

TUESDAY, 24 OCTOBER 2006

IN THE CHAIR: MR BORRELL FONTELLES

President

1. Opening of the sitting

(The sitting was opened at 9.05 a.m.)

President. You wish to take the floor, Mr Carnero González. I imagine that it is for a point of order. On the basis of which Rule do you wish to speak?

Carlos Carnero González (PSE). – *(ES)* Yes, Mr President, I simply wished to mention the fact that the media is reporting that a European citizen, of Spanish nationality, Mr Emilio Morenatti, has been kidnapped in Gaza this morning by a group of armed men. I would ask that you call upon the Presidency of the Council and the Commission to do everything they can ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

President. That is not a point of order. I understand your concern, but the Rules of Procedure must be respected. I take good note of what you say, thank you.

2. Debates on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law (announcement of motions for resolutions tabled): see Minutes

3. Decision on urgent procedure

President. The Council is requesting the application of the urgent procedure with regard to the proposal for a Council regulation amending Council Regulation (EC) No 639/2004 on the management of fishing fleets registered in the Community outermost regions [COM(2006)0433 C6-0295/2006 2006/0148(CNS)].

Who will speak on behalf of the Committee on Fisheries?

Rosa Miguélez Ramos (PSE). – *(ES)* Mr President, I am speaking on behalf of the Committee on Fisheries in the absence of its chairman, Mr Morillon, in order to support this Council request for urgent procedure. We are talking about approving, as you have said, and as the Commission proposes, the amendment of Regulation (EC) No 639/2004 on the management of fishing fleets.

The fisheries sector in the outermost regions is suffering a structurally precarious situation. The Council's approval of the Regulation on the European Fisheries Fund was accompanied by a joint statement by the Council and the Commission in support of these regions, extending until 31 December 2006 the derogations regarding the possibility of granting State aid for the renewal of the fishing fleets registered in those regions.

Although the extension ends in two months' time, the Regulation has not been able to enter into force due to the slow pace of the process for adopting decisions within Community legislation. Our committee is in favour of the urgent procedure and urges the Commission and the Member States to adopt the measures necessary to ensure that the sector can receive the aid without delay.

(Parliament agreed to the urgent procedure)

President. This item is therefore included in next Thursday's Voting Time at 11.30 a.m. and the time limit for presentation of amendments is tomorrow Wednesday at 10.00 a.m.

4. Commemoration of the 1956 Hungarian uprising

President. Ladies and gentlemen, I would now like to make a statement, and I shall do so standing, on the 'Hungarian Revolution' of October 1956.

Half a century ago, the Hungarian people rose up against the Communist dictatorship and against the occupation by a foreign power.

On 23 October 1956, Hungarian university students took to the streets of Budapest to protest against the Communist government and they were soon joined by citizens from all professions and sectors of society.

I must tell you that that is my earliest childhood memory of politics. At that time, the news in my country was full of the resistance by the Hungarian people. I can remember our school teacher showing us where the events were taking place on a map, the voices on the radio and photographs in the newspapers of burnt-out T-34 tanks in the centre of Budapest. It brought alive in me for the first time the notion of fighting for freedom.

For two weeks there was hope; then the radios stopped and a complete silence fell, and behind that silence thousands were killed and hundreds exiled. For some time those who rose up in Budapest hoped that the free West would come to their aid. It did not. For some time, they were led to believe that it would.

We looked on as powerless spectators as thousands of Hungarian men, women and children fled their country and sought refuge in the West. It was an indescribable tragedy for the Hungarian people, but it was also the first chink in the armour of the Soviet system – a chink that would grow and would lead to the fall of the Berlin Wall – and it was undoubtedly a great moment in the history of that country.

Around that time, at the end of June, the Poznan uprising in Poland, with the workers from the Cigielski factory demanding ‘bread and freedom’, was another significant moment in that upheaval. Those events were undoubtedly related. In fact, during the ceremony organised this year to commemorate the events in Poznan in 1956, the Hungarian President, Laszlo Sólyom, said that ‘Poznan and Hungary rose up together against the Soviet occupation. On 24 October 1956 the Hungarians took to the streets carrying placards reading “Poznan - Warsaw – Budapest”’.

That was a source of inspiration for what happened later, although it took a long time. It took a long time, until the spring came in Prague in 1968. It took a long time, until the strikes in Poland in 1970, which led to the recognition of Solidarnosc, ten years later, which was the pickaxe that brought the wall down.

History repeated itself in 1989. Hungary and Poland laid the first stone of the reunification of the continent, and I believe that this is a good point to quote from Albert Camus in 1957, on the occasion of the first anniversary of the Hungarian Revolution.

Camus said: ‘Hungary conquered and in chains has done more for freedom and justice than any other European people for twenty years [...]. In Europe’s isolation today, we have only one way of being true to Hungary, and that is never to betray, among ourselves, or anywhere, what the Hungarian heroes died for and never to condone, even indirectly, what killed them. It would indeed be difficult for us to be worthy of such sacrifices. We can, however, try to be so, in uniting Europe at last, in forgetting our quarrels, in correcting our own errors, in increasing our efforts and our solidarity’.

A reunified Europe today is prepared to make further progress and to disseminate the European spirit even further, thereby helping to create a world in which our actions are guided by the principles of freedom, solidarity and progress.

We owe that to those who died for their belief in a free Europe.

(Applause)

Hans-Gert Poettering, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, we are, today, commemorating the uprising by the people of Hungary 50 years ago, when people rose up in desperation against a totalitarian dictatorship. We are commemorating the events of the autumn of 1956 today because what they did, they did for all of us. They did the idea of freedom, justice and democracy proud. They stood up for human dignity and filled it with renewed vigour, continuing to demonstrate it even when they were crushed by tanks. They went into exile for all of us, suffered for all of us, thus to be borne in remembrance for all of us over the years and the decades.

The heroes of the Hungarian revolution are heroes for us all. They are heroes for Europe. We are commemorating them today because we are indebted to their legacy. We are paying homage to their

achievement because we – especially here in the European Parliament – are bound to one another by the pledge that there must never again be such a challenge to freedom and human dignity in Europe. Their life stands before us like a relief showing the great heights that humanity is capable of reaching when we are compelled to defend the values and the dignity of Europe. We bow down before them.

What began with the first mass demonstration in Budapest on 23 October 1956 and ended when Soviet troops were sent in on 4 November was a revolution for freedom. The participants in the Hungarian uprising quite rightly spoke of revolution, or *forradalom*. By contrast, the Communists who were in power at the time accused them – wrongly – of mounting a counter-revolution, or *ellenforradalom*. The difference is not simply a small fragment of a Hungarian word. The difference is enormous. It is the difference between freedom and serfdom.

The people of Hungary acted for our values in Europe, since the freedom for which the heroes of the Hungarian uprising of 1956 strove and died is a part of the European identity. Our aims are the aims of those people in Hungary back then. Nothing could better illuminate the potency of these events than the fact that, today, we are commemorating the Hungarian uprising of 1956 and that we have with us in this House freely-elected Hungarian MEPs. For me, this will always be the miracle of my generation. Hungary's freedom has become the freedom of Europe, and Europe's freedom remains the guarantor of Hungary's freedom.

Allow me just to express my great appreciation, in the light of today's events in Budapest and in Hungary, to the Hungarian Members of this House, irrespective of the groups to which they belong, for the fact that they have made it possible for us to agree on a common text, a joint resolution. This shows us that we share common principles that bind us together irrespective of the disagreements of everyday politics.

I ask that, in the altercations in Budapest, no side should act disproportionately, that the demonstrators should not receive a disproportionate response, since we are linked by common values, namely the values of freedom, which also link us to 1956, as well as linking us in the modern day, 2006. Let us always, in every disagreement, put this sharing of values at the heart of things.

(Applause)

Martin Schulz, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, there is a connection between the anniversary that we are commemorating today, namely the anniversary of the Hungarian uprising against their Soviet oppressors, and the anniversary that we will be celebrating next spring, the 50th anniversary of the signing of the Treaties of Rome.

These two events took place within a short space of time and both of them were motivated by the same spirit. The Treaties of Rome were characterised by the spirit of freedom and the binding together of peoples in freedom. This was precisely the spirit of the uprising in Hungary too. The people of Hungary wanted out of a system that had been forced upon them; they wanted their own sovereignty as a free people. They had to fight that system and struggle against a power that wanted to take that right away from them.

Fifty years later we are commemorating those men and women who sought out the right that we, the European Union, today guarantee to each people, namely the right to be able to live in freedom and self-determination within the democratic international community. Those men and women who had to fight their oppressors for that right are true heroes of European history. They had no weapons, they could not resist an army and they faced the tanks with their bare hands and their chests torn open – we all know the pictures.

The courage shown by these men and women is worthy of our admiration. In my opinion, that courage, and the stance that was, as both the previous speaker and you, Mr President, have pointed out, to be found not only in Hungary but also in Poland and twelve years later in Czechoslovakia, that courage is also part of the heritage of Europe. It shows that on this continent, men and women have always been prepared to dedicate their lives to freedom. The courage of those men and women is up there with the best that Hungary has to offer Europe. It is also up there with the best that we as Europeans have to preserve.

I believe that the fall of the Wall that came later, the fact that it was possible to tear down the Wall, to overcome the Iron Curtain, grew out of the courage of the days that we are remembering today. One thing is completely clear, and that is that however bitter oppression may be in any particular case, however painful a dictatorship, it will not last forever. No oppression can keep down the desire of a

people for freedom, the desire of humankind for freedom, in the long run. Every dictatorship yet in the history of humanity has fallen at some point. Just as this communist, Stalinist dictatorship fell, so will the other dictatorships in the world. This means that the courage of those men and women in Hungary fifty years ago is the courage of men and women in other parts of the world who are fighting oppression in their own lives today. This is an ongoing fight; it is not over.

By commemorating these events on the 50th anniversary we are also commemorating the fact that the people of Hungary have succeeded, having achieved their democracy and their freedom in their country, in transforming the act that forced them into the Eastern Bloc into an act of freedom whereby, through free self-determination, they have joined the European Union. What that represents is a completely different concept, namely that of voluntarily joining an international community through free self-determination rather than being forcibly pushed into a community of force. It is precisely this that is the giant step forward that we have made in Europe over the last 50 years.

This uprising took place when I was a little baby, just 10 months old. I was a child in 1956. The fact that I have been able to live my life in freedom is an enormous privilege, an advantage that the Hungarians of my generation did not have. I am grateful for this, but I am even happier that, at this point in my life, we who were born in freedom in Western Europe are today able to live together, as Europeans, with those born under oppression, in the Union in which we share. There could be no finer gift for my generation here and in Hungary.

(Applause)

Bronisław Geremek, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe would like to pay homage to the 1956 Hungarian revolution, to the courage, to the determination of the Hungarian people in the fight for freedom, to the memory of the victims of repression and to the suffering of an entire people.

1956 was a turning point in the contemporary history of Europe. In June 1956, as the President has said, the uprising of Polish workers in Poznań was met with bloody repression. The liberalisation of the regime, which took place in Poland in October 1956, lasted only a short time. That year was marked by the events in Hungary. The Hungarian revolution was popular, national and anticommunist. It was crushed mercilessly by the Soviet army. The streets of Budapest were the scene of a bloody repression, and Hungary was gripped by terror and oppression for a long time.

Today we are commemorating this anniversary without trying to settle our scores with the past. But in order to inscribe these events in the history of European freedom, and to feel a sense of community, the European Union needs to have a common memory. The heroism of the men and women of 1956 cannot be forgotten. We must remember Imre Nagy, a communist who became a protagonist of the anticommunist revolution, who was assassinated in a secretive and cowardly manner. We must remember István Bibó, a great thinker and man of action in the service of freedom and democracy, who was thrown into prison and condemned to silence until the end of his days.

We must not forget that Europe, faced with the drama of 1956, certainly expressed its indignation, but remained silent and impotent. This is a lesson for Europe now and in the future. It must be strong, united, and show solidarity. It must find its *raison d'être* in freedom, democracy and respect for human rights and the rights of peoples. And for Hungary, today, we should hope that the Hungarian people and its leaders will draw from the courage of 1956 the strength to find the wisdom needed to put the public good and the common interest above political controversies.

(Applause)

Daniel Cohn-Bendit, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, there are a number of red threads running through history, and it is one of those red threads that we are taking hold of here. It started on 17 June 1953 in Germany, then ran through Poland and Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968, until Communism was finally defeated.

The Hungarian uprising was an uprising for democracy; it was a national uprising, but also a political one. I would remind you of the Petöfi group – the Hungarian intellectuals who founded the Workers' Councils together with the workers, first in Budapest and then throughout Hungary. They had the hope to try to reinvent democracy. That is what happened in Hungary in 1956.

As we remember this uprising now, 50 years on, we can also add to that memory another one, namely the 100th anniversary of the birth of Hannah Arendt. She was one of those intellectuals who had the courage to name two totalitarian regimes in a single breath – communism and fascism. This is precisely what history teaches us: we have never had a permanent hold on democracy. We will only keep hold of it if we fight for it every day. Poland and Hungary are showing us that today, as are the dangerous developments in France, where there are fascist, far-right forces at work. We must continue to stand up and fight for democracy.

The people of Hungary and Poland 50 years ago and those of Czechoslovakia in 1968, and also the people in this country who fought against fascism, have shown us that it is sometimes necessary to give one's life for democracy and freedom. We should take this lesson to heart, and not be afraid to say that totalitarianism – whether fascist or communist – is and always will be totalitarianism.

(Applause)

Francis Wurtz, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that I express a point of view largely shared by my group when I say that I agree that the 1956 uprising in Hungary should be considered first and foremost as a popular uprising for freedom and independence. I also agree that the bloody repression of this uprising by the Soviet army should be unreservedly condemned. Finally, I agree that this Hungarian tragedy should be seen as an emblematic event, because it sheds light on the heart of the existential crisis of a model which would disappear thirty-three years later, as it was unable to reform itself profoundly.

By contrast, we cannot accept a unilateral reading of contemporary history that demonises the communist idea. To stay with the case of Hungary, I would remind you that high-ranking communists played a major role in that country in the movement contesting the regime. We are all familiar with the part played by Nagy Imre, the reforming communist Prime Minister who paid with his life for his commitment to the side of the insurgents. It is less well known that the famous Petöfi circle, whose activities are considered as one of the trigger factors of the movement, was formed on the initiative of young communists. I could go on to cite the name of the great communist philosopher György Lukács, who was also involved in this struggle for reform. In fact, over a whole period, we witnessed a rising tide of protests inspired by communists, whose criticisms were unfortunately stifled. History was not written in advance, it is no more so today.

And so, let us condemn Stalinist crimes as much as necessary, but let us not rekindle the spirit of the cold war which was never productive for freedom and independence in any area. The reunified Europe has more to achieve by turning resolutely towards the future.

(Applause from the left)

Cristiana Muscardini, *on behalf of the UEN Group.* – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, over 2 500 tanks against an unarmed people, 75 000 Red Army soldiers, thousands of victims, over 2 000 people shot by the Kádár government instated by the Soviets, 12 000 prisoners sent to *gulags*, 200 000 refugees: these are a few of the terrifying figures that sum up a nation's tragedy, but also the beginning of the end for a party and a power which, following the shameful and iniquitous Yalta agreements, dominated half of our continent.

The first signs came in Berlin in 1953, followed by the cry for freedom in Poznań, in Poland, in 1956. Stalin had been dead for three years, but his political successors, despite Khrushchev's report to the XX Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union in February 1956 denouncing the Georgian dictator's innumerable crimes, used repressive and criminal methods, for fear that power should slip from their hands in Hungary.

The revolt descended into a great tragedy. Imre Nagy's reformist government was swept aside, and he was assassinated. Only with the fall of Soviet communism could the victims of those years finally be rehabilitated. Referred to by Hungarian communist leaders and the *Kominform* as a 'rabble', in fact, they were and they remain a symbol of human dignity, oppressed by one of the most insensitive and violent dictatorships that history has ever known. This great tragedy must remind us today of the negativity of an ideology and a political practice that left millions of victims in the regions of the world in which the regime was installed.

Some of those who, at the time, defended the use of tanks and the shootings are today reappraising their actions, and, as always, they speak of mistakes. They do not speak, however, of rejecting those ideas that led and inevitably lead to dictatorship and oppression. Only by rejecting and condemning those ideas quite openly can we be guaranteed a future of freedom. Remembering the tragedy of the Hungarian autumn, we appreciate the Union once more as a protector against any humiliation of the dignity of the individual and of peoples.

Furthermore, we recall that there are still regimes that exert an iron grip on the lives of their citizens and that represent a threat to free peoples: the world's many dictatorships, from North Korea to Iran and Cuba. Yet we also remember the dangers of new forms of fundamentalism. May the West never again choose silence, and may Europe be a champion of freedom and justice.

Johannes Blokland, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (NL) Mr President, today, we in this House are commemorating a tragic political event that took place in Hungary 50 years ago. The insurrection that broke out at that time, and that was brutally crushed by Soviet troops, has opened the eyes of many in Western Europe to the dangers of the Communist ideology as dictated by Moscow. The historical significance of Budapest 1956 is much more than local or national.

As a 13-year-old schoolboy, all that I grasped was that my mother's beloved home country fought a heroic battle for a freedom that it passionately desired. The images of Prime Minister Imre Nagy and General Pál Maléter and the fight against the Russian tanks are etched on my mind. We desperately – against better judgment, indeed – hoped that the West would send support. We felt so much for the victims and for the refugees. My parents taught me back then that Hungary is not an Eastern European, but a Central European, country, with strong, religious and cultural ties with Western Europe.

Now, 50 years down the line, the Soviet bloc has been dismantled and eight, and soon ten, of the former satellite states, are part of the European Union. What have we done with this regained freedom? National Socialism was defeated in 1945 and Communism 45 years later. Did anything positive come to replace them? Are we able, on the ruins of those ideologies, to build a society of tolerance, accountability and love of one's neighbour? We need patience and perseverance to achieve this.

Since it took fifteen years for the Netherlands to be reconstructed after five years of occupation, it is likely that a few generations will be needed before all the wounds of oppression, sustained over a 50-year period, are healed. May the Hungarian people display the courage and strength to conquer the past together and to collectively work on a future in peace and freedom.

Luca Romagnoli (NI). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the 50th-anniversary celebrations of the anticommunist uprising draw our attention to the crisis experienced by Ferenc Gyurcsány's socialist government. The new Hungarian elite has reclaimed the 1956 revolution and the communist symbols in order to justify liberalism.

This strategy aims to give legitimacy to the current government, given its affiliation with the communist intelligentsia, and to reassure a population that, socially, is beginning to seriously suffer under the effects of liberalism. Communism in fact amounts to an excuse on would-be social grounds to exploit the people, as demonstrated today by China.

Hungary has its place in the European Union because, in its experience of resisting totalitarianism, it brings new political sensibilities and, as in 1956, a popular ability to generate hope.

Today, the protests by the extreme right against Prime Minister Ferenc Gyurcsány, who has admitted having lied about the state of the economy in order to win the elections last April, have seen 100 000 people demonstrating in Budapest on the occasion of the 50th anniversary. Demonstrators clashed with police for hours in the streets, leading to arrests and injuries. Supporters of the leading right-wing opposition party are themselves claiming the role of the true heirs of 1956.

In my opinion, it is not a case of rewriting the history that everyone knows, or that European socialists and communists fail to recognise. It is all too easy to appeal to the emotions, evoking the bodies of men, women and children who fell under the blows of the Soviet Union in the name of communism. The Italian communists, Hungary and the Communist Party leaders sided with the USSR against the Hungarian revolutionaries. Party Secretary Palmiro Togliatti and his successor Luigi Longo declared their solidarity with the re-establishment of internationalist justice many times, even years later.

The current President of the Italian Republic, Giorgio Napolitano, appeared in the newspaper *L'Unità* condemning the revolutionaries as thugs and disreputable troublemakers. Fifty years later, in his autobiography, he does not retract this statement, but merely explains what is known to everyone, that is that in those years the Italian Communist Party and all European socialism was inseparable from the fortunes of the socialist block, led by the USSR.

We should not so much condemn the Soviet Union's imperial actions, but rather strongly condemn those who, at the time, enthusiastically chose to support the invasion, in the name of communist and socialist internationalism.

President. That concludes this item.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Athanasios Pafilis (GUE/NGL). – *(EL)* The debate in the European Parliament and the resolutions tabled for 50th anniversary of the Hungary uprising are yet another organised attempt to rewrite history and fuel anti-communism.

The celebrations by the representatives of capitalism and the presence of the secretary-general of NATO, the President of the Commission and other imperialist leaders at the event in Budapest are the best testimony of the objectives of the Hungarian uprising, the overturning of the socialist system and the restoration of capitalism.

The publication, moreover, of official documents which prove the active involvement of imperialists and organised support for the revolutionary forces are the best response to those who distort the nature of the events by calling it a popular uprising.

The common, copycat shouts of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance about democracy and freedom are an attempt to sanctify capitalist barbarity and present it as the only way forward for the peoples. At the same time, they are hiding their fear of socialism, which is a social necessity.

The forces of the left are taking on huge political responsibilities with their stand. Even though they know about the undermining and aggressive role of imperialism in the former socialist countries and their murderous role in all the grassroots movements, they are adopting the imperialist propaganda in the name of 'objectivity'. They are not taking a class-orientated approach to the events, thereby giving imperialism an alibi.

Alessandro Battilocchio (NI). – *(IT)* I speak, with great pride, on behalf of the New Italian Socialist Party, a small group of uncompromising Italian socialists who have always chosen the same path and have refused offers from those on both the right and the left inviting us to give up.

This red thread of independence, which runs through to the present day, had its crucial moment in 1956. At that time, the Italian Socialist Party, under Pietro Nenni, firmly condemned the violent attack by the communists that drowned the hopes of the Hungarian people in blood and massacred the insurgents. This was the national uprising of a proud people, who were fighting not only against the physical and moral sufferings inflicted by communism, but also against the political and cultural drabness that had stifled the traditions, identity and patriotism of the Hungarian people. As the tragedies of the following years demonstrated, to speak of communism and freedom has always represented a patent oxymoron. The members of the New Italian Socialist Party will never tire of repeating this truth, which was for too long denied in Italy by the Italian Communist Party.

We therefore honour the 5 000 Hungarian martyrs who did not bow to injustice and who fought to the death to exert their right to a better future, to a prospect of freedom, democracy and peace.

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ROTH-BEHRENDT

Vice-President

5. Breast cancer (debate)

President. The next item is the debate on

- the oral question to the Commission on the reintegration of breast cancer patients into the job market and use of social funds for continued training of health professionals in the field of breast cancer, by Mr Andersson and Mrs Jöns on behalf of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (O-0098/2006 – B6-0433/2006),
- the oral question to the Commission on the early detection and treatment of breast cancer in the enlarged European Union by Mr Florenz and Mrs Jöns on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety (O-0101/2006 – B6-0434/2006) and
- the oral question to the Commission on breast cancer by Mrs Záborská and Mrs Jöns on behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality (O-0116/2006 – B6-0436/2006).

Karin Jöns (PSE), *author.* – *(DE)* Madam President, Commissioner Špidla, Commissioner Kyprianou, ladies and gentlemen, first of all I would like to thank the chairmen of the three committees, Mrs Záborská, Mr Florenz and Mr Andersson, most warmly for their fantastic cooperation in preparing this debate. I would also like to thank you, Madam President.

Breast cancer was on the agenda three years ago, and it is now time to take an initial look at the results, which appears to be urgently necessary. In the 25 Member States, 275 000 women contract breast cancer every year. The risk of dying from it is twice as high in one Member State as in another. To make it worse, younger and younger women are contracting the disease: just in the last few years, the number of women under 40 affected has doubled. Breast cancer is still the number one cause of death in women between 35 and 55.

However, I am also shocked at how radical treatment still is in many Member States. In some countries, mastectomies are still the rule rather than the exception, even in the very early stages of the disease, even though in 80% of cases these days it is possible to operate without removing the breast. As you can see, then, we are progressing at a snail's pace. This is particularly true in the new Member States, where the missed opportunities and deficiencies throughout the chain of care are at their worst. However, at least in the old Member States, the fact that the structures remain, as before, inadequate to catastrophic has less to do with public budget problems than with the economic and class interests of the doctors.

Let us begin with early detection: the development of an across-the-board breast screening programme according to EU guidelines will involve a one-off cost for the public purse of no more than EUR 1.25 per citizen. I am therefore sure that nobody in this House wants to claim that this money is not available. If we had an EU-wide breast screening programme, we could save the lives of 31 000 women in the EU a year, help to reduce healthcare costs and substantially reduce subsequent costs for the whole of society.

To date, though, only 11 countries have a quality-assured screening programme, and these programmes are a long way from being continuous. In your country, too, Mr Špidla, you must put a stop to the practice of passing off opportunistic screening as EU screening. In Cyprus, too, Mr Kyprianou, progress is still very sluggish. Now we know, of course, that you are both on our side, but it would nonetheless have been nice to have the Commission's progress report now, instead of in the Spring, which is when it is expected. We also call on you to put greater emphasis on the option of using money from the Structural Funds to develop a screening programme.

However, even the best early detection system is of no use if subsequent treatment is inadequate or inappropriate. Time and again, breast cancer is operated on and treated in hospitals with barely any experience. I would therefore specifically like to thank the Commission for the EU guidelines for breast centres, which we have received from you since last year. The ball is now in the Member States' court, though, because the only place in the whole of the EU with such centres at the moment is – amazingly – the United Kingdom.

That is why we will also call today, in our joint resolution, for the Member States to establish sufficient breast centres nationwide by 2016. This is absolutely feasible by 2016. We would need around 1 800 such centres EU-wide. Then all women would have the opportunity to get the same optimum treatment, regardless of where they live.

In order to ensure that these breast centres actually work in accordance with the EU criteria, that they really do perform a minimum number of operations on primary breast cancer, namely 150 a year in a single centre, that the specialists really have specialised exclusively in benign and malignant breast

diseases and that they really do carry out interdisciplinary consultations before and after the operation for each case of breast cancer, we now also need guidelines for the certification of breast centres.

In this connection, we would call on you in the Commission to embark on drafting these guidelines with real speed. We would also ask you to draw up guidelines for the job description of breast nurses, who have a very important role to play in these centres, as guides and mediators between doctors and patients throughout the treatment process.

(Applause)

President. Thank you, Mrs Jöns. That is a very personal thank you.

Jan Andersson (PSE), author. – (SV) Madam President, I would like to begin by thanking Mrs Jöns for her great commitment and for having got to grips with this tremendously important issue.

As Mrs Jöns has already said, this is the most common form of cancer among women. It is also the most common cause of death among women aged between 35 and 59. What is more, we know that breast cancer is on the increase among younger women and that the chances of detecting the disease vary a very great deal from one EU Member State to another, as do opportunities for breast-screening. I know from my own country, Sweden, where breast-screening has been available for many years to women in certain age groups, that such screening has reduced the death rate amongst women and that it is important to detect the disease early in order to provide the right treatment. All of this means that the efforts mentioned in the resolutions discussed by Mrs Jöns are incredibly important.

Three committees are involved in this work. We in the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs do not have responsibility specifically for health and healthcare matters, but rather for the link to the labour market. We now have, I am happy to say, a labour market that is designed to involve women and where women can be found in ever increasing numbers. In my own country, the proportion of women in work is just as high as that of men.

If someone contracts a serious illness such as breast cancer, one purely factual consideration is that time out has to be taken for treatment. It is sometimes possible for a woman to go on working, but to do so means also being able to discuss with her employer what changes might be made to her work patterns so that she might continue in employment while she is receiving treatment. It is also possible for someone to become seriously ill for a period of time but then get better as a result of treatment and be able to go back to work. The question is then one of how she can be successfully re-integrated into working life, and in such a way that the breast cancer treatment does not have a harmful effect on it

It is important for us to address these issues. That is the first point to be made by the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs. Our second area of concern comprises the professionals involved in these issues. There is constant progress in terms of research and development and procedures for treating breast cancer. It is important for medical staff to be kept up-to-date at all times on new procedures as they are developed. We do also have instruments at European level – specifically, within the framework of the Social Fund - with which to help staff develop their skills. In this area too, we must be able to make use of the Social Fund for the purposes of skills development, so that staff can use the best methods. This is also something to which the Lisbon Process is relevant. The Lisbon Process is, of course, about best practice, and that means that we are supposed to look to those countries that have made most progress.

Finally, I would like to mention something else that I have spoken to Mrs Jöns about. Breast cancer is a disease that strikes women, but it is important that we men get involved in working towards better procedures. It must not be women alone who are committed to better methods of fighting diseases that affect women. It is, rather, something to which all of us – both men and women – must be committed.

(Applause)

Karl-Heinz Florenz (PPE-DE), author. – (DE) Madam President, I am grateful to you, Mrs Jöns, for allowing me to co-author this question with you. I was delighted to do so, because I was struck during the debate by just how little I had heard on this topic up until now. As I followed the debate, I thought about how faint-hearted we really are in Europe, how stupidly we have acted in the past, and how many questions we have left open for this continent. I will try to add my political weight to the balance in this matter, because in terms of content I have nothing to add to what Mrs Jöns and others have said.

I call on both Commissioners to summon up all their courage to deal with this topic, and to combat the faint-heartedness of the Council. The Council has often – and I have experienced this all too often – weakly said: that is subsidiarity, a national matter. Information and communication are the main tasks for the future, including with regard to this terrible disease, and I would therefore ask both Commissioners to exert all their political influence to convince the Council and to establish guidelines.

Just think about it for a minute: we even have guidelines for drawing up guidelines, but we do not have any guidelines on how we should combat breast cancer, the most important disease on this continent, in the future. I think the idea of developing a job description for highly qualified nurses is an excellent and interesting one, and I pledge you my full support.

(Applause)

Anna Záborská (PPE-DE), *author.* – *(FR)* Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, we are once again gathered in plenary to debate an issue which affects both public health and the lives of women and families in our constituencies: breast cancer.

Already in 2003, the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality had asked a question on this subject to the European Commission. Commissioner, at the time it was your predecessor, Mrs Diamantopoulou, who took the first steps to respond to Parliament's requests.

Today, we ask you to recognise the progress that has been made. The Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality is concerned with reducing mortality rates among women affected by breast cancer, improving their quality of life, and providing women and their associations, but also their close families, with information on the risks and treatment of breast cancer.

In this debate, we should also take account of the role of men. Husbands, fathers and their children are also affected by these specifically women's diseases. I also remember the many parents whose daughters are affected by the disease and who provide them with support.

Within the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, we are working on the various aspects of the disease in order that one day we might see a Europe free from breast cancer. I am encouraged by the great interest that the committee has shown in this issue. I would like to thank my colleagues for their excellent collaboration, which really deserves to be acknowledged.

Breast cancer is a public health issue that is important for all women in the European Union. Every two minutes, someone is diagnosed with breast cancer. Every six minutes, a woman dies from it. This disease makes no distinction on grounds of race, religion or culture.

We must have the honesty to recognise all the causes of breast cancer, without exception. It would be useful to compare the levels of increase across the Member States, in order to come to a conclusive strategy. All women ought to have easy access to the means of diagnosis and to quality treatment in the early stages, independently of their origin, social status or level of education. In this way, thousands of lives could be saved. This would be an example of truly positive discrimination. It is now crucial to make every woman aware of the risk of the disease, and to increase the resources allocated to breast cancer prevention and screening in the Member States.

Commissioners, like me, you know from experience that the medical equipment is too expensive for regional hospitals in the new Member States. The medical industry is not prepared to make an effort in terms of finances; it is too concerned with making profits. All the same, I ask you to examine seriously the possibility of funding breast cancer prevention through the Structural Funds. The efforts of politicians, doctors and scientists in developing the network of cooperation in all the Member States could enable us to ensure equal access to the means of screening and health care. Only through this close collaboration can the fight against breast cancer transcend ideological divides and personal rivalries.

(Applause)

Markos Kyprianou, *Member of the Commission.* Madam President, I should like to thank Parliament for having organised this debate on breast cancer. The very detail of the questions shows the wide range of issues involved. I will not try to address every question separately; that would be an impossible task, given my limited speaking time. However, I would be very happy to provide detailed information at a later stage.

I shall therefore focus on three key areas, but first I should like to acknowledge the magnitude of the problem, already mentioned by many speakers. Every year, 270 000 women are diagnosed with breast cancer in the European Union. That affects their lives and the lives of their families and it has a very significant medical, social and economic cost.

The first issue I should like to touch upon – and it has already been addressed – is how far we have come since the European Parliament's resolution of 5 June 2003. It is true that the resolution set out some ambitious targets for the Member States to reach by 2008, notably a 25% reduction in mortality and a reduction in differences between breast cancer survival rates in the Member States to 5%. I have to admit that it is too early to know exactly how much progress has been made. Member States have committed themselves to report to the Commission on the situation by the end of this year, three years after the adoption of the Council recommendations. The Commission will therefore produce an implementation report in 2007. I can assure you that the lack of information from some Member States will not delay production of the report. Instead, the report will indicate the Member States that have not provided the information.

There are already signs that the resolution and other actions have had positive effects and started to make a difference. We expect progress on aspects such as the exchange of best practice models to facilitate application in different parts of the EU and the guidelines for screening diagnosis, delivering some very significant reductions in breast cancer mortality. In addition to providing the results on mortality, we hope to have the data to be able to set out a clear picture of the timeframes involved and developments as regards inequalities.

The second general area I should like to touch upon is research. Breast cancer will feature strongly under the Seventh Framework Programme. This will cover both the detection of the disease and, crucially, the causes – in other words, how it can be prevented.

As regards detection, research is focusing notably on improving breast cancer screening and alternatives to conventional mammography, in order to improve early detection. Examples already supported under the Sixth Framework Programme include mammography with molecular imaging or the application of positron emission tomography – PET – specifically designed for breast cancer examination. Early detection is, of course, crucial in ensuring successful treatment, but that is still treating the disease rather than the causes. I am therefore very pleased that work on the causes of cancer is a priority in the Research Framework Programme. That work will cover the three key areas of genetics, environment and lifestyle.

Thirdly, the issue of campaigns: these can play a very important role in public health issues, in raising awareness of key issues by private individuals, public authorities and decision-makers, as well as, of course, health professionals. Not only does it enable individuals to help and protect themselves, it also puts pressure on the decision-makers to give priority to this problem, which they sometimes fail to do.

The European Parliament's 2003 resolution has been an effective part of an ongoing campaign to increase awareness. Awareness-raising among women on the importance of screening has been a key part of European action against cancer. Such campaigns can be supported under our public health programme.

In conclusion, we all agree that breast cancer has to be tackled and best practice examples show that significant results can be achieved. However, we have to understand that it is a continuous process. We must never become complacent, even if we are encouraged by the initial success of some of those efforts and initiatives. A coherent and collaborative approach is needed, covering in particular the three aspects I highlighted earlier.

Of course, we have to admit that most of these actions are principally for the Member States, but the European Union can and *will* provide support – as in the case of research – where possible. As an indication, I can refer to future support for breast cancer screening guidelines, which will continue under the current and future health programmes, the European Council network and the European Union network for information on cancer in Europe. A new project that has now been shortlisted answers some of the questions relating to the extension of the guidelines. The European Union guidelines will be updated to cover not only the setting of standards for breast cancer nurses but also the specification for specialist breast units. They will set the standards, principles and benchmarks to which Member States will have to adjust their breast cancer screening, training and treatment. These initiatives will cover the need for information and consultation in the new Member States as well and will help to integrate the relevant experts within existing networks.

We must never forget that each year more than a quarter of a million women depend on such action. They and their families depend on the priority we and the Member States will give to such an important and serious problem. We must not let them down.

(Applause)

Vladimír Špidla, *Member of the Commission. (CS)* Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, all of those present in this Chamber are aware that breast cancer is a terrible ordeal for the sufferers. We are all aware of what an ordeal it is for their families and for those closest to them. This is a disease that can turn a person's life upside-down. The treatment is arduous and lengthy, and often stops sufferers from working or leading a normal life. My fellow Commissioner Mr Kyprianou spoke just now on issues of health and prevention in relation to breast cancer.

In my short speech, I should like to focus on reintegrating breast cancer patients into working life. Breast cancer severely disrupts people's lives. Life changes direction and women are often ill-prepared for such a change, although in reality they often cope with the situation better than their relatives, friends, colleagues and employers. The latter often do not know how to behave towards women with breast cancer. There is no universal solution. Each individual situation needs to be treated on its own merits. There is little information or guidance available on how to deal with breast cancer sufferers from a legal, work, health or psychological point of view.

The Community should improve the mechanisms for helping breast cancer patients. Experience has shown that it is better for women with breast cancer to carry on going to work, assuming, of course, that their physical and mental condition allows them to. In order to make life better for patients while they are unwell, special working hours and adapted holiday arrangements, for example in tandem with working from home, need to be introduced. This would also help them to reintegrate more easily and more quickly into the working environment. Support for employers and colleagues could play a crucial role during treatment. Psychological help should also be permanently available, and to this end, an educational awareness-raising campaign should be launched, aimed at employers and the workplace in general.

As I said before, it is important to create the conditions whereby women with breast cancer can quickly and successfully be reintegrated into the labour market. The specially adapted working conditions that may be needed during treatment should perhaps be extended until some time after treatment, in order to help the patient to reintegrate. Breast cancer patients must not be allowed to suffer discrimination in the work place. The European Directive of November 2000 provides a general framework for equal treatment in employment and prohibits discrimination on the grounds of disability. The question remains whether long-term illness falls under the heading of disability. In the United Kingdom, for example, following lengthy discussions on this issue, the law prohibiting discrimination against the disabled has been updated and now provides for protection against discrimination against cancer sufferers. The European Court of Justice will need to decide whether this interpretation applies to the directive on prohibiting discrimination.

EU legislation, specifically Directive 89/391/EEC on the introduction of measures to encourage improvements in the health and safety of workers, also states that employers must adapt the nature of work to the worker's state of health, which implicitly includes those with chronic and long-term illnesses. I welcome the proposal to draw up a charter to protect those with chronic and long-term illnesses in the workplace. I feel, however, that the social partners should develop such a charter in conjunction with the relevant bodies at national level.

Apart from legislative instruments, the Commission supports cooperation between the Member States via the open method of coordination in the area of social protection. Investment in health is one of the goals of the new structural funds for 2007-2013, in particular in the convergence regions. The objective is to increase the number of healthy working years and to enable as many people as possible to play an active role in society. This objective relates both to health infrastructure and to the training of health workers, an issue that has been mentioned in this Chamber. The measures in this area may include health support, disease prevention, knowledge sharing and the training of highly qualified workers.

Honourable Members, the European social model is based on solidarity with the most vulnerable members of society, towards whom we have a moral responsibility. Breast cancer sufferers are physically and psychologically vulnerable and fragile, as well as actually having to fight against this disease. They

need support, they need decent healthcare, they need protection against discrimination, they need to be reintegrated into working life under the best possible conditions.

Honourable Members, I think that you can rely on us in this matter.

(Applause)

John Bowis, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Madam President, we have heard a list of all the things we need, and what the House is saying is that we need action to achieve those things.

This resolution offers one of those rare occasions where we have total unity round this Chamber: unity across committees, unity across political groups. It is unity on what is a rare disease. It is one of the rare diseases that is not the result of poverty; it is the result of increasing prosperity. That is why it is very much a European disease growing in prevalence.

The most common cancer among women is breast cancer. We know the figures: 275 000 a year; 88 000 dying a year. That is why we demand access to better services, better research. But medical science is making hope possible: early diagnosis, new drugs, specialist nurses, new therapies and knowledge leading to prevention. All those things mean that we do not have to accept this terrible toll among women.

But it is also an issue for men. One thousand men in the European Union die each year from breast cancer. Fill this Chamber with men – every seat filled, and the galleries and the interpreters' booths, and the platform – and wipe it out. That is the number of men we are losing each year to breast cancer. Men need specialist services too. They also have problems because although it is easier to spot in men, it is left too late and so the tumours are too large. So they need screening. Too many men cannot cope. They cannot cope, not just with the disease, but with going home to their families and telling them they have got breast cancer. They cannot cope with going down to the pub to tell their mates they have got breast cancer. Some – and 'some' is too many – kill themselves rather than face the consequences of their diagnosis. That is our fault. We do not enable them to cope; we must. For men and women, our message is that we have a united resolution and we demand united action from the Commission.

Stephen Hughes, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – Madam President, my thanks go to Mrs Jöns for bringing this issue back before the House. This disease is not only a women's issue, as Mr Bowis and Mrs Záborská have said. Hundreds of thousands of men, hundreds of thousands of families, are affected by the disease each year. My mother-in-law died of breast cancer and my wife's eldest sister was diagnosed with breast cancer ten years ago, but thanks to early and successful treatment she is alive and well today. I am sure you can imagine the shadow this disease casts over me and my family. But, as we have heard, it is a particular ordeal for the 275 000 women who contract the disease each year and, tragically, the 88 000 women who die of the disease each year in the European Union, and their families.

These are figures which can and must be radically reduced. We need further research into prevention. But it is particularly shocking to me that mortality rates vary by as much as 50% across the Member States and that mastectomy rates vary by up to 60%. That too is unacceptable. There is clearly a pressing need for best practice to be spread evenly across the Union into every region and that best practice needs to be built around the European guidelines for quality assurance in breast cancer screening and diagnosis.

Another pressing issue is the fact that an increasing number of younger women are developing breast cancer – 47% under 55 years of age. Add to that the fact that up to 20%, a fifth of former breast cancer patients, do not return to work and it becomes clear that something needs to be done if we are to meet the Lisbon target for women's participation in the labour market. I therefore fully commend the resolution's call – and I am pleased to hear Commissioner Špidla respond positively to it today – to draw up a charter for the protection of the rights of breast cancer patients and currently sick people in the workplace to facilitate their reintegration into the world of work. Their working hours need to be tailored to their treatment pattern and their reabsorption into the workplace needs to be built around their rehabilitation.

Five women per day are diagnosed with breast cancer in my own region. I hope that, with proper research into prevention, that figure will be reduced. I also hope that our work can come to mean that those diagnoses will not represent a death sentence; rather a diagnosis needs to become a trigger for early, sensitive, humane intervention, successful treatment and re-entry into the world of work and a full and fulfilling life.

Elizabeth Lynne, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Madam President, I should like to add my thanks to Mrs Jöns for this splendid initiative. She has done a tremendous amount of work on it.

The lifetime risk of developing breast cancer in European women, as we have heard, is one in ten, and it is the biggest killer of women between the ages of 35 to 59, and the second biggest overall. Mr Bowis was absolutely right: we must not forget that although it mainly affects women, one thousand men die of breast cancer each year.

Still not enough is being done by Member States. With advanced screening techniques, it is possible for breast cancer to be identified at an early stage. The European Commission published a new set of guidelines on breast cancer screening and diagnosis in April. They estimated that 32 000 breast cancer deaths across Europe could be prevented. But many Member States do not have technical screening facilities or trained nurses in place. I urge every Member State to sign up to the European guidelines but, more importantly, to implement those guidelines.

We need to do even more in terms of education. Lifestyle, as well as genetics, can apparently affect the likelihood of getting breast cancer. We also need to make sure that those diagnosed with breast cancer are not discriminated against in the workplace, as we have already heard. They should be allowed to continue to work during treatment, if that is what they wish to do; but, if not, to be able to resume their careers afterwards. That should be covered by the 2000 Employment Directive on anti-discrimination in the workplace – we have done that in the United Kingdom. But many Member States do not class breast cancer as a disability, which is why we need a definition of disability. With so many people developing breast cancer, we must get that right.

We must also have an exchange of best practice, particularly as mortality rates vary by 50% between Member States. It is up to us all to keep this high on the political agenda.

Hiltrud Breyer, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, we have before us an excellent motion for resolution, which talks a great deal about better prevention and treatment for breast cancer. As several of you have already pointed out, it submits proposals for, for example, better screening. Quite right too, and we should build on that.

However, I would like to stress once again that it is also a matter of prevention. It is an old wives' tale that genetic factors and lifestyle are the only causes of this illness. New studies have confirmed that harmful environmental factors in the form of toxic chemicals or increased radiation are responsible for half of all cases of breast cancer. That is something to which we must pay attention. Alongside comprehensive research into the causes, health protection must be at the forefront of European chemicals legislation.

In the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, we initiated a move towards greater health and environmental protection in Europe. However, today's vote on breast cancer also provides clear support for a strong REACH, because it is clear that the changes in women's hormonal systems make them particularly susceptible to the harmful effects of chemicals. Studies from the USA show that female farmers who use certain pesticides on their fields are more prone to breast cancer. Women who live within a mile of a special waste site for herbicides and pesticides are also at greater risk, and we know that many of the softening agents previously used in cosmetics contribute to the growth of breast cancer cells.

Prevention should have an even higher priority in our fight against breast cancer.

Adamos Adamou, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (EL) Madam President, I have listened to all the previous speakers and I too wish to take my turn in thanking the authors of the resolution and those who have worked so intensively to combat breast cancer.

I shall comment, Commissioner, on the inequalities and on treatment. As you know, the mortality rate is higher in the ten new Member States and screening programmes are very 'kindergarten', to coin a phrase. I include my own country in this which, as you may know, has a pilot rather than a national programme. It is a pity, Commissioner, to leave the country where someone will fall ill with breast cancer and the country and hospital in which they will be treated to luck. This is due to the fact that the guidelines on the development, firstly, of quality mammograms and, secondly, of countries with specialist treatment centres – breast clinics – with specialist nurses, are not easy to consolidate.

I shall not, of course, omit to refer here to what John Bowis also said earlier: that men also get breast cancer and that we should not always refer solely and exclusively to women. As we are debating breast cancer today through this fine initiative, I should like to point out that other forms of cancer, Commissioner, are not poor relations.

There are other forms of cancer where, with precisely the same guidelines, we can reduce the repercussions and the mortality rate. What we need is a strategy for cancer as a whole, which coordinates all 25 Member States, and to stop sucking on the sweetie of subsidiarity, with the result that no money is granted from the Structural Funds in order to develop these programmes. I beg you to please examine these issues.

Liam Aylward, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – Madam President, I wholeheartedly support this question to the Commission from each of the three committees on what I regard as a most important topic. I also want to welcome the positive response from the Commissioners.

I co-signed this resolution on breast cancer as I believe the European Union can do much to assist Member States in this area through extensive research, benchmarking and sharing of best-practice principles, as well as offering Member States substantial professional, material and technical assistance through European programmes.

The main concern that legislators and health teams face today with regard to breast cancer is that every woman, irrespective of her place of residence, social status, occupation and education, should have access to high-quality screening for treatment and aftercare in the event of cancer.

We need to improve the service of information to women, both younger and older, about the risks of and availability of treatment for breast cancer in order to ultimately reduce the mortality rate of women and to improve their quality of life and assist them in returning to work if they so desire.

There is a need for more extensive research on the causes of breast cancer, in particular on the effects of hazardous chemicals and the environmental pollution, nutrition, lifestyle and genetic factors.

I call on the Commission, through the Seventh Framework Programme, to provide financial support for the further development of blood-based tests, to provide funding for comprehensive investigation into the causes of breast cancer, to urge Member States to set up information and counselling centres, whilst simultaneously reporting back to the European Parliament on the results of more recent research conducted in this very important area.

Urszula Krupa, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (PL) Madam President, the alarming statistics on women suffering and dying from breast cancer certainly call for a resolution calling on the Commission and the Member States to combat this epidemic and conduct breast screening. Importantly, they also point to the need to take preventive action, which should involve the elimination of risk factors. It would therefore be appropriate to draw logical conclusions from existing research. These results indicate that breast cancer is not simply due to toxic damage, but that its main cause is the use of hormonal contraceptives from an early age, along with hormone replacement therapy. In addition, breast cancer can be triggered by complications following abortion.

Furthermore, breast cancer often occurs amongst childless women, or amongst women who become pregnant relatively late in life and who go through the menopause relatively late. The more children a woman bears, the smaller the chance she has of developing breast cancer, ovarian cancer or cancer of the uterus. It follows that the increased incidence of cancer can also be linked to the feminist concept of womanhood, which aims to deprive women of motherhood, exploit them as a potential part of the workforce and practically force them to control their so-called reproductive life, which virtually amounts to perceiving them as animals.

According to psycho-oncologists, the increased incidence of tumours is not unrelated to the spread of mental disorders, notably depression. These result in reduced immunity to disease and allow the development of tumours. Preventive measures should therefore involve spreading a culture of life as an alternative to the widespread notion that everything around us is about to collapse.

Irena Belohorská (NI). – (SK) I would like to inform you of the outcome of discussions held on 20 October 2006 at one of the largest and oldest women's organisations in Slovakia, the Union of Slovak Women. At the meeting the women were discussing the intolerable breast cancer situation in Slovakia and other European countries. Nowadays, cancer is curable if diagnosed early enough. Thus, given that

the disease is preventable, women are dying partly because of our ignorance. Therefore, I am here to inform you of the 'Don't Let Us Die' initiative conceived on 20 October. I call on politicians, physicians, patients and the general public to prevent their mothers, wives, partners and daughters from dying of a disease that need not be fatal.

The European Parliament enacts regulations on nature protection, European motorways are being built, but investment in health is overlooked. The European Union is also striving to reduce life-style differences between Member States. Indeed, we are doing well in many areas. However, statistics on cancer curability indicate that there are major differences between Member States, and these include breast cancer survival rates. Slovak women have a 30% lower chance of surviving this kind of cancer than many women from Western Europe.

It is deplorable that we cannot effectively guarantee the screening needed to boost the survival rate. It is necessary to give women the opportunity to see their doctors for screening in the evening or at weekends, and at the same time to reward doctors and medical professionals properly for this additional work.

I believe that the majority of women are aware of this problem and behave responsibly. They only need the appropriate access to a doctor. Prevention, however, is not free; it requires considerable funding. Therefore, everyone should be exerting more pressure to ensure that spending on prevention is not crowded out by other priorities. We should approve a budget that provides for investing in prevention, which means not only fitting out hospitals and purchasing mammographs or sonographs, but above all investing in human resources so that a sufficient number of health professionals are available to operate this equipment.

Cristina Gutiérrez-Cortines (PPE-DE). – (ES) Madam President, I would like to draw attention to something that has already been said.

Firstly, I believe that the European Commission's policy is a good one, trying to harmonise aspects in a field in which it does not have any real competences, but where it can exercise leadership, and in this regard we insist that it extend its policies and carry on emphasising self-examination and pointing out the differences amongst the various countries. I am not saying that it should condemn them, but I do say that it should highlight any shortcomings. Above all, I also believe that its website should be expanded and self-examination should be introduced, for example, and a series of other possible actions taken, as is already happening in some commercial organisations.

Secondly, I would like to draw attention to the family tragedy that normally accompanies cases of breast cancer. I believe that families are very frequently broken up and that many women do not dare to report their case precisely because the cancer interrupts their work rhythm, disrupts their normal lives and would prevent them from looking after their families in the event of their having to undergo surgery.

I therefore believe that the European Union must broaden its action and deal also with this area of family assistance and of awareness-raising.

Dorette Corbey (PSE). – (NL) Madam President, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, as has already been stated, breast cancer is a major health problem, and increasingly so. It is second only to lung cancer as the most prevalent type of cancer, but the causes of lung cancer are partly known. Smoking and asbestos are significant among them and air pollution is a risk factor. Something can be done in order to prevent lung cancer; as people can, for example, stop smoking.

Little is known, in fact, about breast cancer, though, other than the statistics. The incidence of breast cancer in the Netherlands is higher than anywhere else. There are also statistical connections, and I would thank the Commissioner for the extensive and detailed response to my written question. The Commissioner claims that there is a connection between obesity and breast cancer; there is also one with having children late in life. There is a socio-economic factor: low-income groups do not get screened as often and are therefore more likely to die of the disease. Finally, according to the Commission, perhaps the most important factor determining the risk of breast cancer is hormones, particularly oestrogens. These can be oestrogens from various sources, including chemical pollution, or exposure to environmental factors, but also the use of medicines or contraceptives.

Commissioner, this is important information. In all contacts I have with women's groups, there are two factors that keep cropping up. Many breast cancer patients suspect that their illness is related to the

environment, medicines or the use of the pill. Could you therefore give the necessary incentives so that research in this area is given the necessary priority? More clarity is needed about the effects of hormone-regulating substances in the environment and the use of hormones such as medicines and contraceptives.

I am particularly indebted to Mrs Jöns for her unstinting concern for, and commitment to, women with breast cancer. Her work is a true inspiration to many women. I should also like to express my appreciation for Europa Donna, which I should like to thank for the excellent work they are doing in making it possible for European countries to learn from each other, which is exactly what we should be doing.

Anneli Jäätteenmäki (ALDE). – *(FI)* Madam President, the number of cancer cases will grow dramatically in the years to come as the European population ages. Many are worried about the adequacy of resources for treatment and growing costs. This has to do with economic growth, and also the increase in patients' own costs. Guaranteeing our citizens equal opportunities to receive treatment in healthcare and nursing is an important policy issue both within the Member States and at EU level. We must ensure that age does not mean that people are less entitled to services and good care.

Next I would like to say a few words about the integration of patients into the world of work. I understand that it is important for growth to get people back to work. This is often important for patients as well. We patients are quite normal people on the whole. Nevertheless, we also have to remember to be humane when integrating people back into work. From the point of view of humanity, it is important that everyone has sufficient time to recover from their illness. We have to remember that recovery time differs from one person to another.

Satu Hassi (Verts/ALE). – *(FI)* Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank the rapporteur very much for some excellent work. I want to protest against Commissioner Špidla's statement that breast cancer stops people from living a normal life. It does not actually need to be that way. I myself am an example of someone with breast cancer which, if discovered in time, operated on and treated properly, does not in any way prevent someone from leading a normal life and working.

Finland is one of the European countries in which breast cancer is becoming common fastest, but thanks to screening and treatment, the mortality rate has not gone up for decades. Improved screening and treatment alone are not enough, however: we also need to examine the causes of cancer. My colleagues, Mr Breyer and Mrs Corbey, mentioned that new research suggests that as many as half of new cases of breast cancer may be explained by environmental factors, one of which is industrial chemicals, which we are exposed to all the time. A cocktail of chemicals that damage hormones is particularly dangerous, especially for the foetus and during puberty. We need to do something about this.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). – *(PT)* Madam President, as we know, breast cancer is not only the most common cancer in women, it is also the biggest killer of women between the ages of 35 and 59.

Accordingly, the policy of information on breast screening must be improved and stepped up, programmes to detect cancer at an early stage must be put in place and support for research into preventing breast cancer must be strengthened. Hence the importance of the issues that we put to the Commission. We are also hopeful of a positive response from the Member States so as to ensure that all women, regardless of their social and economic status, have access to the prevention, screening, early diagnosis and treatment of breast cancer, and can be reintegrated into the labour market without suffering discrimination.

Jean-Claude Martinez (NI). – *(FR)* Madam President, in France, in practical terms, breast cancer means first of all, at the screening stage, a mammogram, followed by anatomical pathology confirming the presence of cancer. This assessment should be extended to include the liver, the brain and the bones, which are the three areas targeted by metastases.

At best, in France, a bone scintigram will be taken; MRI and above all PET scans, used for early metabolic diagnosis, are not performed. During treatment, if patients receive radiotherapy, it will be carried out by a low-ranking technician. As a result, accidental irradiation sometimes occurs around the heart and the thyroid. Finally, after treatment, if, when a patient suffering back pain is examined, a scintigram is taken showing a suspicious shadow on the bone, screening by PET scan will still not be performed. Why? Because in France, for 35 million women, there are only two PET scanners. Why? Because the budgetary austerity pact forbids spending on hospital equipment. As a result, women are dying in Europe due to breast cancer, but also due to the ideological cancer of the European Commission known as budgetary Malthusianism and rampant free-marketism.

Françoise Grossetête (PPE-DE). – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, breast cancer kills too many women in the European Union, many of them far too young. These deaths are unacceptable given that we know that early detection can cure this cancer. We are all aware of the mental and physical trauma suffered by women diagnosed with this illness: they have to reorganise their family and working life and, quite simply, deal with it. However, there is absolutely no harmonisation at European level with regard to the way in which we combat the scourge of breast cancer. Only ten Member States run screening programmes, with varying degrees of success. European women are therefore faced with a blatantly unfair situation, simply because of which country, or even which town, they live in.

Commissioner, our aim is to eradicate this disease, in the knowledge that, quite apart from the traumatic experience for the patient, it has a cost for our society. The solution to this blight is early, compulsory screening, organised by the governments of the Member States. In order to be effective, this screening must be free, and above all must be well run, which requires the availability of up-to-date equipment throughout the European Union. Digital mammography, which in the past sometimes missed microcalcifications – the most common signs of breast cancer – has made considerable progress, so, Commissioner, when are we going to have digital mammograms throughout the European Union?

Effective screening also requires all the equipment to be subject to calibration and therefore to quality controls, because there is nothing worse than giving women a false sense of security through a radiological examination that could be of poor quality. For this screening to be effective, equipment on its own is not enough: the doctors who perform these diagnostic tests must undertake continuing training, as well as regular refresher courses and compulsory testing to evaluate their skills.

Finally, women need information regarding the prevention of breast cancer: they need advice on healthy living and food safety, and must not be afraid of screening. Research must enable us to make progress in finding the causes of breast cancer. I am convinced that, if we combine our efforts, we will once again be able to show what the European Union can do to improve the health of European women. That is certainly a subject that should have unanimous support in the European Union: zero deaths from breast cancer in Europe!

Anne Ferreira (PSE). – (FR) Madam President, Commissioners, I should like to start by thanking my fellow Members for their hard work and for the clarity of their comments. The problem we are discussing today is a serious one: one only needs to look at the alarming statistics on the occurrence of breast cancer in Europe and to see the number of deaths caused by this disease to be convinced of that. This problem is made all the more serious by the fact that there are major inequalities between countries with regard to both the prevention and the treatment of cancer, and these inequalities have become even more pronounced since the last enlargement.

Although the Treaties state that, in conjunction with the Member States, the European Union shall work to protect and promote the health of European citizens, we nevertheless need to give greater emphasis to the phrase 'in conjunction', because the EU's guidelines and recommendations have not been taken sufficiently into account. We now need to respond to this state of affairs, and not continue to tolerate it. The European Union must ensure that its citizens have equal access to the detection and management of the disease, and to the best available treatments. We can do this by legislative and budgetary means, as well as through the Structural Funds and research programmes.

We must channel all the resources necessary to research all the causes of this disease, be they environmental, social or genetic, and to undertake research into innovative treatments. The Commission needs to present us with some proposals in this regard, and I really do think that the European Union should make the fight against breast cancer, and against cancer in general, a political priority, because together we will always be stronger. This is the added value of the European Union that the people of Europe expect.

Studies, diagnostics, evaluations and resolutions are all necessary, but action is absolutely vital. The Commission and the Council should therefore heed our warning cry and lose no more time.

Marian Harkin (ALDE). – Madam President, today we are debating an excellent resolution which has implications for all women and indeed for all families in the EU. As already stated, every six minutes a woman in the EU dies from cancer. That is a truly shocking statistic and one which should spur us on to immediate action.

Breast screening, which according to the WHO can reduce deaths from breast cancer by up to 35%, is offered on a nationwide basis in only 11 Member States. Shame on all of us! And shame on my own country, Ireland, where we have not yet rolled out breast-check nationwide. Deaths from breast cancer in the Republic of Ireland are significantly higher than in the north of Ireland, where they have already established breast screening. But we, like many other European countries, do not yet have nationwide cover.

Finally, two crucial points: every country should have nationwide breast cancer care supported by interdisciplinary breast units at appropriate locations; and women over 69 or, in Ireland's case, 65, must not be excluded from breast screening.

Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou (PPE-DE). – *(EL)* Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I too should like to congratulate the competent parliamentary committees for their initiative in instigating this joint debate on breast cancer, given that it is a given and constantly increasing risk to women's and men's health, at younger and younger ages.

The repercussions which it has on the organisation of personal, family, social and productive life have already been pointed out. A call is therefore being made today for the Community strategy to respond to both present circumstances and emerging trends and challenges for the health of our citizens and to use all possible means to achieve the objectives of a perceptible reduction which it has set.

Breast cancer is an illness in which proper screening plays a fundamental role, as we know from the statistics at our disposal and as we have heard today during the debate. However, this means that we need a modern infrastructure in terms of materials and equipment and specialised staff. The 'Europe against Cancer' programme, in conjunction with all the other facilities offered by the Structural Funds, research programmes and so forth, must respond to these challenges.

Proper medical and psychological monitoring of patients is also very important, as we have already heard. The Member States, therefore, together with the regional and local authorities, are obliged to safeguard these conditions of prevention, monitoring and therapy for all citizens in every corner of their region. This is particularly important for the new Member States, especially as we are about to welcome another two new members to 'our family'.

I should like to emphasise here the role which civil society plays in informing and supporting patients. Many interesting initiatives have been developed in various countries and have even been networked at European level. We need to support their work, especially in the new Member States, and to provide the opportunity for exchanges of best practices and added value for the benefit of the health of our citizens.

Karin Scheele (PSE). – *(DE)* Madam President, I would like to extend my warmest congratulations and thanks to Mrs Jöns, who is not only the main initiator of today's motion for resolution and of the question, but also works tirelessly to raise awareness of the issue of breast cancer. That of course means that there will be huge support for this motion for resolution tomorrow.

Breast cancer is the number one cause of death amongst women aged between 35 and 59, amongst both mothers and women without children. Every year, 88 000 women and 1 000 men in the European Union die of breast cancer. Breast screening can considerably reduce mortality from breast cancer amongst women aged between 50 and 69. There have been EU guidelines on this subject since 1992, but so far they have been implemented in only 11 Member States, and there are huge differences in women's mortality rates. That is why we are eagerly awaiting the progress report that Commissioner Kyprianou announced for 2007.

However, today the European Parliament is not just discussing the early detection of breast cancer and the best way to treat it, but also prevention. The causes of breast cancer need to be investigated in more detail, in particular the role of toxic chemicals, environmental pollution, diet, lifestyle and genetic factors, and also the question of how these factors interact.

In a few weeks, when Parliament votes on the new European chemicals policy, we will have an opportunity to send a clear signal that we take the prevention of cancer seriously.

Lissy Gröner (PSE). – *(DE)* Madam President, Commissioners, ladies and gentlemen, today we have been hearing the overwhelming figures that bear witness to the effect that breast cancer has on the lives

of both men and women. It is a matter of pure chance whether treatment is started quickly and efficiently and therefore how high the woman's chances of survival are.

As the coordinator of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, I have been working on this topic for many years, and we have gained a great deal of experience. We cannot leave it at that, though. We have had the EU guidelines for quality mammography for over ten years now. In Belgium, where I have my second home, I am invited for routine screening, while in my homeland of Germany nothing is happening. The lives of mothers, daughters and wives could be saved, and the trauma reduced.

However, we are still only progressing at a snail's pace. The Committee for Women's Rights and Gender Equality presented an excellent report in 2003, but very little has happened since. I think there is a lack of political will in this matter: I can tell that the will is there at European level, but in the Member States much still remains to be done. The Seventh Research Framework Programme now once again gives us the opportunity to exert pressure so that more money goes into research.

In the case of other women's diseases, such as migraines, too, there has been little political pressure applied to move forward and take interdisciplinary action. As over 20 years of experience in the United States have shown, interdisciplinary breast centres can provide very efficient assistance. We now also have such centres in Europe, but here, too, I do not see any sign of the political will to really implement that.

Let us therefore work together, here in the European Parliament, to fight against the trauma of breast cancer, and do so for everyone, not just those who can afford it.

Edite Estrela (PSE). – *(PT)* In spite of the progress that has been made in diagnosis and treatment, breast cancer is still the main cause of death among women of between 35 and 55. It is estimated that in Europe alone breast cancer kills more than 130 000 women per year. Every two and a half minutes a woman is diagnosed with breast cancer. All women must have access to information, prevention and appropriate treatment. Screening programmes, using mammography, should be mandatory in all Member States. More information campaigns on how to lead a healthy lifestyle are needed. The prevention and treatment of breast cancer should also be among the priorities of the Seventh Research Framework Programme, especially at a time when studies show that, as well as genetic factors, environmental and lifestyle factors can also play a part in the development of breast cancer.

Britta Thomsen (PSE). – *(DA)* Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, breast cancer is the most frequent cause of death of women aged between 35 and 50, and the number of women who survive the disease varies greatly from country to country. We must call on the Member States to set up centres to provide information and advice on hereditary breast cancer, and we must call on the Commission to present a progress report on the matter every other year. It is important for priority to be given to breast cancer research. The EU's Seventh Framework Research Programme should, therefore, also appropriate resources for research into breast cancer: not only into its physiological and technical aspects and into alternatives to conventional forms of treatment, but also into its social consequences and, especially, into its causes. We need to be able to learn from each other, and this is of course precisely the kind of cooperation for which the EU also offers a constructive framework. The EU should head European campaigns to prevent the disease and to inform women as to how they can examine their breasts. Moreover, the individual governments should introduce national breast-screening programmes in all the Member States, because early detection of breast cancer can significantly reduce mortality rates.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (PSE). – *(PL)* Madam President, the statistics on cancer in the European Union are alarming. Breast cancer is the second most common type of cancer after lung cancer. In the European Union, a new case is diagnosed every two minutes and a woman dies of breast cancer every six minutes.

The best way of combating breast cancer is through regular screening and promoting effective diagnosis of the tumour. The widespread use of mammography could reduce the number of deaths by as much as 35%, providing, of course, that the tests are carried out regularly and are readily accessible to all. European Union provisions laying down standards in this area have been binding for 15 years. Nonetheless, about half of the countries in the Union are not implementing regular screening programmes. This must change. As the European Parliament, we expect a clear response concerning the actions the European Commission intends to undertake to help Member States reach their targets. One of these is a 25% reduction in the average mortality rate by 2008.

A coordinated strategy at Union level is essential in order to combat breast cancer. Now is the time for specific action. Over 100 000 women a year are dying of breast cancer.

Marta Vincenzi (PSE). – *(IT)* Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the debate has brought forward the themes of prevention, the quality of health intervention, the urgency of research, and the right to dignity and to work. These themes form an integral part of the Lisbon Strategy.

Parliament's political objective is therefore to indicate the urgency of coordinated action, something that the Commission must carry out by assuming a stronger and more visible leading role in relation to the Member States. It is not enough to set targets for 2008: we need to monitor them, take corrective action and understand what progress is being made. There are no prizes for model countries in this field, nor are there penalties for those which do not make progress. I therefore propose to the Commissioners that they introduce a kind of blacklist for nations that do not make any progress, as we have already done for airlines that do not guarantee safety. Let us use the strength of public opinion, united with the scientific community, to support Community policies.

Karin Jöns (PSE), author. – *(DE)* Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, that was a very important debate, and a very good one, for we have shown once more that this House really does stand alongside women suffering from breast cancer, and their families too. We are, by the way, as far as I am aware, the only legislature in the European Union to mark the international month of breast cancer by debating structural improvements in the treatment and early diagnosis of breast cancer.

Today, while I would like to extend thanks to the Commission for having given us an undertaking that it will devise a certification procedure for interdisciplinary breast centres and for specialist nurses in the field, I have to tell the Commissioners that we really would be pleased if they were to put these guidelines on the web, which would not be an over-hasty thing to do in this era of modern communication, and that we have not given up the hope of their putting the existing guidelines on sale in something other than book form alone.

This debate, though, has, for the first time, put the spotlight on a completely new angle, that being the question of how to deal with women with breast cancer in the work environment and their reintegration into the labour market, and calls have been made for a campaign to make employers aware of these issues. Commissioner Špidla has today – if I understand him rightly – promised us one, and many thanks to him for that. This highlights how important it is that there should be a charter of rights for people with chronic illnesses at work, and I think that the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs will be concerning itself with that issue.

Let me close by observing that the answer, to those who have no idea how to deal with breast cancer patients, is that they should be treated in exactly the same way as those suffering from other cancers; they should not be stigmatised – which is, unfortunately, something that still happens – but should, quite simply, be treated entirely normally, which will probably do them the most good.

President. Thank you, Mrs Jöns. Although I am meant only to be chairing this debate, I shall do what I am not supposed to do and endorse your call for the guidelines to be put on the Web. The Commission does not need to use the book as a means of recovering its costs.

Markos Kyprianou, Member of the Commission. Madam President, I should like to thank Members for a very interesting and helpful debate. I knew from the beginning that we were on the same side, but it is good to reassure each other whenever possible. I should like to respond to a few specific points very briefly and then make one general comment, which will cover the issue raised.

We are aware of the issue of breast cancer in men, raised by Mr Bowis. We have to deal with it as a rare disease, because it is much less common than for women. We are focusing on it and will raise it with experts very soon to see how we can include it in future guidelines, but as a rare disease, in the same way as we deal with other rare diseases.

On research, I should like to repeat that environmental causes are part of the plan. The new Seventh Framework Programme will provide an opportunity to open up that area of research. Gene-environment interaction and cancer development will also cover lifestyle and other major risk factors. We will then be able to learn more about the causes of the disease. That is a priority, because prevention is much more important than having to treat the disease afterwards.

The question of other cancers was raised by Mr Adamou. We are working on those and not just concentrating on one. Each one is a specific case and needs specific guidelines and a specific approach. We expect to have guidelines for cervical cancer by next year, for prostate cancer by 2008 and for colorectal cancer by 2009. We have to evaluate, we have to have research, we have to put everything together and then come up with guidelines.

We are also working on other areas such as the hepatitis B and C viruses, because we know they cause liver cancer, as well as aspects such as tobacco, obesity and other causes of cancer.

We have issued guidelines and recommendations on how Member States deal with this and the inequalities. These do not have legal force, so we cannot enforce them on Member States. They represent best practice. With your help, we encourage and put pressure on Member States to comply with the guidelines. I look forward to debating this once we have produced the report. We shall then be able to discuss the outcome and the commitment of the Member States.

This is a worrying issue. The numbers are terrifying. If we have to put pressure on Member States to do their job on this, you can imagine what happens with rare diseases which do not affect so many people. Putting it cynically and bluntly, there is not so much political pressure. If we stop to think about it we could panic, but we must not. Our job is to make sure that Member States fulfil their commitments and follow the recommendations they adopt and the guidelines they agree to. We shall be working on that, in relation not just to breast cancer but to all the inequalities that unfortunately still exist in the European Union, within Member States as well as between Member States. This is not the European Union of solidarity that we all aspire to and have all joined.

That applies to the use of structural funds. The money is there, but unless spending on health is adopted as a priority by Member States, there is nothing we can do. Again, it is a challenge for us to make Member States adopt the policies.

Unless Member States acknowledge that spending on health is not a cost but an investment – and we have to convince them of that – the situation will not improve. That is where we have to work together and cooperate.

Vladimír Špidla, *Member of the Commission*. (CS) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen. I should like to thank you for the debate, which has been extremely fruitful, and has clarified the issue of breast cancer from a range of perspectives. I welcome the fact that other issues have come to the fore in the debate, including social issues, showing that the circumstances of this disease extend beyond exclusively medical factors, and touch also on the fight against discrimination in the work place and in society as a whole.

It is also clear that the direct opportunities open to the EU are limited, although we are not making the most of the opportunities that we do have, and in my opinion this is one of the biggest challenges that we face. I should like to thank Parliament in general, because I firmly believe that if we manage to maintain the same level of determination and political will to resolve this issue, we really can resolve it, directly or indirectly. Given that social and medical policy is always measured in units, and that those units are individual human beings, any progress, however great or small, can ultimately be converted into human lives, and I am convinced that we can achieve such progress and that the outcome of this will be clear.

President. A motion for a resolution (B6-0528/2006) to wind up the debate has been tabled under Rule 108(5) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Wednesday at 12 noon.

IN THE CHAIR: MR MOSCOVICI*Vice-President***6. Programme of support for the European audiovisual sector (MEDIA 2007) (debate)**

President. – The next item is the recommendation for second reading by the Committee on Culture and Education (A6-0337/2006) on the Council common position for adopting a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the implementation of a programme of support for the European audiovisual sector (MEDIA 2007) (06233/2/2006 – C6-0271/2006 – 2004/0151 (COD)) (rapporteur: Mrs Hieronymi)

Ruth Hieronymi (PPE-DE), rapporteur. – (DE) Mr President, today finds us debating MEDIA 2007, the third generation support programme for the European film industry.

I want to extend the warmest thanks to the members of the Committee on Culture and Education and to the advisory committees for their excellent cooperation, and particularly too to Commissioner Reding and her staff, who, together with this House, have tried to do everything they could to help the European audio-visual industry develop further and be a success.

It was exactly a year ago today, on 25 October 2005, that we in this House adopted this draft programme by a broad majority. We had wanted to adopt the programme in good time – and by that I mean early – so that it could be available to Europe’s film-makers with effect from 1 January 2007, but the European Council was not, alas, far-sighted enough to stick to this timetable, and required us, in the first instance, to go through some difficult financial negotiations.

The MEDIA 2007 programme is structured in the same way as its successful predecessors, MEDIA and MEDIA PLUS, covering training, development and sales in the audiovisual sector, but not production, which is a matter for the Member States to deal with. What makes the MEDIA programme so extraordinarily important is the fact that the audio-visual sector is, as we are all aware, one of the fastest growing economic sectors not only in Europe, but throughout the world. If Europe wants to keep up, it has to get on the right track.

The MEDIA programme represents a response to two core problems with the European audio-visual market, the first of which is its fragmentation, which is attributable primarily to our cultural, linguistic and national diversity; while that is a treasure, and one of the most important treasures Europe possesses, it also presents great challenges in terms of market development. Secondly, the audio-visual market in Europe suffers from chronic under-capitalisation. The MEDIA programme does a good job of responding to those challenges.

The MEDIA programme helped fund 90% of all films produced for export within Europe, and every euro invested through it brings another twenty in follow-up investment, and so it was very definitely right that the Commission, and Commissioner Reding in particular, should push as they did for adequate funding for this on the part of the European Union, and proposed that this should amount to the sum of one billion euros. It is unfortunate that the Council could not, in the course of negotiations, be prevailed upon to accept this sum, which was reduced to EUR 671 million, so we have managed to maintain the status quo without achieving any further development.

The new programme does, nevertheless, incorporate three priorities. The first is digitisation, the second enhanced cooperation at every level, and the third improved access to financial institutions specialising in the funding of films. All I can say to all that is that we are speaking out strongly in favour of a quick start for the programme, of its successful implementation and of what we hope will be adequate funding next time round.

Viviane Reding, Member of the Commission. (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I know that, like me, everyone in Parliament values the MEDIA programme, a programme that has proven itself and that has supported the European audiovisual sector since it launched. We are now in the fourth generation of this programme, and the fact that we have stuck with the basic structure, whilst innovating with regard to the precise elements linked to technological progress, shows that the programme has demonstrated its worth, that it is important, that it is unanimously recognised by those in the sector and that it is vital to the future of our audiovisual creativity and heritage.

Mr President, I am delighted at the European Parliament's unwavering support, and in particular at the constructive and unfailing support of its rapporteur Mrs Hieronymi. The recommendation for second reading marks a new step towards a speedy entry into force of the programme in 2007. Parliament has done its part, and the final decisions now need to be taken by the Council. I hope that this will enable those working in the audiovisual sector to benefit from next year, smoothly and seamlessly, from this aid that is so vital to them for many reasons: firstly, for European cultural diversity, secondly, for the creation of European productions, and, finally, for the robustness of the content industry. For my part, I am going to promote, as in the past, the adoption of this decision, which will be a crucial step for the future of the European audiovisual sector.

Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.* – (EL) Mr President, today's proposal for the adoption by the European Parliament of the common position on the decision to implement a programme of support for the European audiovisual sector is due, I would say, to the personal persistence and systematic work of a great many people, especially the rapporteur, Mrs Ruth Hieronymi, whom I too, as draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, honestly congratulate, together with the leading person working on the MEDIA series of programmes, Commissioner Reding.

In cooperation with the European Commission and the Council, we have come to the final version of the text of the MEDIA 2007-2013 programme, which gives especial added value to the development of the European audiovisual sector which, apart from its economic benefit and importance and the anticipated contribution to the development of employment in the European Union and of the competitiveness of the audiovisual industry, also has a particular social and cultural value.

The audiovisual sector today has huge potential for combating gender stereotypes and cultivating the attitudes and conduct of European communities on the basis of traditions, unchanged values and respect for the dignity and uniqueness of human beings.

Thanks to the contribution of the European Parliament to the strengthening of the pre-productive and post-productive stage of the majority of European audiovisual producers, the new MEDIA 2007 will continue to highlight their importance for the promotion of cultural dialogue and linguistic and cultural heritage.

We also hope that, within the framework of the globalisation of competitiveness and of the strategic objectives of Lisbon, a European industry will be promoted which is respected, strong and of differentiated content, in order to develop European values and make them accessible, by giving greater attention to the promotion of the lesser spoken languages ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Marianne Mikko, *on behalf of the PSE Group.* – (ET) Ladies and gentlemen, first of all I would like once again to congratulate Mrs Hieronymi, the rapporteur, who has skilfully made MEDIA 2007 into an excellent document with which to support the European film industry.

I am glad but also concerned; glad that support for digitalisation has become a central part of the MEDIA 2007 programme, but concerned that, at the present level of funding, the European film industry will not be competitive.

Digitalisation is a challenge that the European audio-visual sector needs in order to develop its ability for innovation. Digitalisation could become an effective means of overcoming the division of the European market.

I would like to thank the Commission, the Council and all of my colleagues who supported my positions as shadow rapporteur. As regards the present situation, the proportion of US production on European television stations has once again reached a record level. Hollywood also rules our cinemas.

There was a time when the cinema belonged to Fassbinder and the French new wave. More recently it belonged to Kaurismäki and the Dogma group. Now the intelligent European audience wants to see Asian film production.

I know that the rise of brilliant filmmakers depends largely on chance. The present underfunding means that the next European film genius may go to work in America or go into another field of work altogether.

The media is not just an industry. The media is a means for the creation of identity, and it is because the European Union cannot function without European identity that I would like to emphasise once again how essential it is that we support our film industry.

I would like to thank you all for the work you have done, but I must conclude by saying that what has been achieved in the area of financing is below the level it was at when we began work. For that reason, I feel sorry for Europe.

Alfonso Andria, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, it is already a year since, at first reading, we welcomed the excellent work by the rapporteur, whom I would like to congratulate once again on her more recent work. Furthermore, last September, Mrs Hieronymi, myself and other MEPs discussed these topics with members of the Italian Government and operators in the sector, during a long and interesting debate on the occasion of the 57th year of the prestigious Venice film festival.

We appreciate that there has been a delay. The European Parliament has, with a great sense of responsibility, acted extremely swiftly and today brings to the attention of the Chamber the final text of the report on the MEDIA programme, which has of course been much improved, making resources more accessible to potential beneficiaries, strengthening cooperation with other Community programmes in the areas of education, training and research, as well as creating easier access to credit for the audiovisual industry in order to remedy the chronic underinvestment in the sector.

Moreover, the use of new technologies represents an inevitable shift towards rationalising costs and consequent competitiveness. I therefore propose that the Commission should take it upon themselves to evaluate the pilot projects carried out and to share experiences where they have been successful.

In conclusion, I would like to relaunch the proposal that I made to this House last year, in relation to the report on preserving our film heritage, to create a thematic European film archive to safeguard a careful selection of films on historical events and on events relating to the development of the Community project.

Helga Trüpel, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I too would like to start with warm thanks to Mrs Hieronymi for her work and to Commissioner Reding for her good cooperation.

What our media policy is in fact about is the further development of the specific aesthetic language of European films. At the heart of our cultural self-image is the desire to fight against Hollywood's dominance, to show our own films, characterised as they are by European diversity, and to facilitate their production and distribution. Although we know that the audio-visual industry is also of enormous importance in terms of the Lisbon Strategy and of Europe's economic development, this is not just about the economy; it is also, in a profound sense, about cultural policy and about cultural identity and cultural diversity.

I agree with the previous speakers who have highlighted under-capitalisation and the need for a rapid start to be made, and for our media programme to be better funded.

Seán Ó Neachtain, *on behalf of the UEN Group.* – Mr President, I also would like to congratulate the rapporteur, Mrs Hieronymi, on her work and Commissioner Reding on her work in support of this programme.

I support the continuation of the MEDIA programme for the period 2007-2013. We must remember, as Europe integrates more closely, that it is very important that we seek to protect and promote our different cultural and linguistic diversities within the EU itself. We must always remember that the diversity of Europe is its greatest strength. In essence, the MEDIA programme will help to develop the audiovisual sector in Europe during the coming six years.

Amendments by the European Parliament have ensured that the importance of European cinema is being recognised under the MEDIA programme for the purpose of intercultural dialogue, linguistic and cultural diversity and non-discrimination.

Thomas Wise, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group.* – Mr President, this proposal has been another plank in the attempts to impose EU ideals and censorship on an unsuspecting public. It is less about support to industries in the EU, and more about protecting them from outside competition in the real world.

I have to ask: why is this proposal necessary? Well, maybe because in implementing such a programme the EU can exploit yet another area where its message can be delivered to folk who will not believe or contemplate that they are being manipulated. I quote: 'It is to be recalled that (...) the programme MEDIA has now clearer references to the importance of European cinema for intercultural dialogue'. But it wholly ignores the bigger intercultural dialogue between the different European cultures and those of the wider world, for instance that of the Indian subcontinent. Not only that, but each and every aspect of this report duly sets out another attempt to interfere with commercial activity.

We are told that the programme will cost EUR 671 million. We also know that he who pays the piper calls the tune. But where is the added value? Who benefits? It ignores what folk might want to see, given freedom of choice. However, the EU will benefit by distorting the marketplace in the minds of citizens. Ah yes, EU citizens, those poor folk who had citizenship forced upon them, from which there is as yet no escape!

Tadeusz Zwiefka (PPE-DE). – (PL) I would like to begin by thanking the rapporteur for her excellent work. As we are all aware, the audiovisual sector is a very important element of our economy. Over a million people are employed in it. This sector also plays a crucial social and cultural role, because almost every European household boasts a television set.

Unfortunately, and it pains me to say so, films produced in Europe represent only 26% of the European film market, as opposed to the 71% accounted for by American productions. I cannot agree with the previous speaker that some kind of force is involved here. It is indeed incumbent upon us to provide European audiences with a choice. This must, however, be a choice involving good quality European productions, because the percentages I mentioned just now certainly do not reflect the quality of the films we are able to watch. It is therefore to be hoped that the MEDIA 2007 programme will help to redress the balance.

Strengthening European cultural diversity and European cinema production is a noble aim, but it can only be achieved by simultaneously strengthening the competitiveness of the European audiovisual sector. Obviously, digitalisation is one way to combat fragmentation and under-investment in the European film market, but what is really required is a better distribution system on the European market and also on the international markets. Nowadays, technological progress in terms of digital services facilitates better dissemination of European audiovisual products. However, the lack of private sector involvement, especially in the context of financing ventures in the audiovisual sphere, will not allow the MEDIA 2007 programme to be fully implemented. The current offer concerning credit for audiovisual production is very inadequate, particularly regarding films created by small and medium-sized producers. The same is true of the grants available to young filmmakers.

I trust the MEDIA 2007 programme will not go to waste.

Nikolaos Sifunakis (PSE). – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, today is a particularly important day for the Committee on Culture and Education, with the reports by my honourable friends Mrs Hieronymi, Mr Graça Moura, Mrs Gröner, Mrs Pack and Mr Takkula on the multiannual programmes for the audiovisual sector, culture, youth, education and European nationality tabled for final approval by plenary. The members of our committee merit congratulations.

Despite the delay in approving the programmes, which was due to difficulties in reaching agreement on the financial perspective, we believe that the resources which will be made available, even though inadequate, will allow these programmes to continue to offer their benefits.

In particular, the MEDIA programme may play an important role in improving the competitiveness of the European cinema industry, by giving financial support to the development of audiovisual works, the training of professionals in the sector and the strengthening of the distribution and circulation of European works. We also need to highlight here the efforts made by Mrs Reding.

The development and promotion of European films is of decisive importance to the maintenance of cultural diversity and economic development and employment. Unfortunately, the great wealth of the linguistic and cultural diversity of Europe is also the cause of an even greater structural problem on the audiovisual market. I refer to the extensive fragmentation of the national markets, which does not allow the European cinema industry to acquire a larger share of the European and global market.

MEDIA 2007 needs to help combat the lack of cross-border circulation of European works.

Bernat Joan i Marí (Verts/ALE). – Mr President, first of all I would like to congratulate and thank Mrs Hieronymi for her excellent work and Commissioner Reding for the positions she has adopted.

I think it is very important to support the audiovisual sector and European cinema in order to ensure diversity and plurality in Europe and to work towards the main aims of the European Union. I think that it is also very important for endangered cultures, for the languages of stateless nations, for minority languages and so on. The reference in the report to the regional and local levels is very important, because it focuses on the need for real diversity in the European Union. That is a great support. Also, we have to support independent producers in order to enrich audiovisual output and make it more in tune with reality and with European culture.

Georgios Karatzaferis (IND/DEM). – (EL) Mr President, if you watch television in any country of the European Union and do not see the news, you think that you are in the United States. The American culture reigns; that repulsive culture with violence, crime, rape and so on which enters our homes so easily. We need to protect the European family from this culture, which does not suit us. Clearly, therefore, we need to strengthen European cinema; we need to strengthen the culture and civilisation of this continent, but I greatly fear that the means introduced in the report are powerless.

Television is 'nitro-glycerine' in the hands of the person controlling it. It provides the food that person wants. I would refer to Euro News, which we fund, which a short while ago called all the Italians mafia for something to do with football. Euro News comes along and makes its own policy, saying 'Macedonia', unlike the European Union, which calls this country FYROM.

The point, therefore, is that we need to give financial support and, at the same time, control where our money is going and how some of it is being spent. This is an important matter, if we want to be successful on a vital issue, because it is opinion-forming. Of course, the history of the Member States can also be strengthened, if you want. I do not know the history of Poland, just as Poland does not know the history of Greece. We are now one family. We should know where everyone comes from. Who we are and where we want to go. So this needs to be funded and I hope that such provision is made, but of course it needs daring and not the method with which we are approaching things today.

Viviane Reding, Member of the Commission. (FR) Mr President, I would once again like to thank the European Parliament, and in particular the Committee on Culture and Education and its chairman and rapporteur, for their valuable assistance in the interests of European creativity and cinematographic diversity.

I share the opinions and the concerns of those Members who say that, unfortunately, the funding is not adequate for our ambitions. We have not received the funding we asked for: it is regrettable but true. We must therefore act to ensure that the new programme, with less funding, is an opportunity to wipe the slate clean and to concentrate on those actions that have real European added value, while calling on the national governments to take responsibility for the other actions.

As the rapporteur has already explained very well, we will then stick with the actions that have proven themselves over the years. Having said that, we will also add, for example, support for video on demand, which is becoming a priority. We will also support digitisation, which is a particular opportunity for the circulation of European productions, and we will increase support for distribution in order to create the necessary synergies for the era of online film. We are also going to introduce a new action to support the presence of European films on the emerging markets in other continents. Those are the most important elements of this initiative, which enjoys the almost unanimous support of the European Parliament, the Council of Ministers and those in the sector. Mr President, thank you for Parliament's assistance, which will be understood, from the outside, by both viewers and creators of audiovisual productions.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow at 12 noon.

7. Culture programme (2007-2013) (debate)

President. – The next item is the recommendation for second reading by the Committee on Culture and Education (A6-0343/2006) on the Council common position for adopting a decision of the European

Parliament and of the Council establishing the Culture Programme (2007-2013)(06235/3/2006 – C6-0269/2006 – 2004/0150(COD)) (Rapporteur: Mr Graça Moura).

Vasco Graça Moura (PPE-DE), rapporteur. – (PT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the process that will culminate in the vote on the Culture Framework Programme 2007-2013 at second reading has been complex and slow: slow essentially because of a series of setbacks regarding the financial perspective, as we all recall, and complex due to the nature of the issue and to the varied range of contributions to the debate from all members of the other committees that issued their opinions with the members of the committee directly concerned.

What ensued from all of these contributions was rich dialogue on the Culture Framework Programme 2007-2013, which subsequently went from first reading to the current stage of proceedings. This process was marked by formal and informal interventions from both the Commission and the Council, leading to fruitful exchanges of views and consensus positions that can only be viewed as extremely positive.

As a result of all of this, most of the amendments adopted by this Chamber at first reading have been enshrined in the common position. Of these amendments, I wish to highlight the explicit reference, in the recitals and in the body of Article 3, to the importance of a common cultural heritage shared by Europeans, an idea that encapsulates the objectives of the programme.

We must accordingly monitor, at all times, the implementation of the specific objectives laid down by the programme relating to this enormously extensive heritage, which has for centuries been ingrained in all fields of human activity. Given that these fields relate to our civilisation and culture, they also reflect our identity.

It has also been possible to agree on satisfactory arrangements for the duration of the actions, scheduled to take between one and five years; for the intervention of cultural operators, the number of which per country will vary according to the nature of the action; and for the funds from the budget granted to each of the sectors concerned, in particular the granting of additional resources for cooperation measures, that is to say, for smaller projects, as opposed to larger-scale or multiannual cooperation projects. This will make it possible to consider actions by small-scale operators, who tend to be closest to the citizens, without neglecting the larger-scale, more visible actions that involve more countries over a longer period of time.

In addition to all of this, I would like to highlight the provision for special actions aimed at raising awareness among Europe's citizens of cultural diversity in the Member States. Some of these actions are already provided for, such as the European capitals of culture, and support for European bodies operating in the field of culture, which, very importantly, function as ambassadors for European culture, and many of which have received crucial backing from Parliament in the past.

If the rules change on account of the financial regulations in force and these bodies thus find themselves having to apply for the aid they need under the Culture Programme 2007-2013, it is vital that they are not overlooked and that they remain able to pursue their actions.

The Commission and the Council expect that the multidisciplinary nature of the programme will make it highly flexible and able to support many innovative proposals. In spite of some reservations that I expressed during the debate at first reading, I sincerely hope that they are right.

Against this backdrop of the institutions working together and heading in the same direction, there is just one negative point, which is easy to spot. I refer to what can only be described as the very meagre resources granted to the Culture Programme 2007-2013. At first reading, a number of us who contributed to the debate – in other words, not only me, the rapporteur – drew attention to this point.

This is a third generation programme aimed at going further and being more effective than previous ones. It is a programme that encompasses a broader range of actions and boasts a larger number of interested Member States. It also involves higher management and monitoring costs, and yet the budgetary appropriation falls well short of what it needs to achieve these objectives and well short of what all those responsible – the members of the Commission, the ministers of culture, the cultural agents and operators, and the politicians – feel is absolutely vital.

Even so, I feel that we should express the wish that the Culture Programme 2007-2013 is a great success and that it makes an eloquent contribution to the development of the Europe to which we are all committed.

Ján Figel, *Member of the Commission*. Mr President, I am pleased to be here at the end of the second round of negotiations. I sense a very positive feeling about proceeding with the final vote and decision. We are now looking at the range of programmes for which I am responsible, including youth, education and the citizenship programme.

We start with culture. This is highly symbolic and very important because we believe that, as in the past, culture can provide many important answers to the future of Europe. Let me remind you that in December 2004 President Barroso said that cultural values rank higher than economic ones, because the economy helps us to live, but it is culture that makes life worth living.

I am pleased to say that an excellent climate of cooperation between our institutions characterised the whole legislative process and brought us to a very satisfactory compromise. I should particularly like to thank the rapporteur, Mr Graça Moura, for his excellent work and, for similar reasons, the whole Committee on Culture and Education, under its chairman Mr Sifunakis. Its support for this programme is an important contribution to the forthcoming decision.

I am also very pleased that the general line proposed by the Commission in the original proposal has been welcomed by both Parliament and the Council. The next Culture Programme will thus promote, firstly, the transnational mobility of people working in the cultural sector, secondly, the transnational circulation of works of art, as well as of artistic and cultural products, and, thirdly, intercultural dialogue.

I am equally convinced that the programme will contribute to the flourishing of multilateral cooperation within Europe, as well as to the development of a European identity, thanks to the interactions which we encourage between citizens. We will have EUR 400 million at our disposal.

I also wish to thank the European Parliament for its support. We might envisage more support, but we first have to be aware of the limits and, secondly, support is growing and there will be more opportunities to organise cooperation. However, as Mr Graça Moura has just said, we need to be efficient.

I want to confirm that the Commission is able to accept the three amendments contained in the report; they correspond to the compromise between our three institutions. I very much hope that the next Culture Ministers' Council in November will reach a final decision.

Bogusław Sonik, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (PL) Mr President, I support the overall aim of this programme, namely strengthening the common European cultural area and reinforcing the sense of European citizenship. These are very laudable aims.

I was, however, surprised to read, in part of the Council's common position of June of this year, that the Culture Programme (2007-2013) contributes to, I quote 'the strengthening of the transversal objectives of the Community, by contributing to the elimination of all discrimination based on sex, racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, disability, age, or sexual orientation'. Transversal Community objectives – what kind of newspeak is that, ladies and gentlemen? Are we witnessing a renaissance of Socialist Realism? Does this all mean that the key criterion used in the assessment of future projects will be their supposed impact on discrimination? Perhaps it would be best to entrust the assessment of the projects to the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia in Vienna or to the recently established European Institute for Gender Equality. I would like to point out that I did not find a reference of that nature in the earlier version of the programme, Culture 2000.

Europe was divided for over 50 years. Our programme should therefore provide an opportunity for increased awareness and understanding of the cultural diversity of the nations of Europe and the cultures suppressed by Communist totalitarianism in Central and Eastern Europe in particular. This should be the thinking underpinning the projects in the new version of the Culture Programme (2007-2013). Culture should be perceived as a means of facilitating the cultural integration of 27 Member States, rather than as an integrated world view. Culture must enjoy complete freedom. It promotes the cause of freedom most effectively when it is involved in spreading it.

Guy Bono, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, allow me to start by congratulating the rapporteur, Mr Graça Moura, on the work he has done on the fundamental topic of the Culture 2007 programme and, in particular, on the agreement he has reached on behalf of the European Parliament.

I would like briefly to go over the three points that I championed for the Socialist Group in the European Parliament within the Committee on Culture and Education. Firstly, with regard to the transversal aspect of the programme, it must be noted that the agreement reached goes in the right direction: nobody can

object to increasing the coherence of the programme, which will make it possible to put a stop to the fragmentation that for a long time has characterised the European Union's cultural activities. However, intentions are one thing, and the resources proposed are quite another.

I now come to my second point, the issue of the budget, which was also mentioned just now by the rapporteur and by the Commissioner, too. I would say this, and I will keep saying it for as long as necessary: there is no point in the European Union setting ambitious objectives such as promoting cultural diversity and cooperation if the available budget is not up to it, being no more than 15 cents per citizen per year. We have called for a substantial increase in the budget allocated to the programme, so that it can play a part in the rise of a European culture and identity, which will enable us to move beyond national self-interest, and hence to escape from the crisis from which the Union has been suffering for a year and a half now. It has to be said that the 2007-2013 financial perspective, stabilising Community expenditure at 1% of the European Union's GDP, will not allow us to achieve the objectives we have set ourselves in this programme or to give culture the role we intend for it in the building of a stronger Europe with greater solidarity. Therefore, we cannot allow ourselves to punish this programme for a second time by delaying its implementation. As Aristide Briand said, if we cannot have the means for our policy, we must have the policy for our means. We therefore need to act quickly to implement this programme soon, so that we do not disadvantage the cultural organisations on the ground, which rely on this funding and which have been waiting for months for a decision to be taken.

Claire Gibault, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, to start with I would like to congratulate Mr Graça Moura on the quality of his work and to thank him for the favourable attention he always paid to our proposals. His report is excellent, which is hardly surprising coming from this Portuguese writer who is such an ardent defender of the Portuguese language.

As shadow rapporteur for the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I would urge Parliament to give him its full support. This programme covers the following objectives: promoting the transnational mobility of people working in the culture sector, encouraging the transnational circulation of works of art and cultural and artistic products, and promoting intercultural dialogue. That said, one wonders how, with such a limited budget, we will be able to safeguard and promote linguistic diversity and encourage language learning and the teaching of music and performing arts. One also wonders how this programme will be able to promote and develop the European Union's external visibility thanks to the promotion of its cultural diversity and of the aspects common to all its cultures.

I am therefore very disappointed that the Commission has not understood the vital role that culture plays in our European identity, and I find it particularly serious that it felt able, on the basis of the interinstitutional agreement containing the financial perspective for 2007-2013, to approve such a tight budget, amounting to only EUR 354 million, compared to the 600 million called for by the rapporteur and the 408 million proposed by the Commission.

The budget for the 'culture programme 2007' for the period 2007-2013 now represents just 0.04% of the European Union's budget granted in the financial perspective.

All artists in Europe will be amazed that the European institutions still consider culture to be the icing on the cake, as a luxury that takes second place to necessities. If promoting culture involves raising awareness levels and curbing obfuscation, this shrunken budget is not the way for Europe to set an example.

Helga Trüpel, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I too would like to start by thanking Mr Graça Moura for his work on this important aspect of our European policy.

People like to quote, whenever we discuss the significance of cultural policy for Europe, the saying to the effect that 'You do not fall in love with the internal market', for Europe adds up to more than just the internal market, even though it is something we cannot do without. Europe has a great deal to do with the cultural identity and our cultural riches, which we want to preserve and develop. Culture can divide people from one another, particularly when it emphasises differences, but our cultural policy is aimed at bringing the people of Europe together through culture, establishing contacts between them, making it possible for them to establish contact with, and feel a sense of belonging in, the world, indeed, with different, and in diverse, worlds. The smoothing away of differences is not something that we should be in fear of; it is something to be encouraged, something that is at the heart of our European cultural policy.

That is why the three objectives – the encouragement of cultural exchange, the mobility of artists and cultural dialogue – are the right ones, but the amount of money voted earlier will not enable them to be achieved. If we want to do more for Europe on the cultural front, we will have to muster the courage to set a bigger cultural budget over the coming years.

Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański, *on behalf of the UEN Group.* – (PL) Mr President, a nation's standard of living is a function of material assets, but its identity is determined by its culture, in the broadest sense of the term. Culture is a nation's true wealth, and the driving force behind its existence and development. Culture also constitutes a platform where nations can reach understanding and integrate. Culture develops through a historical process. It does not take kindly to brutal interventions or to being forced to develop along specific lines. Culture needs freedom.

The Culture Programme (2007-2013) we are debating today is intended to organise the aims and restrict their number. It also aims to support the transnational mobility of people working in the cultural sector, the transnational circulation of works of art, as well as of artistic and cultural products, and also intercultural dialogue.

From the simplistic point of view of European integration, the proposed aims are understandable. From the point of view of cultural development, and the meaning and multifunctionality of culture, the approach is too narrow to be accepted without further ado. It is essential to include action for the protection and support of the sources of culture, especially where they are under threat.

Alessandro Battilocchio (NI). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I speak on behalf of the new Italian Socialist Party.

European cultural heritage is a major part of our Union's wealth and I am therefore grateful to the three institutions for the efforts made so far to safeguard and promote it.

The great value of the Culture programme, which I hope will also be retained in the next programming period, lies not only in promoting the mobility of persons and works in the sector within the Community, but above all in the great opportunity that this represents for small operators and small communities in the EU to keep their own histories and identities alive.

Promoting individual cultures at local level is in fact extremely valuable, as much for the European Union in general, which bases its unity and strength on the diversity within its borders, as for the economy of the social fabric and regional realities at all levels.

I therefore fully support the Council's proposal to find a balance between small- and large-scale projects, to make it easier for small operators to access the programme, and to allocate half of the available funds to these kinds of measures.

Ján Figel, *Member of the Commission.* Mr President, I welcome the very positive responses; there may be still some pressure for doing more. We all want to do more for culture, because it is important for the European mentality and European identity; for living together in one broader and broader house. I think that the best narrative of Europe is diversity and unity. Diversity growing means an invitation to promote and deepen unity, and unity based on values is mostly promoted via our cultural programme.

I am sure that some points that were mostly to do with the budget are invitations to do more in future. If you recall the previous programme, we had seven cents per culture, per year, per citizen – Mr Bono mentioned that now we will have 15 cents. There were invitations to do ten times more – 70 cents per culture. I just want to remind people that the budgetary authority in the Union is Parliament. Your support, but also further support, will help to create more space. The citizenship programme is also based on the cultural Article 151 of the Treaty. First of all, this is the competence and basic responsibility of Member States. We are supporting Member States in their cooperation, not replacing them.

We will have the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue in 2008 and the achievement in negotiating a new convention on cultural diversity protection and promotion under UNESCO shows the success of this Union. I want to assure Parliament that the implementation of the programme as soon as possible after the final decision will allow us quantitatively and qualitatively to do more for culture via Culture for Europe. I am sure that we will have many occasions to work together on the implementation.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place today, at 12 noon.

Annex – Commission statement

The Commission would like to draw the legislative authority's attention to the need for the financial package mentioned in the basic act establishing the culture programme (2007-2013) to be expressed at current prices, and for this to be done no later than on its final publication in the Official Journal. This corresponds to the standard budgetary practice and will help to ensure, with all due transparency, that the legislative authority's decision is complied with. For the programme in question, the sum at current prices amounts to EUR 400 million.

IN THE CHAIR: EDWARD McMILLAN-SCOTT

Vice-President

8. Voting time

President. The next item is the vote.

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

8.1. United Nations: approval of category M2 or M3 vehicles with regard to their general construction (vote)

8.2. Accession of Bulgaria and Romania: recruitment of officials of the European Communities (vote)

8.3. Amendment of the Statutes of the Galileo Joint Undertaking (vote)

8.4. Norway and the EMCDDA (vote)

8.5. Request for waiver of the immunity of Bogdan Golik (vote)

8.6. Defence of immunity of Mario Borghezio (vote)

8.7. Draft amending budget No 3/2006 (vote)

8.8. Draft amending budget No 5/2006 (vote)

8.9. An EU-South Africa Strategic Partnership (vote)

8.10. LIFE + (vote)

8.11. Programme of support for the European audiovisual sector (MEDIA 2007) (vote)

8.12. Culture programme (2007-2013) (vote)

8.13. Community civil protection mechanism (vote)

8.14. Implementing measures (level 2) of the Transparency Directive (vote)

8.15. Implementing measures (level 2) of the Prospectus Directive (vote)

8.16. Women's immigration (vote)

8.17. Recovery of Community funds (vote)

President. That concludes the vote.

9. Explanations of vote

Report: Berger (A6-0329/2006)

Bruno Gollnisch (NI). – *(FR)* Mr President, my reference to the Rules of Procedure is based on Rule 6(7) and Rule 7 of the Rules relating to immunity. As no debate has taken place, there will be no oral explanations of vote. With regard to the case in which action is being taken against our fellow Member, Mr Borghezio simply because, following a judgment, he wrote the word ‘Shame’ on the pavement, a word that, moreover, it was possible to remove from the pavement, I shall simply say, following that hypocritical decision: shame on the rapporteur, shame on the Commission and shame on this Parliament of hypocrites and dissemblers who apply a variable-geometry case-law in the defence of immunity.

Report: Chichester (A6-0348/2006)

Glyn Ford (PSE), in writing. I support Mr Chichester's report. I believe that the Galileo satellite system serves two vital purposes. Firstly, it will enable the EU, independent of the United States, in association with its partners, to develop and deploy a global satellite system that will give an autonomous capability in this area. Secondly, it shows symbolically the EU's commitment to playing an increasingly global role in world affairs. Regardless of the technological and material advantages that will accrue, this political dimension is vital in itself.

Report: Pittella (A6-0350/2006)

Hélène Goudin (IND/DEM), in writing. (SV) I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the position put forward by the June List on 27 September of this year.

I have voted against this report because it rejects the Council of Ministers' draft amending budget No 3. Unlike the majority of the Committee on Budgets, the June List believes that the Council of Ministers is perfectly entitled to redistribute expenditure between the different institutions of the EU in the course of the budget procedure, if it thinks this is the right thing to do.

Report: Pittella (A6-0340/2006)

Hélène Goudin (IND/DEM), in writing. (SV) The amending budget is made up of three distinct elements covering completely different fields. I have chosen to vote against the whole package as put forward.

When it comes to the total of EUR 259 million to be provided by way of financial support to encourage economic development within the Turkish Cypriot community, the following question arises: is there yet an overall solution designed to promote peaceful and stable development on Cyprus at a time when the EU is getting involved in this situation and contributing significant financial resources to Cyprus?

In respect of the appropriation for the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All, the June List is already on record as being sceptical towards the entire project.

With regard to budgetary adjustments following modernisation of the accounting system, this is more of a technical issue, even if I am sceptical about the overall activities of the European Development Fund.

Report : Morgantini (A6-0310/2006)

David Martin (PSE), in writing. I welcome this report. It endorses the EU proposal for a Strategic Partnership with South Africa which is comprehensive and which moves towards real political cooperation with the most significant political power in Sub-Saharan Africa and the strongest economy in Sub-Saharan Africa, accounting for 50% of the region's GDP.

Whilst praising the considerable progress made in post-apartheid South Africa in consolidating a functioning parliamentary democracy as well as the economic strides made as a middle-income developing country and as a leader of the Southern African Development Community, the report focuses on the need to address the considerable social challenges still facing the country. These challenges include particularly the high incidence of HIV/AIDS (with 18.8% of the population currently infected) and rates of unemployment of more than 40%.

I fully support the report's call for HIV/AIDS to be tackled as a priority for economic development, as well as its emphasis on the Strategic Partnership providing a single framework under which the existing EU cooperation instruments can improve performance in the interests of the South African population and economy.

Margie Sudre (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) The European Union is South Africa's largest trading partner and the biggest provider of development aid to that country.

The South African economy accounts for 50% of the GDP of Sub-Saharan Africa. South Africa is an engine of development for Africa and a political power working for peace in those regions of Africa that are in conflict.

That is why I consider it essential, 12 years after the end of apartheid, for the European Parliament to support today the establishment of a Strategic Partnership with South Africa.

The report emphasises the fight against AIDS. It also cites measures designed to promote economic revival and to combat social inequalities, and refers to integration and support for exchanges, as well as to incentives for foreign investment. It asks South Africa to use its influence to foster a peaceful solution to the political crisis in Zimbabwe.

A new economic, social, health or political crisis would have a considerable impact on the whole of southern Africa, as well as on Réunion, which maintains many economic and cultural links with South Africa. If this agreement is important for Europe, it is vital to Réunion, as we have everything to gain from the stability of our South African neighbour and partner.

Report: Isler Béguin (A6-0288/2006)

Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, with reference to Mrs Isler Béguin's report on the Financial Instrument for the Environment, I would like to express my extreme concern for the environment regarding pensioners in Italy. I voted in favour of the report, but I would have voted for it much more willingly if this directive, as well as protecting the environment, had also protected Italian pensioners.

I take this opportunity to protest against President Prodi's centre-left government, which has tabled an amendment to Article 85(6) of the budget law, deducting from the pensions of the 500 000 Italians who have worked in Switzerland a good three-quarters of the amount to which they are entitled in accordance with the judgment of the Court of Cassation. An environment in which pensioners are deprived of their right to a fair pension is not healthy.

Liam Aylward (UEN), in writing. LIFE has proved to be an invaluable EU environmental policy since 1992. Now we have an opportunity for LIFE + to become even more valuable, in particular to the smaller and newer Member States, which could receive a more equal spread of budget over the period 2007-2013 of €2 billion. I fully support the Council proposal to delegate the implementation of 80-85% of the budget to national agencies and so I have voted against this Report.

For example, the overall amount indicated for Ireland from the programme is €25m. This funding could then be doubled through co-financing instruments up to €50m. Environmental Projects in Ireland which could benefit under the seven-year programme include waste prevention, waste reduction and recycling initiatives, development of innovative technologies with positive environmental benefits, local and regional environmental awareness campaigns and the development of special conservation areas.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. (PT) The Council common position, to which this report relates, is substantially different from the Commission's original proposal in 2004. I wish to highlight the inclusion of the 'Nature and Biodiversity' component, the objectives of which include supporting the further development and implementation of the Natura 2000 network, including in relation to coastal and marine habitats and species, and, most importantly, stemming the loss of biodiversity in the Community by 2010. The inclusion of this component in the Life+ Programme tallies with the position adopted by Parliament at first reading in July 2005, and this is something we welcome.

Despite the fact that we voted in favour of the programme and its objectives, we are compelled to express our disappointment that the budgetary resources earmarked for the Life+ Programme, covering the period from 1 January 2007 to 31 December 2013, are woefully inadequate, as a result of the disappointing agreement on the Budgetary Framework for 2007-2013. They fall short of the assessment made by the Commission itself, which, let us not forget, put the needs of the Natura 2000 network at EUR 6.1 billion per year, that is, EUR 3 billion under cofinancing. They also fall short of the amount proposed by the Commission in 2004. The guarantee of cofinancing the Natura 2000 network via the structural funds will not enable it to meet all of its needs.

Vasco Graça Moura (PPE-DE), in writing. (PT) The LIFE+ Programme and its predecessors are the main funding instrument for the EU's environmental projects.

The Council has acted wrongly and insensitively in substantially reducing the budgeted amount. Parliament has reintroduced the amount originally agreed upon, in line with the financial perspective, for funding the Natura 2000 network, which is aimed at preserving nature and biodiversity.

An amendment has been incorporated aimed at ensuring that the European funds earmarked for the environment are not used for other purposes relating to the LIFE+ Programme, such as spending on

human resources, because the Member States are to have a project management team, rather than the usual management by seconded staff.

There is also a compromise amendment laying down that if no agreement is reached at second reading steps will be taken to ensure that funding of ongoing projects will continue.

For Portugal, this report is very important because a large proportion of the mainland and the outlying areas forms part of the Natura 2000 network, funding for which is set out in this report.

The Portuguese Social Democrat MEPs therefore support the Isler Béguin report.

Caroline Jackson (PPE-DE), in writing. Though I believe LIFE funding has done good work, the problem has been the excess of demand over supply and the difficulty of supervising what is going on because it involves fairly small payments to a large number of projects and this report does not address these issues.

In 2003 the Court of Auditors looked at the LIFE scheme and found that financial beneficiaries failed to keep sufficiently transparent and detailed accounts. LIFE money was also found to be involved in substantial land purchases where there were insufficient guarantees that this land would continue to be used for nature conservation purposes once the implementation period for the actions was over. The Court asked whether the Commission had set up an adequate system of management.

The answer is that, as the fund is currently organised, the Commission cannot do so. It is therefore perfectly acceptable and sensible for the management role to be devolved to the Member States. This does not mean that environmental schemes will suffer from the withdrawal of LIFE money, but that money may be better spent and more transparently supervised.

David Martin (PSE), in writing. I voted for the amendments to the common position on LIFE+. I am particularly concerned with the requirement for a 55% allocation of funds for nature and biodiversity. Important as these areas are, such a requirement would limit Member States' ability to allocate funds for projects addressing their own environmental priorities such as climate change.

Report: Hieronymi (A6-0337/2006)

Hélène Goudin (IND/DEM), in writing. (SV) I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate the June List's rejection at first reading in September 2005.

The question we should ask ourselves is as follows: should the EU be dealing with political issues of this nature or do they fall within the area of competence of the Member States? The June List's answer is clear: this is a matter for the Member States.

If the Member States wish to pour extra resources into promoting their national film industries, they are obviously entirely in their rights so to do. The EU, on the other hand, should not be running special programmes to promote the European film industry. If a large number of EU countries believe it necessary to cooperate within this policy area, they can do so without the interference of the EU.

Intergovernmental agreements or cooperation between film companies can take place outside the framework of the EU.

The EU does not need further sweeping and expensive projects. The EU should instead strive for targeted cooperation on significant and truly cross-border issues.

Report: Graça Moura (A6-0343/2006)

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Mr President, I have voted against the Graça Moura report on the grounds that, firstly, the approach underlying the 2007-2013 cultural programme, namely that cultural networks need subsidy only at their outset and become self-financing thereafter, goes against their non-commercial character and runs counter to the sustainability of support grants intended by the EU.

This cultural programme also formulates intercultural dialogue in abstract terms, so that this objective might well refer to anything or nothing, and transparency is therefore out of the question; that is another reason why I have voted against this report.

Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am grateful to Mr Romagnoli for his technical support, which has enabled me to explain my vote on the report by Mr Graça Moura establishing the Culture Programme.

I voted in favour as I am hopeful about the future of this European Union, but I should like to stress that there is no such thing as culture when, in Italy, Mr Prodi's Socialist-Communist government has decided, in accordance with Article 85(6) of the budget law, to deduct part of the pensions of the 500 000 Italian pensioners who have worked in Switzerland, thus ignoring the judgment of the Court of Cassation, which ruled that these very pensioners were entitled to draw four times their current pension. This is not fair, and I hope that 'culture' will also signify respect for pensioners' rights.

Hélène Goudin (IND/DEM), in writing. *(SV)* Cultural issues are, of course, very important. The June List is of the opinion that cultural policy should, in principle, be handled by the Member States. As far as European cultural heritage is concerned, however, it may be justified for certain matters to be dealt with at Community level. Nevertheless, we believe that the appropriations given to this Culture Programme have been much too liberal, given that this is an activity that should essentially be the responsibility of the Member States.

I have therefore voted against the amendments in this report.

Sérgio Marques (PPE-DE), in writing. *(PT)* I should like to congratulate Mr Graça Moura on the position he put forward at second reading on the Council common position for adopting a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Culture Programme (2007-2013).

I wish to express my support in particular for the amendment to the common position as regards financial support for the actions mentioned in Article 8(2)(d) of the decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing the Culture Programme (2007-2013)

Report: Papadimoulis (A6-0286/2006)

Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Mr Papadimoulis's report is slightly different to the previous ones, because it talks about the establishment of the Community civil protection mechanism.

I voted in favour, even though I would have preferred this report to have provided not only for civil protection, but also for the protection of pensioners. I am referring to Italian pensioners, who should be protected by the Italian Prime Minister, Mr Prodi, and by his Socialist-Communist majority. They have decided, in accordance with Article 85(6) of the budget law, to deduct a good three-quarters from the pensions of the 500 000 Italian pensioners who have worked in Switzerland. This decision is in breach of the Court of Cassation rulings, which oblige the Italian Government to pay these pensioners the pensions that they deserve.

Carlos Coelho (PPE-DE), in writing. *(PT)* The civil protection mechanism was set up five years ago to facilitate the mobilisation and coordination of civil protection resources in the event of emergencies inside or outside the EU. In 2005, more than ten countries activated this emergency response mechanism.

The purpose of this proposal is to strengthen the mechanism on the basis of the experience acquired since 2001, to lay down a legal basis for future Community action in the area of civil protection and to strengthen the rapid response and preparedness instrument for emergencies.

This report includes the 'public health' dimension in civil protection. It also stresses the importance of solidarity among the Member States and of a more effective European monitoring system. Furthermore, it addresses the issue of effective land management and use in disaster prevention and the use of military assets to prevent and combat emergencies.

This mechanism is vitally important for Europe as a whole, but in particular for Portugal, a country that is devastated every year by droughts and fires, which fall under the proposed mechanism.

The Portuguese Social Democrat MEPs therefore support the Papadimoulis report.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. *(PT)* The report adopted today, which is aimed at making the emergency response by the EU and the Member States more consistent and effective, is one that we broadly welcome, despite a few reservations.

We know that the primary objective of civil protection is to prevent collective risks and the serious accidents or disasters arising from them. Hence the need to minimise these collective risks and to offset the impact should an emergency arise, to rescue and provide assistance to people and other living things, to protect cultural and environmental assets of major public interest, and to help the people affected to return to a normal life.

Accordingly, we welcome the possibility of investing in studies, training, prevention and monitoring, and in fostering an exchange of experiences in order to learn from past experience – positive and negative – and to rectify any shortcomings.

We also support the creation of a targeted, appropriate emergency communications network, the launch of extensive information campaigns, and the adoption of educational and awareness-raising initiatives aimed at the public and in particular the youngest members of society.

Françoise Grossetête (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) I voted in favour of this report.

Prevention is a basic factor in reducing risks, but not every disaster can be prevented. Faced with emergencies, the European Union must no longer, therefore, rely on improvisation.

‘Man’s habitual shortcoming is not to anticipate the storm during fine weather’, said Machiavelli. The European Union must show that he was mistaken.

Before implementing any action plan, it is important to draw up a list of existing resources, both material and human. It is on the basis of such information that vital coordination between the Member States will take shape with a view not only to tackling the disaster but also to ensuring that European action is more visible on the ground.

It is just as crucial, moreover, to lose no time in arranging for new facilities to be installed in areas that we well know are at risk, particularly from fire and flood.

The protection of the individual and solidarity between Member States are fundamental principles of the European Union. I do not, therefore, understand the Council’s resistance to developing these civil protection actions, not to mention creating a special Community force.

Yes, the initial responsibility for civil protection falls to the Member States, but that does not mean carrying on regardless.

(Explanation of vote abbreviated in accordance with Rule 163(1) of the Rules of Procedure)

Jens Holm and Eva-Britt Svensson (GUE/NGL), in writing. (SV) We welcome the Commission’s proposal to improve the civil protection mechanism introduced in 2001. Europe, like the rest of the world, is hit by all kinds of disasters and crises, and it is clearly desirable to institute intensive coordination in order to respond to such events. Unfortunately, we have been forced to note that both the Commission’s proposal and Mr Papadimoulis’ report make explicit reference to military resources having to be available for civil protection activities. We are strongly opposed to all forms of initiative relating to military cooperation within the European Union. We therefore chose to abstain in the final vote on Mr Papadimoulis’ report today and to vote against the Commission’s proposal.

Diamanto Manolakou (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL) The development of strong and adequate mechanisms to prevent and deal with natural disasters is fundamental for the protection, assistance and relief of the victims of natural disasters and for dealing with environmental disasters.

In Greece, the inadequacy of such mechanisms was revealed again during the recent floods in several areas. In particular in the strategy for preventing and restoring disasters (anti-flood protection, reinforcement against earthquakes) and relieving victims, the policy of the Greek Government presents criminal shortcomings.

One transnational civil protection mechanism may help in dealing with natural disasters. However, it cannot and must not replace the extension and reinforcement of independent mechanisms in the Member States.

Similarly, civil protection mechanisms cannot operate to cover up responsibilities for deliberately causing environmental disasters. The creation of mechanisms which undertake to deal with disasters due to

deliberate action or negligence (as proposed) gives an even larger margin for unaccountable action by companies, with disastrous consequences for the environment and public health.

Primarily, however, the establishment of mechanisms to respond to 'terrorist action' cannot be accepted. Practice over recent years confirms that the fight against 'terrorism' is designed to stifle and direct the grassroots movement, the class, trade-union movement. The 'prevention of terrorism' through the monitoring mechanisms which it is proposed to strengthen is leading to more restrictions on fundamental democratic rights.

David Martin (PSE), in writing. I voted in favour of this report because I believe given the cost of 'disasters' on Member States in terms of human lives, economic losses and injuries, it makes sense to pool resources and thus pursue economies of scale in areas such as logistics and transport.

Sebastiano (Nello) Musumeci (UEN), in writing. (IT) It is well known that, in Europe, civil protection in relation to natural disasters falls within the competence of the Member States. Unfortunately, in some of these countries, there are worrying delays and a sense of indifference, due to a lack of coordination.

It is precisely for this reason that, for years now, I have been proposing the establishment of a European Civil Protection Agency that would have the task of bringing the various national laws in line with each other and that would be responsible not only for preventing and anticipating risks, but also for managing emergencies.

Strangely enough, in fact, neither the proposal for a Council regulation establishing a rapid response and preparedness instrument for major emergencies nor the proposal for a Council decision establishing a Community civil protection mechanism take into full and due consideration all of the activities aimed at studying and determining the causes of disasters, at identifying the risks and at singling out the more vulnerable regions subject to such risks – in other words, the 'anticipation' of risks – even though they are crucial when it comes to tackling natural disasters effectively.

This Agency, created on the model of the US Federal Emergency Management Agency, should not only repair the damage caused by natural disasters, but also, and above all, fund preventative actions aimed at eliminating or reducing the causes of such disasters.

Carl Schlyter (Verts/ALE), in writing. (SV) I am opposed to the Commission's proposal that the Member States should make use of each other's military capabilities. A coordination centre able to assist in directing fire-fighting helicopters to where they are most needed at the time is, however, a sensible and cost-effective idea. Moreover, when major disasters strike, there is a great lack of highly advanced fire-damage prevention, and it would therefore be a very good thing if we were able to get help to each other quickly in such situations. This is precisely the kind of cooperation that the EU should be undertaking. I am voting in favour of the report.

- Motion for a resolution: B6-0529/2006

Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, how can there be any transparency in Europe when, in one of the 25 Member States – namely Italy – 500 000 pensioners who have worked in Switzerland and returned to Italy are paid pensions equal to 25% of the amount paid to Italian workers who work in Italy?

It is true that Switzerland is not yet part of the European Union, but it is part of the European Economic Area. It would be good if a Member State of the European Union behaved properly towards those of its own citizens who have worked abroad and who are entitled to the same pension as citizens residing in Italy.

Report: Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou (A6-0307/2006)

Hubert Pirker (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, speaking also on behalf of the Austrian People's Party delegation, let me say that there are several reasons why I voted against this report. One is the demand contained in it for persons who have entered the European Union illegally to be accorded equal rights with – or, indeed, more rights than – legal immigrants as regards such things as the right to accommodation, family benefits, health care and access to educational institutions. The report also presses for new grounds for the grant of asylum, for example to a person who has been forced into marriage or has agreed to what is termed an arranged marriage. Giving in to these demands will do

nothing to solve problems, but will instead create new ones, for measures like these do in fact exert a suction effect, attracting even more illegal immigrants.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – *(DE)* Mr President, I, too, voted against the Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou report, and I shall now proceed to explain why. If one is talking solely in terms of women who have migrated legally, then one must certainly help them to become familiar with our system of standards and values, to become integrated and also to help their families to do so. It is particularly when one comes to the second or third generation of immigrants that conflicts can arise, which – as we have had to learn from the French experience – can result in acts of violence that may even be unavoidable. We must, however, come what may, prevent culturally and religiously motivated problems such as forced marriages, honour killings and genital mutilation from occurring in the first place. Family reunifications involving second, third or fourth wives – which go against the prohibition, customary in Europe, of bigamy – must be brought to an end without delay. It is because the report makes no such requirement that I have voted against it.

Michl Ebner (PPE-DE). – *(DE)* Mr President, I, too, voted against the Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou report, since I take the view that it blurs the dividing line between legal and illegal immigration, fails to draw an adequate distinction between our positions on the two and thereby, ultimately, constitutes a positive incitement to illegal immigration. I see that as politically misguided and as sending the wrong message. Legal immigration needs to be better organised and regulated, while every form of the illegal variety needs to be combated. At the end of the day, I take the view that we should solve the problems that exist on the ground in developing countries and should get much more directly involved in this than we have been to date if we are to get human, economic, social and religious problems out of the way.

Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I hope you enjoy your lunch, since I believe that this is today's last explanation of vote. I voted in favour of the Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou report on the role and place of women immigrants in the European Union.

In this instance, too, I would have preferred the report to have included something in relation to the position of the 260 000 or so Italian women who have emigrated to Switzerland in order to work and support their families and who, once back in Italy, have drawn a pension equal to 25% of the amount that they would have received if they had worked under the same conditions in Italy, and this despite the mutual agreement between Italy and Switzerland.

I do not think it right to behave in this manner towards women in general, and especially not towards those women who are old-age pensioners. Long live pensioners!

David Casa (PPE-DE), in writing. Although we all agree that the plight of irregular immigrants is something that we have to work hard on, and that these unfortunate people should be treated with all the dignity a human being deserves, we must not forget that the influx of irregular foreigners into our countries is causing a big headache to the authorities, especially in Mediterranean countries. I therefore think it would be wiser to amend the Dublin II regulations prior to committing ourselves to something that may prove to be too big for us.

We are obliged to do so, not only when considering the state our detention centres are in and the pressure that they are causing in our countries, but also out of respect for the immigrants themselves. We should not give them false hopes. I think we should get our house in order prior to offering something which at present I am sure we cannot guarantee. I urge all concerned for the umpteenth time to grab the bull by the horns and make a genuine effort to have Dublin II amended

Charlotte Cederschiöld, Christofer Fjellner, Gunnar Hökmark and Anna Ibrisagic (PPE-DE), in writing. – *(SV)* The Swedish Conservatives have today voted in favour of the report on women's immigration.

The fundamental rights of immigrants must be respected and should not be dependent on gender or on belonging to a specific group within society. We support joint management of migration policy, which is a natural extension of cooperation under the Schengen Agreement. We are, on the other hand, opposed to a common integration policy because this area is best dealt with by the Member States themselves.

We are also against the introduction of registers of female genital mutilation as this would represent an intrusion into privacy that we cannot support.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. (PT) Female immigration is known to be rising steadily in the EU, currently accounting for some 54% of the total number of immigrants. The reasons for it fall into a number of categories, including economic migration, family reunification, and seeking refuge and asylum. Women often face a large number of difficulties and forms of discrimination. Public support mechanisms, particularly social structures and services, must therefore be strengthened.

It is particularly important that international conventions are implemented, especially the one on family reunification. The human rights of immigrant women – including access to education for their children, the right to family benefits and the right to healthcare – must also be guaranteed, whether or not their situation is legal. In any event, we believe that immigrant women entering an EU Member State for the purposes of family reunification must be given the opportunity to obtain their own legal status independently of their spouse as quickly as possible.

We also feel that immigrant women and young people should be allowed to reside in a Member State and should be accorded all the support they need, especially those who have suffered physical and mental violence, including the practice of forced or arranged marriages.

Bruno Gollnisch (NI), in writing. – (FR) The report devoted to immigrant women is alarming. Indeed, the situations it depicts (absence of personal status, exploitation, mutilation, crimes of honour etc...) point to the terrible failure of policies on immigration and integration. The report seems to demonstrate that immigrant populations intend to carry on with their practices and customs in the European Union, regardless of the fact that some of these are in flagrant violation of our laws and values. It neglects to mention that immigrant women themselves, or those of immigrant descent, sometimes attach more value to respect for their traditions than to respect for the law and that they are, then, very far from being, as the rapporteur naïvely imagines, instrumental in promoting their children's integration.

It also overlooks the fact that marriage of a national of non-European origin with someone from their country of origin has - in France and certainly in other EU countries - become the mean reason for immigration, ahead of family reunification. When they are marriages of convenience, such marriages are a source of illegal immigration. When they are not, the fact is that, despite his or her nationality on paper, one of the spouses is not integrated and is not about to be, either.

If we continue down this road, we shall only promote further ghettoisation in our societies and increase the risk of confrontation between communities.

Hélène Goudin (IND/DEM), in writing. (SV) The June List has previously stated that the EU is a union of values. In the light of this, I have chosen to support those wordings which make clear that all groups in society should have equal rights.

The June List supports constructive measures designed to attain greater integration of vulnerable groups in society. We are nonetheless of the opinion that it is the national parliaments and the regional authorities that should, essentially, be dealing with this pressing issue. I am critical of the general trend whereby the institutions of the EU seek to extend their influence and competence within more and more areas. It is important to draw a clear dividing line between what is to be decided by the EU and what is to be decided at national and local level.

Marine Le Pen (NI), in writing. – (FR) This report has completely lost the plot, combining as it does all the fantasies of the Left and the Greens. Here are just a few examples. Paragraph 7 calls on Member States to grant immigrant women whose status is irregular and whose children are attending school the right to family benefits and allowances. Paragraph 10 calls for the procedures for granting a residence permit to be simplified. Finally, paragraph 17 calls for women immigrants to be encouraged to participate more actively in the social and political life of host countries.

Obviously, everything is being done to transform, as if by magic, something that is a problem – namely illegal immigration – into something that is all very fine, moral and humanistic, namely legal immigration.

There is not a single word about putting policies in place for returning illegal immigrants to their countries of origin. Nor is there anything about the possibility of implementing a coherent and effective codevelopment aid policy in these countries in order to put a stop to the growing exodus from, in particular, African countries.

There is nothing but the desire, expressed from the beginning to the end of this report, to welcome ever more immigrants and to give them ever more rights.

Reports like this one do not help build Europe. Rather, they destroy Europe.

Astrid Lulling (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) I voted against this report in the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality because I consider paragraphs 6 and 7 to be unacceptable and inadmissible. Indeed, I am of the view that access to family benefits and health care for anyone whose situation is irregular would be an incitement to mass immigration, something that is unacceptable, given the immigration problems with which we are already faced.

Moreover, an increase in illegal immigration would further exacerbate the conditions confronting migrants. The European Union cannot adopt a report that further encourages the work of people smugglers and that leads a lot of women to risk their lives in order to emigrate illegally to Europe in the sole hope of being able to receive social benefits.

I should like, however, to emphasise that I am very committed to protecting women's rights. I consider that the efforts made to guarantee immigrant women's fundamental rights by means of this report are commendable, but everything must be avoided that might have harmful effects that would, in fact, make the situation of these women even more difficult.

Lydia Schenardi (NI), in writing. – (FR) Studies, statistics, reports, assessments ... With Parliament's support, the European Commission has, for some months now, been busily analysing the social, professional, political, economic and family situations of immigrant women in host countries. That is all well and good, as there is at present little reliable information that can be used in this area, even though we all know that women, and in particular Muslim women, suffer all kinds of discrimination.

What, however, concerns me about this report is the fact that it highlights the rights of immigrant women who have entered Europe illegally. The right to vote, the right to family allowances and housing benefits, the right to remain in the host country ... The report calls for, and lists, a whole package of rights but, bizarrely, it has not a word to say about a policy of returning illegal immigrants to their countries of origin or, again, about a co-development aid policy for all those countries, very often African ones, which are suppliers of immigration to Europe.

Europe keeps on welcoming people left, right and centre. In reality, Europe is transforming something that it deems unacceptable, namely illegal immigration, into something that it deems to be humanitarian and moral, namely legal immigration for population purposes.

Report: Casaca (A6-0303/2006)

James Elles (PPE-DE), in writing. This is an important report, much of which deserves to be implemented. Urgent action is required to improve recovery rates. However, my British Conservative colleagues and I are unable to support the report overall because we do not accept in principle that the long-term solution to many of the problems in this field is the establishment of a European Public Prosecutor, an idea which is reiterated in this report (paragraphs 43-45).

Such a Public Prosecutor would be an unacceptable interference in the constitutional responsibility of Member States for their judicial systems. Furthermore, as there is rightly widespread opposition to its introduction, emphasising its necessity is a dangerous diversion from tackling the real problems at hand. For this reason we are obliged to abstain on the final vote.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. (PT) The recovery of inappropriately used Community funds must be investigated on a case-by-case basis and requires greater attention, not least from the Member States.

In this regard, I wish to highlight the example of the relocation of companies that have enjoyed the use of Community funding for years, and situations in which public health is put at risk in one or more Member States. Cooperation between the different Member States and bodies should facilitate and improve the swift recovery of the amounts concerned and prevent the companies or organisations involved from continuing to enjoy Community funding.

This is a valid cause, but we object to it being used to launch a further drive towards federalism; the report proposes the creation of an EU-level public prosecutor's office and public prosecutor, which would be a further step in the scaling back of the Member States' sovereignty.

President. That concludes the explanations of vote.

10. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

(The sitting was suspended at 12.35 and resumed at 15.00)

IN THE CHAIR: MR BORRELL FONTELLES

President

11. Approval of Minutes of previous sitting: see Minutes

12. Membership of Parliament: see Minutes

13. Welcome

President. I am told that we have a distinguished visitor in the official gallery. It is Mr Akbar Ganji, renowned writer and journalist, who was released in March following a six-year jail sentence for his activities in support of democracy and press freedom in Iran.

Mr Ganji, we welcome you most warmly to the European Parliament.

(Applause)

The European Parliament actively supported Mr Ganji during his long spell in prison and his hunger strike and called for his release on several occasions, particularly in its Resolution on Iran of 13 October 2005 and also by means of several letters and interventions by the President of Parliament and by the chairpeople of the Delegation for relations with Iran and of the Human Rights Sub-Committee

In fact, Mr Ganji has taken part in a joint meeting of those bodies this afternoon, and I have no doubt that they will have gained much from his knowledge and experiences.

14. Draft general budget for 2007 (Section III) – Draft general budget for 2007 (Sections I, II, IV, V, VI, VII and VIII)

President. The next item is the joint debate on the budgetary procedure 2007.

In this debate we shall examine

- the report by Mr James Elles, on behalf of the Committee on Budgets, on the draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2007 (Section III) [C6-0299/2006 – 2006/2018(BUD)] and Letters of amendment No 1/2007 (5733/2006 – C6-0000/2006) and No 2/2007 (9010/2006 – C6-0000/2006) to the draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2007, and

- the report by Mr Louis Grech, on behalf of the Committee on Budgets, on the draft general budget of the European Union for the financial year 2007 (Section I, European Parliament; Section II, Council; Section IV, Court of Justice; Section V, Court of Auditors; Section VI, Economic and Social Committee; Section VII, Committee of the Regions; Section VIII (A), European Ombudsman; Section VIII (B), European Data Protection Supervisor [C6-0300/2006 – 2006/2018(BUD)].

James Elles (PPE-DE), rapporteur. – Mr President, thank you for introducing us to this first budgetary debate for 2007. At the outset I should like to thank all those who brought us to this stage, particularly those in the secretariat of Parliament's Committee on Budgets and those associated with it. Without them it would have been impossible to get ourselves to this state of preparedness.

In setting out the guidelines for the 2007 budget – one that is different from others in the sense that it has been the first budget in the new financial perspective – much of the first part of the year was spent in negotiating the result of the financial perspectives. Indeed it is a rare budget when we find that we do not yet have some of the programmes in place, because the multiannual programmes are in the process now of being completed as, let us hope, the Financial Regulation will be in place for the beginning of next year to be the basis for our operation.

In terms of general considerations, there are three that I should like to set out, which have shaped our strategic thinking in the Budgets Committee in presenting this budget to Parliament.

Firstly, as we noted in the annual policy strategy (APS) discussions in May, which form the basis for our preparation for this budget, the speed of globalisation outside Europe is shaping our policies. I believe we have rightly criticised the Commission for taking a laid-back and complacent view on this. We need to be able to take account in our budgetary policies of the effects of what is happening elsewhere in the world.

Secondly, we are acutely aware that the results of the financial perspective discussions have left us with fewer resources than we might otherwise have hoped, and therefore lead to the need for prioritisation in the way in which we shape our policies.

Thirdly, we must communicate better with our citizens and give them the confidence that we are capable of running the budget effectively.

That being said, what has the process now led to in what we voted for? First is the general outlook. In terms of commitments I believe we have been very prudent in allowing significant margins in the various parts of the budget, well under the ceilings provided for in the IIA; and for the first time since 2000 we are not requesting the flexibility instrument.

On the question of payments, we have taken a horizontal approach that reflects the approach taken by Reimer Böge, as our rapporteur on the financial perspectives – whose report Parliament adopted – in outlining a number of priority areas; and this is what we have reflected in taking payments on first reading to 1.04%, yet again well beneath the ceiling allowed for 2007 of 1.06%. This is also keeping a ratio between commitments and payments below 80% in most cases.

In terms of the pilot projects and preparatory actions, we have a range of different possibilities; in terms of internal policies, where we are wanting to underpin innovation, and where we are looking in terms of security at a major initiative on migration management, thanks to our friend and colleague Mr Deprez from the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs; and, last but not least, on external policy, to see what we can do to build up linkages with China and India, because, as reflected from the outset, in the present globalising world we do not have the right kind of networks which link our business and scientists with those of China and India. We are putting these in as preparatory actions to be approved under the 2007 budget.

Lastly in terms of payments, I have mentioned the common foreign and security policy, the CFSP. There are some in the Council who think that we are not being particularly generous in leaving it at a cut of 50%. There were those who wanted 100%, but we reached 50% as a good compromise because there are a range of people, particularly in the Committee on Foreign Affairs but also elsewhere in this Parliament, who would like to see the commitment entered into by the Council fulfilled for the way in which we handle the common foreign and security policy between Parliament and Council.

Equally, in terms of the special representatives, where we are recommending that the whole sum be transferred to the EU delegations, the point we are making on first reading is that we want to have, if not special treatment, at least clarity in the way in which these people are appointed. As the amendment says, we would like to adopt guidelines for the decision to establish, select and appoint EU special representatives and for the regular assessment of their work.

Turning now to the second aspect, which is value for money, this is an innovative concept where what we want to do is to stop throwing good money after bad. I do not think there is anybody in this House who has opposed this particular kind of concept, which is involved in identifying those lines where we know from the different reports available to us that the policies are being implemented poorly, either quantitatively or qualitatively.

Thanks to the work of the Committee on Budgets – though it would have been nice if the rapporteur of the Committee on Budgetary Control could have contributed more to this process – by looking at our own cost benefit analyses, at the Court of Auditors' reports, at the budget forecast alert and at the synthesis reports provided by the Commission, we have been able to identify a number of lines which we unanimously have voted into reserve at 30% on first reading in the Committee on Budgets. The intent is to be able to release these sums by the end of the year on second reading, so long as we can have a satisfactory explanation from the Commission on 15 November, when we will have a joint Committee on Budgets-Committee on Budgetary Control meeting to examine these lines and to see

whether they are now operating positively. The whole idea behind this is that we can purge the budget of those lines which are operating ineffectively, and move towards what we are looking for, which is a positive statement of assurance.

Where the Council has suggested that this might be against the Financial Regulation, I think Article 43(1)(b) makes it quite clear that where there are sufficient grounds for us to put monies in the reserve, then we are entitled to do so.

It would be nice if, by the end of our process – maybe on the margins of our conciliation meeting with the Council on 21 November, or in our vote in December – we could come to a common statement by Parliament, the Council and the Commission on how we handle this concept of value for money on a regular basis, so that we can make it a part of our process, rather than something treated in an arbitrary manner.

There are a few last comments on other aspects – budget control and value for money. The first of these is shared management: the problems about which we heard from the President of the Court of Auditors in the Budgetary Control Committee yesterday evening, when, much to my surprise and that of other colleagues, he said he was not particularly interested in shared management because the Council pays and it is the Commission that takes responsibility for signing off the budget. I do not think it is possible to have a statement of assurance unless the Member States sign up to their responsibilities under the budget for the funds that they pay, which amount to 75 or 80% of the budget. Therefore, shared management is something we think is important to have implementation of the IIA provision.

Secondly, as regards work on the agency – which Mrs Haug has so ably coordinated for us – we are putting sums of money of the increases in reserves so that we can hear views from the agencies as to what they will be doing with their money and their work programmes in order to get value for money once again.

Last but not least is the question on the administration, where the Council actions on first reading to effectively diminish the number of Commission posts by some 2000 in the next few years are something we have not been able to sign up to. We believe that we need a screening exercise of the Commission by 30 April 2007 so that we can understand what the mid-term demands of the Commission are before taking radical action to cut back.

In addition to that, we would not only like a state of play from the Commission as to which of the outstanding regulations we could have withdrawn, but above all what we would like is to be sure that we have clarity between what we have here in the budget process and the legislative process of the work programme which is decided on by the Commission today; so that when we have a final decision on this budget, hopefully in December, and the resolution from Parliament on the legislative work programme, then both of these can be bound together and we can have the Commission President come to Parliament in February 2007 and tell us what the final work programme of the Union is. Otherwise it is unclear to citizens.

Therefore, I would conclude by saying that this is a budget which in terms of priorities is what I would call a budget which is consistent and forward-looking; in value-for-money terms, it is a budget which can be said to be coherent and prudent; and lastly, that in taking these two building blocks together, we will be able to look forward to the review which will be coming by 2008/2009 and have a very clear position for the European Parliament in order to ensure that where we need increases in particular policies or different actions to be taken on policy matters, we will be well prepared for that debate.

(Applause)

Louis Grech (PSE), rapporteur. – (MT) The budgetary increase given to the other sections in 2007, when compared to that given in 2006, was only marginal and much less than that requested in the preliminary draft. The increase agreed upon reflects the rate of inflation and the amounts related to each institution's specific priorities. The Committee on Budgets decided to restore more than EUR 10 million out of the reductions of around EUR 29 million made by the Council to the other sections, excluding Parliament and the Council.

The 2007 budget was based on the institutions' essential priorities, while ensuring their unhindered operational and functional efficiency. Globally, the increase for institutions amounts to EUR 31 million compared to the EUR 48 million requested.

Over the years, Mr President, exaggerated margins have become common features of some institutions' estimates. This practice, or rather bad practice, brought with it an awkward system of last-minute transfers or the cancellation of certain appropriations. This situation will be difficult to manage when, in a few years' time, the property-acquisition process will start to decline. In this regard, we believe that an increasingly activity-based approach would be more effective. Moreover, the presentation of budget estimates should be more standardised, motivations should provide clearer justifications and estimates should be more accurate.

With regard to Parliament, the Committee on Budgets agreed that the final amount of the 2007 budget should be of EUR 0.1397 billion, that is to say a margin of EUR 25 million below the maximum of 20%. This level corresponds to 19.65% of the administrative expenditure under Chapter V. In this regard, however, Parliament is not renouncing its traditional 20% share. In fact, the committee extends its support to the appropriation of unused funds for unexpected, but justified, expenses by means of 'amending budgets'. The creation of an efficient structure, together with the implementation of a redeployment exercise should be the main objectives in the strategic planning for the 2007 Establishment Plan. Moreover, the filling of vacancies resulting from retirement will not be considered an automatic process.

With regard to support and services for Members, we agree with the Secretary-General that the main objectives relating to the 'raising the game' exercise were, broadly, achieved. However, there is a recurrent complaint that there is insufficient information about the support services available for MEPs. The administration should address this shortcoming and correct it by no later than the end of this year.

Mr President, due to lack of time I am unable to talk in detail about all the priorities addressed in the budget and in my report for 2007. These priorities relate to the EUR 48 million allocated for expenses connected with enlargement involving Bulgaria and Romania; the measures taken for the simplification and upgrading of legislation; the scrutiny of the cost-efficiency of translation services, especially with regard to the length of texts; the authorisation of EUR 9.5 million in supplementary funds for the improvement of the visitors' programme; the decision to keep EUR 6.7 million in the reserve for Web TV, a final decision about which will be taken after a presentation of the prototype in CoBu; and the need for greater control of the administration of multilingualism, for which we put EUR 3 million in reserve. The misuse of this service by some, including political parties, should attract sanctions. EUR 50 million have been reserved for buildings, and we must ensure that buildings policy is periodically reviewed.

I must conclude by saying that budget implementation requires better management if objectives are to be achieved. There is also a need for annual reports based on more detailed information about the work carried out by the institutions. These reports should be used to justify requests for additional funds so that Parliament might arrive at a more rational decision about fund allocation. This way, budgets financed by European taxpayers will provide real added-value to their everyday lives.

Finally, I would like to thank all those who contributed towards the drawing up of this report. I would especially like to thank the Secretary General, who has handed in his resignation. We will miss him; whether he will miss us is another matter.

Ulla-Maj Wideroos, *President-in-Office of the Council.* (FI) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is an honour for me to be here at Parliament's debate on the 2007 budget. I can assure you that we will note with interest the issues raised during the discussion and pass them on to all our colleagues.

The budget's drafting process is a long one. I appreciate the frank atmosphere of debate that has reigned all year long between Members of the Council and Parliament. We last discussed the issue at the budget trilogue on 18 October. I had an opportunity then to give a few tentative reactions to the draft amendments by the Committee on Budgets, to be voted on in plenary on Thursday. Before I present certain important matters to the Council, I would like to deal with certain issues of quality, which are of importance for the work of the Union as a whole.

It is my intention now to speak frankly and call a spade a spade. I believe that the Committee on Budgets, under the leadership of Mr Elles and Mr Grech, has worked without bias, by also focusing on what can be accomplished using our citizens' and taxpayers' money. Hopefully, the Commission too will become involved in this work.

The value for money from Union taxes must be made a regular process. The value for money concept must become something that pervades the entire budgetary procedure.

In my opinion, the first reading of the budget should concentrate on facts and figures. I do not think that the budgetary authorities should make political statements at first reading.

I said at the Council presentation of the draft budget on 5 September 2006 that the EU's budgetary procedure is in need of innovation. Without innovative budgetary solutions we cannot promote the Union's competitiveness or make the institutions' administration more efficient. The budgetary authorities must take concrete action to achieve their objectives in this 2007 budget.

From the Council's viewpoint, Parliament's intention to increase payment appropriations significantly, when there is no proven need to do so, is not the right way to build a bridge between the EU and the general public. An increase on this scale would only result in an enormous surplus in the first year. The 2007 budget should be based on realistic and justified appropriation needs.

Halving the common foreign and security policy budget is simply not acceptable. In the interinstitutional agreement concluded five months ago, Parliament approved an average sum of EUR 250 million per annum. That being the case, I believe that the EUR 159 million advocated by the Commission and the Council is a reasonable figure. I would therefore ask how Parliament's suggestion of EUR 73 million can be justified. I would hope that the plenary session will act responsibly with regard to these two whole areas.

The budgetary authorities need to develop a procedure for the use of reserves in the very near future. Appropriations should not be set aside merely for tactical reasons. Here too, the provisions of the Financial Regulation must be complied with to the letter.

As we all know well, the 2007 budget is the first to be covered by the new interinstitutional agreement. It is very important that all of its old familiar aspects, such as ceilings and adequate margins, are respected right from the start. The new agreement also has new provisions on, for example, pilot projects and preparatory operations. I would highlight the importance of these provisions, which clearly state that pilot projects and preparatory operations are not the exclusive right of one budgetary authority. Both Parliament and the Council must also respect this aspect of the content of the new interinstitutional agreement.

The 2007 budget is a package. It is important that the budgetary authorities establish the jointly agreed package within the framework of the budgetary procedure. The crucial elements of the overall package are interlinked.

Finally, I would like to return to the revision of the Financial Regulation. This is a subject that Parliament and the Commission have been anxious about, and they have been urging the Council to make haste. President Borrel last raised the matter in his discussions with Prime Minister Vanhanen on 17 October. It is with pleasure that I can now state that the Council adopted a common position on the revision of the Financial Regulation on 19 October. We can therefore hold negotiations with Parliament on the Financial Regulation on 21 November. I am sorry that we have not been able to keep to the timetable proposed by the Commissioner responsible for the budget in her letter in June. The Commission had hoped that the meeting would be held last week. I believe, however, that the timetable that I have referred to will give everyone sufficient time to formulate a comprehensive overall solution.

I hope that these brief comments of mine have done something to clarify the Council's opinions. I earnestly believe that Parliament and the Council can reach a good common solution on the budget for 2007 in the discussions in the weeks ahead.

Dalia Grybauskaitė, *Member of the Commission*. Mr President, I should like to express the Commission's appreciation for the work that was done by the Committee on Budgets and its rapporteur, tackling more than 1200 proposals from other committees in the process of the preparations for first reading. We know what that means and how it was done. In general, the Commission has had a positive reaction to the proposal that has been placed on the table by Parliament for tomorrow's vote. However, I should like to mention three sensitive points, which we would like to solve, together with Parliament, before second reading.

The first point is about the horizontal reserves on 30% of budget lines on value-added programmes. We are a bit concerned about the first application of the programme – not as a political idea, which we

supported from the very beginning, but the first application of it on the amount in general and some conditionalities that are coming together. However, the Commission and its secretariat are ready to come in the middle of November for the hearings, to which Parliament has invited us, to explain as much as we can, to allow Parliament to lift as much as it will be able to before the second reading.

The second element is on agencies, especially three new ones. They are supposed to come into being in 2007. The Committee on Budgets was removing preparations for them. We understand that it concerns point 47 in our new interinstitutional agreement. The relationship between two budgetary authorities needs to be clarified and the new procedures defined –that is why we will in the near future be asking for technical meetings between the three institutions to clarify the situation in order to allow those three agencies to come into being as of January 2007.

The third element is a reserve of EUR 50 million on Commission staff salaries in heading 5. We would like to thank Parliament for restoring the cuts which have been performed by the Council, but reserves are still of concern to us because conditionalities are wide and there are a lot of them. But as I said in the beginning, we will strive to make as much information as possible available before 15 November and before the final conciliation with both arms of the budgetary authority, so as to be able to lift as much as we can. If a reserve is not lifted at least partially from 1 January, we are not able to start recruitment at all for anybody, including from new Member States and the replacement of retired staff.

In general we are positive. We are ready to work closely with Parliament on lifting and fulfilling all conditions provided at first reading as a proposal for us. We hope that by 21 November we will be able to come to an agreement that will be good for all three institutions and acceptable.

István Szent-Iványi (ALDE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. – (HU)*
The foreign affairs chapter was perhaps the greatest loser in the seven-year budget, which immediately calls into question whether the European Union will be capable of fulfilling its role as a global player. It is especially unfortunate that in the annual budget process, the Council has made even further significant cuts to its foreign affairs budget. It was for this reason that the Committee on Foreign Affairs decided to restore the preliminary draft budget on numerous points, and thus to allocate the original amounts.

We set up the European Parliament's foreign affairs priorities as that we deemed it necessary to devote more resources to the candidate countries and potential candidate countries, to spend more on those countries on the eastern side of our European Neighbourhood Policy, and to provide more humanitarian aid to Palestine.

The Committee on Budgets did not agree with all of our proposals, and therefore we are submitting these proposals once again on behalf of the Committee on Foreign Affairs. In the interest of a responsible and consistent foreign policy, we call on you to accept the proposal of the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

IN THE CHAIR: ANTONIOS TRAKATELLIS

Vice-President

Jürgen Schröder (PPE-DE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Development. – (DE)*
Mr President, perhaps I might be permitted to start by congratulating my colleague Mr Elles on his strategic thinking, particularly with regard to China and India. This is a new thing and something we should take very seriously.

We in the Committee on Development have managed to get the funds from the preliminary draft budget reinstated, to keep the budget transparent, and to produce a report that is already in line with our colleague Mr Mitchell's on development cooperation instruments, but I have nevertheless tabled two amendments in the plenary, which were not, however, adopted by the Committee on Budgets.

One of these was Amendment 250, which was intended to set up a pilot project for small and medium-sized enterprises in developing countries, which were, I would remind the House, the subject of a report we adopted earlier this year. If we want to build up the self-employed and small business sector in developing countries, we need to give SMEs an enhanced role. It really would be vexatious if we were to fail to put in place a pilot project that underlined our own call for stronger SMEs in developing countries.

The other amendment to which I referred was Amendment 253, which has to do with exchanges with other parliaments. It refers to our own House's Budget and to the possibility of maintaining links with

other legislatures, such as the Pan-African Parliament or the Parliament of Afghanistan, which would enable this House to have a real and positive influence on the democratisation process around the world, and so I urge you, on Thursday, to vote to adopt this amendment too.

Ona Juknevičienė (ALDE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs.* – (LT) The budget is essential in implementing projects that are important and beneficial to the Community and its citizens. One such project is the Globalisation Adjustment Fund of EUR 500 million.

I suggested assigning the funds to the reserve of the following year's budget of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs. We will vote on this in December. However, ladies and gentlemen, I would once again like to draw your attention, and especially the attention of the Commission, to the rules established for the use of the funds. The question is whether the money will actually reach a particular unemployed person? The money cannot be misappropriated as it had often been the case with donor aid to undertakings in the process of restructuring.

I foresee a considerable risk of misusing the Commission's funds. It is against this that we, the members of the Committee on Economic and Monetary Affairs, have voted. We cannot accept the rules unless they are substantially amended. I therefore call upon you to take a firm stand and demand that the Commission guarantee the transparent and effective use of funds.

Jutta Haug (PSE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety.* – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the start of the first financial year of the Financial Perspective that we negotiated in April and adopted in May is almost upon us; the financial framework is a tight one, and presents us with a number of problems as regards the achievement of our policy objectives.

The Commission took a very cautious approach to drawing up the preliminary draft budget for 2007, and the Council – as always unperturbed by what the experts might say – cut it even further down to size. The Committee on the Environment tried to save what could be saved by reinstating the figures from the preliminary draft budget and making responsible increases in a few lines.

The Committee on Budgets took on board all the Committee on the Environment's amendments, and for that I am very grateful to my fellow-Members who sit on it. We cannot, however, regard the overall situation as satisfactory, since the financial year 2007 will present us with as yet unresolved problems with LIFE+ and the action programme on health.

Agencies are the only area in which we can look forward to the future with optimism on the grounds that they are being properly developed and funded, and by that I mean not only those agencies for which the Committee on the Environment is the competent specialised committee, but all of them, cooperation with which has undergone a marked improvement over the last two years; indeed, the personnel and personnel development plans for them will be in our hands by the end of the year, and I take a positive view of all of them.

It has to be said, though, that there are persistent difficulties with the new ones – the Gender Institute, the Human Rights Agency, and the Chemicals Agency – and, contrary to what the Commissioner has just said, these are not of a merely technical nature, for there is as yet no legal basis for any of them. We in this House are still waiting for the start of negotiations with the Council pursuant to Article 47 of the Interinstitutional Agreement – negotiations, that is, on where the money for the three new agencies is to come from. Perhaps the Presidency of the Council might be so good as to move this process along a bit.

Neena Gill (PSE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy.* – Mr President, I should like to make three points. Firstly, I should like to thank the rapporteur for increasing payment appropriations for priority programmes linked to the Lisbon Agenda, like the Competitiveness and Innovation Programme and the Seventh Framework Programme for Research. These are key initiatives that not only provide work for Europe's valuable and highly skilled scientists but also prepare the EU to face future challenges as a global leader. We should not overlook the significant and positive impact that they have on our regions and their populations.

Secondly, I commend this report for the concern it expresses for the Galileo Programme, which has been under-funded in the 2007 draft general budget. This showcase EU programme is a major technological, economic and political challenge and we really need to be sure about it. I do not understand

why we are prepared to cut funding in this area. It would be an embarrassment for the EU if this project were to stall or fail due to lack of financial backing.

Thirdly, since many areas, such as the ones I have just mentioned, require increased funding, I do not understand why, when the ITRE Committee's request is for a smaller budget, this does not come from the Security and Space Research programme, where we should reduce payments and not increase them.

Turning to more general non-ITRE issues, on the structural funds I support the call in this report for an increase in payments. This is the one area where ordinary citizens see the difference EU policies make to their everyday lives. My own region, the West Midlands, is a case in point. EU funds have acted as a catalyst in re-energising the potential and development of local communities.

On external affairs, Asia is one of the largest and most populous regions in the world. It contains 60% of the world's population. So I am amazed that the Commission has cut funding. Last year money for the tsunami disaster was taken from other Asian programmes without any increase and this year, because the tsunami funding has decreased, the Commission has cut the funding again. Has the Commission forgotten that the money is desperately needed by the Asian programmes which were sacrificed, where the EU is committed to meeting Millennium Development Goals? I ask the Commission to justify this.

I welcome this report's call for transparency in the allocation of funding for information and communication. We need full transparency across the board, so EU taxpayers' money spent on EU policies should be totally traceable and published on the Internet. Then we can see exactly how much money goes to whom. This applies equally to the Members of this House and especially to agriculture.

Finally, I should like to congratulate both the rapporteurs, Mr Elles and Mr Grech, on producing excellent reports. I thank them for their hard work.

Bill Newton Dunn (ALDE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection*. – Mr President: one minute, two points. The Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection has quite simply voted for the maintenance of the Commission's proposed spending on consumer protection, not the deep cuts proposed by the Council. So we are voting for the status quo as proposed by the Commission.

Secondly, I should like to mention Parliament's budget for communicating with our citizens. Each year American congressmen are allowed to send four four-sided newspapers to every single one of their voters to tell them of their glorious achievements. I propose an amendment that would allow each of us here to send one free four-sided newspaper to each of our voters every year to tell them what we are doing. I hope colleagues will support the amendment, which would help make up the communication deficit. We have a few voters here in the visitors' gallery, but there are millions out there who do not know what we are doing and we need to communicate with them.

Anne E. Jensen (ALDE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Transport and Tourism*. – (DA) Mr President, Commissioner, Madam President-in-Office of the Council, in the financial perspective, the amount for the trans-European networks – the 30 top-priority transport projects – has been cut back to a third of the amount that the Commission originally found necessary. We still do not have the legal basis for the funding in order. Nor do we know how the reduced amount is to be distributed over the next few years. We have therefore chosen to put the whole of the amount for 2007 – almost EUR 800 million – into reserves until everything has been clarified. We cannot, of course, make use of the first year's budget without having a clear idea of what is to happen over the next few years. You do not build half a bridge. It is a question of 'either/or'.

In the case of the three agencies for maritime, aviation and railway safety, we want to see the Commission's figures reinstated in the budget. These are new agencies in the course of being set up, and they need space in which to work.

Last but not least, I would draw attention to the pilot project for safe lay-bys along European motorways. With more stringent rules governing drivers' rest and driving periods, it is important for European drivers to have proper and safe conditions in which to rest.

Marian Harkin (ALDE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Regional Development*. – Mr President, I should like to say 'well done' to the rapporteur: he has certainly shown a steady hand. On an overall level, payments in the 2007 budget must reach 1.04% of EU GNI if we are to deliver effective programmes to our citizens. It is also crucial that we adopt a qualitative, value-for-money approach with

the resources that we have. Somebody made the comment that the Council pays. In fact, it does not. The citizens pay. We are dealing with taxpayers' money; they have entrusted their money to us and they rightly expect to see positive results within the context of overall value for money.

As rapporteur on the REGI Committee, I strongly urge that the appropriations in the preliminary draft budget be restored and that cohesion be considered one of the policy priorities of the EU.

Finally, I call on the Commission to clarify the legal base of the peace programme and enable resources to be allocated to the International Fund for Ireland. As an Irish MEP, I am pleased to have the opportunity to thank the EU for its continuing support for peace and IFI funding. Well in excess of EUR 1 billion has been given to promote peace-building, understanding and tolerance. You have supported communities and shown faith with ordinary people in the border regions of Ireland. You have played your role and you can take credit for that.

Marc Tarabella (PSE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development*. – (FR) Mr President, Mr Elles, ladies and gentlemen, with a few exceptions, all the amendments by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development have been accepted by the Committee on Budgets.

First of all, I am delighted that the amendments concerning the restoration of the Preliminary Draft Budget have been adopted, and I am even more delighted that the amendments concerning the increase in aid to the poorest people have been adopted: food aid, refunds for milk, free distribution of fruit and vegetables, promotion activities, the distribution of milk to schoolchildren and aid for bee-keeping. We should have liked more account to have been taken of, in particular, suckler-cow premiums – vital in disadvantaged areas – aid for energy crops and pilot projects on energy efficiency. We shall take the liberty of re-tabling amendments along those lines in plenary.

Overall, we consider that the Committee on Budgets has been attentive beyond our expectations to the amendments that we were proposing, and we would thank you, Mr President, Mr Elles, ladies and gentlemen, for the constructive spirit in which your decisions were taken.

Rosa Miguélez Ramos (PSE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Fisheries*. – (ES) Mr President, our committee has drawn up certain observations with regard to the cuts introduced by the Council in relation to the European Commission's proposals.

The most significant of these cuts is the EUR 10 million cut in the reserve in international agreements, which is being taken away — is disappearing — both for commitments and for payments. The Committee on Fisheries believes that this could even create problems with regard to the Union's legal obligations in this field, and we are therefore calling for the initial sums to be restored.

The Council's other reductions relate to the payments of the European Fisheries Fund: EUR 23 million for the convergence regions and EUR 7 million for those that are not included in this category. The Committee on Fisheries believes that these cuts would make it impossible to pay the advance of 7%, as stipulated in the Fund's own Regulation.

Ladies and gentleman, the general contribution allocated to fisheries is already modest enough, and we therefore find these cuts unacceptable. As well as being arbitrary and unjustified, they send a very negative message at a critical time for the sector, and we in the Committee on Fisheries are therefore asking for the figures proposed by the Commission in the preliminary draft budget to be restored.

Helga Trüpel (Verts/ALE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Culture and Education*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I, too, believe in principle that we should go after value for money, for the effective and economic use of funds is what matters. On the other hand, though – and this is where we have different ends in mind – Europe needs money if we are to be able to enthuse people and move the European project forward, which is what we want to do, and that will not be possible unless proper funding is made available.

Let me remind the House of this morning's debates on the culture programme and on Europe's culture policy, and of the debates we are going to have this evening on lifelong learning, on youth policy over the coming years and on 'Europe for the Citizens'. This morning, it was lamented – as it will be this evening too – that we do not spend enough money in this field, in an area that really does have an impact on people, on Europe's citizens, and builds a link between them and Europe.

We share together the great problem of how we get people not only to accept Europe, but also to be enthusiastic about it, and that is why, far from cutting back on these programmes, we should be investing more in Europe's future. That is also why the Committee on Culture and Education has been highly consistent in rejecting the cuts the Council wanted to make to these programmes.

Gérard Deprez (ALDE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs*. – (FR) Mr President, Mrs Wideroos, Mrs Grybauskaitė, ladies and gentlemen, on behalf of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs, I want first of all to say a well-deserved thank you to the general rapporteur, our fellow Member and friend Mr Elles, as well as to the Committee on Budgets as a whole, for the way in which it has taken account of the priorities of the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs.

Among these priorities, there are two that obviously deserved a very special effort when it came to the budget. The first priority was better control of the EU's external borders, which are now subject to permanent and considerable migratory pressures, with the whole of the southern border under particular pressure. Anyone who needs convincing of this need only watch television and read the newspapers every day. In this connection, it was essential to strengthen the operational resources of the FRONTEX Agency, which we established for the purposes of external border control. Happily, the Agency's resources were, indeed, strengthened, with the support, in particular, of our general rapporteur and Spanish fellow Members who helped us correct – I do not know, Mrs Wideroos, whether to use the word 'stupidity' or 'incoherence'; I shall opt for 'stupidity' – the stupidity of the Council, which had, for its part, reduced the resources of the FRONTEX Agency in spite of current circumstances.

We had a second priority, this too recognised by the whole of Parliament and enthusiastically supported by Europeans, if all the available polls are to be believed, which was to increase the resources earmarked for the fight against terrorism and organised crime which, as you well know, make a mockery of the EU's internal borders. On this subject too, our message has been heard by the Committee on Budgets which has, in particular, increased the resources set aside for Eurojust. These too had been reduced in the Council's draft budget. Mrs Wideroos, I shall leave it to you to choose a suitable adverb to characterise this reduction.

I make no bones about the fact that, where the 'freedom, security and justice' sector is concerned, the Council is equal neither to what is at stake nor to Europeans' expectations, and our Parliament will be able to take pride in using its vote to correct the inconsistencies in the position of the Council, whose members delight in making all the right noises but balk at acting together to confront serious problems they have in common. It is a terrible shame.

Carlos Carnero González (PSE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs*. – (ES) Mr President, it is often said that knowledge does not take up any space, but in this case I believe that the debate and the reflection on the future of Europe should have a space in the budget.

When we met with the general rapporteur in July, I told him, on behalf of the Committee on Constitutional Affairs, that this may appear to be the least important thing in this debate, but that in reality that was not the case.

We are debating the way we want Europe to be in the future and, in order to realise our dreams, we need funds and resources, above all so that we can inform the citizens, strengthen the institutions responsible for relations between civil society and the European institutions and promote the debate.

Are we going to achieve that with the budget we have?

The amendments presented by the Committee on Constitutional Affairs have been taken up to a certain extent by the Committee on Budgets. In that way we will be able to promote proper reflection on these matters and also ensure that the citizens understand some – if just a little – of this debate that we are holding here and know what the Union's budget is.

Piia-Noora Kauppi (PPE-DE), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality*. – Mr President, I should like to thank my colleagues, Mr Elles and Mr Grech, who have done considerable work on the EU budget for 2007.

In general, although I support the approach of our rapporteurs, in the final analysis we must guarantee sufficient funding for common foreign and security policy and we must find a solution to the funding of the agencies. However, the ongoing negotiations can only be based on a mutual understanding that

all sides abide by their earlier commitments. I address this to the Council in particular, which has repeatedly proposed extensive budget cuts in areas of great importance to the European Parliament.

On behalf of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, I should like to raise a few points that unfortunately have to be raised every year. The principle of gender mainstreaming is enshrined in the Amsterdam Treaty, which requires a gender equality perspective not only to be applied to measures designed specifically to promote equal opportunities, but also to be incorporated into all policies at all levels of the budgetary process by means of gender budgeting. Since 2003, when this House adopted a resolution on gender budgeting – that is, building public budgets from a gender perspective – the fact that public budgets, including the EU budget, are not gender-neutral and have a different impact on women and men has been taken into account.

A gender budgeting approach should be used to assess and restructure all pertinent budget programmes, measures and policies, as well as to determine to what extent resources are allocated in gender-equal or -unequal ways and ultimately achieve gender neutrality, where equal consideration is given regardless of gender.

When the Finnish Minister for Social Affairs and Health, Tuula Haatainen, addressed our committee in early October, she highlighted the mainstreaming of equality policies in budgetary planning and evoked the Finnish example of seeking to ensure that all items, not only in the national, but also in the EU budget, take gender equality policies into account. I certainly hope that the Finnish Presidency will succeed in this respect.

Alexandra Dobolyi (PSE), draftsman for the opinion of the Committee on Petitions. – (HU) I wish to speak on behalf of the Committee on Petitions about the budget for the European Ombudsman. We often speak of bringing Europe closer to its citizens, of helping the citizens to gain a better understanding of what the European Union really is.

The office of the European Ombudsman is a small institution, one that does a considerable amount of work in this area. It is therefore very important for the Ombudsman to have sufficient budgetary resources available to be able to perform his duties successfully and effectively. In April of this year, we spoke very positively about the European Ombudsman during the discharge process. I would like to remind everyone that we spoke of this office as a model (for other institutions, with clearly defined competencies) and a well-administered budget.

The European Ombudsman is sparing with translation charges and does not wish to add new items, and it is precisely for this reason that, on behalf of my committee, I request that, because we have to take account of the forthcoming enlargement, we support a moderate increase in the budget requested by the European Ombudsman, while emphasising the need for budgetary discipline and for citizens to be provided high levels of services.

Ville Itälä, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – (FI) Mr President, I would like to thank Mr Grech, the rapporteur for Parliament's budget. It was a pleasure to work with him and to reach joint compromises in my role as shadow rapporteur. I congratulate him on the excellent end result that we achieved. Above all, we have to remember the principles upon which the budget is drawn up. Firstly, we have to be precise about how we intend to spend taxpayers' money. Another principle is that we spend money on what is necessary. We should not be doing all sorts of nice and interesting things, but what is really necessary.

The 20% increase principle is hopelessly outdated. It sometimes leads to madness, such as the proposal for Internet television. The idea behind Internet television is for Parliament to have its own TV channel. The money for that cannot really be justified to taxpayers. As an example, I might mention the speech given in Brussels by Finland's second Minister of Finance at the beginning of the Finnish presidential term. The speech was broadcast via Internet TV to everyone in Europe, but in the whole of Europe there were just 14 interested viewers, half of whom were the Minister's own advisers. If we are to make an investment of tens of millions for just a handful of people, the money is certainly going to be in the wrong place. It would be more cost-effective to spend the money, for example, on bringing journalists from small local and regional newspapers here, after which they would write articles on Parliament and what happens here. People read these sorts of newspapers carefully, but they will not really follow these Internet TV broadcasts.

We need all budget headings to be closely evaluated and monitored, and this applies especially to building policy. I am happy that we have found a common view, because the building in Strasbourg became a scandal, and we no longer need publicity like that. We therefore need to be a lot more careful about how we spend money.

Catherine Guy-Quint, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Mrs Wideroos, Mrs Grybauskaitė, ladies and gentlemen, allow me first of all to thank our two rapporteurs, Mr Elles and Mr Grech, who, through the work they have done and the tenacity they have shown, have been able to give direction to our work on this first reading of the budget.

This budget, the first of the 2007-2013 programme, is a very modest one, representing only 1.04% of GDP. Not only is it very modest, but it is probably not up to the challenges facing the European Union: the energy crisis, the crisis of confidence, world conflicts and the increase in poverty and job insecurity, all coming at a time when Europeans are expressing ever more expectations of the European Union. The restricted framework forces very modest ambitions on us. Quality, and not just quantity, characterises the approach to this 2007 budget, therefore.

The budget has also compelled us to adopt a hybrid strategy. Indeed, not only are our legal bases for the new policies not ready, but we are not ready, either, to champion and implement all the policies wished for by Europeans. We want to be ambitious, as people expect us to be, but we must also be realistic, as we do not know whether we shall be able to implement these policies. For the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, the minimum consisted in reinstating the preliminary draft budget for all the policies to which we are attached and, in particular, for the Lisbon objectives and the Gothenburg policies, not forgetting employment, solidarity, the environment and rural development.

2007 should be the year in which our communication policy is overhauled, given that Europeans have been very much forgotten up until now. Where external policy is concerned, I would also appeal for us to adopt a balanced approach to administration, particularly where the EU's borders are concerned, as we cannot be satisfied with a unilateral approach that concentrates on law and order. I should like, if I may, to emphasise two important points: first of all, the role to be played under the heading of the EU budget by cofinancing involving the European Investment Bank, and this with a view to relaunching the Lisbon and Gothenburg strategies; and, secondly, the role of pilot projects and preparatory actions, which have always favoured the birth of new ideas and which should be implemented.

In reality, I am mostly concerned about the implementation of this budget. Our rapporteur has opted for spending with a qualitative focus. This amounts to championing the way in which our priorities have traditionally been financed, but it also constitutes an appeal to the Commission to respect fully the political choices made by Parliament. If, moreover, Parliament can make criticisms of the way in which policies are administered by the other institutions, it is because such criticism is authorised by the Treaty, the institutional agreements and actual practice. Parliament is one of the branches of the budgetary authority, and we do not wish to be dispossessed of our power as a result of abandoning all authority regarding the way in which our votes are brought into play. Is it fair, however, for us, in the name of that power, to make it more difficult for these same institutions to exercise their prerogatives? No. It would be dangerous, and even counter-productive, to try to intervene too much in administrative practice. I would also say to the Council that the Commission could not do better if, at the same time, we were to agree to freeze recruitment by that institution. However, we have little room for manoeuvre if – as we have cause to fear, given the latest line proposed – all our priorities are adjusted in accordance with the European Commission's shortcomings in implementing policy.

Finally, and in conclusion, I wanted to tell you, Mr President, that the Council must remember that it cannot impose its point of view, because we need together to comply with the priorities of the European political project and because, if we reduce the budget by too much, we shall no longer be able to develop any of these policies of which Europeans expect so much.

Anne E. Jensen, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (DA) Mr President, the budget we are presenting today is a responsible and sensible budget. We have not accepted the Council's indiscriminate cuts to administrative expenditure but we have, on the other hand, put EUR 50 million from the Commission's administrative budget into the reserves and demanded a clearer explanation of trends in certain areas of expenditure. We must not close our eyes to the facts when we establish the budget, but go into details and ensure that precisely those resources that are necessary are available.

In that connection, I wish to thank our rapporteur, Mr Elles, for the approach he has chosen to adopt in this year's work on the budget. I am thinking of the idea of 'value for money', following on from criticism by the Court of Auditors and in cost-benefit studies and other reports. In particular, I would draw attention to the cost-benefit studies as a constructive innovation, offering us a far better survey of, for example, trends in the Commission's information and communication policy and the development of the common foreign and security policy.

Specifically on behalf of the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I would emphasise the need for adequate resources for the legal and asylum policy and for the foreign policy. There is a sharp contrast between the fine words uttered by EU Heads of Government in formal speeches and the resources that their finance ministers are prepared to make available. At the same time as Heads of Government emphasise that the EU should present a united front in refugee policy and strengthen the common border management agency, FRONTEX, finance ministers make a point of cutting back on appropriations to the agency. Clearly, this is inconsistent. I am pleased, moreover, that we have had to reach agreement to sort these matters out.

In connection with the financial perspective, it is quite clear that the EU's foreign policy was badly handled. That the budget we are presenting today is clearly a responsible one is shown, however, by the fact that Parliament has not tried to challenge the interinstitutional agreement. We have established a budget within the framework of the agreement. Foreign policy is an area that will demand close attention over the next few years, however. I think that, especially in regard to our close neighbours in Central and Eastern Europe, we in the EU have an obligation to promote stronger economic development and to encourage a view of democratic development as something hopeful and positive. The money needs to be used well, and we therefore ask that the Commission ensure that the new programmes take account of the Court of Auditors' criticism of the aid to Russia.

With regard to Parliament's and other institutions' budget, my group has adopted the approach of our rapporteur, Mr Grech, whom I should also like to thank for a constructive and substantial piece of work. It means that the budget is somewhat below the level originally announced by the institutions but, after thorough analysis of each individual institution, a position has been adopted on what is in reality needed and a suitable margin thus created. We have had a number of debates about whether Parliament needs 20% of the total administrative expenditure, and we have ended up with a figure that is rather on the small side. My group supports the policy of recent years to the effect that Parliament should purchase the buildings it uses, but we must ensure that we have a clearer overall view of what resources are needed for buildings over the next few years.

Helga Trüpel, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, this House's budget debates may well not be renowned for being sexy, but they are very important, for we, in the 2007 budget as in all the others, are setting out the priorities for our work over the coming year.

You will be aware that the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance did not vote to approve the 2007-2013 Financial Perspective on the grounds that we see this financial plan as resolving too few problems. We take the same view of the 2007 budget, and ask ourselves whether it will enable us to do those things that have to be done.

For example, we do not agree with our agricultural policy or with the excessive subsidies paid out for agricultural exports. Our deep-frozen chickens sell in African markets for half the price of those that the Africans produce themselves, and then we end up complaining about how we get too many refugees from Africa, when it is we ourselves, with our own agricultural policy, who are helping to create the problem.

There is also fisheries policy, where our fishing quotas are still too high, and we are endangering our fish stocks. This is another policy that the European Union should change.

Not to mention our policy on tobacco, for we are still subsidising tobacco growers while at the same time banning tobacco advertisements. That, too, strikes me as inconsistent and not a smart policy for Europe to adopt.

Now that many European countries have the globalisation blues – remember the referendum in France? – our globalisation policy ought to be a more just one, with us speaking out more emphatically in favour of fair trade and getting more serious about our commitment to the Millennium Development Goals, in which respect we are lagging behind the rest of the world when it comes to funding the war on poverty.

Europe, though, must also do more towards a forward-looking energy policy; we need to invest more in research into renewable energies that would make us less dependent on Mr Putin and enable us to be more forthright in our criticisms of his autocratic regime.

What do we have to do instead? We have to invest more in education, research, culture, the media and in the cultural industry, which is an important pillar of the Lisbon Strategy, and that would enable us to make that strategy more precise and more forward-looking. What we in Europe need is to be more of one mind where policy is concerned; that is the only way in which we will develop a responsible common foreign policy that is pro-active, that spreads civilisation, that reinforces civil society through the neighbourhood policy, but also intervenes when absolutely necessary. If that is what we want, we are not spending enough money. Much as I would love to see us take 'value for money' as our yardstick, we also have to work on the basis of 'good money for Europe'. If each of our Member States is spending only one per cent of its gross national income on Europe, then not enough money is being made available for European policies that are both important and the right ones to pursue.

Esko Seppänen, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (FI) Mr President, Commissioner, I was going to say Madam Minister, but I will not. The reading contains a kind of virtual version of the EU budget. After the Council's reading, the level of payment appropriations was 1% of the Member States' combined GNP. Parliament in its first reading is raising this to 1.04%. This is being done by increasing appropriations for the draft budget, which could be called virtual because Parliament has not been in the habit of holding on to its increases right to the last.

The Council has regularly been the winner in negotiations. Parliament's credibility will suffer if that happens again. Our group demands that Parliament keep to its priorities.

The rapporteur, James Elles, has been innovative in looking for appropriations where the Commission has not implemented the budgetary requirements of previous years. We support his approach, where some funds are set aside in reserves and only released after the proper statements have been produced.

Our group supports the right of the new Member States to seek staff positions in the Commission for their own citizens. Consequently, we cannot support the cuts in Commission personnel as proposed by the Council.

Public authorities, including the European Union, may act as catalysts in various economic processes. On the other hand, the same money may also be spent on administrative projects led by Eurocrats, which in fact erode people's confidence in the Union. An example has been the PRINCE programme. Another will be the 3DGENOME project, plan D. There is a danger that Parliament's own Internet television channel will be another. Our group does not support the use of Commission and Parliament appropriations to produce Euro-propaganda, and we do not want the militarisation of the EU using money for the common foreign and security policy.

Wojciech Roszkowski, *on behalf of the UEN Group.* – (PL) Mr President, on behalf of the Union for Europe of the Nations Group, I should like to begin by congratulating both rapporteurs and thanking them for all their work. This year, we are faced with a rather curious situation. The meagre Commission budget was cut only slightly by the Council, whereas Parliament's Committee on Budgets is proposing an increase in spending and financial commitments above the limits proposed by the Commission. This stance is obviously worth supporting, as the Union cannot rise to the challenges it faces without a larger budget. I refer to the forthcoming enlargement and increasing competition at world level.

We can but hope that a suitable compromise will be reached in November and that the European budget will be closer to Parliament's proposal than to the Council's. Given that the Council wishes to cut expenditure, as it is wont to do, it was entirely appropriate for Mr Elles to suggest a value for money approach. This method involves working more efficiently to attain our aims. Bearing in mind that the 2007 budget is the first budget within the new financial framework, it is to be hoped that it will augur well for subsequent years.

I should like to take advantage of this opportunity to reiterate my appeal to all those who care about human rights to support the amendments tabled by the UEN, in which we call for an end to Union financial support for programmes promoting compulsory abortion in third countries. Allow me to stress that the issue at stake here is compulsory abortion, not abortion as such.

Rejection of these amendments will amount to supporting practices that infringe fundamental human rights. It will reveal the hypocrisy of all those who constantly advocate human rights whilst simultaneously trampling all over them.

Dariusz Maciej Grabowski, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group.* – (PL) Mr President, I must begin by thanking the rapporteurs. Nonetheless, the 2007 budget is a bad one. Most Members are aware of this, but only a small minority venture to say so openly. It is a bad budget because it fails to deal with, or even to tackle, any of the European Union's major problems. These include the sluggish economy and the increasing differences between the levels of development in the countries of the old and the new Union. The 2007 budget is also bad because it does not respond to the new challenges facing society and the economies of the Member States. There is the destabilisation of the market for raw materials, and in particular the steep increase in the price of sources of energy. There is also the important issue of economic migration from the new Member States to the countries of the old Union and the consequent rapidly rising social and economic costs in the poor countries.

If the amendments tabled by the Independence and Democracy Group had been adopted, the 2007 budget could have served to introduce a new approach to funding for the agricultural sector. In view of the strong resistance to these amendments expressed at meetings of the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development and the Committee on Budgets, we expect them to be rejected by Parliament. This is a testament to the power of agribusiness and the large landowners. It also reveals where Parliament's true allegiance lies, as the House is quite prepared to defend the interests of a rich minority against the large majority of farmers who are poor. It should be pointed out that the resources saved could be devoted to supporting entrepreneurship, research and development and investment in infrastructure. The 2007 budget increases expenditure on administration, and provides for the creation of new offices and agencies. We are strongly opposed to all that.

In conclusion, the IND/DEM Group will vote against the 2007 budget and we trust that other Members of the House will do likewise.

Sergej Kozlík (NI). – (SK) On the liabilities side, the draft budget of the European Union submitted by the European Council is fully consistent with the ratio parameters of the approved long-term financial perspective for 2007–2013. Appropriations for competitiveness and cohesion have increased significantly in the area of growth and employment as well as in the area of freedom, security, justice, civil society and the status of the European Union as a global partner.

In compliance with the financial perspective, the share of spending on direct payments in agriculture has decreased; by contrast, the share of spending on rural development has grown.

Unfortunately, as a result of the Council's efforts to significantly reduce the overall volume of funding, the positive trend in respect of payments has to a large extent dwindled away. The Council's reservations concerning the beneficiaries' ability to draw down budgeted expenses have had some negative implications. As the Council holds the key to the successful use of funds, I see this as the Council's reservations towards itself. However, Parliament's conviction that the available funds will be used well and efficiently exceeds the Council's expectations. Therefore, I will vote in favour of those amendments that bring payment parameters more in line with the long-term financial perspective.

Janusz Lewandowski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, at this crucial stage of work on the 2007 budget, it seems to me that the European Parliament is taking more account than the Council of the priorities, figures and principles of interinstitutional cooperation agreed for the period of the 2007-2013 multiannual Financial Perspective. As people elected by the people, we have a good understanding of the concern felt in the Member States. There is concern that the new generation of multiannual programmes might not begin on time. That will be one of the main criteria against which the year 2007 will be assessed. We also share a common desire for a new financial regulation, hence our pressure on the Finnish Presidency to ensure that we can work on the basis of the new financial regulation in 2007.

The oft-repeated refrain that we are striving to rationalise the budget will become more than mere words this year. Mr Elles, our rapporteur, has proposed, and obtained Parliament's support for, a very consistent position. This entails giving strong financial support to the priority lines, whilst applying a 30% reserve to budget lines that seem unlikely to be used in full. We should all sing from the same hymn sheet in this matter. There is certain to be a difference of opinion, however, on the issue of posts and salaries in administration. We believe that the European Union's new functions require motivation, a stable

administrative staff and recruitment from the new Member States. There is bound to be disagreement amongst us on this issue during the conciliation procedure in November.

Personally, I am not fully satisfied with the geographical focus, as our main commitment is to the continent of Europe. The larger the European Union, the greater its responsibility for Europe. This should be reflected in the geographical focus applied to the distribution of funds. Nonetheless, the margins are retained and the flexibility instrument remains unused. It should also be possible to reach a compromise this year, and our argument should be the strength of Thursday's vote in the European Parliament.

Giovanni Pittella (PSE). – *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am grateful to the rapporteurs, Mr Elles and Mr Grech, and I welcome the Commissioner and all of my fellow Members. I should like to make two very brief remarks.

The first relates to what was said by Mrs Guy-Quint. Those who wanted proof of the inadequacy of the 2007-2013 financial perspective now have it. The first budget of the new financial framework clearly demonstrates that the funds are overstretched. The rapporteur has made some leaps of faith, some of which have been rightly corrected by the political groups, but nothing has been able to address the tight constraints of the multiannual financial framework.

After this first piece of evidence it should be obvious, even to those who argue that 1% of gross national income is enough to sustain the Community budget, that what is instead required is a change, a mid-term review. I therefore call on Parliament to start preparing for this challenge right now.

My second remark will be brief. Mr Elles has done well to propose an operation for controlling spending, which has our support and backing. It is right to be as transparent as possible, but it is also right not to undermine the fundamental policies of the European Union.

Kyösti Virrankoski (ALDE). – *(FI)* Mr President, Commissioner, firstly I wish to thank the general rapporteur on the budget, Mr Elles, for his excellent preparatory work. He has demonstrated intimate knowledge of the work of the EU and the administration of its funds. His approach has been well-argued and bold. At the same time I want to thank Mr Grech for the excellent and responsible job that he has done, and Mr Lewandowski for his skilful leadership of the Committee on Budgets.

The 2007 budget is the first to be drafted within the framework of the new financial perspectives. It is, moreover, an initial source of financing for new programmes and a final one for old commitments. The draft budget is moderate. It remains within the framework of the financial perspectives, and it does not even propose the use of the flexibility instrument. Nevertheless, it has clear priorities. In my opinion, it is quite right that appropriations for training, research and development have been increased. We must build more than just a pile of paper round the Lisbon Strategy. For that reason, we still need to make it easier for enterprise to flourish, which will mean competitiveness under the CIP Programme and a clear boost for innovation. All these have been among our group's objectives.

The Northern Dimension and cooperation in the Baltic Sea region have been on the agenda for a long time, and it has been considered important to develop them. My group has tabled two draft amendments, Amendments 492 and 493, in which there is an addition to the explanatory statement for the budget headings on pan-European road and gas networks, which states that funds could also be used for financing projects which implement the strategies referred to. I hope that there is support for these draft amendments.

Gérard Onesta (Verts/ALE). – *(FR)* Mr President, I shall concentrate on the European Parliament's budget. The Grech report is the definitive word on the European Parliament's budget, and I should like sincerely to thank Mr Grech for the quality of his work and, especially, for the climate of dialogue that he has been able to create. For the period of a year – and a year is a long time – he will have to administer all the releases of funds, as well as the reserves. Make no mistake: we shall have someone open, coherent and fair to engage with.

For the second time in its history, Parliament will not achieve the mythical 20% mark. It is useful to think in terms of an operational budget, but it is necessary to be very attentive and very much on the ball if, as proposed by the Grech report, we wish, as the need arises, to mobilise more money in order to acquire buildings, given that acquisition procedures are extremely protracted, what with the Bureau being required to give a decision, the Committee on Budgets needing to offer an opinion and the Council

having to give us the go-ahead. If, for example, I were to purchase a building in London or Paris over the next few days, I am not sure that we could, in a few weeks, release the funds for which we had, however, made provision the previous year. It is therefore a very good idea to stay below the 20% mark whilst, however, remaining very much on the alert in case an opportunity should present itself.

The second very important feature of the Grech report is that it has placed the individual at the heart of our objectives. Next year, and for the first time, we are going to embark on a new process through the setting up of the parliamentary web-TV channel project, the beginning of the work in our visitors' centre and the meeting of the first citizen 'agora', which will involve people in our legislative work. I think that we have made a lot of effort to put the citizen centre stage, and I should not like to conclude without emphasising – since we learned yesterday evening that he was to be leaving – that Mr Priestley, our Secretary-General, has, during the ten years that he has headed the administration, worked hard to modernise our budgetary procedure and to make it more rigorous and transparent.

Diamanto Manolakou (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, the draft budget serves in an absolute manner the anti-grassroots, reactionary policy of the European Union.

It is within the framework of the new financial framework for 2007-2013, cut and sewn to the measures to strengthen European capital. The 2007 budget promotes the anti-labour Lisbon Strategy and the united market, while at the same time cutting resources for many regions, such as Greece, strengthening inequalities and unequal measures with prospects of it not even being included in the poor Cohesion Fund. It drastically cuts spending in the agricultural sector, completing the application of the anti-farming reformed CAP, thereby wiping out more small and medium-sized farms and, at the same time, cutting hundreds of jobs.

This is the modern spirit of the European Union: intensification of work, mass unemployment, poverty-level wages and pensions and, of course, drastic cutbacks and further privatisation both in public health and in social insurance systems. Nonetheless, resources are increased by 98% for competitiveness, industrial innovation policy and entrepreneurship, as is the funding for measures for employability, temporary work and class cooperation. They call it social dialogue. It is a class budget, which is unfair and should be condemned by the grassroots classes, because it brings inequality, injustice, poverty and greater exploitation for the workers and greater profits for capital. That is why it should be rejected.

Zbigniew Krzysztof Kuźmiuk (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, not only is the 2007 budget the first budget in the new 2007-2013 Financial Perspective, but it is also the first budget relating to 27 Member States, including Bulgaria and Romania. For those two reasons alone, it ought to be as high as possible in terms of expenditure. The 2007-2013 financial framework indicates that payments may amount, at most, to 1.06% of the Union's GNP. Unfortunately, in its draft payments plan, the European Commission proposed payments totalling barely EUR 116 billion, which amounts to only 0.99% of the Union's GNP. For its part, the Council of the European Union proposed a further cut of EUR 1.75 billion.

Against this background, we should welcome the stance of Parliament's Committee on Budgets. It proposed payments at a level of EUR 121.9 billion, which amounts to 1.04% of GNP and is around EUR 5.1 billion more than the Commission's proposal.

Therefore, I very much hope that the House will endorse the proposals made by the Committee on Budgets and that they will be successfully defended throughout the course of our negotiations with the European Commission and the Council.

Michael Henry Nattrass (IND/DEM). – Mr President, in his report Mr Elles says that it is essential for policymakers to focus on what the real challenges will be for the EU in the years ahead. When David Cameron was campaigning for the leadership of Mr Elles' party last year, he told the *Daily Telegraph*, 'we must challenge the culture of the EU, leaving it to focus on its real job, making the single market work properly and championing free trade'. However, Mr Elles' policy priorities include common foreign and security policy, the European Neighbourhood Policy, terrorist threats, border controls on immigration, environment and communication.

This is the Tory hidden agenda and it is very different from the one Mr Cameron put forward when he needed the votes from the more Eurosceptic party members. But of course this is the same Mr Cameron who was pretending he would leave the PPE-DE. One year on, Mr Elles is free to carry on promoting the PPE-DE agenda. His real leader, Mr Poettering, is no doubt delighted.

Hans-Peter Martin (NI). – (DE) Mr President, I would like to thank the Finnish Presidency for at last being so bold as to do something, even if only in a small way, about the sacred cow of appointments in the EU.

I think it extremely regrettable that the attempt at doing away with at least 200 posts before moving on to doing more of the same sort of thing should be repulsed in the way in which it has been in paragraph 29 of the Elles report. That really is the wrong way to go about it. To show just why it is so very wrong, let me quote Mrs Guy-Quint, the lady who tabled the amendment, and who said: ‘I have never yet heard any rational justification for these cutbacks. They are about nothing more than settling personal scores, about offended vanity, intrigues and aggression.’ That is what she said in committee. Of course, the opposite is the case. The EU has done the sensible thing by getting rid of plenty of jobs already, and it would send the right message if we were, for once, to make a few cuts of our own.

Ingeborg Gräble (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, colleagues, This budget for 2007 follows on seamlessly from that for 2005, and the rapporteur deserves thanks for accomplishing something so unprecedented. What we have to do in managing the budget is to do more to combat the waste of EU funds in the shape of displacement effects and lack of efficiency.

The job cuts in the Commission remain highly controversial; we say ‘no’ to them, albeit with reservations, and the acid test we apply is what gains in efficiency is the Council prepared to concede that the Commission – in its field offices in Luxembourg, for example – has achieved? How well equipped is the Commission itself to perform its future functions, which will have less to do with making laws and more with the monitoring of how Community law is implemented? There are no more than two posts for monitoring Community environmental law, which accounts for 40% of the laws we adopt.

Something else that we have to make provision for in the parliamentary budget is the means for dealing with a further loss of credibility on the part of Europe. In 2007, we will be appointing nine translators and interpreters of the Irish language, even though eight of the thirteen Irish MEPs do not speak Irish. Sixty Members are travelling around with the new EUROLAT parliamentary assembly, adhering, in so doing, to none of the customary practices of parliamentary assemblies, such as intergovernmental agreements, for example. This Parliament of ours is having building work carried out at all three of its sites in 2007, and this is something I find difficult to explain to groups of visitors or to the voters back home.

These are all good issues that we can use to demonstrate that we are taking the Court of Auditors’ criticisms seriously and also that we are serious about managing the EU’s budget better.

IN THE CHAIR: MR SARYUSZ-WOLSKI

Vice-President

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (PSE). – (PL) Mr President, 2007 will be the first year of a new seven-year Financial Perspective. It is therefore particularly important, at this point, for the institutions of the European Union to clearly define the real needs and priorities for the coming years.

Working on the basis of budgetary discipline and increased efficiency, we should, at the same time, depart from the practice of accepting very high margins of expenditure. In the past, this often led to resources being wasted. It also seems appropriate to retain the present strategy of purchasing the buildings we use. This will result in savings in the long term and make funds available for other activities. It also seems essential to review the policy on staff management, particularly regarding outsourcing the implementation of activities, which has a detrimental effect on continuity and stability and could therefore have a negative impact on the functioning of the institutions.

As far as employment policy is concerned, the posts resulting from enlargement must be our priority at present. This process must include information on accommodation for new staff. The cuts in the budgets of individual institutions proposed by the Council should not be an aim in themselves. Taking into account the enlargement in 2004 and the next one, which is almost upon us, the overriding aim must first and foremost be to ensure the effective operation of all the Union’s institutions.

In conclusion, I should like to warmly congratulate both rapporteurs on a very well prepared document and us on a sound compromise and an ambitious budget.

Nathalie Griesbeck (ALDE). – *(FR)* Mr President, Commissioner, firstly, I too should like to congratulate our rapporteurs, Mr Elles and Mr Grech, on their painstaking work, and to thank and congratulate all of my colleagues on the tremendous work put in on this occasion by the Committee on Budgets when examining the 1 200 amendments, with the aim of meeting the expectations of the 450 million people in Europe.

Firstly, I, for my part, should like once again to point out that I regret the poor contribution made to the European budget by the Member States within the context of the financial perspective. This contribution is clearly not enough to implement the policies that it now falls to the European Union to translate into something that Europeans want.

Our Parliament therefore has relatively little room for manoeuvre in this area. If our ambition must be realistic – indeed modest – then let us at least make it as clear as possible. That was the proposal made by the Committee on Budgets, and that is what we must examine today and in the weeks to come, by prioritising the most effective policies for attaining these objectives and thus for achieving the world's most powerful knowledge-based economy. That is why I welcome the efforts that specifically focused, via the proposals, on research, innovation and development policies; on aid for SMEs; on pilot projects; and on the appropriations earmarked for cultural policies which, according to the recommendations made by our colleague, Mrs de Sarnez, are regarded by Europeans as a fundamental part of our common project.

Finally, and in keeping with the humanist and realistic image of our European integration process, I welcome the substantial increase in the appropriations dedicated to the policy in favour of the most impoverished people in Europe.

To conclude, I am pleased that, where external policy is concerned, a balance has been struck that takes account of the peace process in Palestine, even though the reservations voiced will enable us, in my view, to send out a strong signal to the Council in the weeks to come, since we are at first reading.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL). – *(PT)* Although it improves upon the Commission's proposal of 0.99% of Community GNI, and that of the Council at 0.98%, in terms of volume of payments, it comes as no surprise that Parliament's proposal for the Community budget for 2007, at 1.04%, falls short in the very first year of what was agreed in the financial perspective, namely 1.06%, which in our view is itself inadequate if we are to promote genuine economic and social cohesion, particularly given the needs of an enlarged EU.

Given that this is part of the negotiation process, we hope that, unlike what has happened in the past, Parliament will at least seek to ensure that the minimum amounts provided for in the financial perspective for 2007 are adhered to as far as possible, and that these funds are used for the purpose of pursuing an effective economic and social cohesion policy and a genuine policy of cooperation and development.

Although we welcome the adoption in the Committee on Budgets of specific amendments that we tabled, we are very disappointed that other important proposals that we tabled were rejected, which were as follows: the creation of compensation packages to offset fuel price rises in the fishing industry; the creation of a Community programme to support small-scale traditional coastal fishing as a response to the specific problems experienced in the sector, in accordance with positions previously adopted by Parliament; and an increase in the funds earmarked for convergence in the European Regional Development Fund to compensate fully the 'regions affected by the statistical effect', such as the Algarve, since they have been cut by some 20% this year.

Liam Aylward (UEN). – Mr President, I should like to refer to one particular budgetary matter. The Commission is presently finalising its public health programme for 2007-2013. We all know that in the recent past the Commission has had very effective information campaigns, highlighting the dangers of tobacco and AIDS within the European Union.

The Commission has a budget of EUR 56 million per year to highlight public health threats and to implement public information campaigns throughout Europe. I believe the time has now come for the Commission to implement an information-awareness campaign to highlight the problem and dangers of, and the cures for, depression within the Union. I have also written to many governments of Europe seeking their support for this political initiative.

One in four people in Europe experience at least one significant episode of mental difficulties during their lives and up to 18 million people in the European Union, aged between 16 and 25, suffer from major depression. Depression and anxiety disorders are the most common mental health problems experienced in Europe. Studies have estimated that by 2020 depression will become the highest-ranking disease in the developed world. In fact, there are even higher levels of depression in Eastern and Central Europe.

We have identified the problem; we have the financial resources to highlight it; so let us go forward and meet this challenge now.

Hélène Goudin (IND/DEM). – *(SV)* Mr President, first of all, the June List believes that the European Union's common agricultural policy needs to be scrapped. As I have pointed out on so many occasions in this House, EU agricultural policy is reprehensible because the money is given to the wrong recipients, and often to recipients who are very rich. What is more, it denies the world's poor countries an honest opportunity to sell their agricultural produce on the EU market because we subsidise non-competitive agriculture.

Secondly, the June List believes that structural policy should be returned to the national competence. The EU resources that come back to Sweden come with a very large number of conditions attached and are in most cases not adapted to Swedish needs.

Next year, Sweden's contribution to the EU budget will rise to a good EUR 3 billion. We shall get back approximately EUR 1 billion. Thirdly, then, the June List believes that Sweden's membership fee should be halved in the light of how distorting and unjust the EU's agricultural and trade policy is.

Jean-Claude Martinez (NI). – *(FR)* Mr President, the European budget is like the theatre of Bertolt Brecht. While 'Waiting for Godot' – while waiting for 2014 and own resources – we are managing the most modest of appropriations: EUR 116 billion in payment appropriations, which is not even 1% of gross national income. A game is being played here. For example, the nomenclature has been changed, with a shift from eight headings to six. An attempt has been made at humour: the Europe of 17 million unemployed is referred to under Heading 1 as 'growth and employment'. The CAP budget, which is destroying farming and fruit and vegetable growing and uprooting 400 000 hectares of land, is referred to under Heading 2 as 'confirmation of resources'.

These changes in form apart, this is a classic budget in every respect. Firstly, it includes a financial framework for 2007-2013, which is contained within an interinstitutional agreement – the fourth of its kind – signed on 17 May. It includes Malthusian sums, for example for agriculture: indeed, market expenditure is going to be wilfully reduced by more than EUR 500 million. It also includes the great classics: EUR 7 billion with which to toy with external policy in the world; EUR 5 billion for a research framework programme that will not research much; and EUR 850 million for the trans-European networks.

All of that, while we await the 2008-2009 review during which every issue will be discussed – not only the UK rebate but also, and above all, agriculture and the agricultural budget. The great budget debate will therefore take place between 2010 and 2014. While we wait to discuss the fisheries sector, Erasmus and the citizens, and if we cannot take tea – since it is almost 5 p.m. – we prefer, during this afternoon's budget debate, to exchange the little budgetary titbits with which our rapporteur has embellished his magnificent report, which is, all the same, very pleasing.

Antonis Samaras (PPE-DE). – *(EL)* Mr President, the European Union is the most ambitious endeavour in history. Yet we are funding this endeavour with a minimum 1% of GDP. It is not only that we are giving so little; it is that the Commission and the Council do not even want the minimum amounts committed to be taken up.

The Commission made provision in the preliminary draft for just 1%. The Council reduced it still further to 0.98% and we increased it to 1.04%. The Council is doing its best to reduce funding for the Union, the Commission is not doing its best to defend it and thus this role falls to the European Parliament alone.

Many also proposed that we should put spending on agriculture in reserve. We rejected that proposal. The destruction of European farmers is not a development policy or a unification policy of Europe; it is – quite simply – a disastrous policy.

Now to a sensitive political issue: we reinstated the amendment for the restoration of Christian churches in northern Cyprus. A vote in favour of this amendment will demonstrate Europe's respect for its cultural heritage and will strengthen the application of European principles for peaceful coexistence between different religious and ethnic groups.

Lastly, so far we have been informed after the event about the Council's decisions on the CFSP. This cannot continue. We need to debate in advance with the Council all the basic options, before the decisions are taken which we are then called on to fund. In order to send our message to the Council, we reduced spending on the CFSP in 2007 by 50%. I should like at this point to say, while agreeing that Mr Elles was obviously right, that the Minister will be making a mistake if he truly believes that what we did was what she herself called 'tactical words'. I hope that the Council will now rethink its stand to date.

Vladimír Maňka (PSE). – *(SK)* Energy security is one of the political priorities of the new financial perspective and the 2007 budget of the European Union. It is part of the Competitiveness and Innovations Programme, and there is also a separate research programme within the Seventh Framework Programme.

Our goals in this area are ambitious: we would like to transform the unsustainable, fossil fuel-based energy system into a sustainable one that draws on a variety of energy sources; we must improve energy efficiency, secure energy supplies, prevent climate change, and increase the competitiveness of European enterprises, first in the energy sector and then elsewhere.

The strategy of the European Union and the European budget are important factors in helping to tackle the bleak outlook for European citizens as regards the provision of sustainable, stable and affordable energy.

Undoubtedly, the budget for 2007, that is to say, the first year of a new programming period, is of strategic significance. However, it is necessary to emphasise that resources are limited and much will depend on how efficiently they are used.

Markus Ferber (PPE-DE). – *(DE)* Mr President, Commissioner, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, ladies and gentlemen, 2007 is going to be a very exciting financial year, for in it, that which the Heads of State or Government, in December last year, adopted as their political priority, and was agreed on by this House and the Council this May, is, for the first time, to become a living reality.

There are a few aspects of this that I am already getting seriously worried about. This very week, we will be adopting a number of legal bases for multiannual programmes intended to run with effect from 1 January next year. The stage we are currently at is that the Member States are putting together their framework plans for the conduct of structural policy and submitting them to the Commission. My very real concern is that the 2007 budget will become an austerity budget as a consequence of many programmes not even being able to get started, even though they are urgently needed.

What I will say, in quite specific terms, and speaking as someone from a country that has the honour of providing the EU with one-fifth of its funding, is that our concern is that, when so much money is called for – despite the lack of any increase over the past in terms of percentages of gross national income, although I will mention in passing that gross national income has increased as a consequence of enlargement – there must of course be some value given in return for this money.

It is for that reason that I am very glad that our rapporteur, Mr Elles, has said that we want to fund more programmes and less administration, although what the Commission still has to do is to demonstrate that it can run the programmes in a proper manner and that all this will not be absorbed by administration costs. The agencies are another issue that we really have to sort out, since there are apparently going to be three more of them.

What I also want to say with regard to this House's budget is that we have to reap the benefit of what we have achieved through the success of our building policy. It is intolerable that we should, just because the money is available, keep on inflating the parliamentary budget and funding things that may well not actually be needed, such as WebTV, for example.

What we need, then, is value for money, and that is what matters most of all. The report from the Court of Auditors that was presented this morning gives me reason to believe that there is a great potential there for more to be achieved.

Szabolcs Fazakas (PSE). – *(HU)* I would like to join Mr Ferber, in stating that the 2007 budget does indeed have particular significance for all of Europe and specifically for the new Member States, including Hungary. This is the first year of the 2007-2013 financial perspective which we have been involved in drawing up, and which thus fully applies to us. Consequently, especially given the lengthy and not always smooth process of its development, it is very important that 2007 should constitute a good starting point for the subsequent years.

This presents us all with both an exceptional opportunity and a responsibility. It is an opportunity in the sense that by making use of the resources approved in the financial perspective, we can begin not only our own process of catching up, but also the structural and cohesion policies that serve as the foundation for Europe's future and its competitiveness. At the same time, we must take responsibility for overcoming the national self-interest that has, regrettably, become commonplace in both the old and the new Member States when it comes to preparing the budget. Let us not neglect the common values of Europe as a whole and the international role of the EU.

Simon Busuttill (PPE-DE). – *(MT)* The budget that this Parliament will be approving next year will, for the first time, allocate money to a new fund known as the External Borders Fund, purposely created to help Member States strengthen their borders with a view to curtailing the uninterrupted flow of illegal immigration. Given the seriousness of the illegal immigration emergency, it is almost unbelievable that this is only the first time that the European Union is establishing a fund specifically for external borders, but we have succeeded. Thanks to this Parliament, the budget for this Fund will be greater than that requested by the Commission itself. I am talking about a budget amounting to EUR 170 million and designed to protect our frontiers more effectively and thus reduce the influx. My second point is about FRONTEX, the European Agency for External Borders. Up to now, this Agency, which has only been in operation for one year, has not been allocated enough resources to do its work. Suffice it to say that while, up to last week, FRONTEX was coordinating patrols in the Mediterranean, yesterday I saw an advert in the papers announcing that FRONTEX wanted to recruit a director responsible for its sea patrols. This shows that we must not leave this Agency to its own devices in the belief that it will solve everything. Therefore, even in this regard, it is gratifying that this Parliament will vote a bigger budget than the Commission requested, almost EUR 35 million, to strengthen this Agency and help it to carry out its duties more effectively. It is a pity, Mr President, that, rather than follow suit, some European governments have, in a most miserly manner, tried to cut the FRONTEX budget. We would like them to know that the European Parliament will be doing its utmost to ensure that FRONTEX is given all the means necessary to carry out its duties.

Katerina Batzeli (PSE). – *(EL)* Mr President, the priorities of this budget should have been clear and adequate in terms of funding, so as to promote the integration of the new Member States. Instead, in the Council an accounting attitude prevailed in order to reduce appropriations and in the Commission its fearful stand.

How will the Lisbon Strategy be accomplished? How will the Structural Fund programmes be completed? With EUR 425 million less? How will the rural development policy be implemented? With the fictional transfer from the first pillar through the voluntary modulation mechanism or – as proposed – by putting rural development funds in reserve until the Commission decides and gives guarantees for voluntary modulation? How will the role of the Union be strengthened in its foreign actions, in the Balkans, in Palestine, in immigration? By reducing the CFSP by 50%? How will Europe compete with America in the field of research and competitiveness?

We cannot set political priorities and not provide the necessary financial tools to implement them. We are losing credibility and this is undermining the future of the European Union.

László Surján (PPE-DE). – *(HU)* I would like to share four thoughts with you and comment on one problem. The Commission's proposals for next year's budget are well below of the resources provided for in the financial perspective. The EU's competitiveness is deteriorating rather than improving. Secondly, it is a nightmare that the Council has tried to cut back even this moderate proposal. Thirdly, in its current form this will not allow for any development, but simply represents an unsuccessful attempt at survival. Fourthly: it is good news for the new Member States that the great rush to cut back does not affect support for the cohesion funds, or has a minimal effect.

The problem, undoubtedly a significant one, is that while one of the characteristics of the Union is expressed as 'unity in diversity', we are at present far from satisfying this requirement. The translations

of the proposals are either not prepared in time or are done so only at the last minute, and sometimes only in rough form. We are obliged to participate in many meetings at which only some MEPs have native language interpreters available. The enlargement of the Union in January will further increase justified demands in this area. Linguistic diversity is a value that we can under no circumstances renounce.

Herbert Bösch (PSE). – *(DE)* Mr President, as a number of speakers have already said, what we have here before us is the first budget of the new financial period, and one that is described as a budget for savings, even though the only savings have been in terms of the interests of the European public. What we are dealing with here is a misconceived budget policy on the part of the European Union's Member States.

Over the next seven years, then, the Trans-European Networks will have to get along with only EUR 8 billion instead of the EUR 20 billion that they actually need. Once more, the Council of Ministers has recourse to the old coercive trick of telling us, in this House, that if we do not pass the budget promptly, the programmes due to start in 2007 will not be able to do so on time. The Council can, and will, make scapegoats of Parliament and other bodies, even though it sometimes drags out its own decision-making processes over many months, and this is something we have to be on our guard against.

While I am on this subject, let me remind the Commission that it is this House, rather than the Council, that is constantly defending the Commission's line, and it would have a salutary effect if the Commission were sometimes to be aware of that rather than constantly bowing down and taking dictation from the Council.

Also this week, we have to come to a decision on a quite unacceptable proposal that has been made for plugging a hole in the budget in the second pillar, in agriculture and rural affairs, which involves the Member States being allowed to shift up to 20% of the funds from the first pillar into the second, into rural areas, and that has been inadequately thought out. It runs counter to the prerogatives of this House, and it should be rejected. What do these two things – the trans-European networks and rural areas – have in common? Firstly, they have both fallen victim to the Council's irresponsible austerity policy; secondly, in both cases, the Commission has distanced itself from its original position and quietly gone back to taking dictation from the Council, and thirdly, in both cases we have to try to put funds in reserve as a means towards bringing pressure to bear on both the Council and the Commission, in order to eventually save whatever can yet be saved.

Salvador Garriga Polledo (PPE-DE). – *(ES)* Mr President, Commissioner, I would like to begin by congratulating the two rapporteurs, Mr Elles and Mr Grech, who have shown prudence in their respective draft budgets.

Prudence does not necessarily mean an agreement with the Council, because it does not necessarily mean agreeing with the indiscriminate reductions that the Council has established in those budget lines that were not of interest to it, in other words all those that do not relate to common foreign and security policy, a field in which Parliament has made a reduction.

We very much agree with the principle of value for money which our rapporteur advocates for the general budget, particularly at a time like this, a time of extreme financial restriction. Given the European Union's prevailing ideology, which some of us do not share, of applying 1% to the budget, a careful analysis of the budget lines, of their level of execution and of European added value is essential. Perhaps we do not see the notion of 'value for money' in the same way as the Council, but, in any event, it is good that it should be accepted as a budgetary principle.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the President-in-Office of the Council for being here for the majority of the budgetary debate; that does not normally happen and I therefore thank her.

Issues such as the fight against terrorism, the funding of a genuine common immigration policy and implementation of the policies linked to the Lisbon Strategy are treated as a priority by the European Parliament at its first reading. We agree with the strategy on payments proposed by our rapporteur, as well as with the proposed focus on the funding of the common foreign and security policy.

Finally, Mr President, we see the budgetary reserves as a very useful instrument, not just for negotiation and good financial management, but also so that, as budgetary authority, we can acquire the information that the Commission often finds it difficult to provide us with for practical reasons.

President. The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday at 11.30 a.m.

(The sitting was suspended at 5.05 p.m. and resumed at 5.30 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MR DOS SANTOS

Vice-President

15. Membership of Parliament: see Minutes

16. Commission Question Time

President. The next item is Question Time (B6-0437/2006).

The following questions have been submitted to the Commission.

Part One

President. Question no 40 by **Robert Evans** (H-0809/06)

Subject: Airline overbooking

Bearing in mind Regulation (EC) No 261/2004⁽¹⁾ on Air Passengers' Rights, will the Commission consider doing more to discourage the practice of overbooking by airlines?

Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the Commission. *(FR)* Mr President, the Commission currently receives fewer complaints about overbooking than before the compensation levels were raised by Regulation (EC) No 261/2004. At the present time, only 8% of the complaints received by the Commission concerning air passengers' rights relate to instances of overbooking or denied boarding, while 60% refer to delays or cancellations. This trend is due, among other things, to the development of low-cost carriers and to the increasingly frequent use of charter companies, which do not tend to integrate overbooking into their working methods.

Since this regulation entered into force, the airlines have demonstrated more flexibility in looking for volunteers who will agree to give up their seats in return for certain agreed benefits. This practice encourages the airlines to resolve the problem there and then.

That being said, I should like to point out to Mr Evans that, in accordance with Article 17 of the regulation, the Commission is going to present a report on the functioning and application of this regulation to Parliament and the Council at the start of 2007. This communication will be based on a study carried out by an external consultant. An invitation to tender has been published for the purposes of recruiting this external consultant.

Overbooking is one of the items that will be dealt with in this study, and the Commission will obviously wait to learn the results of the study before it decides whether or not there are grounds to adapt the legislation. The fact is, Mr Evans, while these new regulations have indeed had a noticeable effect on passengers' rights, it is the decline in overbooking that has become, in certain cases – it must be said – a trend that is very detrimental to passengers.

Gary Titley (PSE). – I should like to thank the Commissioner for that very thorough and clear answer. However, it is a fact that people still complain about over-booking.

My other concern is that there are still airline companies which are ignoring this Regulation on Air Passengers' Rights and are telling their customers that it does not apply to them. Is the Commission going to get tough on some of these operators who seem to think they can operate outside the law and outside EU regulations?

Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the Commission. *(FR)* Mr Titley, it is absolutely vital that we ensure that these passengers' rights are applied. I must also say that, at the moment, I am trying to call on all of the airports to display passengers' rights, so that it is quite clear that all passengers must be informed

⁽¹⁾ OJ L 46, 17.2.2004, p. 1.

of the fact that they cannot be made the subject of an overbooking without being offered significant compensation in return, as the regulation stipulates. There are three key words in relation to this issue: information, investigation and audit, as I pointed out to you. Next, we shall see whether there are grounds to impose penalties or, at any rate, to bring before the Court of Justice those Member States that have not really monitored the application of these passengers' rights.

There you have it, Mr Titley. I thank you for your question, which highlights the importance of applying European law.

Reinhard Rack (PPE-DE). – *(DE)* Mr President, the Vice-President of the Commission was right to point out that we, together, have managed to solve the problem of over-bookings or, at any rate, to improve the situation. In adopting this directive back in 2004, we had set the standard for delays very low after the airlines told us that the 9/11 disaster meant that stringent rules would make life virtually impossible for them. They make a practice of simply letting delays pile up, so that, with several landing and takeoff manoeuvres in the course of a day, these delays eventually add up to many hours, for which no financial compensation is paid. We have put stringent rules in place for the benefit of railway passengers, who can be entitled to full reimbursement of their fares, yet airline passengers ...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the Commission. *(FR)* I just briefly want to say to Mr Rack that we receive numerous complaints about excessive delays and that we specifically wanted to carry out this audit in order to determine how exactly we can ensure that the new passengers' rights are applied more effectively. You are right: as European citizens, we have a right to demand to be treated decently as air passengers and, in the future, as rail passengers. Therefore, rest assured, Mr Rack, that it is indeed the aim of the Commissioner for Transport to ensure that passengers' rights are applied more and more rigorously.

Jörg Leichtfried (PSE). – *(DE)* Mr President, Mr Vice-President, I am glad that the number of complaints appears to be relatively low, but I have myself had the experience – for we are relatively frequent flyers – of the last three flights I was on being overbooked.

I would now be interested to know whether this is a more frequent occurrence on any airlines in particular. Can it be said that there are certain airlines that make overbooking a matter of professional practice? Might it not, under certain circumstances, be possible to consider taking action – quite apart from proceedings for breach of contract – against these companies, not only in order to obtain compensation, but against those companies themselves. What is the likelihood of an improved public relations effort to make passengers aware of the possibility of compensation payments?

(The President cut off the speaker)

Jacques Barrot, Vice-President of the Commission. *(FR)* Mr President, I can confirm that there has been a reduction in the number of complaints about overbooking. In 2001, they exceeded 16%, and they now stand at 7%. Nevertheless, I, like you, am entirely convinced that the victims of this practice should apply, in each of the Member States, to the body in charge of investigating these complaints. Then – as I pointed out to you – this audit will enable us to have a far more comprehensive view of these problems. We will thus be able to know which airlines regularly carry out this practice and which ones deserve a serious warning.

President. Question no 41 by **Michl Ebner** (H-0812/06)

Subject: Protection of youngsters in chat rooms

Internet forums and chat rooms are used predominantly by young people. Users can exchange views in a quick and simple manner. In principle, this use of new media is to be welcomed, but ensuring youth protection on the Internet is proving extremely difficult. Anyone interested can join in a given conversation in a chat room and, to do so, must provide some personal details. In many cases, this information cannot be verified. It is impossible, therefore, for children and young people to know precisely with whom they are dealing. For example, offenders could log into a chat room using false personal information.

Is the Commission planning to take action regarding child and youth protection in chat rooms? Does it have a strategy in mind to prevent the misuse of children's and youngster's chat-room forums?

Franco Frattini, *Vice-President of the Commission*. (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the communication that the European Commission adopted in July, at my suggestion, addresses the general theme of a European strategy on the protection of children's rights. It is clear that special attention is paid in this European strategy to the risk of children and young people falling victim to the actions of criminal paedophiles who use the Internet.

We support very strong preventative action. In particular, we are in favour of the creation of an international database that can gather together all of the principal data relating to criminals and to those who operate via the Internet for paedophilic purposes, mainly so that we can stop the spread of images that, obviously for reasons to do with sexual exploitation, affect children and young people, and so that we can root out and clamp down on the culprits, namely those who use the Internet for these purposes.

We have also decided to fund a programme called 'Safer Internet plus', which consists of a European network of telephone lines and, above all, of Internet communications aimed at allowing Internet users to cooperate with the police. Through this system of safer Internet use, which is called Safer Internet plus, Internet users will be able to inform the police authorities or Internet providers of any potentially dangerous 'hits', and thus the presence of those who use the Internet for pornographic purposes.

Furthermore, we have recently adopted a communication on the trafficking of human beings that includes a chapter specifically dedicated to children and to violence against children. I am looking into the application of the framework decision on the fight against the sexual exploitation of minors and children and against the use of children in pornography. In conjunction with the application of this framework decision, I believe that we will be able to come up with measures to further enhance the legislative framework and to clamp down even more harshly on Internet-based sexual exploitation that harms children. I will report on this issue before the end of the year in a Commission communication.

Finally, the general theme of computer crime will be addressed at the start of next year with a strategic document that will contain a chapter specifically dedicated to child protection. Mr Ebner will be aware that we have refinanced the Daphne programme. The Daphne II programme is dedicated to European initiatives combating violence not only against children but also against women and will have a budget of EUR 50 million for the new operating period. Through this system, we plan to promote best practice in preventing violence against children and to launch information campaigns aimed at promoting more responsible Internet use on the part of children and young people.

Michl Ebner (PPE-DE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am grateful to Mr Frattini for his very thorough reply. I must acknowledge the fact that he has done some very extensive work in this area, and I believe that he will succeed in bringing about the security and the protection that we want for our children.

I hope that this programme and its activities bear fruit and I, for my part, hope that Parliament will firmly support its work.

Franco Frattini, *Vice-President of the Commission*. (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am truly grateful to Mr Ebner.

We are currently at the implementation stage. The European strategic plan will, however, include other important advances. We are thinking about launching a European emergency helpline in the near future for children who are in difficulty. It will have the same three numbers for the whole of Europe – 116 – followed by a national number for each country, and will help children who have been kidnapped, who are lost or who are in difficulty.

Together with the major international credit card companies, I am also looking into the possibility of blocking the credit cards of those who access paedophile websites for the purposes of buying pornographic material involving children. Everyone will recognise that a threat such as this is already in itself a signal designed to strongly discourage this type of criminal.

Alexander Stubb (PPE-DE). – I am asking my question as the father of Emily, who turns five on Friday, and Oliver, who will be two and a half. Oliver is not yet surfing the net, but Emily already is.

I fully share the views put forward by the Commissioner and the previous speakers about protecting youth, but can the Commissioner guarantee that we are not starting to impose restrictions on our general use of the internet, because the last thing we want is a headline to the effect that the European Union is preventing us from using the internet freely?

Franco Frattini, *Vice-President of the Commission*. (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, obviously, no one is thinking about restricting people's use of the Internet, which is one of the most extraordinary means of communication, insofar as it puts children and young people throughout the world in touch with each other.

However, it is quite clear that we must make sure that we root out and clamp down on criminals who use the Internet in order to establish closer contact with young people, who must obviously be protected. It is therefore not by restricting Internet use, but by doing more in terms of prevention and control, that we can help children to use the Internet in complete safety.

President. Question no 42 by **Paulo Casaca** (H-0827/06)

Subject: Stoning of seven women in Iran

According to Amnesty International news release MDE 13/111/2006, seven Iranian women, Parisa Akbari, Iran Eskandari, Khayrieh Valania, Shamameh Ghorbani, Kobra Najjar, Soghra Mola'i and Fatemeh, face imminent stoning in Iran.

Despite repeated assurances from the Iranian regime frequently transmitted by the Community authorities promising moratoria or the suspension of this barbaric practice, reports of the sentencing and execution of women have continued to mount since the European Union embarked on its 'human rights dialogue' with the regime.

Can the Commission explain the reasons for the total failure of the human rights objectives that it outlined for its policy of dialogue with the Iranian regime? Can it say what specific action it has taken to prevent the murder of these Iranian women?

Peter Mandelson, *Member of the Commission*. The Commission remains deeply concerned by the human rights situation in Iran and views the practice of execution by lapidation as particularly abhorrent. It is fully aware of the reports by Amnesty International covering sentences of stoning, referred to by the honourable Members. Stoning is a cruel, inhuman and degrading form of punishment, which the Commission finds totally unacceptable. The EU has repeatedly called on Iran progressively to restrict the use of the death penalty and insisted that it be carried out according to UN minimum standards, including the requirement that capital punishment may be imposed only for the most serious crimes.

In December 2002, the EU started a human rights dialogue with the Iranian authorities, with the participation of civil society representatives. One of the practical results at the time was confirmation by the Iranian side of a moratorium on stoning. Regrettably that dialogue has not taken place since the summer of 2004 because of the reluctance of the Iranian authorities. However, tentative dates for a new round of human rights discussions have been fixed for mid-December.

Paulo Casaca (PSE). – (PT) Mr President, so the Iranian authorities have promised a moratorium and have failed to keep to it; no surprise there.

What I should like to ask you, Commissioner, is why the Commission insists on talking with a fanatical clique that is tyrannising Iran, rather than with the vast majority of Iranians, who think differently. I should like to recommend a book to you, written in your language, entitled *We are Iran*, a collection of writings by a large number of Iranians who think differently and with whom the Commission ought to speak.

Peter Mandelson, *Member of the Commission*. We talk to all elements of civil society in Iran. It is difficult for the honourable Member on the one hand to ask us to make representations; to make a case to the Iranian authorities; to make a stand for human rights and against this abhorrent practice; and, at the same time, to criticise us for engaging in a dialogue. If you do not have a dialogue, then it is harder, if not impossible, to communicate your view.

In my view, the European approach is right. In close collaboration with EU embassies in Tehran, the Commission monitors the situation on the ground very closely, in particular as far as the death penalty is concerned. Whenever it learns of a death sentence passed on juveniles or on women at risk of stoning, the EU undertakes immediate démarches with the judiciary and other competent authorities. So the EU is not relying on dialogue alone. It makes its views very directly and clearly known whenever such a case arises, and will continue to do so.

Piia-Noora Kauppi (PPE-DE). – Commissioner, when you say that the European Commission takes the human rights situation in Iran seriously, when is this issue discussed in other dialogues with Iran? We now have a dialogue about the nuclear programme in Iran. Is this issue addressed in those negotiations, or in the negotiations on trade issues? This is a serious matter and I do not think it is enough to say that we are trying to get back to the negotiating table on human rights. This has to be put on the agenda in all dialogues with Iran. When do you intend to do that?

Peter Mandelson, Member of the Commission. The Commission follows up human rights cases through several channels. It does not simply rely on the dialogue, the last session of which was held in June 2004, and another session of which is due to take place shortly. We make diplomatic representations through a variety of different channels, in addition to the set-piece dialogue that is in place, and we shall continue to do so.

Edite Estrela (PSE). – (PT) Following the remarks of previous speakers, I should like to know the Commission's position on the rape of pregnant women and young children, as a means of silencing the opposition in Iran. This is a violation of women's rights and human rights, and I should like to know if the Commission is aware that this occurs and what its position is on the matter.

Peter Mandelson, Member of the Commission. We follow individual cases. We know of a number of women who are at risk of execution by stoning. Our views are very well known and frequently expressed; nobody is in any doubt at all about our opposition. In particular cases, individual by individual, you can be assured that all possible means will be used to express our view and that maximum pressure will be exercised.

Part Two

President. Question no 43 by **Lambert van Nistelrooij** (H-0831/06)

Subject: Commission proposal for a European Parliament and Council regulation on roaming on public mobile networks in the Community

Following the publication by the Commission of its proposal for a regulation on roaming on public mobile networks (COM(2006)0382 final), it has become apparent that the Commission proposal does not contain much information about the impact of the specific situation of residents and businesses at the internal borders of the EU Member States as regards roaming costs.

Does the Commission have any information about the costs which will be incurred in internal border regions?

What will the Commission do to ensure that mobile operators cater for the specific needs of residents and economic activities in the EU's internal border regions?

Viviane Reding, Member of the Commission. I am grateful to the honourable Member for asking the question. This gives me the opportunity to give an answer which I know is very important to Parliament, because Parliament has given much prominence to the topic of international roaming in recent years.

As you know, for citizens there are two problems: first, the high prices they have to pay for crossing the borders; and then the problem of inadvertent roaming on a foreign network when they have not yet crossed the border but are living in a border area. In competitive markets one expects to see convergence of prices and costs, but when it comes to roaming there has been for many years now no evidence of a real relationship between prices and underlying costs. This point was also made very clearly in the impact assessment which accompanied the regulation which I have put on the table.

The question is very simple. Why should a French customer who just crosses the border to Italy and makes a local call be charged from 50 cents to over EUR 1 per minute, when an Italian customer who is doing exactly the same will be charged between 10 and 13 cents per minute? All right, there are some additional costs if you take your phone into a neighbouring country, but there is very little justification for such high differences in price.

In every other area of telecoms – fixed and broadband – European consumers are seeing significant improvements in price, choice and quality; only for international roaming has this not been the case. There are millions of citizens who have been very frustrated at these high prices for many years. We estimate that there are roughly 99 million European citizens living in regions located within 50 km of

the borders and 11 million citizens within 5 km of the borders. They are those most affected by the extraordinarily high roaming prices.

The regulation I have proposed, which is under discussion in Parliament and the Council, proposes substantial reductions in the roaming charges for all Europeans, consumers and business travellers. It is clear that when that is put in place, those living and roaming in internal border regions will be among the biggest beneficiaries of the regulation.

From a technical point of view, because of the nature of mobile networks, consumers who live in such areas will have to pay some roaming charges, but there will be guarantees, if the regulation is passed, that the prices will be far more reasonable than they are today.

There is also the question of inadvertent roaming, which is a possibility wherever mobile services are available and national borders exist. That is also why it is very important for those people that the charges will be closer to the cost.

I very often criticise the operators for charging high prices. On the other hand, I must also say that when operators make the right moves in the right direction, I have to give credit where it is due. I am pleased to note, for example, that operators in Ireland and the United Kingdom have started to offer all-island rates. That means, for instance, that citizens in Ireland and in Northern Ireland now pay only one single rate, irrespective of where they are. That is a good example of best practice. I would like to see such initiatives encouraged and followed in other areas across Europe.

Lambert van Nistelrooij (PPE-DE). – (NL) Mr President, roaming costs, particularly those in border regions, account for some EUR 5 billion annually in unacceptable and, in fact, unnecessary expense for businesses and residents alike. I am therefore indebted to Commissioner Reding for her very emphatic intervention in recent months and also today, but a voluntary solution between businesses in the border regions for this problem of roaming, of which one is hardly aware, where one is moved from one network to another several times a day, is a major problem; I therefore fear that things will not get solved sufficiently promptly if they are done on a voluntary basis. So I would ask the Commissioner, and the whole of the Commission, whether it is prepared to draft progress report on this subject. I think that we need to step up our efforts, for I know that the border regions would like to have a say too.

Viviane Reding, Member of the Commission. Unfortunately the national regulators do not have explicit powers to prevent or reduce the possibility of inadvertent roaming. As the international roaming problem has shown, we do not yet have an internal market in this area. That is why we have to follow this very closely in order to find good examples and underline them. In Ireland, for instance, Comreg and Ofcom have agreed to set up a joint working group to investigate the extent of the problem of inadvertent roaming by mobile users and we welcome and encourage that approach. But it is not yet possible to address the problem on a wider scale through the normal regulatory process.

Andreas Mölzer (NI). – (DE) Commissioner, the foreign surcharges on the new UMTS technology are even more pricey than on conventional mobiles; if you surf abroad, even if only over a partner network, you lose a lot of money fast, and the bill does not generally show whether it has been calculated by the minute or by volume.

Is the Commission planning to ensure greater transparency in this area by way of the Roaming Regulation?

Viviane Reding, Member of the Commission. I was asked specifically by Parliament, among others, to address the question of international roaming charges for mobile phones. At the time I examined this matter, there was no specific demand for action on data services, such as SMS, and when the national regulatory authorities called on the Commission to do something, they were only concerned about the high level of international roaming charges for voice telephony. I know from the many discussions I have held, particularly with Members of Parliament and with citizens, that there is also a problem with data. Parliament, which is examining the regulation, now has the opportunity to go a step further than the Commission did. Let me also appeal to businesses, since industry is always complaining that we intervene in price regulation. Operators now have a chance to show that they themselves are capable of bringing prices down, so that the regulators or politicians do not need to intervene.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (PSE). – Commissioner, you have given convincing examples of the absurd situation as regards roaming prices in different countries, but you did not mention the new Member States of the EU, where the situation is even worse. Will the Commission pay special attention to the

new Member States of the European Union with a view to eliminating the very big differences in general mobile telephone and roaming charges?

Viviane Reding, *Member of the Commission*. The proposed regulation on international roaming costs applies to all European Member States, including the new Member States. In October 2005, the Commission created a website where all the prices were published, in the interests of transparency, including those in the new Member States. These prices are to be reviewed one year on, in order to see how they have evolved in the different Member States. As I have said, I am going to regulate with the help of the European Parliament and the Council, which are the legislators. In a few weeks' time, then, the website will have been updated and you will be able to see whether overall prices in the different countries have gone down and what the trends have been during the last year.

President. Question no 44 by **Stavros Arnautakis** (H-0840/06)

Subject: Broadband Internet access

According to recent information published by the Commission's Directorate-General for the Information Society and the Media, only 13% of schools in Greece have broadband Internet access. Greece is thus ranked last of 27 EU countries. As Commissioner Viviane Reding, the Commissioner responsible, said on 29 September 2006, computer know-how skills are now essential, and broadband Internet access may constitute a basic tool for development and competitiveness.

What does the Commission intend to do to encourage Member States such as Greece to introduce computers with broadband Internet access in schools? How does it intend to support measures to introduce IT instruments in schools and bodies and organisations located in remote regions, in particular island and mountain regions?

Viviane Reding, *Member of the Commission*. The honourable Member is correct: the Greek electronic communications market has unfortunately suffered from a very long delay in the transposition of the regulatory framework. It should have been in force in 2003. It was only completed in Greece in June 2006. We have seen very clearly that where the framework is not in place there is no competition. Where there is no competition there is less investment. That is one of the problems in Greece.

On a more positive note, EU structural assistance in Greece provides substantial co-funding for investments aimed at promoting speedier adoption of ICT in Greece and, in particular, for broadband internet in schools and public organisations in remote, island or mountainous areas. Cohesion funds in Greece also permit projects for the acquisition of informatics equipment in schools or public organisations in the regions, including remote, island or mountainous areas.

As you also know, Greece has started the implementation of a major project aimed at extending broadband access to those Greek regions outside Athens and Thessaloniki which do not yet have that connection and, under normal commercial circumstances, would not get it.

The Greek Government has also launched the DIODOS project, which established a high-capacity Greek internet educational network through which a number of internet providers are offering advanced internet services to research, academic and education communities at prices that are expected to be 50% below current retail prices.

You will also be aware that the Commission is working very hard on bridging the digital divide. That is why the Commission recently published a communication on bridging the broadband gap, which gives a strong commitment to achieve broadband for all Europeans through policy, budget aid and regulatory instruments. Included in that are the structural funds, but also – and this is new – the rural funds, in full respect of state aid rules. The communication proposes action that aims at strengthening current policies, national broadband strategies and reinforcing the exchange of best practices through a website. We believe it is very important for the regions to understand what other regions have done and to see what they might be able to copy or adapt to their specific needs. In that sense we hope that the many problems that persist in some regions, and especially in Greece, can gradually be overcome.

Stavros Arnautakis (PSE). – *(EL)* Mr President, I should like to thank the Commissioner for her reply, which fully satisfied me. I should also like to extend my special thanks to her for visiting Cyprus and for visiting the ENISA, thereby helping to resolve numerous problems for the benefit of this organisation. We extend our special thanks to you, both Greece and Cyprus, for your visit to Heraklion.

Viviane Reding, *Member of the Commission*. Besides being a beautiful island, Crete is also a region striving to overcome the broadband gap it faces and I know that the honourable Member is helping to pursue that goal in his capacity as a representative of Crete. Any help we can give, of course, must come through the Greek Government, because, in the case of structural or rural development funds, it is the government which must take the initiative. The Commission is willing to provide help, so that the large gap which still exists in the non-urban areas of Greece can be narrowed.

Mairiad McGuinness (PPE-DE). – I should like to thank the Commissioner. In Ireland the schools fare better and students are fine while they are at school. When they are at home, however, the situation is very poor; 25% of the population cannot get broadband. Has the Commission given serious consideration to filling the gap by new technologies, such as WiMAX, although these need spectrum and frequency access? Have you considered this and do you have a response to it? Many of my constituents cannot get access to broadband and students are deprived of the technology when they go home.

Viviane Reding, *Member of the Commission*. It is clear that there are many techniques and technologies that can bridge the broadband gap. The Commission has always been very consistent in saying that we need technological neutrality. We cannot favour one technology over another and sometimes a mix of technologies is the right approach. Fibre is not always the answer; sometimes satellites can be more efficient. In the Nordic states, for example, where there are a lot of geographical problems and problems of distance, this mix of technologies has provided a solution. I know from the statistics for schools with broadband internet access that Ireland is not doing wonderfully well. That is astonishing, because I know that education on the new technologies in Ireland is very advanced. I therefore hope that the broadband gap in Ireland can be filled and that in future all schools will be able to reach the world through the new technologies.

Malcolm Harbour (PPE-DE). – I was glad that the Commissioner, in her first answer, reinforced the importance of sustaining competition and the access obligations in the framework of broadband delivery. I wonder if she would like to confirm to the House that she will be resisting the calls from certain operators and even regulators for a regulatory holiday for certain levels of investment in broadband? Secondly, bearing in mind that she and I will be at the global forum on internet governance next week, can she confirm that she will be joining us in promoting the virtues of competition on a global scale, in order to raise the level of broadband connection globally and reduce costs?

Viviane Reding, *Member of the Commission*. I can give a positive answer to both questions. The first answer is very clear. I will not permit regulatory holidays, not even in big countries, because regulatory holidays are against the interests of our citizens who only have access to a single provider and no competition, which will lead to high prices and is not in the interest of the industry in general. So I will fight regulatory holidays.

The second answer is also yes. I will be in Athens next week at the world internet governance conference. I will meet there with parliamentarians, and I applaud the fact that the European Parliament is sending a delegation to that very important conference, because the voice of the people of Europe has to be heard there.

President. Question no 45 by **Jim Higgins** (H-0855/06)

Subject: European Registry of Internet Domain Names

Can the Commission confirm how many applications for .eu domain names were submitted to EURid up to the start of the Sun-Rise 2 period? Of the total applications what is the average EU rejection rate (%) and specifically, the rate of rejection for Irish applicants? Can the Commission offer an opinion explaining the reason for discrepancies between the figures for the EU average and the figures for Irish applicants? Is the Commission aware that the registrar did not service Irish registries with the necessary means to fully comply with the application process? If it agrees that information was unavailable is the ADR a fair method of remedying the problems encountered by the Irish applicants? Finally, is the Commission satisfied that all necessary information is now available from the registrar to the registries?

Viviane Reding, *Member of the Commission*. My answer to the honourable Member is that, according to information from the registry, the number of applications submitted during the sunrise period was 346 218, of which 181 306 were filed during the first phase and 164 912 during the second.

The current rate of rejection for applications from Ireland is 46%, compared to an overall EU rejection rate of 34%. The complete table with a breakdown of all applications per prior right and country of applicant can be found on the registry's website.

The kind of documentary evidence to be provided by an applicant depends on the national law of the Member State in which the prior right is established. There are huge differences between the legal systems of the Member States, which are reflected in the more or less complicated means needed to prove the existence of a prior right. This results in a higher or lower rate of rejection of applications in certain countries, such as Ireland.

As to the question of whether the registry provided Irish registrars with the necessary means to comply fully with the application process, the Commission is not aware of any specific discrimination in this respect. From October 2005 – that is, two months before the launch of the sunrise period – the registry published on its website and in all the official languages a detailed description of all technical and administrative measures concerning the registration procedures. This information, by the way, is still available online to any interested party. During that same period, the registry also set up a call centre, where applicants could obtain quick responses to their questions in 20 official languages.

As to the alternative dispute resolution procedure, its purpose is promptly to resolve disputes between domain name holders on matters such as cyber-squatting or intellectual property rights, as well as in relation to individual decisions by the registry. Should an Irish applicant consider that he or she falls within either of these two categories, the Commission is of the opinion that the alternative dispute resolution procedure is indeed a fair method for remedying the problem.

In conclusion, the Commission considers that the information made available by the public registry is sufficient for applicants and for registrars to proceed with the registration of domain names during the registration period and afterwards.

Jim Higgins (PPE-DE). – Thank you for your reply, Commissioner. Despite our performance on broadband, it is nice to hear the Commission acknowledge what has happened in Northern Ireland and Ireland as regards roaming, which I hope will serve as a model for other countries.

In her answer, the Commissioner firmly placed the blame on national governments for their inadequate legislation. This is true not only of Ireland but also of the United Kingdom. Mr Patrik Lindén, the communications manager of EURid, has put it very bluntly indeed. I will take your message back and will certainly point out that at national and local level much of the responsibility for the fact that we are way behind the rest of Europe effectively rests with our own government and our own legislation.

Viviane Reding, Member of the Commission. According to the legal framework established for the Dot.EU Registry, the Commission is not responsible for deciding on the interpretation of national law in connection with the validation of prior rights. That mission has been assigned to the validation agent selected by the Registry, PriceWaterhouse Coopers. That is one point.

The second point is that the decision was also taken, in collaboration with the European Parliament, to be respectful of national law in that sense; and because there are huge differences between national laws, I would not like to say that one law is better than the other. National law is linked to national habits, to the cultural diversity of our countries, so it is up to the national governments to change this law or to leave it as it is.

President. Question no 46 by **Sarah Ludford (H-0784/06)**

Subject: Fair Trade

In your response to the European Parliament's report on Fair Trade and Development in July, you stressed that the EU needed a coherent and collective policy framework on Fair Trade and undertook to look at how the Commission could support the various certification and assurance schemes and help consumers obtain accurate and transparent information. What further conclusions have you drawn on an EU policy in support of Fair Trade?

In particular, while Fair Trade distribution and labelling schemes are well developed for food and drink products, this is not the case for garments. It is claimed, for instance, that Bangladeshi women can work 80-hour weeks in textile factories for just 10 euros a month, producing clothes to be sold cheaply on

EU high streets. How will the Commission work with NGOs to assist the development of international Fair Trade standards and certification for the production of garments?

Peter Mandelson, *Member of the Commission*. Fair Trade has made enormous progress in getting labelled products onto supermarket shelves and into mainstream buying habits and practices. The same cannot yet be claimed for crafts and garments. The Commission will consider, as part of the follow-up to Parliament's report, whether there is scope for action in this area.

When I said in Parliament in July that 'what is required to tackle poverty and to enhance development is a fair and coherent policy framework', this was not limited to Fair Trade – though I acknowledged the helpful role that the report on Fair Trade and development would play. So whilst the Commission is considering how to capitalise further on the role of the Fair Trade movement, there are a number of other wider actions that it can undertake.

In cooperation with developing countries, we can promote decent work and international labour standards, as well as the interaction between decent work and other policies. The new thematic programme on investing in people, which comprises awareness-raising, training, information-sharing and the development of a set of indicators to monitor progress, will be an important tool.

The close link between decent work and poverty reduction is increasingly well understood in the EU. In the 'European Consensus on Development' – a document published in 2005 – employment and social cohesion are recognised as one of the nine areas of Community action. Employment, decent work and social cohesion are also central in the EU-Africa strategy.

In May 2006, the Commission adopted a communication on decent work for all, which will be presented at the Commission Conference on Decent Work and Globalisation in December, where the issues will be tackled in a comprehensive framework.

We are also contributing to the adoption of international norms and standards for all products, including textiles, through ongoing trade-related activities at bilateral and regional level. One example is a quality support programme in Bangladesh, which focuses on the improvement of the quality standards, metrology and accreditation systems in the country to help national laboratories ensure regional and multilateral recognition and acceptability of the conformity assessment certificates. The Bangladesh Standards and Testing Institute will also be strengthened in its basic capacity as a standards-setting body and in the area of metrology.

The programme will help to enable Bangladesh to address multilateral requirements, as well as to increase the competitiveness of its export industry. The project aims to create public-private partnerships and promote in particular awareness of quality and environmental managements systems and social standards – ISO 14000 and SA 8000 certified companies have increased in number – as well as strengthening the Consumer Association, through which pressure for change and control will be built up.

Sarah Ludford (ALDE). – Thank you for that answer, Commissioner. I entirely accept that there are wider issues in trade and development than Fair Trade alone. However, I should still like to hear from the Commission that you will give specific support to developing clear criteria for assessing Fair Trade assurance schemes. I should also like you to reflect on ways to boost transparency in pricing, so that consumers can see if the Fair Trade premium is passed back by supermarkets, as well as seeing that if they buy their ten-pound or fifteen-euro dress, their bargain may be at the expense of a decent living for textile workers.

Peter Mandelson, *Member of the Commission*. I sympathise with what the honourable Member is suggesting. I think that consumer information, consumer power in this context, is indeed the key. Fair Trade relies on consumers who have heard about the difficulties faced by poor producers and want to do something about it. We can help mainly by helping consumers to be clear about what is on offer, but we are looking for opportunities to support the Fair Trade movement when it comes up with targeted requests. I look forward to considering those as we reflect on what further action to take to support the Fair Trade movement in the weeks and months ahead.

Paul Rübzig (PPE-DE). – *(DE)* Mr President, fair trade is an issue not only in textiles, but also in energy. Russia's energy-intensive industries are currently being supplied with oil at 8 dollars per barrel, and gas is available at a very competitive price. With this in mind, how do you rate the chances for survival

of our own energy-intensive industries, and what effect do you think this will have on Russia's accession to the WTO?

Peter Mandelson, *Member of the Commission*. That is an intriguing question, one which certainly goes far wider than, and indeed probably almost entirely steps outside, the scope of the original question put to me. Nonetheless it is fascinating.

I believe that the best way of improving, strengthening, deepening, making more satisfactory the energy demand and supply relationship between Europe and Russia is, first of all, to press Russia to adopt other, more transparent policies of free transit that are governed by global trade rules. I see no reason why energy goods should not be subject to global trade rules like any other good. But I also believe that the best way to strengthen the energy relationship between Russia and the EU is by anchoring that energy relationship in a wider set of trade negotiations and agreements, the object of which would be to bring about integration of the Russian and European economies governed by fair and transparent market rules and agreed norms and standards.

It is in that context that I look forward to pursuing this subject as part of the wider trade negotiations that I hope will open up following Russia's accession to the WTO.

Philip Bushill-Matthews (PPE-DE). – Commissioner, one of the many obstacles to the development of Fair Trade is the occasional attempt by other countries to dump products within Europe on a below-cost basis, of which shoes was but the latest example. My question is not about how right or wrong the shoes decision is; it is about the process by which that decision is taken. I understand that 12 countries voted against, 9 voted in favour and there were 4 abstentions. Could you please comment on the logic of that process, Commissioner?

Peter Mandelson, *Member of the Commission*. I think the honourable Member has now volunteered to return to this Chamber and take part in our debate, at about midnight or some time after midnight, on the Muscardini report of this Parliament, which concerns trade defence instruments. I certainly look forward to seeing him early tomorrow morning during the course of that debate. Unfortunately he is not on the list, so he will no doubt want to be there to listen and follow the debate so that he can take the issues forward in other ways.

My short answer to his question is that our job in the Commission is to uphold the rules, whether they be the rules of the WTO or our own EU laws. We should do so objectively, transparently; but, as I have said on previous occasions, it is my strong view that those of us who believe in free trade should, wherever necessary, stand up for fair trade; and that approach will be reflected in the Green Paper which will review the use of trade defence instruments in the Community and which will be published in the next few months. I look forward to engaging with him and hearing his views and contribution to the debate surrounding that Green Paper.

President. Question no 47 by **Seán Ó Neachtain** (H-0790/06)

Subject: World Trade talks

Can the European Commission make a full and comprehensive statement concerning the present state of play of the World Trade negotiations?

Peter Mandelson, *Member of the Commission*. On 5 September 2006, I gave a full and comprehensive statement to Parliament on the state of play of the Doha Development Agenda. I am sorry to say that no major progress has been achieved since then; the negotiations remain suspended.

However, it is important to note that since then, be it at the G-20 meeting in Rio, which I attended, or the Cairns Group meeting in Australia, where I was represented – both in September – all key players in the talks have reiterated their commitment to the Round and their willingness to resume negotiations as soon as the political circumstances allow. However, it will take more than that to get the DDA back on track. All sides will have to show flexibility and realism and make offers that represent real efforts in all areas of the negotiations.

There is a narrow window of opportunity for resuming the talks between the United States mid-term elections on 7 November and early in the spring of 2007, when the US Congress starts working on a new farm bill.

I visited Washington at the end of September to explore the US position on the DDA, to probe US congressional politics on the subject and to explain our position. I met with policymakers in the Administration, with a number of key law-makers on the Hill, and with constituencies like the National Farm Bureau and the National Association of Manufacturers.

The political situation in the United States is difficult. However, I was encouraged by my contacts with the Administration, where I sensed a genuine willingness to conclude the Round during President Bush's tenure, although this will require the use of considerable political capital, even to get Congressional extension of the President's Trade Promotion Authority.

So in the coming weeks our strategy must be to clarify the political conditions for renewing the talks and prepare the ground for movement – short of new offers. Our sights also remain firmly set on preserving the development issues, at this stage in the context of the Single Undertaking.

If the DDA fails, or if the suspension is extended for too long a period of time, my firm judgement is that we run serious economic and political risks. There remains a lot on offer in the DDA in terms of agricultural subsidy reduction, tariff reductions for agricultural and industrial products, improved rules and development; and hence a great deal to lose if the talks fail. We should not underestimate the broader systemic implications of failure for the multilateral system at large. The DDA should therefore remain our main focus of attention – as it will – and the EU is willing and prepared to go back to the WTO negotiating table as soon as realistically possible.

Seán Ó Neachtain (UEN). – I have often said to you in this House that 5% of world trade is agricultural trade and the 95% is being blocked by the 5% at fair trade talks. Is it not time to remove the blockage? Is it not time, Commissioner, to get on with the vast bulk of world trade and deal with agriculture on a separate level?

If you concede more on European agriculture, you will have broken the agreement that the Member States have made on agricultural subsidies and agricultural support. So is it not time to deal with the vast bulk of world trade and leave agriculture aside?

Peter Mandelson, Member of the Commission. I do not accept that point of view, because I believe that we have a clear obligation, for objective reasons and because it was in the original Doha mandate, to bring about a negotiated and agreed restructuring of agricultural trade.

We are obliged to do that because reform of agriculture has lagged behind the progressive changes that have swept through the rest of the international trading system, with that benign and beneficial impact on industrial tariffs. But in the case of agriculture you have, exceptionally, a system of agricultural support and in some cases export subsidies which has been very trade-distorting.

As a result of our reforms in Europe we are curing ourselves of the trade-distorting impact of our agricultural support mechanisms. That is not the case, notably, in the United States. I believe it is important that we do not say goodbye to this round without exhausting every possibility of bringing about the progressive reform in agricultural support and trade that will be of great benefit to developing countries.

David Martin (PSE). – Commissioner, are you concerned that the plethora of bilateral trade agreements – and I do not just mean EU bilateral trade agreements – that is growing up at the moment is a threat to getting the WTO talks back on track?

Peter Mandelson, Member of the Commission. I do not think it is a threat, but I acknowledge the risk of a diversion of energy and negotiating capacity. There are always choices to be made by different countries and negotiators as to what form of negotiation they prioritise – the multilateral or the bilateral. But I am entirely satisfied that, given the long-term nature of the negotiations we are entering into and the clear sequencing of the initiatives we intend to take, there are no circumstances in which I would permit our own negotiating effort and commitment to the WTO to be diminished or jeopardised by any pursuit of bilateral free trade agreements.

Georgios Papastamkos (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, I should like to make a comment and ask a question.

The insistence of third trading partners on agricultural negotiations continues to cause surprise, given the small volume of agricultural products traded globally.

Does the Commissioner think that the emerging economies are truly prepared to contribute to this round of negotiations with fundamental commitments to industrial products and services or do they simply envisage unilateral disarmament on the part of the developed countries?

Peter Mandelson, *Member of the Commission*. I think that economically the emerging economies can certainly take on the sort of requests we are making, not only because they are obliged to reciprocate proportionately and commensurately, because that is the principle on which the world trade system and its negotiations are based, but also because they would benefit from it. They would benefit from the progressive opening-up of their industrial sectors by a reasonable lowering of their applied industrial tariffs. I say 'applied' because the bound duties will come down. They are already being reduced autonomously in many cases amongst the emerging economies. I do not underestimate the benefit to the global economy as a whole, as well as to us in Europe, of those autonomous reductions in tariffs being consolidated by means of a ratchet so that the liberalisation cannot be reversed.

I think it is understood by our negotiating partners that, quite apart from the economics, the politics dictate that there must be reciprocity, flexibility and moves in the area of industrial tariffs and services if we are going to be able to demonstrate clearly to our constituents that there really is a worthwhile return for the enormous payments we are making into this round in order to bring the negotiations to a successful conclusion.

President. Question no 52 by **Bernd Posselt** (H-0807/06)

Subject: Introduction of the euro in Sweden

What is the Commission planning to do to induce Sweden, in line with its Treaty obligations, finally to introduce the euro?

What effect is Sweden's negative example having on the debates on the euro in Poland and the Czech Republic?

Joaquín Almunia, *Member of the Commission*. (ES) Sweden is currently one of the eleven Member States with derogations in relation to adopting the single currency. The Member States with derogations are obliged to adopt the euro as their currency, and to that end they must work towards meeting the convergence criteria laid down in the Treaty. Nevertheless, the Treaty does not set explicit time limits for the Member States to comply with that obligation.

In the 2004 convergence report, the Commission concluded that Sweden met the price stability criterion, the criterion relating to the public budget situation and the criterion on the convergence of long-term interest rates. Nevertheless, in that same convergence report, the Commission concluded that Sweden did not meet the exchange rate criterion, which requires the country in question to have remained within the normal margins of fluctuation laid down in the exchange rate mechanism of the European Monetary System without any serious tensions and for at least two years prior to the assessment.

Furthermore, in the 2004 convergence report, the Commission pointed out that the Swedish legislation was not fully compatible with Articles 108 and 109 of the Treaty. In view of this assessment, the Commission concluded that there was no need to modify Sweden's status as a Member State with a derogation in this area.

In accordance with the Treaty, the Commission and the European Central Bank will publish the next convergence report before the end of this year. The new Member States have committed themselves to adopting the euro as soon as they comply with the criteria laid down in the Treaty. In this regard, Slovenia will enter the euro zone on 1 January 2007. Cyprus and Malta wish to join on 1 January 2008 and Slovakia on 1 January 2009, and other Member States, which had previously set specific targets, are in the process of revising them.

In any event, as I said again at the beginning of my reply, with the exception of the two States with an opt-out clause - the United Kingdom and Denmark - the other Members of the European Union that have yet to adopt the single currency, and for which the derogation is in place, are obliged to adopt it and to work towards complying with the criteria, but there is no date by which they are obliged to have complied with them.

Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, there are two more, and quite specific, items of information that I would welcome.

The first is that I should like to know whether the Commission, when a Member State such as Sweden, without any arrangement being made for it in the Treaties, fails, for a period of years, to introduce the euro, will take legal action against it by, for example, taking it to the ECJ, or whether it will let the matter rest for another twenty years.

Secondly, I would like to know what is happening about Poland, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. Is there any sign of any of them – Hungary in particular – actually doing anything?

Joaquín Almunia, *Member of the Commission*. (ES) Mr Posselt, we must not confuse the Member States' obligation to prepare for adoption of the single currency with the actions that the Commission and the Council may take — and are taking in fact — in relation to Member States that are not complying with the provisions of the Treaty, in the field of budgetary discipline, for example, as in the case of Hungary and other Member States.

Preparations for adoption of the single currency relate to budgetary discipline, but also the stability of exchange rates and the development of interest rates, which is something decided upon by the markets according to the economic situation of the Member States. They also involve legal reforms, bringing the status of the Central Bank of the Member State in question into line with the rules laid down in the Treaty for the European System of Central Banks, and they also relate to the development of inflation.

The factors for complying with the criteria for adoption of the single currency therefore depend partly on political decisions to be directly adopted by the governments or parliaments of the Member States, and partly on factors that are not always under the Member States' control. Consequently, although it will theoretically be possible in the future to apply infringement procedures to States that are not making preparations, we do not currently believe it to be necessary or even desirable.

Danutė Budreikaitė (ALDE). – (LT) Commissioner, if a wealthy and economically stable nation such as Sweden is unable to introduce the euro, I cannot but question the future of the euro zone project. It is evident that most of the current euro zone members are failing to meet one or more of the Maastricht criteria. For example, Lithuania has failed to meet the inflation criterion by 0.07%.

How do you think the euro zone will develop in the future? According to some forecasts, the euro will disappear in 15 years. What preventive measures should be taken?

Joaquín Almunia, *Member of the Commission*. (ES) Mrs Budreikaitė, I do not believe that the future of the euro is in question. Not at all. A few years after its launch, in 1999, and five years after more than 300 million were able to carry it in their pockets for the first time in the form of coins and notes, the euro is now a reality which those who use it consider to be a success.

In my view, therefore, the issue is not whether the euro has a future; the question is whether the countries that are not preparing properly for the adoption of the euro are going to suffer the consequences in the future. That is the real question. Each time I have contact with the authorities of the countries that are to adopt the euro in the future but which do not yet comply with the criteria laid down in the Treaty, I urge them to adopt a credible and effective strategy for complying with those criteria and adopting the single currency.

For some years we have been enjoying abundant liquidity in the financial markets, interest rates are low and memories of monetary crises and volatile exchange rates are fading in Europe. There is no guarantee, however, that those situations that we saw in the past, before the existence of the euro, are not going to re-emerge in the future. Let us pray that they do not, but it could happen. We have seen 311 million Europeans enjoy the advantages of having a common currency, and we have also seen all of the Member States of the European Union enjoy the advantages of the fact that twelve of them have adopted the single currency.

There are therefore more than enough reasons for the Member States that have yet to adopt the euro to be convinced that they must prepare and adopt economic policy decisions aimed at fulfilling these criteria and strengthening a currency which, seven years after its birth, is already the world's second largest currency.

Hélène Goudin (IND/DEM). – (SV) In a referendum, the people of Sweden rejected participation in economic and monetary union by a broad majority. Mr Posselt wants to ride roughshod over the result of a referendum. To do so is incompatible with a democratic view of the world. The Swedish economy has not been harmed by the fact that we are outside the single currency.

I call on the Commissioner to state that he fully supports the result of the Swedish referendum and to distance himself from Mr Posselt's deplorable and undemocratic view of the world.

Joaquín Almunia, *Member of the Commission*. (ES) Mrs Goudin, I am perfectly aware that a referendum took place in Sweden in 2003. I am perfectly aware of its result. Unfortunately the result was negative, but, like all of the Members of this House, the honourable Member will be aware that the Treaty must be complied with by all of the Member States and, though the existence of a referendum creates obvious political difficulties in terms of conforming to the Treaty, the obligations laid down in it nevertheless remain.

President. Question no 53 by **Justas Vincas Paleckis** (H-0823/06)

Subject: Euro zone integration

It is common knowledge that all the new Member States that joined the European Union in 2004 made a commitment to participate in European monetary union. Last year it was observed that more and more of the new Member States are postponing entry into the euro zone to a more and more distant date, often not even predicting when they will fulfil the convergence criteria. It is difficult to deny that, given the rapid development of the new Member States' economies, some of the conditions laid down for the convergence criteria (for example, inflation) will not be met for quite some time. In this situation, it is hardly likely that strict artificial conditions, which would only disrupt economic processes, are vital to lowering inflation.

Euro zone candidates greatly appreciate Commission consultations, which help Member States to attain the criteria for monetary union more quickly without harming the economy of the country in question. Besides country consultations, what additional measures does the Commission intend to take given that it is becoming increasingly apparent that, for various reasons, some of the new Member States will not be able to meet the strictly applied conditions for entry into the euro zone for some time to come? How does the Commission view the euro zone's prospects for expansion in terms of time? How would the Commission react if any of the new Member States sought to postpone adoption of the euro until after 2013?

Joaquín Almunia, *Member of the Commission*. (ES) Mr Paleckis, on signing the Accession Treaty, the ten Member States that joined the Union in May 2004 agreed to adopt the euro as soon as they complied with the necessary conditions. These countries, and Sweden – which we have just discussed – are expected to implement policies in order to ensure compliance with those conditions. Nevertheless, as I said in my previous reply, the Accession Treaty does not set any time limit for achieving this.

Many of the new Member States have adopted target dates and strategies for adopting the euro, thereby giving concrete form to their political commitment through firm convergence policies.

Responsibility for implementing those policies lies with the Member States, for which the application of stability policies contributes to a broader objective than simply compliance with the convergence criteria for adoption of the single currency. Those policies are also necessary in order to guarantee high and sustained growth, as well as medium-term financial stability.

Although the Commission supports the efforts of the Member States with derogations with regard to joining the euro zone, it is not possible to predict the pace at which that enlargement of that zone will take place. The Commission believes that achieving a high degree of sustainable convergence, in accordance with the Treaty, is a necessary condition in order to make the adoption of the euro a success, both for the current members of the zone, and for future members.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (PSE). – I thank the Commissioner for his comprehensive answer. You have recently been to Lithuania, which had an unhappy experience in its attempt to introduce the euro because its inflation was 0.07% above the target level. In your opinion, would it be better for Lithuania in future to think about joining the euro alone or in the company of the two other Baltic States – Latvia and Estonia?

Joaquín Almunia, *Member of the Commission*. (ES) Mr Paleckis, when, during the first half of this year, Lithuania, at the same time as Slovenia, asked the Commission and the European Central Bank to issue an opinion on their degree of compliance with the criteria laid down in the Treaty for membership of the Monetary Union, the Commission's response, which was subsequently backed by the Council,

was unfortunately negative in the case of Lithuania and positive in the case of Slovenia. It was negative in the case of Lithuania because, at that time, that country did not comply with the inflation criterion.

You have talked about the difference that existed at a particular time between Lithuania's average inflation over the last twelve months and the reference value, calculated in accordance with the Protocol to the Maastricht Treaty, with regard to the maximum inflation permissible for acceptance as a new member of the eurozone. It is true that the difference at that time was very small, less than 0.1%. Now, unfortunately, a few months later, with the latest data available, which has been published by Eurostat for September's inflation, Lithuania's average inflation over the last twelve months differs from the reference value by 0.7%; over just a few months it has multiplied by seven.

As I was able to say to the Italian authorities on my recent visit to that country, the important thing now is not to discuss the small difference in the past; in my view, it is not even important to discuss firstly the date or conditions for entry. The important thing at the moment for Lithuania, and for the other Member States that wish to join the euro as soon as possible, is to decide what economic strategy and what measures, within a coherent economic policy strategy, must be adopted and implemented in order to comply with the Treaty's criteria.

In view of the fact that average inflation in Lithuania has increasingly diverged from the maximum reference value, which currently stands at 2.8%, I urged the Lithuanian authorities to define that strategy and I once again offered the European Commission's cooperation in working jointly with the authorities of that Member State in the search for the best strategy, the most effective strategy, for bringing inflation under control without jeopardising Lithuania's excellent economic growth or the wonderful results that the Lithuanian economy has been achieving in many other respects.

I believe that that is not just the attitude of the European Commission, but also of all of the Member States that want Lithuania to comply with the conditions as soon as possible and become a new member of the euro zone, as Slovenia will on 1 January. If Lithuania is accompanied by other Member States, the other Baltic States, then all the better. We cannot change the conditions for assessing whether or not the Treaty's conditions are met, however, regardless of how much we want our assessment of compliance with those criteria to be positive.

Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (PPE-DE). – Commissioner, you mentioned that Slovenia will be joining the eurozone on 1 January 2007, Malta and Cyprus in 2008, and Slovakia in 2009. During your recent visit to Lithuania, did you propose a clear date when Lithuania might join the eurozone? And have you already received an action plan from the Government, including the fight against corruption?

Joaquín Almunia, Member of the Commission. (ES) The only definite date is 1 January 2007 for Slovenia, although it is the case that, in June, the European Council supported the Commission's proposal and the Ecofin Council confirmed that Lithuania complies with almost all of the conditions for joining the euro zone.

I said in my reply that Cyprus and Malta want to be members of the euro zone from 1 January 2008, but the analysis and assessment of compliance with the criteria has yet to be made. I also said in my reply that Slovakia wants to be a member of the euro zone from 1 January 2009, and at the appropriate time we will have to assess whether or not it meets the conditions.

In our next convergence report, which will be adopted by the Commission and presented to this Parliament in December, we shall assess the extent to which, at this precise moment, the derogation countries comply with the conditions. Nevertheless, the Member State in question must comply with the conditions prior to the date on which it wishes to join the euro zone.

The Lithuanian authorities had a target date and they must now set a new date. When I visited Lithuania in September, that date had not been decided upon. As far as I know, they have not set a date since my visit.

I have insisted to the Lithuanian authorities, and to the authorities of other States in a similar position, that they have the strategy before the date, because, without a strategy, the dates decided upon will have to be modified over time, since the decision on the date, in itself, is not sufficient to satisfy the criteria that are going to be required.

David Martin (PSE). – Commissioner, I fully support what you say about candidate countries meeting the convergence criteria. But do you accept that it is very frustrating for them to be struggling to meet

those criteria and, at the same time, to see existing Member States of the eurozone systematically breaching their obligations? I know you have raised this issue with the Council. But what efforts will you continue to make to ensure that existing eurozone Member States meet their legal requirements?

Joaquín Almunia, *Member of the Commission*. (ES) Mr Martin, I understand the frustration of the candidates for adoption of the single currency whose candidature is not being successful because they do not comply with the inflation criterion, for example, when, at the same time, they can see that certain Member States of the euro zone, which have been part of it since 1999 or 2001, are still members despite the fact that they do not comply with, in some cases, the inflation criterion, in others, the deficit criterion and, in others, the debt criterion.

In the case of Member States that do not comply with the budgetary discipline criteria – deficit and debt – the instruments laid down in the Treaty are applied, by means of the Stability and Growth Pact mechanisms. I must say to those people who suggested that the new Stability Pact was going to be ineffective and excessively flexible, that that Pact is now being applied rigorously and fully. Since the new Pact has entered into force, there has not been a single disagreement in the Council about accepting and supporting the Commission's proposals, and amongst the Member States of the euro zone there has not been a single complaint about having to comply with the recommendations adopted by the Council, on the proposal of the Commission, aimed at restoring budgetary discipline. There have been such complaints outside of the euro zone, but not inside it.

Nevertheless, there are certain Member States of the euro zone with inflation above the 2.8% reference value that I mentioned before. There are no instruments for taking action in relation to a Member State of the euro zone when its inflation is greater than the reference value. There is one very powerful instrument, but it is not in the hands of the Commission, nor Parliament, nor the Council. It is a market instrument, because those Member States are losing competitiveness, and their citizens and companies are suffering the consequences of the loss of competitiveness, which can no longer by definition be restored through modifications in exchange rates, because these Member States have adopted the single currency.

President. Question no 54 by **Gay Mitchell** (H-0846/06)

Subject: Effect of accession on the Eurozone

How does the Commission expect the Eurozone to be affected by the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the EU next year?

Joaquín Almunia, *Member of the Commission*. (ES) Mr Mitchell, the Commission does not expect the accession of Bulgaria and Romania to the European Union to have immediate effects on the composition of the euro zone.

Following their accession, on 1 January, both countries will take part in the Economic and Monetary Union as Member States, with derogations, and they will participate fully in the multilateral supervision of economic policies, as laid down in the Treaty, just like the Member States of the Union that do not belong to the euro zone.

From the date of their accession to the European Union, and since they will not be members of the euro zone and will not have an opt-out clause, Bulgaria and Romania will have to work towards complying with the convergence criteria with a view to being able to adopt the euro in the future. For the other Member States of the euro zone, however, I cannot see any immediate effect whatsoever apart from the very positive fact that the Union will have two new Member States.

Gay Mitchell (PPE-DE). – Thank you for taking the question. I agree with the Commissioner that the euro has guaranteed transparency in pricing and facilitated travel and above all, having one currency has created a greater unity of purpose for Europeans than anything else we have done together. All that is to be welcomed.

I understand that the European economy seems to be cooling, but is still expected to grow by 2.5% in 2006, its biggest growth since 2000. That is to be applauded, but slowing global growth and increased interest rates mean that European economic growth might be hindered. Can the Commissioner tell the House if he anticipates any more changes in economic growth after the impending enlargement and indicate what effect that will have?

Joaquín Almunia, *Member of the Commission*. (ES) Mr Mitchell, it is true that the euro zone, and the European Union as a whole, is also showing growth in 2006, and we are seeing the beginning of clear economic recovery. Despite this economic recovery, however, we are still seeing growth figures that are lower than those expected when the economic and monetary union entered the third phase and, to a certain degree, some people are trying to establish a relationship between that low growth, compared to other areas of the world economy, and the existence of the single currency or the existence of the economic and monetary union itself.

I believe that the most rigorous analyses, not just those by the Commission, but also those by other institutions outside of the European Union, come to the conclusion, like us, that the obstacles to growth in Europe and, in particular, in the most significant economies of the eurozone, are basically, fundamentally, of a structural nature. Hence, we must place the emphasis not only on respect for the operating rules and the rules on budgetary discipline or on the independence of the European Central Bank in the shaping of the economic and monetary union, but also on growth policies of a structural nature, which are what we call, in our jargon, the Lisbon Strategy policies. It appears that what our economies need is a combination of healthy macroeconomic policies, geared toward stability, and ambitious structural reform policies.

From that point of view, enlargement, the arrival of ten new Members in May 2004, has been a spur, an incentive and a positive stimulus for the European economies as a whole. A few months ago, in May 2006, coinciding with the second anniversary of the arrival of ten new Member States, the Commission published, under my responsibility, a communication on the economic consequences of enlargement. Our assessment of the economic consequences of enlargement has been very positive; very positive for the new Member States and also for the old ones, for the European Union of fifteen, because, amongst other things, the new Member States are, generally speaking, showing a greater capacity for implementing structural reforms and making the necessary structural changes. It is true that they are starting from a less advanced situation. They have also introduced dynamism, positive pressure, which is also encouraging economies of the former European Union of fifteen to speed up the implementation of structural policies.

In fact, I believe that some of the positive impacts of structural reforms aimed at greater growth may be coming to light during this recovery phase. It is still too soon to judge the extent to which the improvements in productivity being recorded during the first two quarters of this year are exclusively due to factors linked to the economic cycle. The European Central Bank tends to put practically all of the increase in productivity recorded over recent quarters down to the economic cycle, but I believe that there are certain indications that the structural reforms that have been adopted over recent years and whose pace is beginning to speed up as a result of the positive impact of enlargement are also beginning to play a positive role in this improvement in productivity.

President. Questions which had not been answered for lack of time would receive written answers (see Annex).

That concludes questions to the Commission.

(The sitting was suspended at 7.15 p.m. and resumed at 9.00 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MR ONYSZKIEWICZ

Vice-President

17. "Youth in Action" programme (2007-2013) (debate)

President. The next item is the recommendation for second reading (A6-0341/2006), on behalf of the Committee on Culture and Education, on the Council common position (06236/3/2006 C6-0273/2006 2004/0152(COD)) for adopting a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council creating the 'Youth in Action' programme for the period 2007-2013 (Rapporteur: Mrs Gröner).

Lissy Gröner (PSE), *rapporteur*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the number of Members present in this plenary is certainly no indication of the importance of this issue, and the 'Youth in Action' programme for the period from 2007 to 2013 is certainly a milestone for our young European fellow-citizens. I would like to thank the Commission and the Council for their very constructive cooperation.

At first reading stage, we worked through 58 amendments, most of which found their way into the draft, and it is through this result of informal negotiations that we now arrive at the Common Position, which we are able to accept and on which we are able to agree at second reading.

Working both with and for young people aged between 15 and 18, the perhaps some 170 million citizens who are the European Union's primary concern, all three institutions have endeavoured to find a solution that makes Europe real for them, that helps to make the programme less bureaucratic and makes access to it easier for disadvantaged young people.

We have, with this programme, had a number of general objectives in mind. First among them is the fostering of citizenship. We want to make it easier for young people to work together as members of society while also offering them the opportunity to cooperate at European level, thereby, among other things, overcoming voter apathy and awakening in them an interest in politics.

Secondly, we want to promote solidarity and tolerance among young people, particularly as a means towards greater social cohesion in the EU. In this way, it will be possible for young people, together, to develop new lifestyles and models of coexistence.

We want to promote mutual understanding between young people and the multicultural diversity that we in Europe treasure. We also want to promote systems for supporting youth organisations and young people's civil society organisations and cohesion among young people even beyond Europe's borders. It is with those purposes in mind that we have negotiated a budget of EUR 885 million.

In my capacity as rapporteur, I have proposed the submission of minimum budgets for the following five headings. Of the funding available, 30% is to go to the traditional youth exchange 'Youth for Europe'.

The object of 'European Voluntary Service' is involvement, for a period of between two and twelve months, in non-profit-making activity for the common good in a country other than one's own, and this project is to receive 23% of the funds.

'Youth for the World' is a new project intended to awaken understanding of other peoples in a spirit of openness, which is very important at various levels, and to which 6% of overall resources are to be allocated.

The 'support systems for youth' are to receive at least 15%; by this is meant the European Youth Forum and the network of youth organisations and persons active in this field whom it supports.

It is intended that 4% of the funds should go to support European cooperation among young people, which would amount to the dividing up of 76% of the sectors, and that would offer the Commission sufficient flexibility to become more actively involved where necessary.

Facing up to challenges is the right approach. We have the funds to support the special project 'European Youth Week', and we want the Pact for European Youth, concluded by the Council in 2005, to come alive.

It cannot be acceptable that we should look on and do nothing while disorder breaks out among young people and while young people in the European Union lack jobs and prospects. We must ensure that young people have something to look forward to, and we want the Member States to give these projects their wholehearted support, for we cannot deal with the problem on our own.

I am therefore appealing to the Member States to get stuck in. I recommend that this House agree to the compromise we have arrived at and adopt the Common Position unamended.

Ján Figel, *Member of the Commission*. Mr President, it is not very often that we feel such a strong consensus as we do now. I should like to express my gratitude to those who made it possible, as it is not automatic. I am sure that this consensus makes it probable that in the coming weeks we will be able to adopt, in the full sense of the legal term, the Youth in Action Programme. I should especially like to thank Mrs Gröner, the rapporteur for the programme, as well as the Committee on Culture and Education, which dealt with matters in a very constructive manner during the procedure. I extend my thanks to the committee and its chairman, Mr Sifunakis, for their support.

This consensus and progress in the work will allow full continuity between the current Youth Programme and the next one, so that there will be no interruption. This is a very different case from the previous

one seven years ago, when there was a significant suspension in the Youth Programme for several months.

The new programme is a partial but important response to the Union's priorities: citizenship, growth and peace. Firstly, in terms of citizenship, it will enable young Europeans to affirm themselves as supportive, responsible, active and tolerant citizens in pluralist societies. Getting young people more involved in the field and the life of local, national and European communities and fostering active citizenship represents an important challenge for our societies. There is also a need to enhance young people's awareness of the fact that they belong to Europe and to develop their sense of European citizenship.

Secondly, it is equally necessary to respond to the aspirations of young people by providing them with the opportunity to enrich their education and training on a less formal level. Non-formal educational activities deserve to be supported and recognised at European level because they contribute to European growth. That is why I am very happy that we will have more space for voluntary service in Europe.

Lastly, young people's willingness to develop new relations between young Europeans and young people all over the world, their concern for mutual understanding, a spirit of tolerance and openness are important contributions towards world peace.

Progress in the negotiations on this programme was subject to the agreement on the financial perspectives last May. Following the adoption of this budgetary framework and the decision to allocate EUR 885 million, at current prices, to the Youth in Action Programme, the institutions have shown their capacity to react quickly and constructively to have a new programme adopted without any further delay. I believe that is a very strong message to young people sent by the European institutions today.

Rolf Berend, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the recommendation in relation to the Common Position incorporates numerous amendments made by this House at first reading.

Although, as Mrs Gröner has just said, the budget for the period from 2007 to 2013 provides EUR 885 million for the 'Youth in Action' programme on the basis of the Interinstitutional Agreement on the Financial Perspective for the same period, I would nevertheless like to remind the House that the amount envisaged in the Commission's original proposal was EUR 913 million, and, this House having demanded an increase to EUR 1.1 billion, we have now, in the Common Position, ended up with EUR 885 million. While that may well not reflect what we aspired to, it does give us the security to plan ahead for the coming years, and it is good that we can adopt it in this form today or tomorrow.

'Youth in Action' is primarily aimed at young people between the ages of 15 and 28, although some projects are open to 13-year olds and 30-year olds. My group is glad that this House has been able to take the initiative in highlighting such important aspects of the Common Position as, for example, young people's participation in democratic life, the promotion of such fundamental values as human dignity, human rights, tolerance and non-discrimination, protection for participants by means of proper insurance – which is a very important consideration – the European Youth Weeks, seminars and structured dialogues involving young people, exchange schemes for young people in Europe and the neighbouring countries and, not least, EUR 2 million in financial support for the European Youth Forum.

While thanking Mrs Gröner, I would also like to say that we hope that the unamended Common Position of the Council will meet with widespread support from this House tomorrow.

Christa Prets, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, at times when we find ourselves debating the demographic challenges of the twenty-first century, the young people rioting in France and more and more people supporting nationalist parties, it is enormously important that young people be involved in working towards an understanding of other cultures and outlooks and thereby creating the conditions for greater solidarity in Europe.

In particular, young people who do not or cannot become mobile through programmes such as Erasmus, Comenius or Leonardo within the context of formal education need a change to gain useful experience of intercultural dialogue, and there needs to be more recognition of the role and importance of informal education in this respect. I am convinced of the rightness of prioritising, within the programme, the 'Youth for Europe' project, which campaigns for youth exchanges and young people's initiatives. We

should also invite the European Youth Forum to make regular presentations on its work to the committee, so that all Members may learn from its valuable work and benefit from it.

A very wide variety of problems were raised in discussions with youth organisations, including the different procedures for the issue of visas and the failure to reflect on why those differences are there; my request is that young people be more involved in these.

Jolanta Dičkutė, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – (LT) I would like to welcome Mrs Gröner's report and the common position on which we have been able to agree. I am glad that young people in the countries bordering the European Union – Russia, Belarus, Ukraine and the countries of the North Caucasus – will be able to benefit from the new programme as soon as next year.

European Union membership has a positive influence on many aspects of life in the Member States. Young people, with their present and future challenges and problems, are no exception to this. The 75 million young people who live in the European Union are lucky in many ways. They have freedom of movement, opportunities to study and work in various European Union countries, to improve their foreign language skills, participate in intercultural exchange, and so on. Nevertheless, the above advantages are at the same time also the challenges and tasks that are faced and need to be resolved by the increasingly ageing population of today's Europe. My reference to an ageing Europe is not just incidental; it is a reference to the fact that we must be clearly aware and not underestimate the importance of young people; we must make every effort to actively involve them in the political and developmental processes of the European Union.

Implementation of the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy is overemphasised as a factor of great importance to young people; we, nevertheless, must not forget that young people themselves play a very significant role in implementing these objectives. Investing in young people is one of the cornerstones of pursuing more rapid development and increasing the level of employment in Europe. It is, of course, very important for the Member States themselves to give the Council's recommendations proper support and take specific actions. We know a great many examples of good programmes, and yet many of them have not been fully implemented. This requires closer dialogue and cooperation between young people and politicians at both the national and European level. We must treat young people as a source of positive energy, and not as a burden.

Our objective is to strengthen the trust of young people in the objectives of this important European institution and the Member States in order to eliminate any doubt as regards the broadly declared role of young people in the growth, development and stability of the European Union.

Helga Trüpel, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (DE) Mr President, I should like to start by thanking Mrs Gröner for the work she has done on this report. All of us are convinced that Europe is meant to be an opportunity for young people to be able to move around freely within it, broadening their horizons and learning several languages, improving their education and training and, all in all, becoming trustworthy and responsible people in an open European society.

It is, of course, also important that Europe should gain acceptance among young people. We need to remind ourselves that it will be the young people who will build Europe up and ensure its future development, in other words that what matters above all is that they should find out for themselves what they want Europe to become in future.

This task of improving opportunities for young people will not be capable of being performed in isolation from other policy areas, among which economic policy is quite central, as also are educational and social policy, together with the Lisbon Strategy issues to which reference has just been made. I would very much like to see us taking this policy area seriously rather than neglecting it, for young people are the key to Europe's future.

Ljudmila Novak (PPE-DE). – (SL) The 'Youth in Action' report is very important in strengthening European awareness and European citizenship amongst young people. We all know that our citizens sometimes find it difficult to identify with the European dimension, and that European institutions far away in Brussels seem rather remote to them.

Through this report we have sought ways of making European citizenship more tangible by promoting solidarity, initiative and creativity. Because young people are most receptive to new ideas, we have focused on young people between 13 and 30 years of age. Young people are increasingly taking

responsible positions in politics, and it is right that we should secure for them the tools and conditions which will also direct their attention towards Europe's common objective.

Of the five actions envisaged by this programme, let me highlight the second: 'European Voluntary Service'. Voluntary work is of great importance for the development and future of society. It contributes to the development of existing systems, cohesive values, social progress and other developments in society, and therefore needs to be promoted and given due recognition. Young people active in this area set a shining example thereby, especially to a consumer society which is far too preoccupied with money and personal fulfilment, yet all too little concerned about people around us whose lives could be vastly improved with just a little bit of effort.

Politics is also a kind of voluntary work, at least when you are starting out. When most of us were young, voluntary work was the quickest route into politics. I support this report and I hope that young people will be able to benefit as much as possible from aspiring to and meeting the ideals contained within it, for the sake of their own personal growth and the benefit of society.

Piia-Noora Kauppi (PPE-DE). – Mr President, firstly, I should like to thank our rapporteur, Mrs Gröner, for her excellent work on this report. I am sure we all agree that young people are vital to shaping the future of Europe. I do not believe that we should concentrate on debating whether young people should be supported through EU programmes. There is clear evidence that programmes for young people and students are the best path of EU action for true integration at the citizen level. Nevertheless I should like to raise a few points.

First of all, the budget allocated for the programme still seems to be insufficient. I know the hard work the Commissioner has done, but I still hope that in the final budget for the future years we could see improved numbers.

Secondly, I strongly support lowering the age to 13. Providing opportunities at a young age encourages initiative in later years. I do not think that 13 is too young to participate in 'Youth in Action'.

Something else that would enhance the programme is the expansion of the list of countries with which youth organisations can cooperate, to include as many countries as possible. Countries such as China and Russia are key players in world politics and economics. Forming close ties with those countries at an early age can only be beneficial.

Another factor to consider is the importance of enhanced mobility. It would be a vital step to ease the current visa regulations in countries outside the Schengen Agreement. Far too often student exchanges, 'work abroad' programmes and school trips have to be cancelled because of the difficulty in obtaining visas. Sometimes the complicated procedures and high prices even discourage starting a project. To ease that situation I call for standardised documentation in all EU countries for obtaining visas. We should also try to support the 'Get Visible' campaign, which suggests a separate visa type for NGO representatives. That would significantly enhance the possibility of young people participating in volunteer work programmes, exchange programmes and youth organisation work.

The Youth in Action Programme will end in 2013. It would be short-sighted of me to say that that will be time enough. However, it is a good start. I truly thank you, Commissioner, for all your hard work on this issue.

Ján Figel, Member of the Commission. (SK) I would like to thank all those who have contributed to the debate, which will continue, in a somewhat different way, during subsequent phases, especially when it comes to implementing the programme. I think the consensus is evident. I do not want to speak or respond at length, but I consider it very important that the intensity and level of cooperation and commitment regarding young people in the EU is growing, not only in response to demographic issues but also in response to the overall prospects for European cooperation, solidarity and integration.

The European Pact for Youth was adopted recently, several years after the White Paper. We now have a chance to launch a new programme for young people that would provide improvements in terms of both quantity and quality. This is very important because, among other things, the age bracket has been widened and the budget has grown significantly.

Naturally, we have proposed more, but this issue should also be viewed in terms of the limits and scope of the financial perspective. In addition, the programme of life-long learning and the programme of citizenship or civic cooperation, along with certain external programmes and actions of the Community,

clearly offer increasing opportunities for young people. For example, I have been in Canada, working on a bilateral agreement between the EU and Canada that will cover not only university cooperation but also the area of young people.

These specific lines of cooperation with partnership countries in the area of young people are multiplying and growing. I firmly believe that they will bear fruit.

Thirdly, it is very important not just to formulate policies for young people, but to do it together with young people, as this will be more effective, more successful and more mature in terms of civil society in the common Europe of the future.

President. The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Wednesday at 12.30 p.m.

Annex – Commission statement

The Commission should like to draw the legislative authority's attention to the need for the financial package mentioned in the basic act to be expressed at current prices, and for this to be done no later than its final publication in the OJ. This corresponds to the standard budgetary practice and will help to ensure, with all due transparency, that the legislative authority's decision is complied with. For the Youth in Action programme, the sum at current prices amounts to EUR 885 million.

18. Action programme in the field of lifelong learning (debate)

President. The next item is the recommendation for second reading (A6-0344/2006), on behalf of the Committee on Culture and Education, on the Council common position (06237/3/2006 C6-0274/2006 2004/0153(COD)) establishing an action programme in the field of lifelong learning. (Rapporteur: Mrs Pack).

Doris Pack (PPE-DE), rapporteur. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, the new 'lifelong learning' programme was intended to be a sufficient response, within the framework of the Lisbon process, to the challenges of the present day, for education – as we all, together with everyone else, constantly affirm – is the be-all and end-all of our countries' joint efforts at coming out top in globalised competition.

The Council's cuts in the general budget have also had the unfortunate effect of cutting this multi-annual programme back. The Commissioner has had no hand in these cutbacks. He was on our side, fighting for more. It is regrettable that the Member States did not want that. The final figure we arrived at was EUR 14.37 billion over seven years, but, following negotiations, we have been left with no more and no less than EUR 6.97 billion in the Financial Perspective. Even so, I want to thank all those Members who fought successfully and made it possible for us, together, to achieve a EUR 800 million increase in the funds originally allocated to this programme in the Financial Perspective.

So much for the lofty goals and the bumpy return to earth.

The 'lifelong learning' programme is founded on the two programmes 'Socrates' and 'Leonardo', develops them further and enables working in synergy. We have learned from the latest programmes; our countries' various national agencies have acquainted us with the problems that they had with the programmes, and their views have all, in fact, been taken into account. The 'lifelong learning' programme includes the 'Comenius' programme for schools, its university counterpart 'Erasmus', the 'Leonardo' programme for vocational education and the 'Grundtvig' for adults, the 'Jean Monnet' schemes for promoting European integration and horizontal measures.

I have pushed for more funds than originally planned by the Commission to be allocated to the Comenius programme on the grounds that it is, in my view, the basis for all the other educational programmes, and I have also emphasised the need for more cooperation in the border regions through a new 'Comenius Regio'. The programme puts new emphasis on student mobility between the ages of 11 and 16, with the invaluable experience of a school year spent at a school elsewhere in the EU. We have also taken account in it of the needs of the children of migratory workers.

The Leonardo programme promotes workers' mobility and partnerships in ways that were formerly possible only through Erasmus. Grants payable under Erasmus to university students are being increased to EUR 200 per month, since the former grant was scarcely enough to live on; we had originally proposed

EUR 300, but that could have been sustained only by a drastic reduction in the number of participants, and so we had to abandon the idea. Erasmus also covers preparatory language courses and travel grants.

Better financial provision than before has been made for the Grundvigh programme, under which individual exchanges are now available. The programme is conceived as a response to the current state of the labour market and to population trends.

Whilst continuing to make grants to the College of Europe in Bruges, the European University Institute in Florence, the European Institute of Public Administration in Maastricht and the European Law Academy in Trier, Parliament has also made provision for special grants to the European Agency for Development in Special Needs Education, Middelfart, and the *Centre Internationale de la Formation Européenne* in Nice.

I am absolutely delighted that participation in these programmes is still open to all members of the EEA and to Switzerland and Turkey, and that the countries of the Western Balkans have recently been invited to join in; that leads me to highlight the fact that it is now high time, to say the least, that the easier visa arrangement for South-Eastern Europe took tangible form.

I would like to sum up by saying that the 'lifelong learning' programme will help improve the EU's educational and training programmes, make people more mobile, support partnerships and cooperative efforts between regions, structure the sharing of best practice and encourage the learning of foreign languages. This is a programme that will help people gain a better understanding of the European Union, make it easier for them to live together in it and practice intercultural dialogue and tolerance; it is, in fact the best communications strategy in the EU.

Ján Figel, *Member of the Commission*. Mr President, as our German friends say, *Bildung ist mehr* – education is more. It is a key to many more answers in life than are possible without education, and it empowers individuals and societies to seek a better economic, social, cultural and political future; and that is why I am sure that an integrated lifelong learning programme could provide many new opportunities in quantitative and qualitative terms, because when we see it in combination with what we are doing in Europe all together, it means much more than just a programme. We are agreeing to create the lifelong learning strategies in Member States by the end of this year.

We have a programme from January 2007, and we have a benchmark in our cooperation, in order to increase the participation of adults in the lifelong learning systems in Member States. As Mrs Pack said, lifelong learning is not a luxury, it is a necessity; and I am sure that it gives individuals experiences which enrich their lives and improve their employability.

Learning helps institutions to transfer knowledge from one to another across Europe, to innovate, to improve and to modernise. It increases the transparency of Member States' systems, because when cooperation is open, we see how systems are moving and becoming more and more compatible. In short, it is a valuable European instrument at the direct service of our citizens.

The new programme will expand opportunities and will, I am sure, bring even more benefits. So I am delighted that Parliament, the Council and the Commission were able, almost as soon as the financial framework was finalised earlier this year, to reach agreement on the text of the programme decision. I know it was not easy, but if Parliament adopts it without amendment, as your rapporteur proposes, then the programme can be implemented on time from the start of 2007.

Given the complexity of the programme, that is a major achievement. If we compare the past with the current complex programme, we can see the hard work that has been done. I would like to extend particular thanks to Mrs Pack, the rapporteur, for using her great expertise and experience in the field to make it possible to reach an agreement so rapidly at second reading.

On the text itself, the Commission is fully in agreement that it should not be amended. The financial envelope will be close to EUR 7 billion for seven years at current prices. But we should also see it in broader terms, where opportunities are growing. I do not want to go into details, but I frequently encourage ministers to look into structural funds to see how they could serve the mobility of students; how other programmes like Erasmus Mundus could also help to build a more attractive European educational space.

Our services have been working at full speed to have the implementation arrangements in place so that we can publish the first call for proposals under the lifelong learning programme before the end of this

year, and to ensure that the programme is more accessible and simpler for the end user. Thank you for providing the possibility of enabling us to be so advanced at this moment.

Ivo Belet, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.* – (NL) Mr President, Commissioner, it is, of course, a good thing that we can give the green light to these important learning programmes, for, as you so rightly say, *Bildung ist mehr*, education is more.

Nevertheless, I, like the rapporteur, have mixed feelings. As Mrs Pack said before me, I would argue that the Member States should never have cut back on these programmes – not as drastically, at any rate, as has now been the case. These are programmes that can help us make young people into European citizens, the Europeans of the future. Why ever have we been so brutal in the cutbacks for those programmes? That is extremely short-sighted and in any event a missed opportunity for the EU's future. I think that the Member States have given a perfect illustration of how to queer one's own pitch.

I am sure that the Commissioner will agree with me when I say that every Erasmus student, every Comenius student – and I have met a huge number over the years – every student ends up having a life-forming experience. It broadens their horizons, improves their chances of employment, brings them into contact with others, they experience diversity and learn how to deal with it. In that way, these programmes also contribute to tolerance and, needless to say, to European citizenship.

This House should, in actual fact, have thrown out this limited budget, but that is a different matter, of course. It should have done that not least with social reasons in mind, for quite a few students who come from more socially vulnerable environments and backgrounds will now find it much more difficult to take part in Erasmus. There is no point, though, as somebody already said, in regretting past actions. It is too late for that. We now have to pull out all the stops to make the most of what we have.

I think that schools are sufficiently creative in seeking, and finding, additional sources of income to fund those programmes. Industry, possibly backed by the European Union or national governments, may be able to help. Why could businesses not sponsor exchange projects? A factory that is local to me – Ford – could, for example, invite final-year pupils or students for visits to their sister factories in different countries across the border. It is just a thought, but there may be some scope there.

It is crucially important that we promote the exchange of students and schools to the best of our ability. I would, at this early stage, express the hope that the Council and the Member States will realise that cutbacks on the forthcoming multi-annual programme are bound to leave their mark on programmes like these, and I wish you, Commissioner, the very best in your endeavours to implement the next programme 2007-2013.

Christa Prets, *on behalf of the PSE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, I am glad that we are making today a really big day for culture, with five very major programmes for us to debate and also vote on, which is not the sort of thing that happens very often in this House. It does, however, highlight the importance and necessity of getting programmes of this kind up and running.

Taken all together, little more than one per cent of the total European Budget for 2007 to 2013 is available to us for all five programmes – education, youth, culture, media and active citizenship – and that puts everything back into perspective and also brings us down to earth a bit. I would like to say that these are ambitious programmes, and we certainly could have done with more financial support for them; as has already been said, we had all planned something bigger, and it is the Member States that are standing in the way.

In general terms, though, I do believe that the 'lifelong learning' programme is aimed in the right direction, with simplification, lump sums and more decentralisation in line with what we demanded. Expenditure must be proportionate to financial support, and building in the other EU support programmes on a horizontal basis would have been something else worth aiming for, but I would also appeal to the Commission for things to be made simpler for the national agencies and for the applicants too. The national agencies are in the course of being restructured, and this process will certainly take up more time yet, but here, too, dialogue and support from the Commission are called for. We, too, should apply ourselves more to dialogue, for there are still a number of problems left to be resolved.

It is to be hoped that the trend towards increasing mobility will continue, for we have set ourselves the target of three million students by 2012, and so we must make further strenuous efforts and demand many improvements. The school systems also need to be analysed in terms of quality, which needs to

be guaranteed not only by the EU, but also by the Member States, and we have to demand that they do that.

Jolanta Dičkutė, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – (LT) I would like to begin by thanking Mrs Pack for an excellent report. Lifelong learning is an integral part of any modern and developing society, since the wellbeing of the nation is based on the education, experience and skill that its population acquires. In many cases the level of literacy and education determines a person's health and wellbeing, as well as being a source of income and providing better opportunities for participation in social, political and cultural life.

At the moment, adult education, training and the professional development of working people are becoming increasingly important in Lithuania, just as they are in the European Union as a whole, although it has not yet become a hard and fast rule. Unfortunately, according to 2004 data, our country is lagging far behind the EU average in terms of continuing education of people in the age range of 24–65 years – 28% in Lithuania as opposed to 42% in the European Union. Many of the residents of our country agree that the main reasons motivating people to study are constantly growing labour market requirements and better self-improvement and self-expression opportunities; however, for half of our citizens their age has become a barrier, as they believe they are too old to study. Lithuania still holds on to a negative attitude towards older people pursuing knowledge. In some cases, in fact, particular social groups are being discriminated against.

In fact, the attitude that only a competent employee is able to achieve good results, contribute to the competitive advantage of the company and, most importantly, to gain a feeling of personal value and self-confidence, is already becoming dominant. However, it is generally public institutions rather than private employers, who pay most attention to the training of their employees. This is a huge problem, since private companies employ almost 70% of all workers. Constantly developing technologies and competitive challenges call for qualified employees, and this must be an on-going process.

Consequently, funding becomes an extremely important issue. I believe that this programme and the aid from the European Union Structural Funds will help in reducing the present differences between the various Member States and the lifelong learning strategy will actually be implemented.

Helga Trüpel, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (DE) Mr President, I, too, will start by thanking Mrs Pack for the superb job she has done with this report. That she is one of this House's really experienced experts on educational policy has already been mentioned, and that is evident from the priorities and emphases that she has added to this report.

Europe is lacking in raw materials – that much is a fact – and so it is all the more important that we should develop the potential in the people who live here. The growth achieved by both China and India is extraordinary, and so is the number of graduates they produce. If Europe is to stand a chance in the globalised economy, we have to do more for education, research and development. I do not actually think that the European budget is focussed on the future; we are still investing too much in traditional agricultural policies and too little in education, development and research.

Previous speakers have already lamented the fact that we are, in this area, budgeting for too little overall, with the derisory figure of one per cent over the next seven years. I find that very disappointing; I really would have liked to see more. We should be aiming at enabling every student in Europe to participate in the Erasmus programme, which represents the big opportunity for young people, for the experience of studying in different Member States will make real Europeans of them; they will derive lifelong benefit from what they learn there and, of course, carry it over into their circles of friends and acquaintances and into working life. That is what makes these experiences so very valuable, not only to them as individuals, but also to society. EUR 200 is, of course, preferable to EUR 150, but it is not exactly what we could do with if we are to have a pro-active education policy.

I do, though, think Mrs Pack was right to say that we should start with the young and invest more in them. All the studies show that to be the case. That is why spending more on Comenius, within the context of lifelong learning, is the right thing to do.

Věra Flasarová, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (CS) Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I warmly welcome Mrs Pack's multi-layered approach to drawing up this report. I should like to highlight just a few aspects of the issue.

One of the dangers of the modern world is that people are unable to adapt dynamically because of the narrowly focused and overly specialised nature of education, which gives them a limited worldview and stops them from achieving their potential in the labour market. The world has changed such a great deal that the traditional ideas of getting an education once and once only, guaranteeing long-term employment and continuous progress until retirement, has gone for good. People must be capable of reacting more quickly to the way in which their environment is evolving, and individual European educational programmes should enable them to do this.

Lifelong learning helps people to keep pace with the development of science and technology and makes it easier for them to understand the world in general. Alongside the development of educational programmes, it is necessary to focus on ensuring that lifelong learning is not just a luxury for the chosen few but is accessible to all sections of society, regardless of social status and gender.

Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański, on behalf of the UEN Group. – (PL) Mr President, the purpose of this decision is for Parliament and the Council to set up an integrated programme in the field of lifelong learning, to be implemented in the years 2007-2013. Amongst other things, the programme aims to develop international cooperation between institutions of higher education and schools, and also to promote the mobility of students, staff, pupils and teachers. The programme is composed of four sectoral programmes, namely Comenius for schools, Erasmus for higher education, Leonardo da Vinci for vocational education and training and Grundtvig for adult education.

The original version of the programme's budget has been cut. This has entailed cuts in terms of the quantitative targets for individual components of the programme and also the percentage share of resources. As less funding is now available, many of the actions previously planned will now not be undertaken. These include fostering long and short-term mobility of teachers within the framework of Erasmus, along with study visits and innovative and experimental projects within the framework of the inter-sectoral programme. Pursuant to the provisions of the new 2007-2013 Financial Perspective, the budget allocation for the implementation of the lifelong learning programme has been almost halved. It has been cut from the EUR 13.62 billion originally planned to EUR 7.171 billion. This reduction in the programme's budget implies that there will be fewer grants available for projects and that there will also be fewer opportunities for poorer students to study at foreign institutions.

In conclusion, I should like to thank Mrs Pack very much for all her work.

Andrzej Tomasz Zapalowski, on behalf of the IND/DEM Group. – (PL) Mr President, the lifelong learning programme is an excellent venture, and the aims enshrined in its provisions are all relevant. This programme is intended to implement one of the pillars of the Union, namely the common social policy. However, as has been the case with similar excellent ventures, the programme has fallen prey to funding cuts.

One of the provisions of this programme involves supporting the contribution of learning to social cohesion, which should lead to improved relationships between societies in our Community. I put it to you, ladies and gentlemen, how can this be brought about when the new Member States are still bound by the transitional periods set for access to the labour market, and therefore denied equal access to knowledge and technology? Another key aim is also undermined, namely that of increasing competitiveness, mobility and innovation in the aforementioned market. How can there be talk of such values when there is no mutual recognition of the equivalence of final diplomas, thus putting individuals at a disadvantage at the very start of their career?

In conclusion, I would point out that, once again, a splendid and noble programme is deemed worthwhile and its provisions and aims are implemented mainly in the countries of the old Union.

Erna Hennicot-Schoepges, (PPE-DE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, Mrs Pack has acted as the driving force behind the development of the programmes that we are discussing today, with the integrated action programme. Without her passion, we would never have made the progress that we have made.

Erasmus is certainly the most popular programme. Despite the financial increase, the new version will still depend on general mobility conditions such as the transferability of grants, social security and the recognition of qualifications, too. While mobility does not guarantee that a person's studies will be integrated into his or her curriculum vitae, taking the Erasmus route means that he or she is likely to

have to study for an extra year. Commissioner, I should like to ask you where in the Bologna process is the inclusion of an Erasmus year?

As regards the Leonardo programme, the mobility of employees undertaking vocational training is of prime concern to the craft-based industries and small and medium-sized enterprises, which also need to be made aware of mobility-related issues. Making our workforce mobile: that is what the Leonardo programme could do. To that end, the Commission should embark on campaigns to raise the awareness of businesses and should also ensure that the available budget is actually spent.

I should like to point out that our ancestors used readily to move around. Artists and craftsmen were the ones who travelled the most; it was they who moved society forward. Cross-border trade is the best way to make our fellow citizens forget about borders and to prove that we can do better.

Finally, I shall not stop repeating, Commissioner, that, given the importance that Mr Barroso attaches to culture, we should have the courage to make it a European policy. Indeed, those who want a larger budget must be able to submit political projects that are important and that are recognised as being important. A revival of the debate on the best means of taking the Commission forward would provide a good opportunity for us to speak loudly in favour of such a policy.

Maria Badia i Cutchet (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to join in congratulating the rapporteur, Mrs Pack, on her good work, and all the members of the Committee on Culture and Education, whose contributions have enriched this text.

I would also, however, like to communicate my concern with regard to the implementation of the lifelong learning programme. I remember how, at the outset, we were all falling over ourselves to improve the system of student mobility in Europe. We all voted in favour of increasing the funds for the Erasmus, Leonardo, Comenius programmes etc., in the conviction that it was a very productive long-term investment. Providing the participants with economic facilities and, at the same time, simplifying the process for being awarded grants, brought us closer to the objectives set in the Lisbon Strategy.

As time passes, however, I am finding it harder to remain optimistic. I note from surveys that fifteen-year-old European schoolchildren have poor reading skills and show a high level of truancy and that many young people do not complete their studies within the time set. In view of this information, I wonder how we are going to deal with the challenges of globalisation. If we are to create a knowledge-based society, sustainable economic development and greater social cohesion, we will have to establish a strong foundation from the outset, and that can only be achieved through effective education. In short, in order to deal with future challenges, it is crucial that we invest more in education.

It is possible to improve the way existing programmes operate and to create new programmes. If we make the effort, the numbers will gradually prove us to be right, but all of us must try to convince the Member States that we need to dedicate more money to education and training.

Šarūnas Birutis (ALDE). – (LT) Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to re-emphasise that the programme being discussed provides citizens with more favourable opportunities for on-going training and becoming active participants of the knowledge-based society.

I think that the initial version we have returned to of the document proposed by the European Commission will enable us to more smoothly implement a programme integrating all the initiatives that are now operational in the area of education. A unified system will ensure clarity and, most importantly, the possibility of avoiding redundancy in certain areas.

Those states that are able to participate in lifelong learning programmes have experienced obvious benefits from this European Union initiative. For example, the *Erasmus*, *Leonardo da Vinci* or *Jean Monnet* programmes are well known to the Lithuanian people, indicating that European Union initiatives in the area of education are being implemented quite effectively.

I hope you will support my contention that the lifelong learning programme is of vital importance, both for promoting competition and entrepreneurship and in building a shared sense of European citizenship based on the values of the European Union, such as mutual understanding and respect for human rights and democracy.

Jerzy Buzek (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, I fully support the programme for lifelong learning in the Union.

We are always saying that Europe has to become more competitive. Competitiveness must be built on the foundations of the knowledge triangle – education, research and innovation. Education is crucial to this structure. The Union's educational systems are the competence of the Member States, but a better-integrated European programme on education is very welcome. We now have the Seventh Research Framework Programme and a new Community programme on competitiveness and innovation was launched very recently. The angles of the Union's knowledge triangle are therefore well established. Questions arise as to the sides of the triangle: are these programmes adequately connected and do they support each other? We must not think in terms of three separate programmes, three distinct key aims for the European Union, but in terms of a single joint aim, namely a knowledge society.

I value the proposed changes to lifelong learning, such as the amendment of the Leonardo da Vinci programme to facilitate the transfer of innovation, and the amendment of the Grundtvig programme to facilitate the innovational mobility of older learners. All too often, however, the programme introduces innovative learning methods instead of opening up the field for the innovations themselves and for future researchers. There is no system for recruiting highly talented individuals, particularly participants in the Comenius and Erasmus programmes for young people, and allowing them to continue their development within the framework of the Marie Curie programme. The lifelong learning programme should also be in line with the research priorities of the Seventh Framework Programme. All our actions should be aimed at ensuring the continuity of the knowledge triangle from school right up to the European Institute of Technology.

I congratulate the Commissioner on this programme, and urge him to ensure that these comments are taken into account during its implementation.

Ján Figel, *Member of the Commission*. (SK) I am sure there is no need for me to add much; we should rather do more to implement what we have already agreed upon several times. Education is more than a period in one's life. We can deal with the issues of employment and growth through a much more coherent approach, which is what the Lisbon Strategy is all about. Education cannot be isolated from research and innovation (which involves creativity and the promotion of knowledge). It is also necessary to deploy knowledge practically, and in innovative ways.

I think that the Commission is heading in that direction. The proposal to set up the European Institute of Technology provided evidence of this at last week's summit in Lahti. There is further evidence of it in the whole programme and the policy of putting education at the heart of the Lisbon Strategy, and aiming to shape Europe and generate knowledge for growth and employment.

The four pillars of the lifelong programme have very inspiring names – Comenius (Jan Amos Comenius), Leonardo da Vinci, Erasmus of Rotterdam and Grundtvig. In my opinion this is an important signal. We will not be able to solve all financial problems through this programme, but we can provide a lot of inspiration, in particular for measures at national level so that education, which is within the competence of the Member States, becomes the focus of national approaches or of the Lisbon Strategy. There will then be much more money available, and we would certainly appreciate having more allocations for mobility and cooperation in the area of education.

I think that the upcoming 20th anniversary of Erasmus, the most popular programme in the European Union, is a great opportunity to evaluate the situation, but also a challenge for us to do more together for education, young people and the future.

With regard to visas and cooperation with other countries, as of 1 January 2007 Member States should implement or transpose the visa facilitation decision for students, lecturers and researchers throughout the European Union, with the exception of the UK, Ireland and Denmark.

In response to whether we need harmonisation or some other kind of policy, I would say that what we need is complementarity and compatibility rather than the harmonisation of our education systems, and this is gradually being achieved through measures such as the Bologna Process.

We are constantly calling not only for more investment but also for better investment. The first priority is for 'better investment' whereas 'more investment' comes second. 'Better' also means raising public-private funds. This often takes the form of mobility or education sponsorship on the part of businesses and industry.

So much for my reflections in response to some of the points that have been raised. May I once again thank the rapporteur, Mrs Pack, the entire committee and all those who contributed for their high level of consensus and commitment.

President. The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Wednesday at 12.30 p.m.

Written statement (Rule 142)

Alyn Smith (Verts/ALE). – Mr President, I congratulate our rapporteur for her work in steering this important report through Parliament. Next year Erasmus celebrates its 20th anniversary, having been brought into being by one of my predecessors, Winnie Ewing, when she was chair of the Culture and Education Committee, and there is much to thank her for. Since 1987, over 1.2 million students have completed exchange courses at universities outside their own countries. In the 2004/2005 academic year, over 144 000 students took advantage of the opportunity provided by the Erasmus programme to continue their studies in a country other than their own. The benefit and invaluable cultural and linguistic experience this provides for students is second to none. As a former Erasmus exchange student myself, I can vouch for that.

Erasmus has been one of the successes of the EU in demonstrating its relevance. But while the uptake for students coming to Scotland has been encouraging, with 2163 during 2004/2005, the number of Scottish students going abroad to study has been far less, standing at 1018. I want to see more Scots taking part in this programme and benefiting from the opportunity to study abroad. Erasmus is one way in which we can encourage our young people to have an international outlook.

Annex – Commission statement

The Commission should like to draw the legislative authority's attention to the need for the financial package mentioned in the basic act to be expressed at current prices, and for this to be done no later than its final publication in the OJ. This corresponds to the standard budgetary practice and will help to ensure, with all due transparency, that the legislative authority's decision is complied with. For the 'Action programme in the field of lifelong learning', the sum at current prices amounts to EUR 6 970 million.

19. "Europe for Citizens" programme (2007-2013) (debate)

President. The next item is the recommendation for second reading (A6-0342/2006) on behalf of the Committee on Culture and Education, on the Council common position (C6-0316/2006 2005/0041(COD)) for adopting a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council establishing for the period 2007-2013 the programme 'Europe for Citizens', to promote active European citizenship (09575/1/2006) (Rapporteur: Mr Takkula).

Hannu Takkula (ALDE), rapporteur. – (FI) Mr President, Commissioner, I would first like to thank everyone who has been involved in the deliberations on this report, especially the shadow rapporteurs and members of other committees who have made their comments. I wish in particular to thank my esteemed colleagues and coordinators, Mrs Pack and Mrs Prets, because, being a member of the smallest group, I would not have been able to produce this report without your support. I am also grateful for the excellent team spirit and cooperation which you have shown in our committee.

The programme consists of four areas of action. The first is a Europe of active citizens, which includes town-twinning and citizens' projects. Town-twinning has already proven to be a success story, and I hope that this success story will continue and go from strength to strength with this programme. Furthermore, the citizens' projects are very important. One central idea in establishing this programme was that the European Union could indeed have a grassroots programme which would not be elitist and which the people, the citizens of the European Union, could think of as theirs.

The second area of action is active civil society in Europe. This could help provide structural support for EU public policy research organisations (think-tanks) and for NGOs at European level, as well as support for projects coordinated by these NGOs. I think it is vitally important that open adult education centres and vocational colleges, non-degree-based organisations, have a bigger role, because these are just the sort of organisations that are best at reaching out to ordinary people at grassroots level. This

way, this programme will hopefully also open its doors to people all over the European Union, and they will feel it is something relevant to them.

The third area of action is 'Together for Europe', supporting high visibility events, studies and information and dissemination tools. As we know, it is important to promote the European Union in the appropriate way and to bring it closer to people, because there are shortcomings too in the area of information and communications. People feel that they are a long way from the decision-making process, and therefore they feel that European Union programmes are remote. We have much work to do to bring the Union closer to the people by providing information and through various events.

A fourth area of action was added to the programme, and this is the preservation of Active European Remembrance. There was intense discussion on this in our committee. We finally hit on the idea that, when this action was transferred from the Culture 2000 Programme, it was just this memory of Nazism and Stalinism that we needed to preserve, so that no horrors like this can ever occur again in Europe. We think that it is very important that future generations are also able to understand what the European identity is, what peace is, and what stability is, and it is therefore also important to guarantee active remembrance.

It would also obviously have been desirable for the budget to be up-to-date when this programme was being put together. We know, however, that for some reason there is not as yet enough sympathy in the European Parliament, or at least not in the European Commission or the Council, for cultural projects, or enough appreciation of their importance. I myself believe that culture and our civil society create a basis on which a dynamic and thriving economy can also be built. We on the Committee on Culture and Education, being cultured people, should ensure that the budget will be more effective in the future. This time we were obliged to some extent to cut it from the Commission's original proposal under pressure from the Council, but I hope that the programme can be got underway here, and that it will become a success story.

Finally, I would like to express my gratitude for the cooperation and general understanding that has been reached between the Commission, the Council and Parliament. I am especially glad that NGOs, open universities and amateur sports clubs have been included in the programme. I hope that when this programme starts in early 2007 it might become another success story.

(Applause)

Ján Figel, *Member of the Commission*. Mr President, not more than half a year ago, I was here speaking on the same programme, asking for a quick agreement. At that time the proposal had a different title: 'Citizens for Europe'. Now, after half a year we are here, very close to the final decisions with the new title, 'Europe for Citizens', coming from your input; but I think this was a remarkable shift, both in consensus but also in the readiness to progress towards finalisation.

This programme is very important for citizens and civic society organisations. I am very satisfied with the quality and intensity of negotiations between institutions that have taken place on the programme. I would like especially and sincerely to thank the Committee on Culture for its efforts to accelerate the procedure, and the rapporteur, Mr Takkula, for his excellent work and cooperation.

Those steps in the interinstitutional procedures were accompanied by informal trilateral meetings. They resulted in a compromise acceptable to all three institutions in the form of four amendments on which you will vote on tomorrow.

Concerning the budget, we agreed to allocate an amount of EUR 190 million at 2004 prices, which means EUR 215 million at current prices. This is less than the Commission's original proposal but it still enables us to retain the structure of the programme, only reducing the number of outputs.

I would like once more to express my regrets about the introduction by the Council of a supplementary step to the comitology procedure. This will slow down the selection procedure for certain categories of projects. However, with a view to reaching a quick agreement, the Commission accepted the position taken by the Council and supported by you. Today you are envisaging adopting four amendments: two of them concern the budget breakdown between different actions; one is technical and will accelerate the entry into force of the programme; and the last one adds the promotion of tolerance to the objectives of the programme. That is fully in line with the programme's philosophy.

Let me repeat that the Commission fully supports the agreed compromise and therefore encourages Parliament to adopt those four amendments. If you adopt them, the Council has committed itself rapidly to adopt the whole agreed text and the programme should then be able to enter into force by 1 January 2007.

I can assure you that once the programme is adopted the Commission will take all necessary steps to implement it as efficiently and as effectively as possible. Indeed, my services are already actively preparing its entry into force. We will work in close cooperation with the Programme Committee and in close dialogue with the organisations involved in this programme.

I would like to finish by repeating what Mr Takkula said, i.e. that culture forms the basis for our societies, which is why we defined the legal base for this programme in combination with the culture-related Article 151 of the Treaty. It was the subject of many discussions, but I believe it is the right proposal and the right line to take, for future culture and citizenship to go hand in hand towards responsibility on all levels of our public and private engagement in our lives, as well as in the spheres of enlargement and the future of our Union.

Rolf Berend, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, let me start with a word of thanks to the rapporteur, Mr Takkula, for this very fine report on ‘Europe for Citizens’. Now that the overall amount has been reduced to EUR 190 million from the EUR 235 million that this House and the Commission originally agreed on, that is the amount with which, for lack of any understanding on the Council’s part, we are obliged to manage.

We support the rapporteur’s two amendments, one of which aims for a 2% decrease, and the other at an increase by the same amount. We are particularly glad to see that the new Action 4, which has to do with memorials, keeps alive the memory not only of the crimes committed by the Nazi regime but also of those committed under Stalin.

I would, however, Commissioner, like to address one other problem, one that has been raised by those who benefit from the programmes and by those who run them. This House wishes to point out that its resolution of 5 April 2006 referred to both conferences and seminars, and the bilateral seminars – working parties and meetings of experts – are essential components of the partnership effort in terms of qualifying the programmes and those who work on them, and grants should be available for them in the same way that they are for multilateral conferences.

Furthermore, this House takes it as read that the Commission will, in the course of the applications procedure, accord equal treatment to local authorities and civil society organisations, and the object of that is that the Commission should be prevented from doing as had originally been planned and imposing additional requirements – such as guarantees and special bank sureties – on too many other social organisations, which they would find it difficult, indeed impossible, to meet.

Emine Bozkurt, *on behalf of the PSE Group.* – (NL) Mr President, first of all, I should like to thank the rapporteur, Mr Takkula, for his excellent report and for his good cooperation. I welcome this programme with open arms, for it will benefit the public, us in this House and the European Union as a whole. After all, the Europe for Citizens programme finally indicates that the citizens should not be there for Europe but the other way round. Europe is there for its citizens. Only when the European Union obtains concrete results for its citizens can we count on support for this European Union. Needless to say, we can try to enhance the bonding process between our citizens and the EU by organising exchange programmes and events, but it is always more successful if the citizens come up with their own initiatives, which is where this programme comes in.

I am grateful to Mr Takkula, to my fellow Members in all the groups, as well as to the Commission and Council, for the good working relationship we have enjoyed in dealing with this dossier. There is, however, something that I need to get off my chest. The European Union has recognised that there is a chasm between its citizens and the institutions. This programme is in recognition of this and tries to make amends in this respect. Why then, have we skimmed on this programme and other vitally important programmes? Talking about citizen involvement without injecting money into it is, of course, a waste of time.

I will in any event do all I can to promote this programme to people in the Netherlands. I hope that other Members will bring this programme to people’s attention in their own countries too. If we all made a

huge success of it, next time, the Council and the Commission may have no choice but to increase the budget of the Europe for Citizens programme to an acceptable level.

There is no doubt that the Europe for Citizens programme can become a success. In Europe, there are many people who are prepared to actively work on Europe's integration. This programme allows them to take part in the process and get organising. It is, therefore, enormously important for the European citizens to have the sense of being involved in the EU's development. That is what this programme makes possible. My appeal to the citizens of Europe is therefore that they seize that opportunity.

Marian Harkin, on behalf of the ALDE Group. – Mr President, I congratulate the rapporteur on his excellent work in producing this report on the promotion of active European citizenship.

Many of us who genuinely care about the future of Europe believe that active citizenship will play an important role in the continuation of the European project. The EU is a work in progress; progress from centuries of division to a time of mutual cooperation. That mutual cooperation is for the benefit of all our citizens. Otherwise the EU has no *raison d'être*.

It is also important to understand that this mutual cooperation is not just between Member States. That is certainly important, but it is not enough. There must also be mutual cooperation between our citizens so that they too are an integral part of the process – not as an audience, but as actors on the stage; not as observers but as participants. We are looking here at participative democracy alongside representative democracy – sometimes an uneasy alliance on both sides, but one we must promote because otherwise we just pay lip service to our citizens, and they deserve much better than that.

I am pleased to see the inclusion of non-formal education programmes in this report. Perhaps we might extend that to the recognition of volunteering activities through the provision of a European volunteering passport. Volunteering plays an important role in active citizenship because many of the activities earmarked in the report, such as town twinning, civil society organisations and amateur sports organisations, involve volunteer participation. Intercultural dialogue must also be supported. All of us have our prejudices, our misconceptions about others, and it is only by engaging with each other that we begin to recognise each other's humanity; and that is the foundation of mutual cooperation and mutual respect.

My only regret is that the funding provided will not be sufficient to accomplish the huge and important task we have set ourselves. However, I agree with the previous speaker: let us roll up our sleeves and get on with it.

Helga Trüpel, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (DE) Mr President, I, too, should like to start by thanking the rapporteur, Mr Takkula.

I am delighted that there has been a rethink in the naming of the programme, originally called 'Citizens for Europe', and that it is now called 'Europe for Citizens'. This means that the onus is on Europe, too, and that it must reach out to the public. The aim is to reach and involve citizens, to meet them locally, to take them seriously, to listen to their concerns and to win them over to Europe and the debate on its future.

Town-twinning activities are a good means of contributing to this. A general discussion on European globalisation blues will also form part of the debates within this programme, however, as will the question as to how we can strike a balance between excessive neoliberalism on the one hand, and statism or excessive protectionism on the other.

I should like to mention a further point, namely the inclusion of extermination camps – be they Stalinist or Nazi – in this programme. I believe that a further reappraisal of the history of this particular European totalitarianism, which destroyed Europe and brought great unhappiness to the whole world, is politically appropriate. Learning the appropriate lessons from this and building a genuinely open and democratic Europe remains one of our challenges for the future. The programme is also intended to make a contribution to this.

Miguel Portas, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (PT) We share the concerns and the objectives of the 'Europe for Citizens' programme and accordingly voted in favour. The truth of the matter is that this European Union is short of neither 'Europe for businesses' nor 'Europe for the market'. Far from it, in fact. We have had far too little 'Europe for citizens', too little support for a European citizenship with an active voice in the major themes on which we are building our shared territory. In this area,

decisions lack courage, laws are thin on the ground and support is virtually non-existent. This programme alone will not in itself reverse this situation. We support the programme, but we are also critical of its budgetary weakness. A 60% cut on the original proposal is clearly excessive, but very much in keeping with the restrictive and outdated rule whereby all programmes in the field of education, culture and youth are underfunded. Chronic underfunding is not the result of any scarcity of resources, but of a deliberate policy strategy on the type of Union that the Member States want to construct, which resurfaced when the financial perspective for 2007-2013 was adopted, to the detriment of areas such as culture.

There is no such thing as effective policy without adequate funding. Words and good intentions are all well and good, but the policy must be much more than this.

Mr President, Mr Takkula, we agree with you as regards your preference for transparency in granting funding for projects. This should be based on clear criteria with open application procedures and impartial adjudicators. Unfortunately, this has not been the case. We are pleased to note that we will gradually see an end to the scandal of funding being granted outside the application system to organisations that place themselves above fair competition and are still receiving substantial long-term funding. This damages the Union's image. The fact that these organisations are often associated with important personalities who made their careers in the European institutions only makes matters worse. I come from a southern European country and I must say I warmly welcome the fresh air blowing in from the north in relation to this issue.

Lastly, as regards the new line of funding on memorials to dictatorships, I should like once again to express our complete opposition to the criteria that have been followed. The exclusion of memorials to dictatorships that for decades oppressed various peoples in the south of Europe shows a lack of respect for the thousands of victims of these dictatorships. Without the victory over the fascist regimes of southern Europe, the borders of the EU would be quite different today, and its territory smaller. The exclusion of these dictatorships, and of the memory of them, sends out the wrong message to the citizens, suggesting, as it does, that there are some dictatorships whose memory should not be forgotten and others that are not so bad or even acceptable. It also sends out the wrong message to the world. A pragmatic attitude to dictatorships is indicative of double standards, and poisons and discredits the EU's external policy. A criterion based on unambiguously democratic principles would have been better than a mediocre, mean-spirited criterion that was unable to look beyond the scarcity of funding.

Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański, on behalf of the UEN Group. – (PL) Mr President, we are all playing our part in the creation of the European Union, but we bring with us our own particular outlook, experience and observations. These make it clear that, although we have much in common, there is also much that divides us.

Many European citizens are sceptical about the Union and dubious about European integration. As a result, whilst some are seeking ways of rapidly bringing about European integration, others feel that if this process has to take place at all, it must do so slowly and be carefully thought through. They feel it should be a long-term process that respects national traditions and takes account of contemporary experience.

I welcome the fact that the Europe for Citizens Programme contains many of the suggestions made by Members of this House, in particular in the part concerning memorials to the victims of dictatorship. Financial support is available for places linked to the Nazi regime and also for memorials to the victims of Stalinist crimes. Much was said during the debate on the programme about how little the citizens identify with the process of European integration. A distinction was rightly drawn between citizens of the old, new and future Member States. Insufficient consideration was given, however, to the important fact that, while one group aims to create a single 'one size fits all' European model of national identity as quickly as possible, another inclines towards a Europe of nations, where the sense of national identity would be respected. The latter group would determine common cultural values on the basis of cultural diversity and dialogue.

Witold Tomczak, on behalf of the IND/DEM Group. – (PL) Mr President, the draft document on 'Europe for Citizens' is an example of detailed wishful thinking. Someone dreamt up the idea that if more money were invested in awareness raising, informing and including Europeans in Union events, the citizens would be brought closer to the Union and involved in European integration.

A similar argument was adduced in the Soviet sphere of influence, where our lives were dominated by the single orthodox Socialist ideology. It was believed that pouring money into events would guarantee

the development of so-called Socialist awareness. The Soviet system tried hard to create a single orthodox Soviet identity in the minds of Russians, Ukrainians, Georgians and others. Nations were deprived of their right to their own distinctive identity.

Someone has now decided that it will be easier to integrate Europeans if the relevant document is entitled 'Europe for Citizens' instead of 'Citizens for Europe'. We have seen all this before. Soviet citizens were not supposed to be for the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union was supposed to be for them. What was actually the case was that, for Lenin, Stalin and others, people thinking and acting as Russians, Poles or Hungarians were a hindrance. People brought up in Soviet multiculturalism were more malleable and more amenable to becoming slaves in the service of the empire.

We would do well to remember that the genuine freedom of individuals and nations arises out of national cultures where it has its source. That is why this document should be consigned to the dustbin along with the legacy of the former Soviet Union.

Roger Helmer (NI). – Mr President, our sense of citizenship, like our sense of identity, arises from our history, our culture, our language and our experience of life. It comes from the bottom up. This citizenship programme is top-down. It seeks to create a sense of citizenship where none exists. As such, it is doomed to fail and it is wholly improper.

I was born a British citizen. I never asked to be a European citizen. I do not want European citizenship and I totally reject and repudiate it. The European Constitution, which incorporates the concept of EU citizenship, has been roundly rejected in France and Holland, and it would be rejected if it were voted on in the United Kingdom. The promotion of this failed concept is therefore highly contentious. We are using taxpayers' money to promote one side of a hotly disputed debate, and that is wrong, undemocratic and disgraceful. I call on colleagues to reject this report out of hand.

Christopher Beazley (PPE-DE). – Mr President, it is a very important achievement to have a common position adopted by the Council on this 'Europe for Citizens' programme and I congratulate the rapporteur, Mr Takkula, on his work and dedication and, in particular, for improving the scope of the programme.

I want to dwell on two aspects of the programme: town twinning and the memorials to the victims of the twin dictatorships of Hitler and Stalin. I would urge Commissioner Figel' to coordinate his work with that of his colleague, Commissioner Wallström, who is responsible for information and public relations, in order to maximise the impact of this extremely important report and programme.

Firstly, on the town-twinning movement, I could not disagree more with the previous speaker. In my own country there are town-twinning associations which have existed for 50 years and others which have been newly founded. I wish that the Commissioners – because they are the only people who can do it – would give fair, free and open publicity to the dedication and voluntary work of these organisations. To hear in my own county town of Hertford, the German, French, British and European anthems sung by local citizens and by school children was infinitely more eloquent than the absurd anti-European propaganda that we are given to digest in much of our popular press. We are in a battle for the hearts and minds of public opinion and we cannot allow the sceptics simply to have the best tunes. We have got the best tune, but we have to proclaim it.

Secondly, on the memorials, I am delighted that Mr Takkula has included the victims of Stalinist crimes, because half our European Union was subject to that dictatorship, and just imagine the disbelief of new citizens of the European Union that their suffering should be neglected, whereas those who suffered from Hitler's Third Reich should be commemorated.

Therefore, I commend this report and this programme to Parliament and the entire European Union and let us hope that this time we win the argument.

Gyula Hegyi (PSE). – Mr President, Hungary has commemorated the 50th anniversary of the 1956 revolution. Old women and men remember the revolutionary events they witnessed, and young people try to image what happened 50 years ago when the anti-Stalinist revolution united the Hungarians, the reformed communists and the democrats. But some thousand extreme right-wing rioters changed everything last night. They attacked the police, burned down shops, some of them threw stones and bottles at a synagogue, shouting anti-Semitic slogans under the banner of the Hungarian Nazi movement.

These tragic events show us how important it is to remember, and to allow us to remember, the tragedies and crimes of the 20th century. Mr Takkula's report rightly calls upon us to commemorate the victims of the Nazi and Stalinist regimes. But it is not enough to commemorate: we have to combat present-day extremist ideologies as well. Stalinism is over, thank God; but the danger of the neo-Nazi extremists is still alive. Every democratic party has to condemn extreme right-wing ideologies and violence. We have to learn from the lesson of the Weimar Republic. The smallest concession to the extreme right could lead to huge tragedies.

Maria da Assunção Esteves (PPE-DE). – *(PT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the Eurobarometer data are extremely worrying. Most EU citizens are unfamiliar with the Union's institutional system. The Commission's role is seen as either vague or very vague. The Council is virtually unknown as an institution. The citizens' perceptions are extremely muddled. Many citizens are incapable of expressing a considered opinion on Europe. There is one salient fact running through these data: the citizens want more information and have chosen television as the best means to receive that information.

We have seen that theoretical or bland citizenship, some vague feeling of belonging, makes Europe weaker. Europe is viewed more as an abstraction than an important presence in our lives.

What we need is not theoretical or bland citizenship, but strong, practical citizenship, a feeling of loyalty, a feeling that Europeans can identify with a Community whose destiny is encapsulated in its universal values. Without this feeling of loyalty and identification, no political project can succeed.

Citizenship is the biggest challenge facing a post-national society such as Europe. European citizenship is a product of reason, not of tradition. It needs to be constructed; it is not born spontaneously. This is a new political era, one characterised by sharing and by new forms of governance. It is indeed a time in which the sovereignty of States has shifted to a sovereignty of people.

Be that as it may, how ironic is it that the policy does not encourage people to identify with a project that places them at the centre?

The Citizens for Europe Programme does not provide an adequate budget or an incisive enough information strategy. Publicity about the institutions – especially on television – showing the institutions and the European project must not be delayed any further.

Explaining Europe is vital in forming a feeling for Europe.

Ljudmila Novak (PPE-DE). – *(SL)* The greatest achievement of the European Union to date has been guaranteeing peace and coexistence amongst the nations of Europe. However, critics of the European Union frequently complain that the work carried out by European institutions is too expensive and too remote from its citizens.

The 'Europe for Citizens' programme offers new initiatives that will help to bring European citizens closer together, including those who are not enrolled in any type of formal education but who wish to gain new knowledge and experience and forge contacts with other citizens of the European Union. Participation in this programme is open to twin towns, so the programme will also be accessible to the kind of people who do not take part in major European Union projects every day. However, indirect contact and personal experience can contribute appreciably to an understanding of the Union, as I have noticed when I have met groups from Slovenia who are visiting the European Parliament.

Sport, too, has a great power to unify and can communicate across linguistic boundaries. Participation in top-level sport is fast becoming the preserve of an increasingly narrow circle of people. This programme supports international participation by the wider masses. Major projects bring major benefits, but smaller projects bring great pleasure to many individuals.

The programmes will be all the more successful if citizens can access them easily and if they do not have to fill in mountains of forms every time they make an application. Our citizens often become disenchanted with the European Union precisely because they encounter too many administrative obstacles when attempting to secure funding. This is why we must endeavour, when offering worthwhile programmes, to streamline procedures and to ensure greater awareness of such funds and easier access to them, at both European and national level.

Ján Figel, *Member of the Commission*. (SK) I would like to thank you for all your contributions and particularly for the commitment you have shown concerning the importance of working together as fellow citizens of the EU when dealing with certain issues or ideas.

The programme itself constitutes the legal basis for implementation and will define the conditions that the Commission too will be required to meet. It is important that these conditions be known and implemented as soon as possible. Parliament will be involved through the Steering Committee and programme evaluation.

As regards voluntary work and improvements in the recognition of informal education, we are interested in, and are striving for, progress in these areas, particularly from the perspective of young people. This will be done through the Youth Pass, which should add greater transparency and value to voluntary work.

I agree that it is necessary to raise awareness of the results achieved so far, and of the successes and the nature of this cooperation, particularly, for example, in the area of cooperation between towns and cities. More than 10 000 municipalities in the EU are cooperating under the civic programme. Three weeks ago we awarded 11 golden stars for the best projects – those which are inspiring and which help real people solve real problems in towns and cities across the EU. Such projects might be more widely copied if people were made more aware of them. In this respect, I agree with Mr Beazley.

The programme will also provide opportunities for special events. I would like to refer, for example, to last year's celebrations of the 25th anniversary of the Polish Solidarity Movement that were funded from a special budget line and heading. It will be possible to implement this approach over the next seven years using the Citizenship Programme.

In conclusion, as well as a 'business-friendly' or 'market-friendly' Europe, we also have a real need for a 'citizen-friendly' Europe that is both well-disposed and helpful to its citizens, having as its foundations civil society and a certain degree of maturity. I would also like to emphasise that the name of the programme is but one side of the coin, as the relationship between 'citizens for Europe' and 'Europe for Citizens' is a very important one. This is our space and at the same time it serves us. We need to shape and develop this space and to take responsibility for it.

Once again, I would like to thank the rapporteur and the entire Parliament for a very constructive approach to the programme.

President. The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Wednesday at 12.30 p.m.

Written statement (Rule 142)

Katalin Lévai (PSE). – (HU) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen. Please allow me to offer my congratulations on the creation of the 'Europe for Citizens' Programme (2007-2013) and to congratulate Mr Takkula on the most recent version of the report.

Europe's institutional, social and political relationships today form a dense network, the threads of which have become even more closely interwoven since enlargement. Forming active European citizens plays a key role in this process, and the presence of such citizens is indispensable in order to ensure the continued democratic and balanced development of the European Union.

If we are to have European citizens who take responsibility for themselves and their society, we need to emphasise what today are considered to be 'lost' values, such as freedom, fairness, tolerance and solidarity, which constitute the fundamental values and cohesive bond of European society. I also consider the balanced integration of citizens to be important, but above all, I believe that we need to foster dialogue between different cultures and worldviews. Only in this way can we work together toward a common goal, shaping our own visions while accepting the differences of others and respecting our diversity. Only mutual understanding, solidarity and a sense of belonging can give the citizens of Europe a sense of identity. I support the efforts to shape a European citizenry based on common values, history and culture.

It is important to promote and celebrate the values and achievements of today's citizens, while not allowing our memories of the past to sink into oblivion. If we keep our common cultural heritage at the forefront, we will strengthen the foundations of our shared future.

In my view, European citizenship means nothing other than taking responsibility for ourselves, our country and the European Union, and freely exercising our rights while respecting the same rights of others. The right balance must also be struck between democratic rights and obligations.

This is a common European citizenship of which I would be pleased to be part.

Annex – Commission statement

The Commission should like to draw the legislative authority's attention to the need for the financial package mentioned in the basic act to be expressed at current prices, and for this to be done no later than its final publication in the OJ. This corresponds to the standard budgetary practice and will help to ensure, with all due transparency, that the legislative authority's decision is complied with. For the programme in question, the sum at current prices amounts to EUR 215 million.

20. Restrictions on the marketing and use of perfluorooctane sulfonates (debate)

President. The next item is the report (A6-0251/2006) by Mr Schlyter, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council (COM(2005)0618 C6-0418/2005 2005/0244(COD)) relating to restrictions on the marketing and use of perfluorooctane sulfonates (amendment to Council Directive 76/769/EEC).

Günter Verheugen, Vice-President of the Commission. (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to start by thanking the rapporteur, Mr Schlyter, for his hard work on this proposal, which has made it possible to reach agreement with the Council at first reading.

This is an important directive. It is concerned with restricting the marketing and use of perfluorooctane sulfonates (PFOS) and related substances. These substances are persistent, bioaccumulative and toxic. They have the potential to cause unacceptable risks to human health and the state of the environment.

The proposed Directive is based on specific risk assessments and impact assessments of possible measures. It takes into account detailed discussions with all interested parties. The Directive prohibits in principle, with very limited derogation, the marketing and use of PFOS and related substances. Derogations are envisaged for essential applications in small quantities, which do not pose any unacceptable risks according to the opinion of the Commission's Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks.

Large-scale uses – for example in the field of textiles and carpets – have already been discontinued by industry, and this Directive will reliably prevent the reintroduction of such uses.

The proposed Directive will not only ensure the protection of human health and of the environment, but also serve to strengthen the internal market, as it introduces Community-wide harmonised rules for the marketing and use of PFOS and related substances.

With regard to the derogations contained in the proposal, I agree that the use of PFOS and related substances should continue to be permitted in photoresists and photographic materials, when plating with hexavalent chromium and other metals, and in hydraulic fluids, as the risks connected with these uses are acceptable since there are no equivalent alternatives and it is not certain that the toxicological profiles of the alternatives are any better.

With regard to fire-fighting foams, I can agree that the marketing and use of new foams should be prohibited and that a period of 54 months should be granted for the continued use of existing stocks.

On the other hand, I am not prepared, at present, to support the extension of the envisaged restrictions to other perfluorinated alkyl compounds such as PFOA, as this would be premature given the absence of a completed risk assessment and of sufficient knowledge of current uses and alternatives, but we can return to this subject.

By way of conclusion, I should like to say that the transformation process has benefited greatly from the close cooperation between Parliament, the Council and the Commission. The Commission can therefore endorse all the compromise amendments proposed by the rapporteur, Mr Schlyter.

Carl Schlyter (Verts/ALE), rapporteur. – (SV) Mr President, I would like to start by thanking all the shadow rapporteurs for their very sound and constructive cooperation. It made it possible to find a solution at first reading together with the Council, which also did some good work on this issue.

This solution improves on the Commission's original proposal, and I am pleased to see that the Commission too is now backing the compromise. PFOS and PFOS-related substances are highly fluorinated and extremely difficult to break down. They are additionally very bioaccumulative. We have become aware that chloro-organic compounds are poisonous and cause problems in the environment and we have observed that bromo-organic compounds are hazardous. Fire retardants pose a bigger threat than the fires they were designed to prevent.

It is now the turn of fluoro-organic compounds. They are extremely stable, and the bond between the fluorine and carbon is the strongest in organic chemistry. The properties of stability and surface activity are what have made PFOS a much sought-after chemical. It has, as the Commissioner says, been used for many years in surface treatment for chemicals and textiles. The largest manufacturer realised the risks posed to its workers and to the consumers of its products. Its workers had high levels of the chemical in their bodies, and it decided to withdraw the PFOS product Scotchguard from the market.

The Commission's aim with this proposal was to prevent the re-introduction of PFOS, but the compromise goes further. We now have tougher concentration regulations and we are setting the limit for preparations at 0.005%. This is reasonable, given that its very properties as a surfactant mean that PFOS is used in low concentrations. If the limit were set at 0.1%, there would be a risk of more applications slipping through the legislative net. The definition of surfaces at 1 microgram per square metre shares the same purpose.

Under the compromise with the Council, PFOS is also prohibited in fire-fighting foams. This is entirely logical. There are already alternatives on the market that do not contain fluoro-organic compounds. It is also appropriate to phase out stocks, and, in the compromise, Parliament has extended this phasing-out period to 54 months. Everyone has a vested interest in hastening the phase-out. The large oil fire in the UK that resulted in millions of litres of water being contaminated with PFOS showed the costs of using PFOS. The only way to destroy PFOS is by high-temperature combustion. Everyone can see for themselves how much work is involved in burning millions of litres of water at high temperature.

Chromium plating is the other big area. In this field, the proposal restricts the use of non-decorative hard chromium-plating using hexavalent chromium as the process implement. This exception, moreover, is to be reviewed after an inventory of existing essential uses, which is to be carried out by the Member States within two years. In this area too there are alternatives, such as bigger, enclosed systems, better ventilation and in the future, I hope, also other processes. As far as other exceptions such as photolithography processes and anti-reflective coating and industrial treatments for photographic film are concerned, the quantities in question are very small. Even so, these exceptions too will cease to apply once alternatives are technically and financially feasible.

I would also like to speak about PFOA, which refers to the acids and salts of the same group of substances. In Germany, many people in the Ruhr area know what it is like to have contaminated water. People now have to take their drinking water from tanker vehicles, which is a costly and unsustainable solution. We can attempt to stop these contaminants by means of the codicil that has been added to the compromise on PFOA, according to which the Commission is to analyse and continuously take stock of progress on alternatives. Once there are reliable alternatives, these will replace PFOA. I believe that we are ahead of our time here. We must get to grips with this matter because the next great environmental issue may be fluoro-organic chemistry and the various forms thereof. This is a first step towards protecting people and the environment from a number of these substances.

I would also point out that this is a first reading agreement and that if Parliament were now to support this compromise, that would also mean that the Council would support it and that we should be ready before REACH enters into force. This agreement would then form an annex to REACH. If we were unable to succeed with this agreement tomorrow, the proposal would simply fall, as REACH would then take over.

Avril Doyle, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Mr President, I hope that we are on the way to a first reading agreement. I should like to thank the rapporteur, Mr Schlyter, for his excellent cooperative work on this report. I was delighted to hear that the Commission agrees with all our rapporteur's compromise amendments. It augurs well, indeed, for a first reading agreement.

Perfluorooctane sulfonates – PFOS – are chlorinated compounds with numerous applications in consumer products such as textiles and paper, are known for their repellent properties, amongst others, and are used daily in many consumer products. They also have some specific industrial applications in products as wide-ranging as microchips, fire-fighting foams, chromium plating and hydraulic fluids used in aviation. These chemical substances are known to be very toxic, persistent and bioaccumulative.

We have achieved several important changes to the draft proposal, which will bring greater protection for human health and the environment, especially in the area where the maximum threshold for the amount of PFOS that can be placed on the market as a substance or preparation has been substantially reduced from the Commission's original proposal.

I welcome the inclusion of PFOA – perfluorooctanic acid – in the scope of this directive. According to a recent OECD survey, the substance has a similar structure and toxicity to PFOS and thus should be phased out accordingly. Industry has voluntarily proposed to limit the use of PFOA by 2014, which in itself is a clear sign that our instincts were right to insist on its inclusion in the legislation.

The changes introduced by this House have improved the proposal, and Mr Schlyter's report is both balanced and objective. The report recognises that limited specific use derogations are needed for critical applications of substances for which no alternative currently exists, for example PFOS is essential in very small quantities in the semi-conductor sector and in hydraulic fluids used in aviation. The fact that the phasing-out of these will be based on a case-by-case review, taking into account new information on details of uses and on safer alternatives, is a constructive and realistic way to encourage the affected industries to actively seek alternatives.

In conclusion, it appears that this piece of legislation will go through under the Finnish Presidency and we can avoid tying these toxic chemicals up in the REACH queue.

Gyula Hegyi, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (HU) I welcome the compromise package drawn up by the Council and the European Parliament, which in many respects tightens the Commission's proposal. It is good to see that Parliament is so united on the question of banning or limiting a dangerous substance.

Health, the protection of the environment and the desire for a healthy life are more important than the narrow interests of industry. There is no longer any doubt as to the problem posed by chemical substances. Stricter regulation is necessary in the area of chemicals, and this is indeed the focus of REACH, which seeks to regulate not merely one particular substance but some 30 000 compounds. As regards today's proposal, it has been scientifically proven that perfluorooctane sulfonate is a hazardous substance. It endangers human health and is a persistent substance, one that does not biodegrade and is bio-accumulative, that is, it builds up in the body's cells. Its use must therefore be restricted.

I consider it an achievement that the substance is being banned in more areas than in the original proposal, and in other areas it can remain in use only during a period of transition. In the case of dangerous fires, fire-fighting foam may continue to be used for some time. If it is a question of saving human lives, then naturally we must use whatever is at hand. Over the longer term, however, it is vital that the chemical be replaced by substances that are not harmful to the human body. I consider it particularly forward-looking that the substitution principle has been built into this directive, which means – as everyone is no doubt aware – that the toxic chemical must be replaced by a different, harmless substance, and that research on and the introduction of such a substance is the responsibility of the manufacturer. Over the longer term, therefore, the use of PFOS will only be permitted where its replacement is impossible, and where it does not come into direct contact with the human body.

I hope that those who will now vote for the substitution principle in this directive will also vote for the substitution principle for other compounds as contained in the REACH directive.

Holger Krahmer, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to start by thanking the rapporteur, Mr Schlyter, for his constructive cooperation. It is well known that the two of us do not always see eye to eye, but I welcome the fact that a vote is to be held tomorrow on a compromise that will enable agreement at first reading.

I also welcome the fact that the compromise disregards a number of the demands made by the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety such as the precipitate inclusion of PFOA without a prior risk assessment. The toxicity of PFOS is undisputed, including by industry. After all, industry took it upon itself to dispense with the use of PFOS in particularly critical applications such as consumer goods.

Some sectors at the top end of the value-added chain, such as the aviation, aerospace and semiconductor industries, cannot dispense with the use of PFOS at present, however. A ban on PFOS or a derogation involving strict time limits would deprive some high-technology sectors of planning security. The Commission proposal already lays down appropriate derogations for this, and it is essential that these be retained until there is a suitable substitute.

The problem with PFOS is not the use of the substance in these sectors, however, but the fact that it is still found in old textiles such as carpets and clothing and reaches the environment via these.

I should like to make some concluding remarks on EU chemicals policy with regard to the forthcoming REACH debate. EU chemicals legislation must strike a balance between the socio-economically appropriate use of certain substances and high environmental standards. As with PFOS, derogations must always be possible where there are no suitable alternatives. After all, the objective of chemicals policy must be the safe, risk-based handling of chemicals rather than the ideological policy of complete chemical bans.

I hope that the Commissioner will remain committed to a sound chemicals policy in future, too.

Jens Holm, on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group. – (SV) Mr President, Commission, ladies and gentlemen, we are about to decide on the restriction of the hazardous and harmful substances perfluorooctane sulphonate (PFOS) and the closely-related perfluorooctanic acid (PFOA).

I am especially pleased that there is such broad support for the sterling work done by my compatriot Mr Schlyter. Good work, Carl!

I think that we need to remember this shared vision when, later this autumn, we take another extremely important decision – both for the environment and for our health – namely that relating to the chemicals legislation known as REACH. I hope that on that occasion we will again see great support across the political spectrum from left to right and from the Commission to the Council of Ministers.

As already mentioned, PFOS is a hazardous substance. It is bioaccumulative, which means that it stays in the environment and our bodies for a long time. A study of people from 17 countries by the World Wide Fund for Nature found that PFOS and six other perfluorinated compounds were present in people's bodies. It is thus high time that there was a restriction. I am therefore pleased to see that Mr Schlyter and an in principle unanimous Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety have tightened up the threshold value for how much PFOS may be in use in the market. I would also have liked to see the committee adding in clearer specifications of dates for when PFOS is to be phased out from the market. Apart from this reservation, this is, in my opinion, an excellent report that I and my group, the Confederal Group of the European United Left/Nordic Green Left, look forward to voting in favour of.

I would like to finish where I began. For Parliament to place restrictions on substances that are hazardous to health and to the environment is a good thing. It is also absolutely wonderful that there is such broad support for these measures. I hope, therefore, that we can keep this in mind when we decide on REACH later this autumn. Let us also, on that occasion, see broad support for powerful legislation on chemicals.

Peter Liese (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I, too, should like to echo the previous speakers' thanks to the rapporteur.

Ladies and gentlemen, imagine you are the mother or father of a young child, and your district health authority tells you the drinking water that you yourself have been drinking for months, even years, is no longer to be used for preparing baby foods or for your children on account of very high concentrations of PFOS. Imagine you are the mayor of a medium-sized town and have to spend several million euro in public funds – taxpayers' and fee payers' money – on removing the PFOS from drinking-water supplies. Then you would certainly have a major problem.

This is what happened a few weeks ago in my electoral region, South Westphalia. We have major problems with PFOS, and the cause does not lie at local level. Instead, we have found that the trail of this massive contamination leads to other Member States – probably Belgium and the Netherlands.

There is a high likelihood, therefore, of problems of the kind currently faced by parents and local-government officials in my region occurring in many other regions of Europe, too, when one looks more closely. For this reason, we must now ascertain the exact cause in this specific case and, in the event that declarations have been altered illegally, we must investigate this. We must also tackle the root of the problem, however, as the concentration is particularly high in this case. This substance has even been found in Antarctica and at the source of the Rhine, where there is no industry whatsoever.

We have to look at this very carefully. That is why I am pleased that we have managed to elaborate and improve the Commission proposal, and that we have deleted a number of unjustified derogations – such as the one for fire-fighting foams, for which there are alternatives. We have now reached a good compromise, and should support it.

Marios Matsakis (ALDE). – Mr President, Commissioner, Mr Schlyter rightly deserves our congratulations for his excellent report, which I fully support. Arguably the most important aspect of this legislative proposal is that the story of PFOS is unfortunately one of shame for EU and international consumer protection, and one that should never be allowed to be repeated. Although PFOS were well known to be persistent bioaccumulative toxic compounds, they were extensively used in numerous consumer products and in various industrial applications for decades. This has resulted in the irreversible contamination of the environment and of both animals and humans.

Let us all hope that the directive under consideration here will be fully implemented as soon as possible, but let us at the same time remember that appropriate legislation will also be needed to deal with the hundreds of other perfluorinated compounds which are also very toxic and which today are more or less freely allowed to poison us and will continue to do so in the foreseeable future.

Thomas Ulmer (PPE-DE). – *(DE)* Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to start by giving my sincere thanks to Mr Schlyter for his report, which shows great commitment. PFOS, a halogenated hydrocarbon, is toxic to humans, and also both carcinogenic and mutagenic.

There are no scientific limit values for this category of substances, only empirical threshold values. These substances are not biodegradable, they are fat soluble and, once produced, they persist almost indefinitely. In addition, once they have been absorbed by the human body, it is virtually impossible for it to eliminate them.

It is highly likely that PFOA has a very similar or identical effect in medical and toxicological terms, even though the body of scientific data on this does not yet have any conclusive evidential value. REACH will probably apply to this, and the substitution principle will play a decisive role, although, personally, I always have reservations about this. For all my enthusiasm for the economy and for value added, as a Christian I do not want to balance value added against human life.

I am alarmed by the values of these chemicals measured in both marine and freshwater fish. Now – rightly and with a clear conscience – we are going further than the original proposal of the Commission and the Council. The threshold value has been lowered massively by almost two powers of ten. The number of derogations for chromium plating has been reduced significantly. Logically, the derogation for fire-fighting foams has been deleted, as unlimited quantities of these can be released into the environment. The derogation for closed systems has been deleted, as it is scarcely possible to prove that these are sealed.

On the whole, I should like to express my thanks for the constructive cooperation I have enjoyed, and above all for the speed at which this issue has been dealt with, since we were able to reach a workable compromise in less than three months.

Günter Verheugen, Vice-President of the Commission. *(DE)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to discuss the issue of PFOA briefly, and then go on to make a very fundamental point.

The final decision has not yet been taken in the matter of PFOA. It was not possible to include a ban on these substances in the Directive, as we are not in possession of a satisfactory risk assessment or an impact assessment. An international risk assessment is being carried out at present at OECD level, however. Naturally, we shall look at the results carefully and make any necessary proposals.

I live in the same German *Land* as the honourable Member Mr Liese and have been following the case he described myself with great interest. All I can say today is that, although the investigations by the German authorities have not been concluded, I have the very strong impression that this is a case of environmental crime, plain and simple. Contrary to the law in force, toxic substances have been introduced into the environment. Whether these Directives could have prevented this is a different story. Nevertheless, I think it important that Mr Liese referred to this case, as it confirms explicitly once more the kind of risks he described.

In a modern industrial society, it is inevitable that we have to live with certain risks. The question as to which risks we consider acceptable and which we do not is one on which we have to keep deciding anew. There is a series of assessment benchmarks that can help us make this decision.

I should like to mention one risk that I do not accept – and here I am speaking as the Commissioner for Industry. I do not accept the argument that we must accept the risk of highly toxic substances in our environment because investments have been made. I do not accept the argument that we must accept such substances because they lead to revenue generation. I do not even accept the argument – even if this does not make me any friends – that we must use these substances so that jobs are not lost. I consider wholly inappropriate this comparison between jobs in industry and the use of toxic substances for which alternatives exist. In situations such as this, the decision can only be to protect human beings and the environment unconditionally from avoidable risks.

This is the line that underlies my policy, at least, on all these issues. The House will notice this when we come to discuss the most important, extensive and modern chemicals legislation in the world – namely REACH – shortly in plenary.

President. The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Wednesday at 12.30 p.m.

21. Third-country anti-dumping, anti-subsidy and safeguard action (debate)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0243/2006) by Mrs Muscardini, on behalf of the Committee on International Trade, on the annual report from the Commission to the European Parliament on third country anti-dumping, anti-subsidy and safeguard action against the Community (2004) (2006/2136(INI)).

Cristiana Muscardini (UEN), rapporteur. – (IT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the 2004 annual report on third-country anti-dumping, anti-subsidy and safeguard action, presented by the Commission services, has uncovered a piece of information that has raised a number of concerns within our parliamentary committee. It appears from the report that there has been an abnormal increase in the number of trade protection cases, involving both traditional users of these measures and more recently developed WTO member states. In many cases, WTO rules and case-law have been partially or completely disregarded, causing damage to Community industry.

For the developed countries, led by the United States, major problems arise as a result of the unilateral and half-hearted application of WTO rules. For some emerging countries, the application of countervailing duties is not intended to counteract illegal practices, but to give their local industries extra protection against European imports. In many cases, the investigating standards are low and raise a number of questions as to their full compliance with WTO rules.

The Commission report relates some of those significant cases, namely the 'Zeroing' case with the United States, the Indian anti-dumping cases, the South American and Austrian farming cases and, in general, the extensive and unfair use of safeguards. In many of the cases brought against the European Community, the Community has succeeded in obtaining a satisfactory settlement for resolving the disputes within the WTO.

Nevertheless, a success such as that often comes too late, and irreparable damage is done to European industry. Faced with the picture presented to us by the Commission in its report, the Committee on International Trade could have acted on instinct and suggested adopting the same methods and behaviour as those trade partners that violate the anti-dumping, anti-subsidy and safeguard rules, but it has not done so. We are in fact convinced that respect for the trade rules established at international level and within a multilateral framework is the mainstay of economic growth and, more generally, of the peaceful relationship between nations. Two wrongs never make a right. Having established that, we should like

to reaffirm that the rules must be applied and that, if they are not applied, corresponding sanctions must be swiftly imposed in order to guarantee that the law is upheld. If they are not swiftly applied, the damage will be irreparable.

In defence of the law and of that sector of European industry that feels unfairly affected by unlawful measures, we call on the Commission to take a firm stand in pursuing the WTO negotiations, which are aimed at making other WTO members apply trade protection measures in a less arbitrary way, and to act as the promoter of actions aimed at having the decisions of the WTO dispute settlement body applied more swiftly and effectively. These points should be included in the Doha Development Agenda if – as we hope – these negotiations are resumed.

We therefore call on the Commission to accord due importance to this matter as part of the initiatives aimed at increasing the external competitiveness of European industry, such as were recently announced by Mr Mandelson before the Committee on International Trade.

Finally, we recommend that the Commission refrain from giving preferential or special treatment to those trade partners that repeatedly fail to comply with WTO rules and case-law, giving rise to serious economic consequences for European industry.

The Committee on International Trade is of the opinion that, when faced with serious situations, we cannot remain completely passive. If we want to gain the citizens' support for the new international trade rules, we need to strive for greater transparency, consistency and respect for the law on the part of all the actors, by implementing measures ranging from border controls to the application of common sanctions against those who trade in counterfeit or illegal goods on European soil.

We can associate the conclusions of this report with the recent Commission initiative in favour of a reform of the European Community's anti-dumping and anti-subsidy policy. The aim of this reform is to restrict the use of these instruments by the Commission as part of the efforts to ensure that the Community interest is looked at more carefully and more extensively.

Peter Mandelson, *Member of the Commission*. Mr President, I would like to thank the rapporteur, Mrs Muscardini, and the Committee on International Trade for the excellent work that they have done on this important issue.

The European Union is a major exporter worldwide and this leaves us exposed to trade defence actions by third countries. When such actions are taken in compliance with WTO rules, we cannot and should not complain, and we do not. However, that is not always the case and these actions can easily become a serious and unjustified impediment to our legitimate market access opportunities.

Therefore, we must closely monitor third-country actions against our exports and intervene to minimise the negative impact of such actions on our companies. And we should certainly be vigilant. Whenever possible we favour the diplomatic route, which is the quicker and the most efficient way to solve those issues when we have partners who wish to solve them. But when diplomacy fails, we do not hesitate to resort to WTO panels, as it is our right to do.

Both the diplomatic and the litigation approaches have met with notable successes. Take, for example, the Indian cases mentioned in the report. Diplomacy has resulted in the removal of no fewer than 12 measures. We also hope for significant success on the agricultural products cases that you have identified.

It is well known that the United States is a recurrent problem for us in this context. It is pro-free trade, but its use of the trade defence instrument is seen by many as unreasonable on certain issues. This has been particularly marked in the steel sector, where we have been arguing against certain practices for years on a large number of their dumping and subsidy measures. We have had a considerable success in Geneva but, frankly, it is a long hard slog even getting them to implement the remedies to the disputes which they have lost.

We cannot solve everything through diplomacy or litigation. This is why we welcome your support for the proposals we have tabled in the Doha Round to strengthen the rules and the disciplines governing the use of anti-dumping and countervailing measures.

The Round is suspended, something I deeply deplore and regret, but we are fighting hard to get it restarted. For trade defence this would allow us to seek improved disciplines along the lines of the EU

practice in this field, making it more difficult for countries to abuse the system, which I am afraid some are only too prepared to do. We need tightened disciplines in the anti-dumping system.

We need greater transparency in the operation of trade defence instruments. We need less arbitrariness on the part of governments. Such behaviour simply discredits the rules. It brings the system into disrepute and it does not reflect credit on the multilateral trade system and its principal institution, the WTO.

We agree with you that the dispute settlement mechanism is an essential feature of the WTO system, which needs protecting, but we are working hard to improve it so that faster remedies can be achieved.

We will take the opportunity of any bilateral trade agreement with third countries to ensure that our partner countries take on specific obligations on the fair use of trade defence instruments. This is not an alternative to strengthening and improving the rules at the WTO. On the contrary, it underpins that. It is a way of getting insurance in place, so that we can use all available methods to bring reason and discipline to the operation of these instruments. This would particularly apply for those countries that abuse them the most.

Good practices are as important as good rules. That is why the Commission's departments devote a great deal of time and resources to providing technical assistance to third countries that become new users of trade defence instruments. Our aim is that they should apply them in a fair and balanced manner and in accordance with our own high standards.

These efforts seem to bear fruit. The end of 2005 saw a welcome change from the trend of previous years, with a significant fall in the number of trade defence cases initiated against Community exporters, from 33 in 2004 to 19 in 2005. Market access, including a fair and proper implementation of WTO trade defence instruments by our trading partners, features high on our priority list and we will continue to take any steps required to ensure that our exports are not unduly penalised.

Of course it is difficult to follow each and every case with our current resources and I would certainly like to do more for our exporters, in particular small and medium-sized companies, which often have little experience in this area. The EU must remain an example that others can follow.

As the report recalls, we are viewed as a moderate user of trade defence instruments. That reputation is deserved and that must remain so. It is in that spirit that I recently launched a reflection process on how Europe's trade defence instruments such as the anti-dumping instrument operate in the modern global economy. A broad public consultation will take place early in 2007, based on a Green Paper expected in the coming months.

This consultation will allow the Commission to draw on a wide range of views and identify whether there is scope to improve our rules and practices further. Our trade defence instruments can make an important contribution to ensuring both free and fair trade, thereby stimulating our competitiveness. This will involve strong and close cooperation with all stakeholders, including Member States and industry, and, I would add, the support and involvement of the European Parliament.

Syed Kamall, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Mr President, I welcome the general tone of both the Commission's and Mrs Muscardini's reports in wanting to see a world trading system that is as open and fair as possible. However, when we consider the anti-dumping measures of third countries, we in the Community need to show moral leadership and avoid hypocrisy.

We can agree that trade defence mechanisms are often used as an excuse to protect domestic markets from competition; but we should also admit that the EU is sometimes guilty of using these mechanisms to protect uncompetitive companies from non-EU providers – shoes and textiles being recent examples. Fortunately, we continue to be sparing users of these mechanisms.

With the potential collapse of the Doha development round, we must work with our trading partners to ensure that their legislation and practices comply as far as possible with WTO rules. However, to have any moral authority in this area, our own anti-dumping and anti-subsidy investigations must be transparent and impartial.

I am concerned about the call for a Community approach to defend exporting SMEs faced with protectionism abroad. During last year's 'bra wars', it was a so-called Community approach that suspended imports from China and caused SMEs in London's fashion industry to lose contracts and to

provide compensation to clients left waiting for unfulfilled orders. If that is a Community approach, then we in London want to see less of it.

When it comes to arbitration, I think we all agree that any ad hoc arbitration group should consist of relevant experts. But we must ensure that any experts serving on these groups are experts in the sector being investigated who understand the structure of the industry and costs involved, not simply experts in more general trade issues.

Overall, I would like to congratulate both the Commission and the rapporteur on this report.

Francisco Assis, on behalf of the PSE Group. – (PT) Mr President, the increase in international trade in recent years has led, among other things, to increased competition and has tempted many countries to resort to trade protection mechanisms in order to protect their markets. It should not, therefore, come as a surprise that there have been increasing numbers of situations in which anti-dumping, anti-subsidy and safeguard measures have been adopted.

European exports, as the report before us clearly demonstrates, have been the target on a number of occasions of such measures on the part of third countries. Such cases have risen alarmingly. As well as the traditional countries, some of the new players to have arrived on the international trade relations scene are involved.

This phenomenon, which could significantly harm a number of European industries, must therefore be tackled seriously. Such an approach entails, first and foremost, carefully separating cases in which the use of these instruments arises entirely from the legitimate implementation of the principles of fair trade relations from those in which their use is merely a legal smokescreen to cover up illegal protectionist measures in the very worst sense of the term. This distinction can only be made completely clearly if we are committed to strengthening transparency in the processes aimed at assessing whether trade defence measures are being used legitimately or otherwise. The aim is therefore to ensure complete compliance with the rules and the case law of the World Trade Organisation. To this end, the Commission must channel its efforts into helping improve these procedures, thereby discouraging the illicit use of these instruments.

That being said, it is appropriate to mention the importance of the Commission's assistance to the Member States and to European industry in trade protection cases initiated by third countries. This support is particularly significant for SMEs, which by nature are less well equipped to deal with situations of this kind.

Lastly, we welcome the fact that the Commission is ready to take an active role within the WTO in jointly reviewing the provisions regulating the adoption of trade protection instruments, with a view to stressing the value of multilateralism. At no point in this debate, however, must it be forgotten that the EU is the most open trading area in the world and that the Europeans also have legitimate interests to safeguard.

Daniel Caspary (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to congratulate Mrs Muscardini on this successful report.

Freedom of access to foreign markets is vital to large numbers of European enterprises. This freedom of access does not exist in many cases today, with third countries hindering European enterprises' market access in downright breach of agreements or in contravention of the WTO rules. In so doing, these third countries exploit the whole spectrum of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade skilfully to their advantage and our disadvantage. The competitiveness of the European economy, and thus of the EU labour market, suffers tremendously as a result of these problems. These actions on the part of some of our trade partners are unacceptable.

Commissioner, the EU cannot allow other countries to treat us like this. All participants in world trade must abide by the rules. It also applies that the EU should not treat third countries like this. We, too, must abide by all the rules in order to take credible action against rule-breakers without any open flanks. Fair, free world trade is possible only if rules are in place that are binding and are observed by all parties without exception.

What is to be done, therefore? I would call on the Commission to do everything possible to ensure that we Europeans abide by the rules. I call on the Commission to take measures to protect our enterprises if it is established that individual trade partners have failed to abide by the rules. I call on the Commission

to make consistent use of the existing – or even an improved – dispute-settlement procedure here if, in specific cases, no amicable settlement has been reached in the short term.

We must focus our future efforts on ensuring that all trade partners abide by the rules. Only if all parties, without exception, abide by the rules, can people draw long-term benefit from world trade.

Malgorzata Handzlik (PPE-DE). – *(PL)* Mr President, I should like to thank the rapporteur for a very comprehensive report on the safeguard action taken by third countries against the European Union. Unfortunately, a study of Mrs Muscardini's report and of the Commission's own report confirms that European trade policy gives undue consideration to protecting producers at the expense of consumers. This is particularly true of the agricultural sector.

Import quotas, anti-dumping duties and administrative obstacles for agricultural products cost every European household approximately USD 1 500 a year. Clearly, there are occasions when it may be permissible to impose protective measures, but only in very limited and clearly defined cases. The circumstances in which they can be applied must be laid down in advance, and any decisions must be planned in good time and widely publicised, in order to enable entrepreneurs to make appropriate arrangements for their orders or supplies.

Unfortunately, market players are currently still paying too high a price for poorly planned trading policies and for sudden decisions to apply protective rates, which cause legal and commercial uncertainty and make it more difficult for those involved in trading to adjust quickly to any changes. It is therefore very important for trade policy to be stable and predictable. Preferential rates need to be understandable and easy to apply. Their implementation should be widely discussed in advance with all trading partners, so that each entrepreneur is properly informed, and can feel certain of the future and of his or her orders.

I would like to conclude by saying a few words about trade with developing countries, the World Trade Organisation and the European Union. Developing countries should be able to take advantage of all the opportunities arising from membership of the WTO. These countries should be treated as equal partners. It is therefore not acceptable for industrialised countries to protect the interests of large firms located mainly in the EU and in the USA.

Georgios Papastamkos (PPE-DE). – *(EL)* Mr President, having congratulated the rapporteur, Mrs Muscardini, and thanked the Commissioner for his detailed statement, I should like to say by way of introduction that maintaining and strengthening the competitiveness of the European Union in the new globalised environment requires, firstly, increased European intervention in third country markets and, secondly, effective protection from unfair trading practices by our partners.

The Community – and this has already been said – is still firmly a moderate user of trade defence instruments. On the other hand, the constant increase in trade defence instruments against the Community is taking on worrying proportions.

The Union is – and must remain – an open market to international competition. We are against protectionism. At the same time, however, we are against distorting competition and against our partners' achieving competitive advantages by relying on underhand practices in infringement of international trade rules.

There is no sense in unilateral disarmament by the Union. Trade 'pacifism' operates only when applied by all parties. No one disputes that we are seeing increased use of trade defence instruments against the Community. This being so, the Commission should keep a close watch and ensure that abusive and non-compliant measures are withdrawn, either through consultations and/or by taking recourse to the judicial bodies of the WTO as and where needed.

We are also seeing a comparatively large number of trade defence instruments against European agricultural products. It is therefore the Commission's responsibility to ensure that the radical reforms of the CAP are taken into adequate account by our trade partners when activating anti-subsidy measures.

Peter Mandelson, Member of the Commission. Mr President, I have never been a unilateral disarmer at any stage in my political career, in any context. I have always been a multilateralist, whether it be in respect of disarmament or the putting in place of international rules to create institutions of global governance or in the design of processes to create agreements or to solve disputes in the world. I bring those principles and that approach to this subject as I have done to others throughout my political career.

We have heard a call this evening for moral leadership. The morality that I bring to this subject of trade is my belief in free trade. I say it is moral because I believe that free trade is the best way to drive economic growth, to lever up living standards, to create opportunities for people and to attack poverty in our world. That is what I call 'moral'.

However, one of the ways in which we 'morally' pursue free trade is by standing up for fair trade. When I look around me and see the public disquiet, uncertainty and unhappiness about what is going on in the global economy and the sense that people feel increasingly insecure and threatened by the dramatic changes that are taking place in the architecture and landscape of the global economy, I see people beginning to question whether free trade is a good idea. I see them beginning to wonder whether sheltering from the global economy would be better; whether erecting barriers between us and our trading partners might not be a better way of securing our jobs and our livelihoods.

I make a very strong argument against that reaction and instinct, but I will never help that argument against protectionism if I am seen to be or thought to be weak when it comes to standing up for the upholding and implementation of internationally agreed trade rules which stand out against anti-competitive behaviour, state interventions or trade distortions, which are designed to give one trading partner an unfair, unreasonable and unacceptable advantage in trade against another. That is why it is appropriate and proper to operate trade defence instruments within the rules created by our multilateral institutions.

However, I would never want to see those rules used as a weapon against others' low-cost competition or against others' legitimate use of their comparative advantage. That is not right and it is not acceptable, but nor, if I may say to Mr Kamall, was that the case either in respect of textiles or shoes. Shoes, yes, was an anti-dumping measure, arrived at after considerable investigation, analysis, recommendation, discussion, debate and finally decision amongst our Member States, as it properly should be. I would stand by the objectivity and the transparency with which that decision was arrived at, and it certainly was not adopted for protectionist purposes.

However, in the case of textiles, I never said it was unfair trading. I never said that the fierce competition that we were facing in the case of textiles was as a result of price or market distortions by the Chinese. I merely pointed to the fact that with the final lifting of quotas we in Europe were suddenly and unexpectedly faced with what amounted to an avalanche which, if it had not been resisted, would have had the likely effect of burying our market and severely distorting what people produce, how people sell, their profits, their livelihoods and, therefore, their jobs in such a sudden way that I believed it was appropriate – and, in the end, our Chinese trading partners also agreed that it was right and appropriate – to take voluntary cooperative measures to slow down the rapid increase in Chinese textile exports.

You are right that at all times, on all occasions and in all cases we should operate impartiality, transparency and truthfulness in the analysis we put forward, the conclusions we reach and how we seek to justify the measures we are advocating.

It is true, as Mrs Handzlik said, that any intervention of any sort in the market – legitimate, anti-dumping or other uses of trade defence instruments – is bound to create some uncertainty and weaken the ability of businesses to plan ahead. Mr Kamall made a similar point. I take this very seriously indeed, because I do not want my actions, as agreed by the Member States, to have the effect of making a bad situation worse by further disrupting or undermining the ability of companies to plan ahead and to organise their production, which, of course, is hampered if supply and production chains are undermined or disrupted by interventions such as these. Therefore we must minimise the disruption. One of the things I want to take very seriously in the context of our Green Paper and our examination of this matter, is how we can minimise disruption and offer the greatest possible predictability to companies that might be affected.

I just want to make this last point: Mr Caspary said – if I may elaborate on and embroider his words slightly – that we should keep to the rules and at all times seek to strengthen and improve them. I agree with that. That is precisely what we are doing in the DDA and why we have a multilateral system and process governing these rules and an institution that enables us to negotiate precisely the strengthening and the improvement that you advocate. That is why the WTO system is so important.

I would just like to say in conclusion that, whatever disruptions, interventions, distractions or diversions we have in a trade agenda which is very wide and very complex, I will always keep my eyes very carefully focused on the DDA, the importance of the agenda we are pursuing in the DDA and the vital importance of bringing those negotiations to a successful completion. I want to do that in respect not

only of market access but also of trade rules and their strengthening, and that is what the Commission remains dedicated to achieving.

President. The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Wednesday at 12.30 p.m.

22. Agenda for next part session: see Minutes

23. Closure of sitting

(The sitting was closed at 11.50 p.m.)