the already ongoing election struggle, some are pointing their fingers at the social democrats, claiming that we do not understand the criminality of these events.

The words 'socialism' and 'Communism' may indeed mean different things to different members of our party, but no one could justify the crimes that were perpetrated.

Why is it necessary for us to talk about this - not just for historians, but also for politicians? Because without giving a fair assessment of the past, we cannot be certain that we have done everything possible to prevent it from being repeated. This is important, because the shadows of the past have not disappeared. While it is difficult today to imagine Hitler being raised onto a pedestal, Stalin's monument stands proudly in the main square of his home town Gori. In Russia last year, Stalin was voted one of the 12 greatest individuals in history.

**Wojciech Roszkowski (UEN).** – (PL) Madam President, it is sometimes said that Nazi totalitarianism originates from the Right and Communist totalitarianism from the Left. This is not very precise. Racial hatred and class hatred are only two varieties of the same thing – hatred – which devastates the human conscience and social relations. We heard one such statement here a moment ago, the statement by Mr Pafilis.

Hatred gives birth to oppression, and oppression is the negation of a republic, a democracy and a country ruled by law. Left and Right are both found in a democratic system. Nazi and Communist totalitarianism destroyed democracy. Therefore it was not the case that Nazism was on the Right, and Communism on the Left. Nazism and Communism were all around.

Whoever today relativises the criminal character of totalitarianism, be it Nazi or Communist totalitarianism, stands in opposition to the traditions of a country ruled by law and to democracy. It is, by the way, characteristic that while the European Right does not relativise Nazi crimes today, the European Left does relativise Communist crimes. This is abundantly clear from the attitude of the socialists and Communists to the draft resolution on the matter which we have been negotiating today. In this Chamber we are not voting on the truth about history, we are voting on the truth about ourselves, and about our moral judgments.

*(Applause)*

**Christopher Beazley (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, why is it that democrats feel so restrained about naming dictators and those who dedicated their careers to combating democracy, enslaving countries, persecuting those who dared to speak against them and are responsible for crimes?

This evening, we are not talking about totalitarianism, we are not talking in euphemisms: we are talking about Hitler's Fascist, criminal dictatorship and Joseph Stalin's Communist criminal dictatorship. When I was 16 years old I lived in Frankfurt am Main, which is two hours' tank drive away from Prague.

Minister, Alexander Dubček, whom we honoured in this House, tried very hard to liberalise the system. He spoke about the human face of Communism. The inhuman face of Communism was Leonid Brezhnev and his predecessors and successors.

I believe, Commissioner, that if we are to stand by our beliefs we should honour the victims of Communism and Fascism. We should make no distinction between these twin criminals – that is what they were. The only difference is that Hitler lost the war and Stalin won the war.

Today the President of this Parliament honoured the memory of those deported from three Baltic States – Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania. But, Minister, your country suffered: Jan Palach lost his life. He tried desperately to demonstrate the limits to which he would go to show that the regime under which he lived was unacceptable. I remember listening, aged 16, to Radio Prague as the tanks occupied your capital city in Wenceslas Square. 'Don't forget us' is what your brave countrymen said. This evening, Commissioner, we do not forget those who suffered. We should have the courage to name those who were responsible, but we should look to the future to ensure that never again this continent suffers from Hitlerism or Stalinism.

*(Applause)*

**Luis Yañez-Barnuevo García (PSE).** – (ES) Madam President, let us not forget – I agree – and let us not make too many subtle distinctions: from the political viewpoint, all forms of totalitarianism deserve condemnation and Communism and Fascism did irreparable damage to this continent.

Today we are a united continent of 27 nations and 500 million people who share values of freedom, democracy and human rights, and we ought to condemn equally the totalitarian Communism that destroyed Central and Eastern Europe and the Nazi-Fascism that years before had destroyed many European countries, including my own.

I lived for 32 years under Franco's dictatorship and I shall not forget that, and nor will some of the speakers, from Greece or Portugal for instance, have forgotten their past.

I never forgot, even when I was young, the suffering that people were experiencing under Communist dictatorship. I was never a Communist and I have always condemned Communism. This was not an obstacle to my being an anti-Franco fighter and condemning the Franco system.

The struggle is the same. We must fight for the same principles, the same values and retain a permanent memory of the victims of all these forms of totalitarianism.

**Inese Vaidere (UEN).** – (LV) Ladies and gentlemen, 60 years ago 43 000 innocent people, including children and old people, were deported from Latvia without trial. If this were to happen now in France, it would amount to 1.3 million people. It is therefore important that today we are able to talk about the crimes of totalitarian Communism. It would not be right to leave these crimes to the province of historians, as has been suggested here, until the witnesses and victims of the crimes have passed away. We must not downplay the significance of these crimes, and we must not deny them. The European Parliament in its written declaration clearly stated that 23 August ought to be recognised as a day of remembrance for the victims of Stalinism and Nazism, and nobody here ought to deny that either. The Council must implement this decision by the European Parliament without delay, so that such crimes are never repeated in the future.

**Rihards Pīks (PPE-DE).** – (LV) Madam President, Mr Vondra, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, those who have studied history in Europe, the majority I believe, know that the Second World War began on 1 September 1939, when Hitler invaded Poland. A much smaller number of people know that Hitler was able to do this because on 23 August 1939 he and Stalin had signed an agreement: a non-aggression pact. Even fewer people know that for two years Stalin's regime supplied Hitler and Hitler's army with fuel and industrial materials so that Hitler could conquer Western Europe. Even fewer people know that for the whole of the 1930s offensive weapons, tanks and parachutists had been prepared for Stalin. While Hitler had 400 parachutists ready, Stalin had prepared 1 million parachutists, ready to conquer. Furthermore, this foreign policy had been supported in the decisions of the Communist Bolshevik party of the Soviet Union. In various closed sessions of the Communist party, resolutions were passed to the effect that the countries of Western Europe should be set at loggerheads so that the Soviet Union would then be able to liberate them. There is still more: in relation to domestic policy, on 5 December 1937 those Latvians who had remained living in Soviet Russia began to be arrested and exterminated in their entirety. Over a two-year period, 70 000 Latvians living in the Soviet Union were killed solely because they were Latvians. So, how should we refer to this regime, where foreign policy was aggressive, and where domestic policy was directed towards exterminating the country's own residents? It was a totalitarian, criminal regime, just like Nazism. Thank you.

**Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE).** – (HU) It is difficult to write a common European history, since after World War II, the western and eastern halves of Europe lived through different histories. Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic states were victims equally of both Nazi and the Soviet dictatorships, yet we cannot equate Nazism with Stalinism.

No one can dispute that millions fell victim to the Stalinist dictatorship, entire peoples were dislocated, and no one can exonerate or relativise that. The Shoah, Nazi Germany's organised industry for the extermination of the Jewish people solely on the basis of origin, was an atrocity unparalleled in human history.

In Western Europe it is often not understood that for us, liberation from Nazism heralded at the same time a new occupation, the beginning of Soviet oppression. For that reason, 9 May is felt differently by old and new Member States, especially the Baltic states, which lost their independent statehood and whose intelligentsia was wiped out.

It would be good to acknowledge the past without politics, without present-day political bias, and to formulate a common historical narrative. In the words of the Hungarian poet Attila József, 'it is a great enough struggle to admit the past'.

**Roberts Zīle (UEN).** – (LV) Madam President, several of my fellow Members have already mentioned that today we are remembering the deportations of 60 years ago carried out by the Soviet regime, when it transported people to Siberia. We also know, however, how difficult it is to express condemnation for the Communist regime equal to that for other totalitarian regimes. This is because we are talking not only about the past, but also about the future. This week it became known that in Latvia the leader on the list of European election candidates for the Harmony Centre association, whose newly-elected representatives are to join the socialist group here in the European Parliament, will be Alfrēds Rubiks, the former leader of the Latvian branch of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, who was tried in Latvia for the crimes of the regime. This is a person who is a supporter of Communist ideology and resisted the restoration of Latvian independence to the very last; now he is to be elected by a country which he himself has disavowed. This also provides the answer as to why in the future it will continue to be difficult for the European Parliament to condemn crimes equally, and why good and bad totalitarian regimes will always exist. Thank you.

**Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE).** – (RO) Communism is a deceitful philosophy. In theory, it talks about well-being, equality and respect for human rights, while in practice, it has meant lies, discrimination, hatred and even crime.

Communism must be condemned with all the means at our disposal. This was done in Romania in 2006 through the words of the country's president, as a result of a report compiled by a presidential commission set up for this purpose.

Communism nullifies everything that stands for liberty and makes people dependent on a system. Anyone who has never lived under Communism cannot understand how much a person's life and way of thinking can be affected by a totalitarian system.

If I could turn back the clock, I would make those who have lived their whole lives under capitalism, but yearn for Communism, live in the Romania of the 1980s.

In Romania the Communist regime was imposed with the help of Russian troops, at the cost of hundreds of thousands of lives lost in labour camps and prisons. With their only crime being not to submit to the totalitarian system, politicians, intellectuals, peasants, representatives of different religious denominations and, in general, citizens who were model members of the community disappeared.

While the major problems caused by a bankrupt economic system can be resolved through adequate measures, human beings need time to forget, forgive and adapt to a new way of life, even if it is incomparably better.

Democracy has provided freedom of thought, expression and movement. It must also provide security for tomorrow. There is no difference between poverty caused by the lack of material goods and poverty caused by a lack of resources for buying goods. The day when we successfully get rid of poverty, the spectre of Communism will disappear for good.

Fellow Members, Romania and the other countries in Eastern Europe ended up under this system as a result of the decisions made by the world's leaders, only one of whom was a Communist. The remainder represented democratic systems.

Do not forget this historical truth when evaluating, assessing or deciding on the current situation or on the future of the former Communist states, whether members of the European Union or not.

**Ljudmila Novak (PPE-DE).** – (SL) I note with regret that none of the former Communist countries has yet fully investigated and recognised the crimes of Communism in the period following the Second World War.

Because these regimes were in power for decades after the war, they managed to destroy most of the evidence. This is why the criminals, or the perpetrators, have not even been named, let alone convicted. History was written by the victors.

The European Union must call upon all of the countries which were previously ruled by Communist regimes to enable their historians to carry out research and include the whole truth about the post-war era in school textbooks. They should also write about the culpability of the Western allied forces which returned or extradited exiles into the hands of the Communists.

The European Union should also call upon all of the Member States to consider renaming those streets and squares which are named after controversial heroes, such as Tito in Yugoslavia, who were accountable for many post-war killings, by virtue of their roles at the time.

**Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN).** – (PL) Madam President, when I hear in this Chamber that the Communists are not prepared to hang their heads, despite the tens of millions of victims of the construction of the White Sea-Baltic Sea Canal, the millions of people deported to Siberia from many nations (including Russians, but the Poles alone have to be counted in millions), and the sentencing of entire nations to death, for example the Crimean Tartars, I am astounded and outraged.

Cavalry Captain Pilecki, who went into Auschwitz as a volunteer, and was later also imprisoned by the Communists, told his wife 'Auschwitz was only a game'. My country was affected by both totalitarian systems, and the wounds are still healing today. No such system has the right to exist. We should honour those who fought against totalitarianism, and we should honour the memory of the victims.

**Bogusław Sonik (PPE-DE).** – (PL) Madam President, the European Community must make every effort to keep alive the memory of heroes and not to allow the trivialisation of totalitarian crimes. The fate of those who resisted, of those who, like Cavalry Captain Pilecki, were murdered, should always be in our minds, especially because the idea of European integration arose among people opposed to Nazism and Communism. Furthermore, it was this idea which prevented future conflicts and the emergence of totalitarian regimes after the end of the War.

The establishment of an International Day of the Heroes of the Fight Against Totalitarianism would be a step in the direction of a common understanding of 20th-century European history and part of the common fight against mutual prejudice and ignorance concerning historical facts. Keeping the crimes of totalitarian regimes – Nazi and Communist – in the minds of Europeans can make us hope that our continent will never again be the scene of such tragic events.

**György Schöpflin (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, there is a further dimension to this debate. It is not only a united Europe that needs urgently to look at the entirety of the past, but the same is particularly true of the European Left.

Without a thorough scrutiny of its past, the Left in some of the former Communist states is obliged – compels itself – to live with a false past, a past from which all sorts of painful events are screened out. This further forces the Left to protect this false past and thereby its democratic credibility is eroded. Seeing as the Western Left fully accepts this unreconstructed post-Communist Left as a legitimate partner, it too finds itself obliged to defend an indefensible past. Consequently, its own commitment to democracy is, to that extent, weakened.

**Csaba Sógor (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, Europe has a turbulent history with regard to totalitarianism and the restriction of basic freedoms. In some parts of Europe the 20th century was hallmarked by such totalitarian regimes.

It is our moral obligation today to make sure that every citizen of the European Union enjoys the same rights. It is highly important that the EU should also support the rights of minorities, especially since many countries all around the world do not respect very basic rights in this sense.

At the same time I would like to point out that, while the EU speaks out against discrimination and violation of human rights in cases like Tibet, it is clear to all of us that even within the European Union there are ethnic and linguistic minorities which are very often targets of cultural and linguistic assimilation. This practice of some nation states in the EU is an aspect that should be seriously reviewed and reconsidered.

The Hungarians in Romania, the people I represent, are such a case.

**Zbigniew Zaleski (PPE-DE).** – (PL) Madam President, the suggestion by Mr Szájer to establish a day commemorating the history of the victims of totalitarianism is quite right. I believe it is right because whilst the Nazi horror is fairly well known, and even some Germans have tried to take it in, paradoxically little is known about Stalinism. The paradox lies in the fact that even the Siberians, from Stalin's own country, thought that he was a good man and that the cause of Russia's misfortunes lay elsewhere.

We cannot hear the millions who lost their lives in Siberia, and we will never know how they suffered, but I know of one of the victims who is still alive. That person still feels, even when just walking down the street, that he is no longer alive. That is a symptom of having been sent to Siberia. Those who survived know what that suffering was like. There is a Russian saying (*the Member then said some words in Russian*) – which means 'if you have not been there, you will be, and if you have been there, you will not forget it'. I think we should speak openly about both of these forms of totalitarianism.

**Vytautas Landsbergis (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, we should do everything we can to halt Europe's moral decline. Opportunism is most evident when gross crimes against humanity committed during the last century are neglected. Unfortunately, such negligence of crimes of Communist totalitarianism brings with it an appeasement of all neo-Nazis in Germany, Russia or anywhere: any of them could ask, if the Soviets are forgiven, then why should not our ancestors also be forgiven?

The roots of that bad phenomenon lie in Nuremberg, where Nazis were simply acquitted of initiating a conspiracy with Stalin in the Second World War. The greatest crime was ignored because of due process. Why? Because the shadow of Stalin – Hitler's homologue – was cast over the tribunal for two crucial years. Even at that time, the West capitulated morally to the Soviets. But there is no reason to stay limited of mind and fearful forever.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, today I will complete my speech here in Czech. I will try to summarise and at the same time to answer some of the questions that have been raised here. I think there are three issues. Firstly I would like to thank everyone participating in last week's hearing and in this plenary debate. If it has been the first debate of its kind for a long time then that can only be a good thing and I think that the first conclusion is that we must lead the debate and we must continue with it. That is the aim of the Platform of Memory and Conscience. Why is it important to have such a platform at the European level? It is important as an instrument against forgetting. If we forget the past, of course, we create an opportunity for it to return through the back door in the future. This is also a chance to combat the relativisation of past crimes. Hitler and Stalin are two of a kind. Of course there were countries where Nazism enabled or helped to bring about the subsequent establishment of Communism and its associated crimes. Any kind of relativisation, however – and I do not want to politicise here – any kind of relativisation is extremely dangerous.

Secondly we must retain historical awareness as part of European education. And here I think we must boost the financial instruments in order to ensure that awareness of Europe's totalitarian past has a place in the area of education. This was one of the findings of the hearing that was held last week. This requires resources

and I would like to thank the Commission and Commissioner Figel' specifically for the fact that the Commission is willing to cooperate in this matter.

Last but not least is the question of where the debate should lead. The Presidency is short, lasting just six months. We are at the half-way point and of course I am not pretending that when this Parliament breaks up shortly we can achieve the impossible, but I do think that the idea of creating certain Europe-wide institutions, whether museums, research institutes or foundations, is what we need. The hearing last week was presented jointly by the representatives of several similar institutions that exist at the national level and in my opinion there is a very urgent need to have such institutions at the pan-European level. However, that task belongs more to bodies that are responsible for continuity than to the six-monthly rotating Presidency. If our task was to contribute towards initiating certain debates then I would like to thank you once again for responding to this debate and I challenge those of you who will be responsible for continuity in the future to continue the debate and perhaps one day it will lead to such institutions really being set up.

**Ján Figel', Member of the Commission.** – (SK) I have already explained the essence of the Commission's mission in my introduction and I can only confirm once again that we are both ready and willing, which is also a factor. If the European Commission is willing to assist in this process, then I have already mentioned the next stages, which would involve completing studies of various methods and mechanisms of Member States in this area and submitting the awaited report next year. However, I also have something to add which is rather at the margins of the debate. Some speakers have made the point that it is the 20th anniversary of the collapse of Communism, the fall of the Berlin Wall and of the Iron Curtain in Europe and that a lot of time has passed. In my opinion it is never too late and it would be remiss of this Parliament, this recently expanded Parliament, not to make a statement about the crimes of totalitarian Communism and not to initiate a discussion, because this is an experience that many people have brought to this place and indeed a majority of those in the debate were from the new Member States.

I too lived most of my life under the totalitarian system in Czechoslovakia and it is from the personal and general experience of all concerned that we should create a European memory, a European fellowship, and at the same time bolster the processes which prevent the return of totalitarianism and the trivialisation and denial of its crimes, or denial of the truth. The denial of these crimes actually amounts to a relativisation not only of the truth but also of ethics and morality, leading to further and further problems and to the idea that eliminating people means eliminating the problem. The idea that problems can be eliminated by eliminating people is one of the principles of Stalinism.

I view the expansion of the EU in a broader sense and precisely for that reason I am able to identify the different forms of totalitarianism that have been mentioned, the different forms in different countries. We have a responsibility to identify them, to remember and to take adequate steps from the standpoint of restitution, rehabilitation, establishing justice, upholding the supremacy of truth, respect for human dignity and everything else that stands for freedom and democracy.

I would also like to say that we often feel as if threats come from far away and from outside, and that the dividing lines of today's world have nothing to do with religion or civilisation or culture, but rather with respect for life and human beings on the one hand (defined through human rights) and fanaticism of whatever kind on the other. There are many different kinds of fanaticism. We are familiar with them even in the world of today and that is precisely why the education mentioned by Alexander Vondra is so important, so that both the young and also the not-so-young will be able to distinguish human respect from extremism, populism, nationalism or fanaticism in any of its many different forms.

I would like to end by stressing that the European Commission genuinely supports this process and that it will be looking for ways to assist it. This debate is just one step but other matters will follow. We must do much more at the Member State level. I would also like to end by saying that today's expansion of the EU is possible thanks to the sacrifice of many people and that it has not happened through some kind of automated process. Neither a united Europe, nor democracy, nor freedom nor the legal state came into being automatically but instead as a result of enormous efforts and frequent bloodshed. We must remember this.

I would finally like to end with what was said by – I think – Mr Tunne Kelam about the expansion of the Union involving not only geography, markets and numbers of countries but also an expansion of awareness, an expansion of memory and an expansion of respect and responsibility. If we can include this in the process that we are now celebrating, the five years since expansion, then we will be ready for further processes and for the future. If we fail to include it then the path will be much more difficult. Thank you very much and my best wishes for an expansion not only of memory but also of responsibility.

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

The vote will take place during the next part-session.

#### **Written Statements (Rule 142)**

**Slavi Binev (NI)**, *in writing.* – (BG) Justice is one of Europe's fundamental values.

I support my fellow Members from UEN and resolution RC-B6-0165/2009 which they have tabled, by emphasising that the EU is founded on the rule of law, which is one of the basic features of democracy. This is precisely the principle on which the parliamentary elections must take place. However, the problem in Bulgaria of vote buying indicates the exact opposite.

After the previous local elections were repeatedly compromised by the blatant buying of votes of GERB (Citizens for European Development of Bulgaria), DPS (Movement for Rights and Freedoms) and BSP (Bulgarian Socialist Party), ordinary citizens were left feeling that they had no right to choose. As a result, this makes them much less willing to vote again.

In spite of the existing criminal code and the numerous signs of violations of the law, not a single person mentioned in the Commission's report has yet been convicted of these crimes because the relevant law enforcement authorities are clearly unwilling to stop vote buying. In Bulgaria the judiciary still shows a lack of determination and the well-known culprits are again preparing pre-election campaigns, while those who sold their votes are now looking for new buyers offering the best bid.

I want to stress that as long as these violations of the law are allowed in Bulgaria and the state continues not to take any action on the issue, honest voters are in actual fact being deprived of their basic human right – the right to choose! I urge Parliament not to sit back and do nothing.

**Filip Kaczmarek (PPE-DE)**, *in writing.* – (PL) Ladies and gentlemen, the problem with totalitarianism in Europe stems from the fact that the experiences of particular Member States in this area are very different. Many Europeans simply do not know what life was like under totalitarian systems, and someone who does not understand totalitarianism has a natural tendency to disregard crimes committed under such systems, seeing them instead as events which took place in the course of history. However, Communism and Fascism not only actively fought against most of the values of Europe, but were ready to break all the principles of ethics in the name of sick and degenerate ideas – and these systems really did break those principles, bringing pain, suffering and death to millions of people.

The more Europeans know about the true face of totalitarianism, the better it will be for the future of the European Union. This is not a matter of celebrating the sufferings of millions of people. It is about understanding the dramatic consequences which came from and are still coming from totalitarian practices in many countries in Europe. Solidarity, freedom, empathy, toleration, dialogue – all of these values look somewhat different if we look at them from the perspective of experiences with totalitarianism. Let us remember this. Establishing an International Day of the Heroes of the Fight Against Totalitarianism would undoubtedly help raise the level of knowledge about a painful past. That in turn would contribute to a reduction in prejudice, a limiting of stereotypes and a growth of the hope that never again will we in Europe experience totalitarianism.

(The sitting was suspended at 8.15 p.m. and resumed at 9 p.m.)

**IN THE CHAIR: EDWARD McMILLAN-SCOTT**

*Vice-President*

## **11. Strengthening security and fundamental freedoms on the Internet (debate)**

**President.** – The next item is the report by Stavros Lambrinidis, on behalf of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, with a proposal for a European Parliament recommendation to the Council on strengthening security and fundamental freedoms on the Internet (2008/2160(INI)) (A6-0103/2009).

**Stavros Lambrinidis**, *rapporteur.* – (EL) Mr President, we live in an age where everyone – governments, private companies and even criminals – seek the greatest possible access to our electronic data, to our private life.

The Internet in particular provides details about our private lives, something which was unimaginable a few years ago. At the same time, it is clear that it enhances the facility for us to exercise our fundamental rights, such as freedom of speech, freedom of political action, freedom of knowledge and education and freedom of association.

It is less clear that we are in danger of these very freedoms being violated as a result of using the Internet, with secret surveillance by governments, private companies or even criminals of what we do or look at on the Internet. It is therefore even less clear how we can strike a balance here, how we can regulate the Internet in such a way that allows us to draw on its benefits, while limiting its obvious dangers.

My report attempts to answer these questions. Among other things:

- firstly, it calls for a European initiative to create a global Internet Bill of Rights;
- secondly, it signals the need for an effective but proportional fight against old and new forms of cybercrime, such as identity theft and the protection of intellectual property rights, while pointing out that legislation must not result in the systematic surveillance of all citizens, suspects and non-suspects, right and wrong, because this would, of course, be a blatant invasion of their privacy;
- thirdly, as regards citizens' right of access to the Internet, it calls on governments to ensure such access to the poorest citizens in the remotest regions;
- fourthly, it emphasises that e-illiteracy will be the new illiteracy of the 21st century, just as not knowing how to read or write was in the 20th century and that access to the Internet is therefore a fundamental right which is equivalent to the right to access to schooling;
- fifthly, it calls for measures to limit consent from users, a major issue which I shall now discuss.

The question of consent is extremely complicated and, if we do not resolve it right now, it will come back to haunt us. Let me give you an example: a few decades ago, no-one knew which newspaper I read; only my family and perhaps a few of my friends. That is why – and this is especially true during a dictatorship – the secret services tried to find out, so that they could put me on file. So that they could say Mr Lambrinidis reads such and such a newspaper, so he must be a Communist or he must be pro-American. Today, every time I read a newspaper, I leave a trail. This means that private companies can compile similar 'files', can create a profile for me, of the policies in which I believe, of my eating habits and even of my health. Does the fact that I visit these websites mean that I consent to my society going back 40 years?

We urgently need to pass sensible laws which strike a balance between combating crime and protecting rights in the electronic age. This balance appears difficult but it is not. It is feasible. We need to stop dealing with cyberspace as if it were something outside our daily life, something separate. It is our life. That means that any rights or barriers which apply to the police and private companies inside the Internet must also apply outside, otherwise we run the risk of abolishing freedoms for the sake of security and, ultimately, of having neither freedoms nor real security.

To close, my warmest thanks to the shadow rapporteurs of all the political groups whom I see here in the House for their very considerable support. My thanks to all the MEPs in the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs for the unanimous support which this report received from all parties. I look forward to its being approved by plenary.

**Ján Figel**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I would like to thank not only Parliament in general but especially Mr Stavros Lambrinidis for his important report, which provides very timely input to the promotion of fundamental freedoms and security on the Internet.

Whilst the Internet has acquired a stronger and stronger weight in modern societies and economies, impacting in many areas of our lives, the tremendous pace of technological development raises, at the same time, significant challenges which need to be duly addressed if we want the full opportunities of the Internet and the information society to unravel.

We particularly share Mr Lambrinidis's concerns on the protection of personal data, an issue which is of utmost relevance to Internet users. Let me assure you that the Commission continues to be committed to strengthening citizens' fundamental rights and fundamental freedoms, and in particular to ensuring a high level of protection of privacy and personal data, both on the Internet and in other contexts.



I firmly believe that the pursuit of adequate privacy protection does not stand in opposition to the need to ensure greater security. Indeed, these two objectives can and should be pursued in synergy.

The stability and security of the Internet were our priorities during the World Summit on the Information Society in 2005, and we are continuing with these objectives. These issues will shortly be presented through a new strategy for the protection of Critical Information Infrastructures and in order to enhance Europe's preparation against large-scale cyber attacks and disruptions. This strategy includes an action plan which defines a road map to promote principles and guidelines for the stability and resilience of the Internet.

Strategic cooperation with third countries will be developed within the strategy, notably in information society dialogues, as a vehicle to build global consensus in this area. At the same time, the Commission is convinced that it is necessary to ensure respect for fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression on the Internet.

Again, these two goals are not mutually exclusive. Your report further elaborates on the possibility of working on global standards, data protection and freedom of speech. The Commission participates in the yearly international conferences of Data Protection Commissioners and follows the ongoing work on possible future international standards on privacy and personal data protection. We are strongly committed to promoting the high standards of protection which EU citizens enjoy at present.

Regarding freedom of speech, the Commission will continue to promote this fundamental right in international forums. New legislation in this area would not be considered as the way forward for the time being. We already have a number of binding international instruments on this subject. At this point in time, I believe that it would be useful to engage in effective reflection on the proper ways to enforce the existing legislation. So it is about implementation. This reflection should also include and help global commercial players to better define their roles and their responsibilities in the promotion and strengthening of the fundamental freedom of expression in the global online environment of the Internet.

Let me conclude with a general comment. I believe we should tackle the serious challenges that this report brings to light and make sure that the concrete exercise of rights and freedoms is not unduly limited on the Internet.

For example, an essential element of the Commission's strategy for a secure information society, since 2006, has been to have a holistic approach, ensuring coordination amongst stakeholders but also recognising that each of them has specific roles and responsibilities to fulfil. We all have responsibilities to make sure that our actions on the Internet do not unduly limit – and, if possible, that they promote – the security of others on this medium.

It is, therefore, in the spirit of cooperation that the Commission welcomes and supports this report.

**Manolis Mavrommatis**, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Culture and Education*. – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, first I should like to thank the rapporteur, Stavros Lambrinidis, for the important report which he has handled and for his objective in endeavouring to protect personal data, a principle which the majority of us respect, including me personally.

As draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Culture and Education, I consider that the Internet is an exceptional platform for the dissemination of culture and knowledge; I point this out in order to congratulate and thank all my honourable friends in the Committee on Culture who voted in favour of my opinion.

Examples, such as digital museum archives, electronic books, music and audiovisual material, can be accessed by people in every corner of the world. Unfortunately, however, in the vast world of cyberspace, cultural material is not adequately protected. Piracy tends to be the rule rather than the exception and it is authors who lose out from the illegal distribution of their intellectual property. In other words, poets, songwriters, composers, producers and everyone involved in creativity in general.

There are three things which help piracy to spread: technological facilities and the cheap cost of copying, adverse economic conditions and the penetration of the Internet.

Amendment 4 restores the recommendation of the Committee on Culture for there to be a fair balance between the rights and the freedoms of all parties concerned and for all the fundamental rights of persons, based on the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, to be safeguarded and protected within the framework of the broad use of the Internet.

That is why we support this amendment, which reiterates that fundamental rights are all of equal value and must all be protected in the same way.

**Nicolae Vlad Popa**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (RO) This report is the result of collaboration between the members of this Chamber. This is why I would like to thank my fellow Members, especially Mr Lambrinidis, as well as Mrs Gacek, Mr Alvaro, Mrs Segelström and Mr Mavrommatis, whom I had the pleasure of working with, also as shadow rapporteur.

I think that the report covers the main topics of interest on strengthening security and fundamental human rights on the Internet, referring to the protection of the rights stipulated by the specific regulations in force, including their digital aspects, and to the acknowledgement and development of new principles for controlling the Internet.

The text maintains a good balance between the protection of the freedom of expression and of privacy and the need to continue the fight against cybercrime, also highlighting the major problem of excessive monitoring of Internet activity, which can degenerate into a new form of censorship.

The report also deals with the issues concerning the Internet's educational aspect, e-learning, the definition of digital identity and the recognition of users' rights over the content they have posted on the Internet, as well as the protection of data of a personal nature, in the sense of offering the opportunity for users to delete their own posted content permanently.

These are sensitive subjects in the current climate where social networks are increasingly populated by young people, but not exclusively. This is why I have urged fellow Members to vote for this report with complete conviction.

**Inger Segelström**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (SV) Mr President, I would like to begin by thanking Mr Lambrinidis and everyone else in the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs who has made this such a constructive and well thought-out report. I would also like to express my thanks for the support I received for my amendments. This constitutes support precisely for strengthening the rights of users and consumers.

The section on the applications of the technology – monitoring Internet traffic, for example – is very important. It is good that the European Parliament is now saying emphatically that privacy and the human rights of citizens take priority.

The report makes clear that Internet traffic may only be monitored where there is suspicion of a crime and as part of a legal process following a court ruling. This will be an important basis for the monitoring of civil rights. The report brings necessary measures not a moment too soon.

I am surprised at the amendments tabled by Members from the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats and the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe. Their proposals weaken civil rights and the privacy of citizens. They have not looked critically at what technical progress could bring if we do not pay attention.

Of course crimes on the Internet and crimes that exploit children and young people must be combated. However, the key issues in this context are, for example, the fact that the Swedish Conservative Government has adopted the so-called FRA law, a law that deals with the scrutiny of citizens who are not criminals and have not committed a crime, whereas it should instead be the citizens who scrutinise us. The report is a strong criticism of the Swedish Conservative Government, which defied all criticism and introduced this FRA law in Sweden. The authorities in Sweden now have the right to monitor Internet traffic without there being either a suspicion of crime or any risk to the safety of individuals or society.

Following the decision tomorrow, I assume that the Swedish Government will reconsider and ensure that the law is changed. Otherwise they will be in opposition to the European Parliament and the elected representatives of the 27 countries of the EU.

**Alexander Alvaro**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, I should like to start by congratulating Mr Lambrinidis on a job well done. He fully involved all the shadow rapporteurs during the drafting of this report and did his very best to reach compromises.

This report, which addresses the important questions of the information society, is an important step towards creating an Internet which guarantees both security for our citizens and their fundamental freedoms. The

borders between freedom and security do not end at the borders of the virtual world. He has taken account in his report of the fight against cybercrime, child pornography, identity theft and fraud, as well as copyright violation. He has tried to involve Europol and makes clear that the current laws of the physical world must also apply to the virtual world.

At the same time, he has managed to strike a balance between the protection of civil rights, freedom of expression, data protection and the right to the complete deletion of data on the Internet. Up to the present day, the Internet does not forget. Some of us can be glad that the Internet did not exist when we were still 13, 14, 15 or 16 years old, when we committed the sins of youth which we would not now want to find on YouTube or Facebook.

He has highlighted the need for access to information and, more importantly, access to the Internet and respect for intellectual property. I am well aware that for many Members the report does not go far enough in respect of the protection of intellectual property and copyright. Let us work on that with the IP enforcement directive and highlight these points in that directive.

This report makes clear that censorship on the Internet or blocking access to the network, as planned or already implemented by some Member States in Europe, are measures not worthy of our enlightened society and it also makes clear that the European Union is not following the example of totalitarian states and cutting its citizens off from information or feeding them information on a need to know basis.

I am delighted that we have a balanced report here which takes account of the demands of an information society and I would be delighted if both my and other groups gave this report the broadest possible support tomorrow, so that we can develop an Internet in the interests of society.

**Roberta Angelilli**, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, other Members have already said this, but I would like to reiterate that the Internet should not be criminalised or censored because it provides opportunities for communication, socialisation, information and knowledge, but there is nonetheless a need to develop a global strategy to combat cybercrime.

In particular, we must protect children and educate and inform parents and teachers about the new potential dangers of the web. These are objectives on which Europe must be able to act effectively and I would like to congratulate the rapporteur on a good job well done.

However, despite the penalties and fairly high level of protection afforded by Member States' legislation against online abuse and sexual exploitation of children and child pornography, the standard of child protection must be raised further, not least because of the ongoing development of new technologies, especially the Internet, and the use of new forms of online grooming of children by paedophiles.

It was for precisely this reason that I chose to table an amendment to the report, explicitly calling on Member States to update their legislation on the use of the Internet by minors, in particular by introducing the offence of grooming, as defined by the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, of October 2007.

**Eva-Britt Svensson**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (SV) Mr President, I would like to thank Mr Lambrinidis very much for succeeding in respecting safety on the Internet while at the same time protecting and respecting the invaluable fundamental rights. I assume that protection of our fundamental rights as per this report will also receive support when we take a decision on the telecom package. There is a clear connection between this report and the telecom package. I hope that we are also in agreement at that time that it is important to protect civil liberties.

As several Members have already said, the Internet has brought with it greatly increased opportunities for the freedom of expression. Citizens who do not normally have access to the discussion forums of the large-scale media can stir up opinion and pursue issues. It is a new arena for the exchange of opinions that is sorely needed for political mobilisation. It provides greater opportunities for citizens to scrutinise the decision-makers. What is important is that citizens have the opportunity themselves to scrutinise legislators and other holders of power. It has brought about increased knowledge. Most of all, we also have the opportunity for exchange and to make contact with people from different cultures and different parts of the world.

When we discuss this issue it is also important to ensure that we have real freedom of expression and guarantees against censorship and control of opinions, information and opinion-forming, for example. Fundamental human rights, the freedom of expression and privacy, are important elements of democracy

and must be both protected and respected at all times. The Internet is therefore an important factor in our democratic society today and so should it remain.

I would therefore like us to vote against Amendment 5, which seeks to remove the text 'ensure that the expression of controversial political beliefs through the Internet is not subject to criminal prosecution'. If this amendment should get through it would represent a setback for democracy. Who decides what constitute controversial political beliefs? It is a democratic right to be able to express different political views.

The right of Internet users to be able to delete permanently personal data found on websites is also important. Of course we must combat crime on the Internet, like all criminal activity, but it must also be done in a legally certain manner in accordance with criminal law, as with other types of crime.

Internet crime committed against children is particularly serious. In this regard we follow the Council of Europe Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse. Other groups have also been affected. I am thinking, in particular, about women who have fallen victim to the sex slave trade. The sex industry today uses the Internet and the sexual violence that many women and children suffer. In this context I would like to remind my fellow Members of the fact that they can support a written declaration that is seeking to put a stop to this violence, and that is Written Declaration No 94.

Finally, I would also like to mention the danger that we have seen with regard to the so-called war on terror. This has, on occasion, led to unreasonable government restrictions on the freedom of expression and the privacy of individuals. These restrictions have resulted in a security risk for citizens. The security services of various countries have traded the personal data that they have obtained by monitoring the Internet. This has put people's lives at risk, for example where someone is forced to flee from their home country on account of political oppression. I urge you to give great backing to this report tomorrow.

**Hélène Goudin**, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (SV) Mr President, I am fascinated on a daily basis by how fantastic a tool the Internet is, but, however much the EU might contest it, a global network of computers is not a European one. To believe that a decree from Brussels or Strasbourg could change that is quite incredible and very detached from reality. It may justifiably be argued that the EU is the wrong forum to solve the type of problem highlighted in this report. Allow me to give you a couple of examples. The report compares the right to the Internet with the right to attend school. That is a bit rich when we know that the right or opportunity to attend school is not a foregone conclusion in many EU countries.

Protection and the promotion of the rights of individuals on the Internet and the balance that should be found between privacy and security are extremely important, but these are likewise not issues that should be resolved at EU level. This is an international problem that must primarily be dealt with at international level.

Another issue that is close to my heart is file sharing. Here we are urged to apply common criminal measures to protect intellectual property rights. I firmly believe that it is the Member States that should decide what constitutes a crime and what, if any, consequences it may have. For the EU to completely follow the music and film industry's line is utterly unacceptable, particularly in view of the fact that we are attempting to criminalise an entire generation.

Finally, I would like to say that any attempt to legislate in these areas is going to be difficult, as technology changes much more rapidly than politics.

**Urszula Gacek (PPE-DE)**. – Mr President, I would like to thank the rapporteur for taking on my suggestion, encouraging computer software manufacturers to take additional measures blocking access to pornographic and violent websites.

This is a matter of particular concern to parents. It is a fact of life that our children are often more computer literate than we are. Parents may be vaguely aware of the fact that they can activate filters in Internet browsers, but this demands a modicum of knowledge of browser software, as well as a conscious decision to activate the system.

If, by default, the filter was pre-installed in the 'on' position, it is probable that many more children – including the youngest, who increasingly use the Internet unsupervised – would be protected from unwittingly stumbling on sites which have a damaging influence on them. I appeal to manufacturers to respond to our suggestion. They should not see this as an imposition or a restriction but rather as a marketing opportunity. If I had the choice between buying two comparable computers and saw one displaying a child-friendly label, confirming that filters had been pre-installed, I as a parent would choose that product. In time, parents making such a

choice would ensure that this became the industry standard. I truly hope that we can achieve this with the cooperation of the industry.

**Alin Lucian Antochi (PSE).** – (RO) The Internet has now reached a new phase, being regarded not only as a vital tool in business, but also as a global forum for expressing different opinions.

However, this development has generated ambivalent attitudes. On the one hand, the Internet continues to offer fantastic opportunities, acting as a catalyst for educational, cultural, economic and social development, while on the other hand, it is perceived as a platform which can be used to promote violent behaviour which has an impact on people's freedom and security.

In addition, because of its global nature, the Internet has also become a danger to privacy, as citizens' Internet activities are often subject to monitoring by governments, police authorities, companies and even by criminals and terrorists, sometimes even resulting in identity theft.

In this situation, the legal line must be identified which distinguishes between protecting citizens' security and fundamental freedoms on the Internet and unrestricted monitoring of their activities by various authorities so that the legislation becomes effective and not excessive in the measures taken to combat crime. This is why it is necessary to define global standards for data protection, security and freedom of expression through continuous cooperation between Internet operators and Internet users.

It is also important, and in this respect I fully support the rapporteur, to examine and establish the limits of consent requested of users, whether by governments or private companies, in terms of giving up part of their privacy in return for certain Internet services or privileges.

Last but not least, I believe, Mr President, that Member States must make efforts to bring their national legislations into line on protecting fundamental rights on the Internet, as this is something which may also help outline a joint strategy for combating cyber crime or terrorism.

I wish to extend my congratulations to Mr Lambrinidis and the whole team who contributed to producing this report.

**Sophia in 't Veld (ALDE).** – (NL) Mr President, I should like to add my compliments to those already paid to the rapporteur, who has prepared a fantastic report. I wish briefly to pick out a couple of points.

First of all, in recent years we have seen the storage of personal data by companies and governments increasing hand over fist. Governments make use of company databases, but we still see different levels of protection applying to the first and third pillars – which I find extremely worrying.

The second point – and I am pleased that my amendment on this has been adopted – is that criminals too, of course, turn the Internet to their advantage in all kinds of ways. Identity theft is growing alarmingly, and so we must ask the European Commission to create a contact point for this kind of theft – not only as a way of exchanging information but also for the benefit of victims.

Thirdly, global standards are indeed necessary. Work is also under way on these, but such standards must be drawn up in the course of an open democratic process and not by European Commission officials negotiating with officials from the United States.

Finally, whilst the European Commission often speaks fine words about freedom and civil rights, I have noticed that, led by Commissioner Frattini and also with the help of the Council, countless measures have been taken in recent years that make it possible to spy on citizens round the clock and to restrict their liberties. It is high time we evaluated what has been happening and the kind of consequences being produced. Therefore, I wish to conclude with a suggestion to the Commission: I would urge it to introduce a separate Commissioner for civil rights and liberties in the coming term.

**President.** – I gave Ms in't Veld a little bit of extra time because she has 400 followers on Twitter. I have only got nine. Four hundred and fifty now.

**Jean-Paul Gauzès (PPE-DE).** – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I speak on behalf of our fellow Member, Mr Toubon.

I should like firstly to thank Mr Popa, who has done an excellent job of trying to reach a compromise that is acceptable to us all, despite the extreme positions adopted on this issue by some members of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament and the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance.

The report raises the important issue of finding a balance between security and fundamental freedoms on the Internet. Indeed, while for many this new technology is synonymous with progress and opportunities, it is not without its risks. For example, it is essential to guarantee freedom of expression and of information on this new medium, while ensuring at the same time that respect is shown for other fundamental freedoms, such as the protection of people's private lives and of personal data, and for intellectual property.

The rapporteur, Mr Lambrinidis, who has done an excellent job, has thus taken into account the new types of Internet crime and the dangers they pose, especially for children. Unfortunately the report remains more ambiguous and even dangerous on other points.

The aim of the amendments tabled by Mrs Hieronymi, Mr Mavrommatis and Mr Toubon, is to make it clear that attacks on fundamental freedoms should not be supported in the name of freedom of expression and of information.

The Member States and Internet operators should keep some room for manoeuvre so that they can find the best solutions for ensuring that the rights of some do not completely prevent those of others from being exercised. Laws must apply to the Internet as they do everywhere else. The Internet cannot be a virtual space where an act that constitutes an offence in the real world is deemed permissible, and even protected simply by the effect of technology and the way in which it is used. The rule of law in our democratic societies is at stake.

**Manuel Medina Ortega (PSE).** – (ES) Mr President, I would like to congratulate my fellow Member and friend, Mr Lambrinidis, on the report that he has drafted and, in addition, on the fairly balanced oral explanation of what he is trying to do with this report.

I have brought along a book, which is the *Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe*. This book was approved by 90% of the Spanish electorate and by the majority of the national parliaments of the countries to which we MEPs belong.

It did not enter into force because of certain difficulties of a political nature, but this text is a key one, because it incorporates – and personally I see this as a mandate from my voters – the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. I believe that the charter brings together the principles set out by Mr Lambrinidis in his report.

Firstly, the Internet is an area of freedom, modernity and equal opportunities, where people communicate with each other, mix with and provide information to each other, exchanging ideas and sharing knowledge. This right is recognised by Article II-71 of the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe.

Secondly, the Internet ought to protect freedom and the development of the information society in a way that is compatible with respect for intellectual property and protection for users' privacy. Specifically, the right to intellectual property and also users' rights to privacy are recognised by Article II-77 of the draft European constitution.

Thirdly, we need to seek an appropriate balance between the protection of rights, the fostering of content on offer and the legal market in digital content on the Internet, and development which is open to the new corporate models appearing on the net. We also have to deal with the protection of personal data, which is recognised by Article II-68 of the draft constitution.

I therefore believe that the Lambrinidis report covers these concerns. Clearly, it does not dwell on the details of the conditions, requirements, consequences and sanctions arising from the misuse of the Internet, but I believe that that would be appropriate for a legislative document, and at the moment that is not what we are debating.

**Claire Gibault (ALDE).** – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, as an artist, I am saddened, I am very shocked by the lack of interest shown in the cultural sector by Mr Lambrinidis's report.

I would stress that we should at all times safeguard and protect individuals' rights as a whole, in accordance with the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, and should guarantee the rights and freedoms of all parties concerned. The information society is an increasingly important economic sector, but also a major source of innovation and creativity that underpins the modern-day economy.

This means, among other things, that access for all to a diverse culture and to education must be guaranteed within a context of respect for Community law and that the value of the creative work of authors and

performers, including in the digital economy, must be duly recognised. However, such recognition means remunerating them for all the ways in which their creative contribution is used so that they can make a living from their profession and can be completely free to devote themselves to it.

In this context, intellectual property rights must not be seen as an obstacle but indeed as a driver of creative activities, especially in the context of developing new on-line services.

On the other hand, I believe that, even on the Internet, racist, hate-filled or revisionist discourse must be prosecuted. Freedom of expression must be exercised responsibly. The right balance must be struck between freedom of access to the Internet, respect for privacy and protection of intellectual property. I therefore call on you, ladies and gentlemen, to endorse my Amendments 2 to 6.

**Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou (PPE-DE).** – (EL) Mr President, it has almost become a habit for us to examine a report on the Internet in every plenary. This is a good thing, because it gives the Member States and the European Union an opportunity at last to address effectively these topical issues relating to the use of the Internet. I congratulate my honourable friend Mr Lambrinidis for agreeing to include the members' amendments in his very extensive report, thereby adding several new aspects to the issue at debate.

Last time, Parliament examined questions relating to video games on the Internet and the dangers to minors and the financing mechanism of the European Union for a safe Internet for minors. Today's debate is convincing me more and more that, in the final analysis, everything comes down to a question of legal approach.

That is why I think that the only thing that we should call for is a study at legal level into the multiple problems which arise from the use of the Internet. The report will therefore be useful as a catalogue which needs to be examined in depth by the legal experts, who will then implement the research work which will provide the various stakeholders mentioned in the report with the tools to draft legislation which will safeguard the principle of the rule of law as regards the use of the Internet in a democratic manner. Naturally we cannot speak of democracy when not every citizen has the right, regardless of their financial standing, to use the Internet. That is not how things stand today, but we hope that one day it will be.

**Katrin Saks (PSE).** – (ET) Ladies and gentlemen, can you imagine life without the Internet? I, for one, no longer can. I come from Estonia, which is a world leader in Internet availability. This is probably also why we have greater experience of the dangers of the Internet, from the cyber-war that targeted our country two years ago to the fact that, according to international research, our children have fallen prey to cyber-persecution more than children in many other countries.

Through several of the reports it has passed in recent years, the European Parliament has actually sought to answer the question 'What is the Internet?' A more relevant question today would be whether the Internet world is a separate space, as it were – a virtual world – that is not part of real life, or whether it is a part of the public sphere. This is also discussed by Mr Lambrinidis in his report, in which he states that our main task is to find a suitable balance between privacy and security.

Freedom of expression is immediately brought up whenever the restriction of Internet freedom is mentioned – freedom of expression is the right to disseminate ideas, opinions, convictions and other information, but it also involves responsibility. I would like to thank the rapporteur and hope that we will all have the strength to find the answer to this question: what is the Internet; can it be regulated, and if so, how should that be done? Since the Internet is one of the clearest signs of globalisation, our approach to the issue must also be international.

**Filiz Hakaeva Hyusmenova (ALDE).** – (BG) Ladies and gentlemen, the content of this report fully lives up to its title. It covers the rights in the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and aims to protect children from crime. Congratulations to the rapporteur.

The Internet is a world where facts appear which are not explicitly defined as violations of rights and freedoms or as crimes against them. Opportunities for expression, finding out information and social contacts are often replaced by the direct opposite of these. The Internet provides fertile ground for bypassing regulations and having no restrictions on expression.

In conditions offering anonymity and without any controls, the upshot of this is disclaimed responsibility when it comes to choosing and using linguistic terms. These terms are often infiltrated by slang, cynicism

and even vulgarity. They evolve into a language of distrust and hatred, pass into everyday usage, become a model to imitate and mould a certain attitude.

Such language does not contribute to a child's social, spiritual and moral welfare and does not lead to culture and values. This is why I am focusing my attention on the need for a separate analysis of the language used on the Internet and its influence on the personal development of the child.

**Csaba Sógor (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, I am one of those people who would like to ensure the continuity of Internet freedom. The creators of the Internet had great faith in the basic goodness of humankind, and I tend to share that faith. Unfortunately, very often with the Internet, just as in any human society, we have to face the sad fact that regulations are needed to make sure that those who cannot protect themselves are protected too. The safety of an individual is a fundamental right, just as much as the right to free speech and to self-expression.

Abominations such as child pornography and paedophilia, as well as Internet fraud, must be stopped. We cannot tolerate Internet predators of any kind, and while we are discussing this topic of great interest I would like to draw your attention to a much less discussed fact: the Internet is also full of sites that incite hatred, violence and intolerance towards all kinds of minorities, among them ethnic minorities. It is an aspect of the Internet that needs our attention. We have to make sure that minorities also feel protected. It is unacceptable that many extremist groups use the Internet to instigate hatred and xenophobia.

**Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN).** – (PL) Mr President, I would like to draw attention to several problems associated with the Internet.

Firstly, I wish to refer to protection of personal data and protection of confidentiality in connection with e-voting, which enables people with disabilities to exercise their rights as citizens. Secondly, I should mention protection of intellectual property in connection with artistic material which can easily be passed on via the Internet. Another matter concerns the protection of children from harmful content, such as scenes of brutality and pornography, through appropriate filters and educating parents. The fourth matter is the problem of protecting children from paedophiles and kidnappers, and also the opportunity to track down criminals using traces they have left on the Internet, such as a paedophile's address, or recordings of crimes made using mobile telephones and then posted on the Internet. If the statements made on the Internet by a young man in Germany had not been disregarded, his victims would still be alive, namely the pupils and teachers he shot. The next question, which is in fact the most important, concerns respecting freedom of speech, and here the law should be respected just as it is in every other area. Some of these problems require new technical solutions. I congratulate the rapporteur.

**Ján Figel', Member of the Commission.** – Mr President, I should like to thank all the speakers for their committed and interesting contributions. I just want to add two points about what I said at the beginning. We share, for example, concerns on intellectual property rights and the balanced approach which is needed here. This is important for the overall evolution, or development, of the information society. Enforcement of these property rights must be duly balanced with fundamental freedoms or rights, which are enumerated in the report, including the right to privacy, protection of personal data and the right to participate in the information society.

Many of you mentioned children – minors – protection of those who are probably most facing these challenges, and they are sitting at computers daily. Here I would not only recommend but would strongly invite partners, Member States and institutions to cooperate with the Safer Internet Programme 2009-2013. There is quite a significant budget for this. Action has already been taken on undue or illegal content but also against harmful behaviour or conduct such as grooming or bullying, which have been mentioned.

There are many issues, but I would advocate implementation of serious policies on commitments, whether national or international. We have a directive on privacy and electronic communications, a lot of concrete action or action plans, a European programme on protection of critical infrastructures. So that is why I said we do not need more legislation, rather due and appropriate implementation, and then, of course, further evolution and improvements. Somebody rightly mentioned the telecom package. Yesterday's dialogue gives a lot of hope for final agreement.

I want to conclude by saying that this year was declared the European Year of Creativity and Innovation and the motto is: imagine, create, innovate. So we maybe cannot imagine the world without the Internet but it is important to imagine and create and innovate to make it safer and closer to humanity and human responsibility.



**Stavros Lambrinidis, rapporteur.** – Mr President, I would like to thank the Commission. To make the interpreters' lives easier – as I am speaking off text – I will, as an exception, do this in English.

I respect the sensitivities of those who are concerned about the protection of intellectual property. But I have the impression that they are fighting a battle on the wrong report. My report is not a single-issue report; it is a report that talks generally about protecting fundamental rights and security on the Internet and, indeed, that is why it received unanimous support.

However, to the extent that it does refer to intellectual property rights, one would think by listening to some of the speeches that it ignores them. Let me read, in particular, how balanced we have attempted to be with this report. In paragraph 1(k), we urge the Council to 'proceed to the adoption of the directive on criminal measures aimed at the enforcement of intellectual property rights, following an assessment, in the light of contemporary innovation research, of the extent to which it is necessary and proportionate'. This is what the report states.

The amendments, however, are anything but balanced. Amendments that delete what the report calls for – which is a prohibition to the systematic surveillance of all users, whether or not suspect and whether or not guilty, to protect any security right – are anything but balanced. They call on us to totally abandon fundamental rights to protect something else.

Secondly, amendments that delete or water down a very precise and specific reference in the report – that controversial political speech should not be criminalised – are amendments that I oppose, and I am glad to hear that many others in this room do as well.

Political speech has to be protected, especially when it is controversial. If everyone in this room agreed with each other, we would not need freedom of speech legislation. It is when we do not – and especially to protect the speech that may particularly be angering to people like me or others – that we have those laws. This reference in the report does not talk about 'criminal' speech. It talks specifically about 'controversial political' speech. Therefore, I urge everyone to support this particular paragraph in the report and to support the report in general.

I am deeply grateful to everyone – even those who disagree with me – who was here tonight. I know it is not easy. Thank you for your support during all these months leading up to this report. I look forward to working with you on your reports in the future and showing you similar understanding and support.

**President.** – Thank you, colleagues. Thank you, Mr Mavrommatis, for your opinion and special thanks to the rapporteur, Mr Lambrinidis, for his success and for an important and interesting report.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 26 March 2009.

#### **Written statements (Rule 142)**

**Neena Gill (PSE), in writing.** – I congratulate the rapporteur on this report. I believe the Internet has enhanced Europeans' lives in countless ways. It has increased our ability to access knowledge, aided our understanding of the world around us and reinforced our social connections to other people.

But constituents tell me they are also concerned about the dangers of the Internet. We have remarkable technology at our fingertips, but the very freedom it gives us has also left criminals free to abuse the technology. This report, in its focus on fundamental rights, will go a long way to making the Internet safer. We spoke during the last part-session on the need to tackle child pornography. Through balancing liberty and security, the proposals we have voted on today will form a further vital tool in the fight against that threat.

The report also raises concerns about e-literacy. We cannot move forward as a society together if, by promoting new freedoms for some, we restrict the rights of those who are less familiar with the Internet. We have gladly taken on board the profound changes the Internet has wrought. To move even further forward, our focus should now shift to dealing with the negatives of this revolution just as willingly.

**Daciana Octavia Sârbu (PSE), in writing.** – (RO) It is well known that the Internet is increasingly difficult to control, but protecting the fundamental right to privacy on the Internet and ensuring the Internet is more secure must feature among the priorities of Member State governments.

Using the Internet offers countless benefits, but we must not forget the danger of the abuses which some Internet users are exposed to.

This is why, in order to limit these abuses, it is our duty to define standards for data protection, security and freedom of expression at both European and Member State level.

On the other hand, urgent measures must be taken to combat cyber crime and, on this subject, I would like to emphasise the importance of devising a global strategy.

I insist that in the battle against cyber crime there must be active cooperation between the police authorities, Internet service providers, users and other operators involved.

I must finish by saying that the right to education and Internet access, as well as the security and the protection of the rights of those who use Internet services must be guaranteed.

## **12. Follow-up to the Declaration of the Sports Ministers of the European Union at their meeting in Biarritz in November 2008 (debate)**

**President.** – The next item is the debate on the oral question to the Commission on the follow-up to the Declaration of the Sports Ministers of the European Union at their meeting in Biarritz in November 2008 by Katerina Batzeli and Doris Pack, on behalf of the Committee on Culture and Education (O-0049/2009 – B6-0223/2009).

**Katerina Batzeli, author.** – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, the informal council of Sports Ministers in Biarritz in November 2008 was the first real European sports forum at the level of transnational cooperation.

It is a first substantive and important step. Principles such as subsidiarity, autonomy and self-regulation in sport are broadly applied at national and regional level. However, they cannot answer the basic question of whether sport ultimately has a social role or a purely commercial dimension which inevitably turns a sporting activity into a product of the internal market.

Today, the intense commercialisation of sport and the fact that it has been opened up to purely commercial sectors, such as advertising through the mass media, have lent it purely economic attributes. The Court of Justice of the European Communities has already been petitioned several times to rule, in specific cases, on whether a sporting activity is a service of purely social benefit or if, on the contrary, it also encompasses economic aspects which imply that it is a service of general economic interest.

Even though the specific social role of sport does not warrant its general exemption from the rule of Community law, it continues to be recognised and to allow limitations, provided that such exemptions are warranted by the social role of sport per se.

Commissioner, there are certain questions which are also asked in the question by our committee:

- firstly, the same concern about the autonomy of organisations; the autonomy of sports clubs and federations must be safeguarded. However, there are clear cases in which self-regulation does not safeguard equal treatment of all stakeholders;

- secondly, the Commission urgently needs to give us the necessary guidelines on the question of the definition of the concept of a service of general economic interest in sport and the criteria by which the freedoms of the internal market and the rules of competition are imposed and

- thirdly, one issue which may not be mentioned in the oral question but which is an issue of major importance is that which has arisen at national level, namely how to manage the rights of state or private radio and television stations to cover sporting fixtures. The emergence on the market of numerous new private service providers using new technologies and telecommunications was what basically lured many sports federations into making preferential sales of these rights.

However, it should be emphasised at this point that it is precisely because of the social role of sport that it would be a mistake to promote a system from which solidarity between clubs is missing and economic competition is strengthened. Collective bargaining, a matter which Mr Mavrommatis also addresses in his report, should be promoted as the most suitable and fitting solution for the sport sector.

Whatever the solution, Commissioner, it must respect not only the legal procedure of the market, but also the public role of sport and the fact that it is a social commodity and must be accessible to every section of society. The role of and the way in which sports clubs are organised are important factors in how they negotiate with the European Commission and with the Committee on Culture and Education and the European Parliament.

**Ján Figel**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I welcome the statement by the EU Sports Ministers at their meeting last November in Biarritz. They are important in driving the political debate on sport forward step by step and also in strengthening dialogue structures on sport, as was recommended in our white paper in 2007. This White Paper on Sport is making good progress in implementation.

The recent European Council Declaration on Sport, in December, is also a very important step forward and calls for strengthened dialogue with the IOC and the sport movement as a priority.

The Commission has moved swiftly to follow up both calls from the political side. However, dialogue in sport remains a challenging task, given the diversity of sport and the complexity of the sport structures.

In January, in Lausanne, I met with the IOC President, Mr Jacques Rogge, and representatives of international sport federations. The meeting confirmed that sport organisations are really moving away from insisting on general exemptions – ‘block exemptions’ – from the ‘acquis communautaire’ for sport, and are ready to address sport-related topics with legal implications on a theme-per-theme basis. I think this is the appropriate way to achieve more clarity regarding the application of European Union law to sport, in addition to guidance provided in the white paper.

We are also exchanging views with team sports. My services met last week with the main international and European team sport federations to discuss free movement of athletes and non-discrimination aspects in sport. I intend to follow up on these discussions by convening a further meeting at this high level in June.

Finally, good progress has been achieved in setting up EU social dialogue structures in sport. It started in football and I believe it will continue in other sectors.

Regarding the shape of the dialogue framework, there simply cannot be a single, formal framework for consultation with the sport movement. Given the specific organisation of sport, the dialogue must take account of the different levels of sport.

I am committed to a constructive partnership with all actors in sport respecting the autonomy of sport, subsidiarity principles and national and EU legal frameworks. I think this is crucial in shaping the future EU policy framework for sport, which – without prejudging developments regarding the Lisbon Treaty – we might have to implement as early as next year.

Here I also would like to thank the European Parliament, and especially the Committee on Culture and Education, for its support. You also, notably, approved the specific line, or budget, for a preparatory action, which we will soon start to implement. This is an important opportunity and will help us to frame our ideas for the way ahead.

**Manolis Mavrommatis**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, as rapporteur on the White Paper on Sport, I had the opportunity of presenting the position of the European Parliament at the meeting of the Sports Ministers of the Member States of the European Union in Biarritz.

The White Paper emphasises the need to respect the autonomy and specificity of sport. The political debate on sport in Europe often attributes great importance to the so-called ‘European Sport Model’. During discussions with European sports stakeholders about the White Paper on Sport, the Commission and the European Parliament agreed that, come what may, the specificity of sport must be protected. There are two approaches to the specificity of European sport:

- firstly, the specificity of sporting activities and sporting rules and
- secondly, the specificity of the sport structure.

As far as the second specificity is concerned, the European Union recognises the autonomy of sports organisations and of representative structures such as organisations which organise professional championships.

However, in order to achieve improved and more effective coordination, there must be minimum regulation at European level. Thus, both the Commission and European sports stakeholders believe that most of the challenges can be addressed through self-regulation within the framework of respect for the principles of sound management and compliance with Community law.

Generally speaking, the European Union is particularly careful when it comes to its approach to and regulation of sports issues, provided that they are in keeping with European law.

**Emine Bozkurt**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (NL) Mr President, Parliament has worked hard on the White Paper on Sport and has thrown its full support behind the request to the European Commission to produce clear guidelines on the application of European law to sport. Not only Parliament but also sport organisations from throughout Europe have called for clarity. It is inhumane that they are left in the dark because, as things stand, the courts are having to decide time after time on the application of European law. The European Ministers for Sport repeated the request to the Commission in Biarritz.

It is time we heard from the Commission itself whether it has yet started to develop these guidelines. Can it tell us when they will be available? Is it prepared to organise a stakeholder conference involving, among others, representatives of the world of sport and of the European Parliament, in order to launch or accelerate this process and to increase clarity for European sport organisations as quickly as possible?

This brings me to another, closely related, point. Experience has shown that there are currently few or no good mechanisms for dialogue in sport. The clearest example is the discussion on the amended Anti-Doping Code of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). They cling desperately to unworkable rules, and there is absolutely no scope for real dialogue with the European institutions and the sportspeople themselves to seek solutions with the potential to produce an anti-doping policy that is effective and does indeed respect the civil rights and privacy of sportspeople. I have many conversations with sportspeople and stakeholder organisations who complain that there is a lack of consultation and that WADA and the International Olympic Committee lay down requirements but are not themselves receptive to input. WADA's response to yesterday's proposal by UEFA and FIFA alone indicates that an open attitude is completely out of the question.

With regard to anti-doping policy, to what extent has the European Commission taken it upon itself to establish a consultation on the protection of the civil rights of European sportspeople, and how does it believe a consultative framework for sport should be established – both in general and in this kind of matter? Does the Commission also take the view that this consultation must by definition be mutual?

**Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański**, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Mr President, the oral question about further steps to be taken following the Declaration of the Sports Ministers of the European Union at their meeting in Biarritz in November 2008 is justified. Dynamic changes in society are being accompanied by changes in sport. Increasing numbers of problems in contemporary sport remain unanswered, and there is no reaction from employers. We are going through a specific crisis in sport. Among other things, doping and trade in youngsters are on the increase.

Treating sportspeople, especially youngsters, as if they were goods to be traded denies them the opportunity to continue a career outside sport as adults. The Ministers rightly call for young men and women athletes to be given access to a dual curriculum of education and sports, and for efforts to provide the relevant facilities and structures to be increased. The proposed improvements relating to competition among young sportspeople are good, but they must not cause the exclusion of other sportspeople whose performance is better.

There are, therefore, a considerable number of threats and doubts. The threats have a global character, and so reasonable coordination by the Community in the form of consultative frameworks is acceptable, as long as it is not compulsory. There always remains, however, a question about details. Referring directly to the second part of the oral question it can be said that all top-down, institutional coordination seems to supplant national governments. We must not succumb to that temptation.

**Ivo Belet (PPE-DE)**. – (NL) Mr President, UEFA President Michel Platini recently presented to the European Parliament excellent proposals for curbing the scourge of trafficking in youngsters in football. There is a clear link with the question tabled by Mrs Batzeli. The UEFA proposal is clear: end international transfers of young players, of children under 18 years of age. Of course, this is a delicate matter, as many see it as an infringement of freedom of movement in Europe.

The question is which interest and which principle prevails here. The answer, we all agree, is proper training for young people and children both at school and in sports clubs. Trafficking young children, sometimes from one side of Europe to the other, either with or without their family, cannot be conducive to a balanced upbringing. Hence my question to the Commissioner: do you intend to take up the defence of this UEFA proposal, and do you also mean to start up a dialogue on the subject with stakeholders – players, clubs, leagues and federations – in the short term?

I have a second question, too: it concerns the 'six-plus-five' rule, which is also intended to protect young players and to encourage clubs to invest more in training their own youth. The German Institute for European Affairs (INEA), a research institute, recently carried out a study on this at the request of FIFA and found that six-plus-five is indeed acceptable and compatible with European law. Commissioner Figel', what is your view on this? We should also like for you, for the European Union, to enter into dialogue on this with the sports governing bodies in the light of the specific nature of football on which we all agree, and also, of course, looking ahead to the Treaty of Lisbon.

**Christopher Heaton-Harris (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, I thank the Commissioner very much indeed for his opening statement. What everyone is asking about is legal certainty.

I have a couple of questions based on that and also one on the Treaty of Lisbon, should it be ratified. As a good Conservative Euro-sceptic, I should say that I hope it never is.

But I was just wondering, what will this mean – if it is ratified – for sporting organisations and governing bodies? Many of these governing bodies believe that it will recognise concretely their specificity, the specificity of sport. So, Commissioner, could you tell us how this recognition in the new Treaty will help sport? Will sport then get derogations from different aspects, like employment law or other laws, that they actually want to try and achieve?

On legal certainty, there are so many questions that the Commission should and could be helping sporting organisations with now. Should companies from overseas be investing huge amounts of money into sporting clubs within Europe? I have no problem with this. I actually see it as direct inward investment and, therefore, a very positive thing. But sporting organisations and many governing bodies think this is a bad thing. So, what is your interpretation of a sporting organisation banning such a practice?

As my colleague, Mr Belet, said, UEFA is currently proposing to ban transfers of under-18s across borders. European law recognises a worker as someone essentially with the minimum age of 16, so what happens when a 17-year old challenges the fact that he was not able to move to a big club in a country that was not his own, in the current situation that we find ourselves in?

Home-grown players; 'six plus five' with FIFA: what is the clarification of those two points? Also, football is always very interested in these subjects and it seems to drive the agenda. However, all of these matters actually affect polo and rugby union and table tennis players – all sports are affected.

Are we looking at a wider range of sports? Will the Commission actually open up a forum where sport can come and talk to the Commission openly about some of the problems it has and get some of these questions answered on a regular basis – no matter with the Treaty of Lisbon or without?

**President.** – Commissioner, you have the floor – bearing in mind that we have had many questions, but there actually only two on the oral question.

**Ján Figel', Member of the Commission.** – Mr President, that is true. Usually questions are easier than answers and usually there are more questions than answers, but I believe that together we can find more and better answers.

This is all about cooperation, not only between Parliament and the Commission, but especially with the world of sport associations, federations, Member States and stakeholders. If they are responsible and responsive they come together and look for solutions which are acceptable and compatible with the law. Otherwise we adapt and change the law, whether at national or European level. So that is how we should proceed. I look forward to maintaining this approach.

I think much has changed since 2007. I do not want to repeat myself or to once again recommend reading the white paper. There is a shorter version and also a version with annexes. The first time we tried, we put together descriptions of all cases and all decisions related to sport, which made a kind of map showing how sport relates to European Community law or policies. Of course we are proposing further guidelines. We

have proposed – and in Biarritz I introduced – physical activity guidelines, which could help to promote the volume, intensity and quality of physical education training in our societies and especially in schools. It should be adopted by the Council of Health Ministers. We do not have a Sports Ministers' Council, but in fact the main reason is that it is related to public health.

We cannot have one large specific set of guidelines for everything. I have said that we can address specific concrete issues theme by theme rather than case by case. Next I hope we can deal with licensing – how to make a more transparent and more sustainable system and create a set of principles for our licensing policies. Of course UEFA or its partners should have the concrete responsibility for this, but we can help. It is in our interest to promote principles such as self-regulation, transparency and sustainability, and we can make several other important contributions to improvements in licensing.

We will support the Anti-Doping Conference. This offers a great opportunity to say much more on this, but I am against the establishment of another agency or a European WADA. I have also said publicly that there is NADAS, the European network of cooperation between national anti-doping agencies in our countries, whether they are public or private. Europe needs to be more active and more united. There are lessons to be learned from WADA and we should do so quickly. There are disputes. We have spoken to Ms Bozkurt about this code of conduct. Today I saw on television Sepp Blatter and John Fahey, the Chairman of WADA, discussing how anti-doping and football competitions could go hand in hand after the code of conduct has been adopted, and there is a problem.

So on anti-doping I think we need more internal cooperation in order to make Europe more credible. We have the Council of Europe, we have a convention on this. We have many reasons to be more coherent in our contribution to the world of anti-doping or a world which fights more efficiently against doping. You have said that dialogue is not easy in this area – I mean not just regarding anti-doping but sport issues in general. It is true that sometimes it is difficult, even at international and Europe level or between different disciplines or segments, but I can assure you that a culture of dialogue and openness and a readiness to engage in dialogue is growing.

I took part in the opening of the EOC office in Brussels, which is very close to Rond Point Schuman and to the Commission, Council and Parliament. This means the permanent presence of the European Olympic Committees and the IOC in the European institutions for the purpose of dialogue and cooperation. It says something about the importance of this and the mutual readiness to work in dialogue to find solutions.

With regard to international transfers, I am also in favour of the protection of youngsters and the promotion of training and education. In 2001 we adopted decisions or agreements on international transfers. The general age level is about 18 years, but in Europe there is a specific arrangement for the period between 16 and 18 years of age. Unless severe or very critical problems become evident, we do not need to change but rather to promote better and more training and to work with talent in Europe.

That is why, for example, we supported the home-grown player rule because this mainly promotes this sort of treatment. Of course it is not an absolute rule but it concerns specific arrangements. We give preference to, or promote, specificity under certain rules. We have said that we will come back to this decision in five years' time to see what the real impact has been – not just the theory – of this new rule. 'Six plus five', as it stands now, is simply non-compatible with EU laws, as has been shown in a study. We have spoken to them and have read the papers but there is nothing new there. In substance we cannot say that we agree with the study.

But I have to say that dialogue – especially following recent events in Biarritz and Lausanne – is real and very concrete between the European Commission and its partners, including FIFA. On this specific matter of 'six plus five' we will continue further. Even FIFA says that there is no reason for a hurried approach but rather a need for very concrete and credible answers. They do not want to get into formal disputes. We agreed to make room for more expertise and for more exchange. I think that is very beneficial.

On the Lisbon Treaty and the recognition of specificity, two special clauses are included in Article 149 of the Treaty on European Union regarding education, youth and sport. It also concerns the level of competence. This is only supportive action so the Union will not have any power to decide but only to support Member States in the promotion of the integrity of sportsmen and sportswomen. It could be helpful to organise a Sports Council as we have for education and youth, which will perhaps be the enlarged format. It could help to build the first EU sport policy and sport programme but will not mean a change of architecture or a general derogation. Theme-by-theme specificity, which is real and does not mean business as usual, must be defensible vis-à-vis the system or the European Court.

My opinion only reflects the Commission's opinion. Our opinion is not the final one when it comes to explanation of European Union law. Especially in this area many issues are interlinked. We would like to promote an increased legal certainty, which is why we started the process. The white paper is there and the Pierre de Coubertin Action Plan helps to make it more readable and more concrete but it is a process. With the Treaty we can help even more but, without it, we will have to stay only at the level we have reached now.

I spoke about transfers under 18 years of age. With regard to this, FIFA made a very good decision, not only on transfers but on the promotion and protection of minors in sport – in football – and I think this is the right approach. So in some areas UEFA sets a good example, for instance concerning home-grown players, and in some areas FIFA sets a good example, for instance concerning the protection of minors. I think we can help both and it is important that this is also compatible within the world of football.

Last but not least – and I am sorry to have given a long answer – with regard to a forum on sport, which Mr Heaton-Harris mentioned, we have actually established this. In Biarritz we had a ministerial conference with major partners, but before that there was a forum with more than 200 stakeholders from very different areas of sport. It was a very positive, communicative and open forum and we want to continue with this. I believe that, under the Swedish, or especially under the Spanish, Presidency, we can hold another one to reflect on the progress we have made and to make a commitment to go further.

That is where I was when I started answering the questions – working together in a transparent, regular and credible manner. If that is the case, Europe is a leading area where sport is protected and promoted, and where we fight against negative phenomena such as doping, corruption, violence and racism around sport. I would like to invite you to share this approach because we do not have a better one. We do not want to impose anything again but rather to propose, protect and support. That is my answer.

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

### 13. Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships (debate)

**President.** – The next item is the debate on the oral question to the Commission on the negotiations taking place in May 2009 under the auspices of the International Maritime Organisation (IMO) on the conditions for the entry into force of the Convention for the Safe and Environmentally Sound Recycling of Ships by Johannes Blokland, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (O-0028/2009 – B6-0224/2009).

**Johannes Blokland, author.** – (NL) Mr President, back in the plenary of May last year, the European Parliament took a clear stance against the humanly degrading and environmentally destructive situations involved in the dismantling of ships. Yet, on various shores in South Asia, enormous seagoing ships for scrapping are still being dismantled under conditions that are both environmentally damaging and humanly degrading. In Bangladesh, for example, not one of the 36 dismantling sites complies with minimum environmental and safety standards.

One good thing is that, for this reason, the High Court ordered the Government of Bangladesh a week ago to close these 'dismantling yards' within two weeks. At the same time, the same High Court banned all ships containing hazardous substances from entering Bangladeshi territory. In addition, the Bangladeshi Minister for the Environment has three months to lay down rules, complying with the Basel Convention, for the recycling of ships for scrapping.

These are the very same important measures advocated by the European Parliament in last year's resolution. One could almost be forgiven for thinking that the Bangladeshi High Court had read our resolution. I see this ruling as an important victory in the fight against the unacceptable practices mentioned earlier. It is essential that the Government of Bangladesh duly follow up on the court rulings. This goes not only for Bangladesh but also for other Asian countries.

I have already remarked that the efforts of individual states will not suffice. A global solution to the problem of ship dismantling is still urgently needed. In May of this year, the International Maritime Organization (IMO) is holding a global conference in Hong Kong, the aim of which is to conclude a global agreement on the recycling of ships for scrapping. The resolution by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety must ensure that a clear signal is sent to the Council and the Commission for the negotiations, with the objective of achieving the best possible result.

With regard to last year's resolution, it is important to add the following five points. Firstly, it must be made clear that ships for scrapping that incorporate hazardous substances should be regarded as hazardous waste and hence should fall under the Basel Convention. Continuing to debate the definitions is not in the interests of environmental protection. Amendment 1, proposed by the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, weakens this position somewhat, and thus I cannot support it. Secondly, running ships aground for on-site dismantling must be regarded as unacceptable. Thirdly, there is a need to take measures – particularly on the phasing out of single-hull tankers – before the end of the lengthy ratification period. Fourthly, certification of dismantling yards is to be welcomed. Fifthly, the measures should continue to include a mandatory fund within the framework of producer responsibility – as the European Parliament stated last year. However, the European Commission appears to be reconsidering this position. I should therefore like to hear Commissioner Figel' tell us that the Commission is still prepared to set up a scrapping fund.

With this resolution, in combination with last year's, the European Parliament is charting a clear course towards a solution to the problems referred to. I welcome the high level of agreement on this issue in the Committee on the Environment and the Committee on Transport and Tourism. It is my hope that the Council and the Commission will make an equally concerted effort to conclude a sound convention in Hong Kong in two months' time, one that safeguards the interests of safety, public health and the environment well. I should like Commissioner Figel' to tell us whether the European Commission will be using this clear course as a key asset in the negotiations at the IMO conference, and also what measures the Commission means to take to ensure timely implementation of the convention to be concluded.

**Ján Figel', Member of the Commission.** – Mr President, first of all I would like to thank Parliament for the very strong interest it has expressed and its continuous involvement with regard to ship dismantling. I would especially like to thank Mr Blokland.

This is a very good starting point for further action at EU level to ensure that the European Union plays its part in solving this international problem. These questions are also timely, in the light of the recent ruling of the Bangladeshi High Court that you have just mentioned and the situation in that country. As a consequence of this ruling, all ship recycling yards will be closed within two weeks as they have not been authorised by the Ministry of the Environment. The import of dangerous ships that are on a list will be banned and all imported ships will have to be pre-cleaned. Finally, Bangladesh will start developing a national law on ship breaking in line with the Basel Convention.

Now, let me turn to the situation closer to home by answering your questions.

Your first question concerns the phasing-out of the beaching method – the method of dismantling end-of-life vessels directly on the beach.

I share your concerns about the serious risks this presents to human health and the environment. We considered the question of introducing an EU ban on beaching in the impact assessment of our strategy. There were some concerns regarding the effectiveness of any such ban since it would be only applicable to EU-flagged ships and could be easily and legally circumvented by changing flag.

We believe it will be more effective to put our efforts into ensuring that the technical guidelines currently being developed to support the future IMO Convention really do lead to safe and environmentally sound ship recycling. The progress in the development of these guidelines is, so far, very encouraging. It is very doubtful in any case that the traditional beaching method would be able to comply with the forthcoming guidelines.

And, regarding your second question, I am pleased to confirm that the Commission is fully committed to working towards an effective and early transposition of the Ship Recycling Convention into EU legislation. The Environment DG has already launched several studies and is working on assessing the impacts of the key elements of the Convention. I believe that it is extremely important for the European Union to show leadership and the high priority that we attach to this issue. This will encourage the ratification by third countries and consequently speed up the entry into force of this convention.

But I share the concerns highlighted in your third question regarding the importance of not undermining the existing Community acquis. We need to safeguard the existing requirements in terms of workers' rights and environmental protection when transposing the IMO Convention. And in our study, we will therefore carefully compare the requirements of the IMO Convention with our Community acquis. And I would like to stress that we will, in particular, ensure that the 2006 Waste Shipment Regulation is not undermined.



**Pilar Ayuso**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, this question, as explained by Mr Blokland, is very timely, given the diplomatic conference on the convention for the recycling of ships, to be held in May. I would therefore like to congratulate Mr Blokland not only on the question but also on the resolution that he has drawn up.

In the *Partido Popular*, we are in favour of combating the bad practices and methods in use in relation to the scrapping of ships and we therefore support Mr Blokland's motion for a resolution; there are, however, certain points that worry us.

The first is paragraph 3 – to which Mr Blokland himself has also already referred – which states that ships should be considered in their entirety as hazardous waste and should therefore fall within the scope of the Basel Convention. We have tabled an amendment on this paragraph, because there are differing interpretations, both within and outside the European Union, and we believe that the Basel Convention should be taken into account and that there should be no conflict with it. It ought to be the future international agreement on the scrapping of ships, however, that defines the details of its application.

Paragraph 14 of the motion for a resolution also calls for a funding mechanism that is based on mandatory contributions from the maritime transport sector. It really seems to us a little premature to be talking at the moment about mandatory contributions when there has so far been no decision, within the International Maritime Organization, as to what the system is to be that is to be adopted through this funding, and it seems to me that the European Commission does not have a clear response on this subject either.

Finally, in paragraph 15 there is a call for the Commission to establish clearly that the state with jurisdiction over waste is the responsible state. We do not believe that this is a matter for the Commission to decide; on the contrary, we think that this ought also to be decided in an international agreement.

What is important is to safeguard consistency between the future agreement on the recycling of ships and the Basel Convention on the Control of Transboundary Movements of Hazardous Wastes and their Disposal, while taking into account not only the Basel Convention but also all the existing legislation.

**Ján Figel**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, thank you for the comments both from Ms Ayuso and Mr Blokland, and especially for the latter's committed work. As I said before, especially regarding waste or hazardous waste, here we need to ensure that implementation of the Convention will be fully in line with Regulation (EC) No 1013/2006 on shipments of waste, which was adopted relatively recently.

Regarding funding, there is no fund or mechanism for the time being. We have launched a study in order to prepare the potential options or solution, and we will soon start public consultations on this issue. So your comments, now and then, will be very welcome, particularly on the establishment of the dismantling fund.

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

The vote will take place on Thursday, 26 March 2009.

#### 14. White Paper on damages actions for breach of the EC antitrust rules (debate)

**President**. – The next item is the report by Klaus-Heiner Lehne, on behalf of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, on the White Paper on damages actions for breach of the EC antitrust rules (2008/2154(INI)) – (A6-0123/2009).

**Klaus-Heiner Lehne**, *rapporteur*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, first may I thank the shadow rapporteurs, especially Mr Sánchez Presedo on behalf of the socialists and Mrs Bowles on behalf of the liberals, who worked very successfully with me on the compromise text being tabled today as a report on the Commission's White Paper. We have managed this time to achieve a very large, cross-group majority and a really viable compromise, which can also be used as a guideline for future work by the European Commission and later, during the law-making process, by Parliament and the Council.

We have made clear in this report – and rightly so – that, where competition rules are infringed, Parliament stands by the view that, according to the European tradition, it is primarily the task of the authorities – both the national competition authorities and the European competition authority – to take action and that this is not creating a second arm, as it were, on an equal footing with official action in the fight against cartels. We have deliberately chosen a different path in Europe from the US, with which the situation is often compared.

There is political consensus in the House that we need a solution for so-called mass claims. If the illegal conduct of individuals damages a very large number of persons who suffer comparatively minor losses, then a separate solution is needed for such proceedings, for which normal procedural law is simply not effective enough. The creation of such an instrument is also part of providing access to law and further developing the internal market. On this we are agreed.

There was also consensus that we do not want a litigation industry to develop in Europe as it has in America, with turnover of USD 240 billion, which is ultimately of no advantage to consumers and, as we all know from simply reading the relevant books, mainly profits American law firms. None of this has much to do with the rule of law, nor do we want it to. We agreed that the procedural torture instruments of the American system should not be adopted in Europe. This applies in particular to the taking of evidence and costs. That is a very important point.

We also agreed that we were basically of the opinion that, from a point of view of principle, legislation at European level can only be an opt-in solution and that an opt-out solution would only be permissible here where the Member States already have a similar solution and national constitutional law so allows. An opt in is not allowed under every country's national constitutional law and it also contradicts the principle of the adult consumer.

As we insistently complain, the European Commission has completely forgotten to deal with the question of out-of-court settlements in its White Paper. The Directorate-General on Competition and the Commission have gone straight for litigation. However, as we have known for years from the debate in this House on legal policy, that is not always the ideal way forward and, as a rule, out-of-court settlement mechanisms are often much more suitable for resolving problems. Moreover, parallel work by the Directorate-General on Consumer Protection on the same issue has progressed much further. This Directorate-General used a broad margin for these alternative settlement instruments in its Green Paper, which is one consultation stage before this. We are convinced that the European Commission urgently needs to rework this question.

One last point, which is also crucial: we do not want fragmentation of the law. Now competition law is going off and creating such an instrument. Consumer protection is coming along on the same issue. We know that at some point something similar will be considered in relation to capital market law, environmental law and social law. We consider it absolutely necessary for a horizontal approach to be considered as well and for us at least to support the procedural instruments which are more or less the same in all areas with a horizontal instrument. That is also of decisive importance.

**Ján Figel'**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I welcome, on behalf of the Commission, Mr Lehne's report, adopted by the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON) and adopted as a sign of strong consensus across the political groups. We are also pleased that this report strongly supports the white paper.

The Commission notes that the report agrees with the findings of this paper, that victims of European Community competition law infringements currently face considerable difficulties in claiming compensation for the harm suffered by them. We agree that measures must be taken to ensure full compensation of those victims.

We also share the view that collective redress is crucial for consumers and small businesses in order to give them a realistic and efficient possibility to obtain compensation in cases of scattered damage. The Commission also fully agrees with the ECON Committee report, that excessive or abusive litigation must be avoided. To this end, therefore, collective redress mechanisms must include appropriate safeguards.

Finally, we fully agree that its approach to collective redress must be consistent and that compatibility must, therefore, be ensured between initiatives targeted at various areas, such as competition law or consumer protection laws. At the same time, the Commission welcomes the acknowledgement that a consistent approach to collective redress does not necessarily mean that all areas would have to be dealt with in one single horizontal instrument. The call for consistency must not unduly delay the development of measures identified as necessary for the full enforcement of the European Community competition law.

**Gabriela Crețu**, *rapporteur for the opinion of the Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection*. – (RO) The Committee on Internal Market and Consumer Protection has formulated its position based on a certain reality: the negative effects resulting from the breach of antitrust legislation can be felt economically very often at the end of the commercial chain, affecting end consumers and small enterprises.

In this case, damages for the losses suffered are important but, at the same time, they are difficult to obtain, as many have been affected and small sums are involved. As a result, we have requested a package of legislative and non-legislative measures to provide the tool which all European citizens affected by such a situation can use to defend their right to full, proper damages.

We support all measures designed to eliminate difficulties in achieving this objective: facilitating access to documents, reducing the costs of legal procedures and reversing the burden of proof.

We welcome the Commission's proposal to combine representative actions brought by qualified entities with collective actions, with explicit agreement expressed. However, we consider that 'opt-out' collective actions must continue to be discussed, given the benefit they provide: a 'once and for all' settlement and less uncertainty.

**Ioan Lucian Hămbășan**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (RO) Although the EU Treaty clearly prohibits cartels and other infringements of competition law, it is still difficult for affected consumers in the European Community to claim their rights to compensation.

In Romania, for example, a cartel set up in the cement industry was recently fined several million euro. However, the current legislation in force does not oblige authorities with the powers to monitor competition to get involved in compensation for victims.

I would like to stress the need for these authorities to take into consideration the compensation paid or which should be paid when they calculate the fines imposed on companies which are found guilty of abuses, so as to prevent discrepancies between the harm caused and the punitive measures applied, and especially to ensure damages are paid to those affected by such practices.

This is why I welcome the Commission's intention to improve the methods for guaranteeing the rights of consumers affected by infringement of the law throughout Europe.

Parliament stated very clearly that there must not be any 'opt-out' system in Europe. Therefore, the victims must be identified as quickly as possible at the time a complaint is made.

The 'opt-in' system guarantees that victims affected by the infringement of competition law will actually be compensated. Parliament does not want anyone else, be it lawyers, trade associations or the Consumer Protection Office, to benefit as a result of private actions.

I also believe that Parliament is adding a new important element which the Commission's proposal has omitted. Alternative dispute resolution mechanisms are in many cases much more effective for victims who are entitled to compensation than judicial procedures. I am referring to the fact that at the time when compensation is being sought, settlements must be initiated first of all outside the courts. They are much less costly than private actions as consumers will be compensated for the losses suffered much more quickly.

**Antolín Sánchez Presedo**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, this report has been approved unanimously in the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs. Not only is this an excellent outcome, but also, given the difficult, complex and controversial nature of the issues in question, it is an exceptional one, which should give impetus to and solidly cement the new pillar of private actions, which is vital in making the policy of Community competence effective. This is a new step in the direction of a more advanced and effective policy of responsibilities, which will be more respectful of the rights of victims and more effective in imposing liability on the infringer.

I would therefore like, firstly, to congratulate the rapporteur, Mr Lehne, who has had the principal responsibility for bringing this task to a successful conclusion. The quality of his ideas, his open spirit and readiness to engage in dialogue, and his intelligence in extracting the best compromises have been vital in achieving this. I would like to extend my congratulations to the draftsmen of opinions, the shadow rapporteurs and those who tabled amendments, who have made such a positive contribution to enriching the report.

The Commission's White Paper entitled 'Damages actions for breach of the EC antitrust rules' is a response to a request made by the European Parliament in its resolution on the Green Paper, the content of which it accepts in large part. This is the case when, among other aspects, it endorses the complementary nature of public and private legal actions, and positions itself in favour of group actions, although avoiding the excess of US class actions, thus facilitating the claiming of damages; when it proposes access to relevant information under judicial control, although avoiding a fishing expedition, and when it recognises and calls for the bringing of independent actions or follow-up actions and a voluntary compensation system.

The report stands up for codecision by the European Parliament in the establishment of the legal framework for the bringing of damages actions for breach of EC antitrust rules. This position should not be understood as a denial of the policy of Community competence as a legal basis for the legislation, but as an upgrading of the requirements of the ordinary procedure in this sphere, to meet the higher values recognised in the Treaty.

When a regulation has a significant effect on a fundamental right, such as the right of citizens to effective legal protection – which forms part of the European system and that of the Member States – the democratic principle and respect for national legal traditions – which require that such matters may only be regulated by means of provisions at the legal level, or, in other words, with action by the direct representatives of the public – demands the legislative participation of the European Parliament.

It also establishes a horizontal, integrated approach for tackling the shared problems which the bringing of private legal actions within competition law may have with other realms, thus avoiding a fragmented, inconsistent approach.

Private legal actions may be brought by a public body and also by individual or group actions. This second arrangement may be carried out directly by the victims or indirectly, through qualified entities, whether appointed in advance or designated *ad hoc*, such as consumer or business associations. Where actions are brought by qualified entities, the group of victims must be defined in the submission of the application, but the identification of each one can be done later on, although it must be clearly established as soon as possible, avoiding unnecessary delays and complying with the existing legislation. This solution is very important for cases of lower and fragmented damages.

The report raises in a balanced way the question of access to the information necessary for bringing follow-up actions. The protection of business secrets should be safeguarded, as should the effectiveness of clemency programmes, for which guidelines are requested.

Conditions are set so that the decisions taken by an authority which is a member of the Community competition authorities network can become binding in another Member State and so that, with full compliance with the principle of liability, the burden of proof is reversed and it is presumed that fault or blame exist when the existence of a breach has been established.

It is also worth highlighting the acceptance of the 'passing-on' defence for indirect victims and a system that simplifies and reduces the costs of proceedings. I would also like to emphasise the positive interaction between public and private actions, both in incentivising compensation for victims and in establishing the five-year period for the bringing of actions.

I would like to end by expressing my gratitude to the Commission for the dialogue that has been maintained throughout this procedure and by asking the Commissioner to submit without delay the initiatives required for its developments.

**Diana Wallis**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, I would like to start by thanking Mr Lehne for his report and to confirm that my group will be supporting that report.

I would also like to say that I find it a little odd that we are having this debate late at night when we have a question on the same subject tabled for tomorrow morning. It would have made a great deal of sense to have put both together.

However, in complimenting the report, let me say that my group's starting point will be 'doing justice' – doing justice for SMEs and consumers across the European Union, where they have to face inappropriate and anti-competitive action. A few weeks ago my group organised a seminar at Parliament in Brussels, and I was very struck by certain of our visitors who were at the sharp end of such anti-competitive action, ironically in the cement industry. What did they say? Please, please, get on with this: we need something that will allow us to pursue these inappropriate operators in the European market.

We want a European solution, and we want it sooner rather than later, because, if we do not get it, my forecast and my warning is this: some of our Member States will develop systems that will lead to forum shopping as a result of free movement of judgements. So, please – a European system as soon as possible.

**President**. – I shall make sure that your point concerning the agenda is communicated to the Conference of Presidents, which fixes the agenda – sometimes it makes mistakes.

**Nils Lundgren**, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (SV) Mr President, the internal market is the EU's absolute greatest contribution to freedom and prosperity in Europe. Among other things, it requires effective antitrust legislation. What we are now considering is the issue of damages actions for breach of antitrust rules.

There are good fundamental reasons for citizens and companies to be able to claim damages. Mr Lehne's report indicates, to some extent unintentionally, the problems and the risks involved. The white paper talks of a European legal culture, but this does not exist. We should not create regulations based on wishful thinking. The rapporteur intends us to avoid an 'Americanised' compensation culture. This is also wishful thinking. On the contrary, the risks of such a culture occurring are high.

The division of responsibility between the EU institutions and the Member States has been ignored. There is no objective analysis of what is required by the subsidiarity principle. The principle is quite simply not taken seriously.

There are also many other unclear points and points that are at risk of being completely arbitrary. Paragraphs 7 and 11 together instil a sense of misgiving. An obvious starting point must be damages actions on the basis of a breach of antitrust rules. It requires the crime to have been established in court, after which *res judicata* would presumably have to apply, even in the context of an individual claim, so that judgments relating to a single case cannot be revisited.

Paragraphs 15 and 18 together allow the plaintiff to choose the legal system that is most favourable. This creates legal uncertainty and will result in 'forum shopping', which will be a real threat.

The information asymmetry is to be reduced by forcing companies to provide information to the plaintiff. This will result in the subjective handling of important business information, which can be misused.

There are far too many risks and points that are unclear at this stage. The Chamber should therefore reject this report and request a more detailed analysis of the issue before we take a decision.

**Andreas Schwab (PPE-DE)**. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, first a very big thank you to the rapporteur, Mr Lehne, who has done a magnificent job and has found appropriate solutions to a very difficult question in agreement with the Members from the other groups.

I see from the debate that we are all agreed that we need a horizontal approach for all collective claims and I therefore ask the Commission not to table separate proposals by individual Directorates General for each separate area, but at best to give us a truly collective legal redress mechanism covering all areas for the European internal market and for European citizens and of course – as Mrs Wallis said – for European SMEs. We are united in the thought that the interests of those damaged by a cartel must be effectively upheld and that we must subject the European economy to cartel control in accordance with the principle of the social market economy. Nor do we want any abuse of the various national regulations in the form of forum shopping.

However, this evening's debate has not afforded me very much information on the most effective way of achieving this, because I believe that the potential of collective claims is often overestimated. That is why it is important to lay down again certain benchmarks against which we have to measure all collective claim procedures. We must answer the question of whether additional legal protection for consumers or victims in mass claims, cross-border litigation and litigation which affects more than one Member State really is necessary. We must allow for the Member States' procedural constraints – opt out, opt in and numerous other points – in the European procedure. If this is simply not possible, as the Commission itself has already partially conceded, then we need the Member States' legal instruments on board and a common procedure with the Member States' parliaments in order to serve the interests of European consumers.

We definitely want to avoid collective claims in Europe along the lines of the US model. We want to ensure that compensation is awarded, but only to those who actually sustained losses. We want to advise as emphatically as possible against unjustified claims and we want to promote alternative settlement procedures.

**Olle Schmidt (ALDE)**. – (SV) Mr President, I, too, would like to thank Mr Lehne for a constructive and thorough report, which addresses important issues within competition law and increases consumer protection.

The European Court of Justice grants individuals and companies the right to damages for breaches of the competition rules, but in spite of that fact the reality is that individuals who have suffered loss as a result of a breach of EC antitrust rules rarely receive compensation. We must therefore create mechanisms that increase trust and make it easier for individuals to be able to assert their rights across borders.

We know that consumers and small businesses are frightened of instigating proceedings because of concern about long drawn-out processes and, in particular, high costs. Changes in this regard will promote cross-border trade.

If we are to have a functioning internal market throughout the EU where people can rely on their case being examined in a legally certain manner and on receiving full compensation for the damages caused, in other words the loss, we must also find new mechanisms to facilitate group claims.

When we talk about group claims, the subject of the US and its experiences and extremes always comes up. We must, of course, learn from this, but we should not allow ourselves to be intimidated. Europe must have a European system, not an American one. If we do nothing the situation will only get worse.

**Ján Figel', Member of the Commission.** – Mr President, thank you all for very interesting contributions, especially the introductory exposé of Klaus-Heiner Lehne. This was very interesting, and I now see why you are so consensual and working not only together in committee but also in plenary on these issues.

There is not much I can add, except perhaps on the legal bases. Of course it depends on the objectives and the content of the action proposed, and I want to assure you, as a Commissioner – for another portfolio, perhaps, but I speak on behalf of the Commission – that, in principle, we seek very close cooperation with Parliament. How to establish this with regard to a practical, concrete item or issue remains to be seen, but we will strive for close cooperation or as close cooperation with Parliament as is possible under the applicable legal basis.

On what you have said about fragmentation and a horizontal approach, I think the answer from the Commission – and it is very visible in the white paper – is a consistent, coherent approach, and I think that the European legal tradition and the roots of our legal culture are different from the oft-quoted American ones. But I think that we can learn from the others and further build up our system.

On public enforcement and justice, of course, I think it is very important that we are not going towards lessening this enforcement, and, of course, Articles 81 and 82 are very important pillars of the EU single market and policies. They are about justice, and damages actions are complementary to this law enforcement.

Last – but maybe not least – what was said about out-of-court settlements. The Commission is in favour, but the precondition or the base for such an approach, which would be welcome, is an existing and functioning efficient litigation system on damages actions at the level of Member States. So I think we need to not only encourage but help our Member States so that such issues and systems are running in the EU of 27. Then I think we may also come to these points.

But, in principle, thank you very much for what was, for me, too, a very interesting debate, and all the best.

**Klaus-Heiner Lehne, rapporteur.** – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, first may I thank my honourable friends for their very helpful contributions. I think that we all pulled together and achieved a good result.

However, I also want to say quite clearly to the Commission, in order to avoid any misunderstanding: from Parliament's point of view, there is no question of your tabling a bill that is probably already fit for nothing. Absolutely no question. We expect the Commission to take account of what we have decided today and for it to be included in the actual legislation proposed.

The horizontal approach is not only an important aspect on the basis of the arguments which I expounded earlier; the Commissioner personally also addressed the question of the legal basis. With such an important project, an approach must be chosen which ultimately guarantees that Parliament is involved as a legislator on an equal footing. If an approach based purely on competition law is chosen, that would not be the case under the Treaty of Nice currently in force. This is also a very fundamental political argument in favour of why we consider a horizontal approach to be the right one. I think the Commission should consider this very seriously.

Another decisive point in my opinion is that we still need something on the question of out-of-court settlements. You spoke earlier of convergence with the work of the Directorate-General on Competition. However, if one compares the Green Paper on consumer protection with the White Paper on competition, one does not necessarily get the impression that there is really any such convergence. The most blatant example is the different treatment – or to be more exact the lack of treatment – of out-of-court settlement mechanisms in the White Paper.

There is still a series of other problems which we expect to be resolved. I just want to refer briefly to the question of access to the European Commission's files. It is possible in all criminal proceedings in which compensation is being claimed to inspect the public prosecutor's case files. Why does this not apply to the European Commission? It is beyond me.

The same applies to the question of fixing penalties: this also needs to be taken into account from the point of view that it must be possible to claim compensation in future. Here too the Commission urgently needs to rework the text and table more specific texts and proposals than those included so far in the White Paper. May I say quite clearly from Parliament's point of view, in order to avoid any misunderstanding: we expect more than what is contained in the White Paper and we also expect the Directorate-General on Competition as a whole to follow our suggestions, otherwise there will be resistance in this House.

**President.** – I should like to thank you all for your contributions on this important topic and also thank the Commissioner, the staff and the interpreters.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 26 March 2009.

#### **Written statements (Rule 142)**

**Katrin Saks (PSE), in writing.** – (ET) Parliament's report emphasises the usefulness of leniency programmes in exposing cartel agreements, and I am glad to be able to say here that a draft leniency programme is presently being discussed in the Estonian parliament. This should become an important part of the struggle against cartels, which is important both for the better functioning of the common market and in order to protect consumer rights, because consumer prices may rise as much as 25% due to cartel agreements.

I do, however, believe that representative actions can also play an important role in the effective implementation of competition law and the improvement of consumer protection, and thus we must also devote attention to this, both at the Estonian and European Union levels. Research has proven that representative actions would significantly improve consumers' willingness to stand up for their rights, and in countries where consumer activeness is low because of the fear of the complexity and cost of such undertakings, measures such as representative actions are of crucial importance.

#### **15. Documents received: see Minutes**

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

#### **17. Closure of the sitting**

(The sitting closed at 11.15 p.m.)