

THURSDAY, 15 NOVEMBER 2007

IN THE CHAIR: MRS MORGANTINI

Vice-President

1. Opening of the sitting

(The sitting was opened at 10 a.m.)

2. Situations of fragility

President. – The next item is the Commission statement on ‘Towards an EU response to situations of fragility: engaging in difficult environments for sustainable development, stability and peace’.

Vladimír Špidla, *Member of the Commission.* – (FR) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, since July 2007, the Commission and the Portuguese Presidency of the European Union have been working together closely to launch the process of preparing a more strategic and effective EU response to situations of fragility in partner countries.

This process should be pursued by future presidencies. The objective is not to label or classify countries, but to tailor their instruments and responses to specific situations. In these situations of fragility, there are major obstacles to poverty reduction. Institutional capabilities in such situations are very limited, with states unable to assume the functions of governance, or with the consequences of natural disasters, violent conflict, or a lack of political will on the part of the government regarding development objectives. In extreme cases, these situations can have an impact beyond the country's borders, affecting regional stability or even global security.

The idea of fragility is not new, though the international debate is relatively recent. Donors, partner countries and civil society have been aware for a long time of the need to be more effective in particularly unfavourable situations in order to meet the objectives of sustainable development.

Every situation is complex and different and requires a tailored response, in which diplomatic action, humanitarian aid, development cooperation, and security and crisis management intervention all play a part.

The effectiveness of the European Union's response requires a long-term commitment, but also the definition of clear objectives when taking action in a fragile country. The guiding principle should continue to be capability development and human security, within the perspective of sustainable development and poverty reduction.

Giving support to situations of fragility where this is to the detriment of successful countries should, however, be avoided. Commitments to strengthen aid therefore take centre stage again. The European Commission has presented a communication proposing a pragmatic approach for the European Union to engage more effectively in difficult environments for sustainable development, stability and peace.

This communication was sent to all the European Union institutions. The General Affairs Council on 19 and 20 November will adopt conclusions on this subject. It will invite the Commission to draw up a specific work plan for implementing the recommendations and the priority actions presented in the communication, the aim of which is to address situations of fragility more effectively by supporting the efforts made by the partner countries to create or restore the conditions necessary for their sustainable development.

2008 will be devoted to preparing the European Union's strategic approach to situations of fragility. This process requires the active participation of all the European Union institutions and all those working for development in the EU and the partner countries.

The European Parliament's contribution to this exercise is of great interest to the Commission, which is inviting it to get actively involved in this debate, that should make it possible to support an overall response strategy to situations of fragility and to contribute in this way to creating suitable conditions for sustainable development, stability, peace and democratic governance.

Nirj Deva, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Madam President, it is always very useful to be able to debate such an important issue in front of a heaving Chamber of colleagues who are agog to hear what Parliament has to say on this very important matter. I am also very grateful to the Commissioner for having laid down the ground rules and his views on how we tackle this issue.

Fragility is a condition that has many, many parents. The first of course is the process of decolonisation when the colonial powers drew arbitrary lines on maps, which cut across all sorts of internal stable civil society functions and split countries into two or three or four, irrespective of their tribes or religious factions and so on. That induced a certain amount of instability.

Then there is a natural form of instability that fragile nations now experience: countries which are prone to floods; small island states that are open to only a single economy product. There are countries which are geographically unable to sustain themselves because of the way God has blessed them with very few attributes, countries which have desertification, starting to produce mass migrations of people.

There are 26 so-called fragile states in the world as we speak and the most vulnerable people in the world are facing catastrophic consequences, not through their own fault in some cases, but sometimes through bad governance, sometimes through internal conflict, sometimes through civil wars, sometimes through genocidal dictators as we found, not many years ago, in Sierra Leone and Liberia.

Now you can change a fragile state from being a fragile state to a post-fragile sustainable country, as we see happening in front of our eyes in Sierra Leone. But this requires effort; it requires commitment; it requires a long-term commitment, as the Commissioner said, to that country's economic growth. It requires a commitment of nation-building, an expression which I use advisedly in this Chamber because the concept of nation-building is something that my country, the United Kingdom, has long experience of, as have France and Spain and some other European countries. But it is wholly and utterly away from the knowledge of other emerging superpowers who have not, to put it bluntly, a clue how to punch their way out of a paper bag in terms of nation-building.

We need to be able to connect ourselves with the body of historic knowledge that is repositied in the consciousness of European nations, to help other nations who are taking a lead around the world in the process of nation-building. Had we done that, and had Prime Minister Blair done that, I think the situation in Iraq, for example, would have been completely different.

Is Iraq a fragile state? Yes it is, because it is unstable; the governance is not secure; there are insecurity problems. There are other countries in Africa which are very fragile – the Sudan, Somalia, small islands – as I said earlier all these require coming together with a body of knowledge that we already have and therefore I am very pleased indeed to be opening this debate this morning.

President. – Thank you very much, Mr Deva. I am afraid you forget one factor in instability. When you arrive in those countries instability starts again.

Alain Hutchinson, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would first like to express my delight at this communication which – as you said, Commissioner – is indeed tinged with real pragmatism from the Commission, and which enables us today to debate a problem of concern not only to the citizens of the EU's partner countries in the south of the world, but also our own fellow citizens who often, quite legitimately, ask how effective the European Union's development aid is.

In this particular case, the essential message of our resolution can be summed up in one sentence and should attract support from everyone, beyond the political divisions. It is to propose setting up a simplified cooperation system that allows the Commission and Member States to supply the aid they have promised to partner countries in the throes of particularly grave crises more rapidly than they can today – and I will not dwell on these crises because Mr Deva has just explained them at length. Without this aid the populations of these countries see their chances of survival diminish each day. Once this aid has been approved, which is in itself no mean feat, the complexity and length of current procedures for delivering European aid can cause situations that are even more dramatic and directly harmful to the beneficiary populations.

Take the example of Burundi, a small country in which I chaired the parliamentary observation mission for the last elections two years ago, and to which I will have the pleasure of returning in a few days. The European Union has done a very important and remarkable job there, supporting the electoral and institutional democratisation process after more than ten years of bloody conflict. Once established, the institutions and

the new democratically elected power were very quickly faced with reality and the needs of the population, in terms of health, education and agriculture, which had to be met as a matter of priority.

There is no lack of projects in these sectors, but for them to see the light of day, European aid is utterly decisive. It is not only decisive for meeting the urgent needs of the population, but also to enable the public authorities, which are still fragile, to begin a reconstruction process without which there is a major risk of seeing the country descend very quickly into chaos again. Two years on, Commissioner, the budgetary aid announced by the EU has still not arrived.

What is true for the Great Lakes region is also true for other regions of the world. That is the reason why, Madam President, subject to the clear definition of the conditions they have to meet to be able to receive it, all the countries in the world with which the European Union is cooperating and that are experiencing a serious situation of fragility should be able to rely on an exception system that guarantees rapid and effective intervention.

Ryszard Czarnecki, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Madam President, I am pleased to be able to speak after hearing such remarkable experts and specialists, who have spent years grappling with this subject, and I include you among them, Madam President.

I would like to draw attention to the problem of the growing number of states recognised as unstable. Over the course of six years this number has almost doubled, from 14 to 26, so this is a very real problem, and one that is an increasing challenge for the European Union.

I would like to stress that over half of these unstable states are in sub-Saharan Africa, which highlights the need for us to give particular attention to that region of Africa, that region of the world.

I also think that strong words need to be said about the need to build the authority of governments in these countries. The African Union is right to point out that the problem of reconstruction is also a political issue, perhaps more so than a technical one. In view of this, the mechanisms of democracy and transparency are fundamental issues.

I fully agree with Mr Hutchinson, who spoke before me, about the need to simplify procedures so that our aid might be more rapid and more real.

Raül Romeva i Rueda, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (ES) Madam President, I also truly welcome the fact that this subject is being dealt with in this Chamber, because although it is true that there is not an exhaustive legislative definition of what a fragility state is, we do have many cases which, empirically, fall into that category. This afternoon we are, for example, discussing among other matters the case of Somalia.

This resolution therefore enables us to tackle some of the more serious problems that have to be faced in those contexts – for example, the fact that this fragility is frequently based on a situation of extreme poverty that tends to bring with it institutional collapse and insecurity at all levels.

In addition, it is also crucial to start from the principle that these states present a challenge in terms of development, and this means that we urgently need to define a coherent agenda based on the humanitarian principle of do no harm. This is the first principle, and it is an important lesson to learn from recent events regarding the approach taken by Zoe's Ark in Chad.

With regard to external action, in particular European action, in this type of context, this must be based on implementing programmes on the ground, which must be flexible and adaptable to changing needs and based on a strategy planned in the short, medium and long term. All too often we stop at measures that may be necessary in the short term, but which fundamentally lose sight of the medium and long-term consequences.

Finally, I must mention the importance of establishing a dual mechanism of accountability, in particular including an obligation for the recipient countries to be accountable, naturally, to those who have provided resources, funds and donations, but also to their own populations, whom they should and must protect and ensure the survival of. The donors should also guarantee that they are going to be accountable to these populations.

Pedro Guerreiro, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (PT) Madam President, there is no doubt that it is urgent to provide more and better humanitarian aid in an ever more unequal and unfair world where concentration of wealth in the hands of a few at the expense of the exploitation and misery of millions. There is no doubt that more and better cooperation for development is urgently needed in a world facing a new arms race and

the increasing militarisation of international relations, led by the United States and its allies. It is for that very reason that we are seriously concerned about the attempts to make development aid conditional on security strategies intended in practice to achieve more or less concealed objectives of interference, plundering of resources and neo-colonialism.

An analysis of the international situation must not leave out or underestimate the external causes fomenting and exacerbating the contradictions which are so often at the root of the problems. We need only look at the very subjective list of what the World Bank considers to be fragile States. How many instances of external interference and aggression does that reflect?

We do indeed need an agenda for cooperation and development to respond to the most basic needs of millions of human beings, based on respect for national sovereignty and independence and peaceful solutions to international conflicts – an agenda which encourages the demilitarisation of international relations, which promotes equitable and fair economic relations and the cancellation of foreign debt paid for long ago, an agenda which overcomes the policies which are causing the profound injustices and inequalities, in order to build a fairer, more peaceful, more humane world of greater solidarity.

Ana Maria Gomes, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (PT) In fragile states the link between governance, development and security is paramount. The EU must determine strategic priorities for relations with those states with human security as the overall goal.

It is not enough to support government institutions. It is essential to promote the strengthening of parliamentary scrutiny, to support free and pluralist media, the independence of the judiciary and the empowerment of civil society, giving priority to women, vulnerable groups and minorities. That requires commitment on the part of the EU.

Somalia today tragically illustrates the aloofness of Europe. The causes of fragility that stir up violent conflict, exacerbating the incapacity of the state – bad governance, extreme poverty or violations of human rights, for example – must be broached in bilateral dialogue and often the Council, Commission and Member States fail to do that. The causes of fragility must be taken into account in defining strategies and in the globalisation of the EU's financial instruments. Development aid must be focused on people and direct financial support for governments should be considered only when there is proof of commitment to resolving conflicts, to building the democratic rule of law and to improving governance and the human security of the peoples.

Finally, and unfortunately this aspect is omitted from the Commission's Communication and the resolution we are to vote on, the EU must invest more, alongside DDR and SSR programmes, in controlling global transfers of light weapons, since they fuel armed conflicts which perpetuate the fragility of many states.

Vladimír Špidla, *Member of the Commission*. – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the short but very comprehensive debate. Allow me to sum it up as follows: it basically reflected Parliament's support for the general position, for the Commission's general concept, for the general idea. Of course some individual issues arose during the debate and these can be discussed in the course of future debates. For example, there is the issue of light weapons transfers and many other ideas that, in my opinion, significantly enrich the general concept.

President. – I have received a motion for a resolution⁽¹⁾ submitted in accordance with Article 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday at 12 noon.

3. Social reality stocktaking (debate)

President. – The next item is the report by Elizabeth Lynne, on behalf of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, on social reality stocktaking (2007/2104(INI)) (A6-0400/2007).

Elizabeth Lynne (ALDE), *rapporteur*. – Madam President, I wish to begin by thanking the shadow rapporteurs. That a report of this scale has received no plenary amendments shows this is truly a report from the Committee

⁽¹⁾ See Minutes.

on Employment and Social Affairs, and one we can all be proud of. I would also like to thank the Commission for its close cooperation and the Portuguese Presidency for making social policy a priority for its Presidency.

We face a huge challenge in Europe. That challenge is one of fairness. It is about lost potential, the inability to live a life free from the charity of others, and a life free from discrimination, poverty and social exclusion.

Our objective is clear: we want to expand opportunities so that nobody, whatever their background or circumstances, is left behind. The vision of Europe must be freedom and opportunity for all, increasing opportunities and incentives to work, whilst strengthening the safety net for those who are unable to work.

In 2007 the facts are chilling: 72 million European citizens continue to live in poverty; 8 % of all people in the European Union now suffer from in-work poverty. Those are truly shocking statistics. But what do they actually mean? They mean that one in six citizens is now living below the poverty line – one in six! Many people would not believe that could be possible in 2007. Fifty years after the Treaty of Rome, after 50 years of economic growth, 10 % of people belong to households where nobody has a job! By any measure, poverty remains one of the greatest social problems challenging Europe, and reducing social exclusion must be at the heart of our policies.

In some areas we are succeeding, but we must be frank: in the majority we are not. The gap between the rich and the poor in many EU Member States is increasing. The elimination of income-related poverty must remain a priority for Member States but, for the one in six who live in financial poverty, there are many more who are excluded from society for other reasons. We have to recognise that for many families – for many individuals even – there are problems more complicated than simply low income. Barriers to opportunity are complex. More than anything else, early intervention is crucial. Prevention, of course, is better than cure.

In the UK, we know that the daughter of a teenage mother is three times as likely to become a teenage mother herself; we know that sons with a convicted father are over four times more at risk of being convicted of a crime than those without a convicted father. Yet, in many areas, there is no need to reinvent the wheel. We must look at how other EU countries deal with these issues and learn from them. We must share best practice more effectively. Finland, for instance, has introduced a holistic sustainable approach that has been incredibly effective in reducing the number of people who are homeless. Denmark, meanwhile, is implementing new policies that improve the quality of life of long-term rough-sleepers, rather than having the sole aim of integrating those individuals into mainstream society. In Belgium, people who have experienced poverty are working with social workers to help them better understand the needs of poor people.

It is not always unemployment that causes poverty: in-work poverty is a problem as well. That is why I have called for an exchange of best practice on the provision of a decent working minimum wage throughout the Member States. At least five EU Member States do not even have one. Equally, we must push all Member States to adopt a minimum living income for all.

Member States must do more to prevent exploitation of vulnerable workers as well; to make sure that disabled and older people have a way into employment; to prevent trafficking; to safeguard the rights of asylum-seekers; to ensure equal access to healthcare and community services for all; to destigmatise people with mental health problems; and to promote a more constructive approach to drugs and alcohol.

These are but a few of the issues this report has addressed. Europe's vision must be freedom and opportunity for all. That is why it is so important to look at setting up mechanisms at a European level so that the exchange of best practice becomes a reality.

Vladimír Špidla, *Member of the Commission*. – (CS) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, to start with I would like to congratulate the rapporteur, Mrs Lynne, on her very interesting and comprehensive report. I am pleased to see that the European Parliament has decided to address the fairly wide range of social issues covered by this report, issues that need to be solved urgently. This report is a significant contribution towards social reality stocktaking on an ongoing basis.

This document comes at the time when the Commission and the Member States are examining the possibilities of strengthening the social dimension of the Lisbon Strategy. We must respond to our citizens' fears and we realise that social justice is one of the key problems for them. Public opinion surveys show that the European Union should play a key role in supporting more integrated and cohesive societies.

As President Barroso said during a key debate on globalisation yesterday morning, the European Union has made significant progress in achieving the Lisbon goals. New jobs are being created: 3.5 million new jobs were created last year alone. The unemployment rate has fallen to approximately 7%. Although this rate is

still too high, it is the lowest it has been in the last 10 years. Economic growth has been satisfactory in spite of the recent financial instability.

However, there is no room for complacency. Implementation of the Lisbon Strategy has been uneven and not all of its goals have been met. Indeed, 12 million people are still unemployed, and these are often young people or long-term unemployed people with poor prospects for professional growth or social advancement; 8% of the European workforce suffers from in-work poverty; 78 million European citizens suffer from poverty and one in five European Union citizens suffers from inferior living conditions.

In short, more has to be done in order to meet our common social goals. Now, at a time when we are seeing the positive results of the European Union's strategy in the area of growth and employment, it is the right time to begin to pursue social goals.

I welcome the reference in the report to the necessary political will and resolve to deal with issues of poverty and exclusion. I, too, feel that it is urgent to tackle child poverty, combat discrimination and enhance diversity. This of course means monitoring the transposition of the relevant legislation into national law and, if necessary, instituting proceedings against those Member States that have been found to infringe European Union legislation.

The report also looks at the barriers that prevent involvement in society and integration into the job market. I agree that we have to combine supporting measures with suitable safety nets to ensure that no one is left out.

This attitude is reflected in the recent Commission communication on active inclusion. This communication defines three key elements of a balanced and strategic approach to active inclusion:

- Access to integrated job markets;
- Better access to services;
- Adequate income support.

This communication also launches the second phase of consultation with the social partners on these issues with a view to stepping up European Union cooperation in the area of active inclusion.

Following this consultation, the Commission intends to draw up a recommendation on the common principles of active inclusion, which is scheduled for the second half of 2008. In a further communication due to be adopted in the next few weeks the Commission will also present new measures to support the active inclusion of people with disabilities.

The Commission is grateful to the European Parliament for its persistent efforts to combat discrimination. As stated in the Commission Legislative and Work Programme 2008, the Commission will present proposals in 2008 for solving the problem of the existing protection loophole under Article 13 of the Treaty. The proposals, which should be adopted by next summer, will be based on long-term dialogue with the European Parliament, on experience from the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All and on extensive public consultation.

The European Union has made significant progress in achieving gender equality, and the European Parliament has been an important partner in this process. However, we have to continue to strengthen gender equality in the future. This is a fundamental right, as well as a vital condition for achieving Europe's goals in the areas of growth, employment and social cohesion. I therefore welcome in particular the report's reference to gender equality.

Since the Treaty of Amsterdam the Union has made progress in all areas of gender equality, and since 2003 in the area of equal opportunities for disabled people. That said, there is still a lot of work to be done in both areas. The fact that multiple discrimination still persists is a strong argument in favour of continuously emphasising equal opportunities in all areas. This topic will be dealt with in the Commission communication due to be adopted in 2008, which will be based on lessons taken from the 2007 European Year of Equal Opportunities for All.

Ladies and gentlemen, the changes in the EU's social situation naturally follow the development of our society and the changes in the global concept as a whole. In spite of that, I am convinced that the fundamental concept, i.e. finding a balance between the economic and the social and ecological aspects, is still entirely

valid. Therefore, the onus is on us to continue to look for new approaches that will help us to overcome problems that still exist.

Miroslav Mikolášik, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Environment, Public Health and Food Safety*. – (SK) Although it is necessary to monitor the social situation and social policies in the Member States in order to identify the problems and challenges facing the Union, the actions we take to deal with them are even more important.

As regards public health, we should focus on the problems facing EU citizens in the area of health care. Taking into account the demographic trends and the rising average life expectancy, we have to develop public health strategies that will improve our quality of life, with a view in particular to preventing diseases and combating them effectively. At the same time these strategies should take into account the need for high-quality, accessible and reliable health care for citizens from all sections of society, irrespective of their social status, age or country of residence.

We should pay particular attention to the most disadvantaged groups, such as physically or mentally disabled people, the elderly and children. In view of the rising costs of health care, the Member States should adopt effective measures, such as targeted information campaigns, the use of generic medicines, the use of new technologies, mutual assistance measures at local level or greater solidarity between generations and in families. In addition to that, and in cooperation with the Commission, the Member States should develop policies and support European initiatives to combat smoking, alcoholism and obesity, which will help to improve the quality of life of our fellow citizens.

Last but not least, we should focus on the effective implementation of the existing public health legislation. The Member States and the Commission should ensure the application of the Community legislation on water, air and soil quality, and noise pollution, as well as the application of the regulations on chemical products, including those covered by REACH.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality*. – (PT) In this opinion the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality stresses that there are a number of dimensions to poverty and social exclusion but that the most important of these are the economic situation of families, housing conditions, and access to education, to health care and to long-term care.

The committee stresses that women and children are the main victims of poverty and social exclusion and points out that the risk is even greater in the case of immigrants, the elderly, the disabled and members of single-parent families. It also notes that, on average, 15% of pupils drop out of the education system but that, in some countries, such as Portugal, this rate is as high as around 40%, which gives cause for concern as regards the education and training of young girls.

It stresses the importance of maintaining quality public services, a solid public and universal social security system and high levels of social protection and quality employment combined with rights and of ensuring effective gender mainstreaming in the formulation and implementation of such public policies; finally, it urges the Commission and the Member States to give maximum priority to women's social integration and women's rights, by altering their respective policies accordingly, including income distribution policy.

Edit Bauer, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (HU) Thank you very much, Madam President. Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, Mrs Lynne's report, on which I heartily congratulate her, clearly does not and cannot have the last word on the issue of social inclusion and the transformation of social policy.

We are often prone to think that the European social model is timeless, but social policy must clearly also change, not only through globalisation, but also through the economy, social expectations, the demographic challenge and changing values, since we must find suitable responses to the challenges we face. For this reason too the Commission's initiative for preparing some sort of inventory of the social problems weighing on Europe's population is to be welcomed.

It is obvious that nearly 500 million Union citizens are not one homogenous mass. Despite the fact that the differences in income between the old Member States are falling, the differences between the rich and poor regions are still demonstrating a growth trend. Two thirds of the population of the ten new Member States of the EU live in poor regions where the level of income is half, or less than half, the average income of the old Member States. The situation is even worse in Bulgaria and Romania, where the average income does not even reach one third of the per capita income of the old Member States.

There is no question that in order to fight poverty we need to know more about the different forms in which poverty manifests itself. However, to do this we need new poverty indicators, since up to now we have only had comprehensive data on the risk of relative poverty.

For this reason, we are eagerly awaiting the Commission's communication in relation to this. The report also draws attention to new risks of impoverishment. For example, we know little about how dangerous are the proportions assumed by the population's debt. Of the 15 old Member States, the per capita debt of the population in 12 Member States exceeds EUR 16 000, which accounts for 90% of the average annual family income.

Please allow me to say one last sentence, Madam President. The report again points out the importance of fighting child poverty, and we consider this to be extremely important.

Richard Falbr, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (CS) Madam President, Commissioner, first of all I would like to thank Mrs Elizabeth Lynne for the very good report and for her excellent cooperation. Social exclusion is caused by a wide range of factors, and it would be a great pity not to use this report for follow-up work. In my speech I would like to stress the importance of public services and their contribution to eliminating poverty and exclusion. Once privatised, public services will become more expensive and less accessible. I regret that we have not managed to adopt the position condemning those states that introduce a low basic tax, and so make it impossible to accumulate enough funds to carry out the State's social tasks. It would certainly be useful for the Member States to inform one another of their successes as part of the exchange of information on proven methods. Of course I would also welcome the exchange of information on methods that did not pay off or even backfired. I know that this is not being done but I am sure that it would be useful if the social partners and non-governmental organisations made it happen.

A fundamental precondition to ensuring that more and more citizens of the Member States do not find themselves dependent on often imperfect social welfare is the provision of an adequate number of reasonably well-paid jobs. We cannot tolerate the fact that some people who work often depend on social welfare. Consequently, we must seek to set up an adequate minimum wage in all Member States, either through legislation or through collective contracts, depending on the country's traditional method. Efforts to adapt old age pension schemes are being stepped up. When taking steps to preserve the fundamental pillar – the State old-age pension scheme – all Member States should respect the relevant International Labour Organisation conventions that they have ratified. Integrating disabled people into the job market is particularly important. Therefore, we must look with a critical eye at the actions of those governments that have abolished various incentives for increasing the number of jobs for disabled people, and the Czech Republic is one of them.

Ona Juknevičienė, *ALDE Group*. – (LT) Congratulations to my colleague Mrs Lynne on drawing up her report and on having achieved a political compromise that takes account of the opinions of the different political groups regarding the social realities within the Union.

It is true that the Member States' governments are directly responsible for reducing poverty. It is their duty to take measures to ensure that people have jobs, children attend schools and the poorest people are given social assistance.

However, the Union's role in solving problems connected with poverty and inequality continues to be equally important. The fact that 78 million European citizens live in poverty and the social divide between the poor and the rich is getting bigger and bigger is a most serious indication that action should be taken at both national and European level.

Most Member States have adequate minimum income rates. However, there are still cases where the employers do not pay the established rates, thereby breaking the law. As I have mentioned before on more than one occasion, Lithuanians working abroad happen to experience such unlawful treatment. We should not tolerate employers carrying out such practices.

I welcome the Member States' response to the Council's call to reduce child poverty. However, they have not yet drawn up their action plans for tackling the problem. The disabled and elderly are particularly vulnerable. We must make sure they have access to at least minimal long-term care at affordable prices. The Social Fund has allocated resources for this. It is a shame they remain unused in my country.

I do agree with the rapporteur's position on the necessity of sharing experience and following the successful examples of achievements in Social security. It is necessary to learn from those Member States that are making

efficient use of resources allocated by the EU, to share their experience. Ladies and gentlemen, in order to gain our citizens' trust in the European Union, in its institutions, we must solve the most difficult problems they face.

In the speech he gave in this House, Nicolas Sarkozy, the President of France, said that the French feel that the EU does not care about them and does not provide social security. French citizens have voted not against the Constitution, but against Europe, as they do not feel safe there.

The Commission has promised to prepare a report based on the social realities, with an analysis of social trends. I do hope the main focus of this report will be the framework of actions, the framework that will define the methods of reducing or even abolishing poverty in Europe. Then we will be able to win the support of our citizens and perhaps start to feel that we are working for them.

Sepp Kusstatscher, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, we have here before us a great many ideas on social policy, for which I thank Mrs Lynne. As social policy does not carry as much weight in the EU as economic policy, this report is not EU stocktaking – as the title says – so much as a list of demands for sociopolitical measures in the Member States.

I have two comments to make. Sociopolitical matters are within the competence of the Member States. We at European level may only make recommendations. Europe is in a state of imbalance because there has been economic but not social harmonisation. Europe has not become more just since Lisbon 2000. On the contrary, poverty is increasing. To truly combat poverty and make it possible for all EU citizens to live with dignity and justice, we need not only economic, market and competition aspects but also a social, just, ecological internal market for all people.

Secondly: often it is a case of 'all talk, no action'. We know what the problems are. We do not really need studies and analyses. It is time to take action at last. It is not sufficient to declare 2010 the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. We need an effective anti-poverty agenda, we need data – so that all people, including those who are unemployed, have sufficient basic income and can live in dignity. This is a matter of justice and is a human right for all.

Eva-Britt Svensson, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (SV) Madam President, Mrs Lynne, this is a good stocktake of the lack of social security under which far too many of the citizens in the Member States are forced to live. The stocktake also shows the connection between poverty, overcrowding, social exclusion and increased ill health and shorter life expectancy.

The stocktake looks at the importance of the right to housing, work, social security and the rights of women and persons with disabilities. It also shows that problem gambling, alcohol consumption, drugs and smoking increase social exclusion. The conclusion is therefore that Member States must tackle these problems.

So far so good, but the reality is often quite different. Often these are just fine words because the EU, through various directives and regulations, with reference to the rules of the single market and competition rules, often prevents Member States from solving problems.

In addition, we subsidise wine producers and tobacco growing. The free movement of goods, for example, prevents Sweden from maintaining a restrictive alcohol policy, which is very important. Sweden has a gambling monopoly to limit gambling, but the EU is threatening court action. There is the same double dealing when it comes to the text of legislation on misleading advertising and on advertisements aimed at children, because the EU's other hand adopts TV directives with product placement and advertisements aimed at children.

It is possible to change the social reality but, in order to do so, public health concerns and environmental concerns must be given more importance than the competition rules of the single market, and social welfare and security must be given more importance than deregulation and privatisation.

The GUE/NGL Group is voting for the report and we will continue to do everything to improve social security for citizens.

Kathy Sinnott, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – Madam President, when I initially heard about the process of social reality stocktaking, I was delighted that someone wanted to hold a real discussion on the state of society.

Unfortunately, upon reading the documents from the Commission, I was disappointed to find that the stocktaking process was not looking at social reality but at economic indicators.

I am not convinced that economic indicators are a reliable measure of social reality. If they were, the improved economic status of Ireland over the last decades should be matched by improvements in social cohesion, rather than the rise in serious crime, addiction, suicide, alienation, family dysfunction, exclusion and loneliness that we actually see.

We would not just ask if a person is employed; we would ask if they are valued, connected and nourished physically, emotionally, intellectually and spiritually, and we would check whether the respect for this person extended to every person, regardless of age, size, ability, colour or any other characteristic.

To properly take stock of social reality, we would also look at the sustainability of the natural habitat of the human person: the family. With this in mind, we would not just look at the gap between rich and poor, but the gap left by family breakdown and social isolation.

To understand social reality, we must start with the reality of the human person that makes up society. I will give you just one example, and I hope it will illustrate the contradictory results we get if we look at the money and if we look at the man or woman. We all agree that women should have the right to work and find equality when they do. But when we exert economic pressure on women who would like to stay at home with a young baby to work rather than care for the child and push them into the workforce, we register a very high rate of employment and assume that this means a healthier social reality. However, if we look at the baby, hardwired for immediate maternal input, and see the loss he or she suffers, which scientists tell us will be neurological and lifelong, then we have to question whether this high employment really translates as an indicator of a healthy social reality.

The irony of short-term thinking, of focusing exclusively on the economics of a society, is that it is the welfare of the people and the family at a human level that ultimately has the greatest impact on the economics.

Look at the cost of a troubled people to the exchequer. Think of the cost of crime, drugs, dropping out, etc. Economic growth can be gobbled up by the growth of social problems. The word 'economics' comes from the Greek for management of the home. Economics should serve all people, helping them to be at home in their communities, at home in themselves.

If we get this right, we will have a very healthy social reality of which to take stock in the future.

Frank Vanhecke (NI). – (NL) Madam President, the report somewhat cryptically entitled 'Social reality stocktaking' was adopted almost unanimously in the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs – there was only one vote against – and in fact this should come as no surprise. After all, the report's 97 recommendations amount to calls for assistance for everything and everyone: the poor, women, men, young people, the elderly, the unemployed, low-paid workers, the disabled, those who suffer discrimination, the sick, the healthy of today who may fall ill tomorrow, and so on and so forth.

I could say, with some irony, that the only group omitted from this report is those such as myself: heterosexual, middle-aged white men of right-wing political orientation.

Without irony, however, I would say that there is not a single person in this House who does not agree that the weaker members of our society are entitled to protection and that a civilised society can ultimately be judged on the degree of social protection it affords to people who, for objective reasons, find it difficult to play a normal part in society. Therefore, you would have to be a bad person, as it were, not to support the catalogue of good intentions and social Santa Claus policy contained in this report.

Nevertheless, I shall not be endorsing this report. The fact is that the list of recommendations contains a number of things I cannot support, particularly with regard to immigration policy, integration and diversity, and also the lack of essential protection of family policy. The main reason I cannot endorse this report is much more fundamental, however. Social policy and everything that can be subsumed under the heading 'social security' is an outstanding example of a domain of the Member States, and sometimes of their federal states – not of the European Union.

Unless someone in this House has a machine for producing money and resources from thin air, unless such a machine exists, social protection measures still have to be funded from taxpayers' money. This means that choices have to be made and that, unfortunately, we cannot always play Santa Claus to everything and everyone.

There are essential decisions to be taken that are most fundamental to a whole society, and these decisions must be taken at the lowest possible level, as close as possible to citizens, and not in the ivory towers of Brussels, Luxembourg or Strasbourg.

The experience in my home country, for example, has been that Flemings and Walloons make fundamentally different choices on such matters as health care and their approach to unemployment. The Flemish and Walloon societies are different, their political and economic worlds are different, and therefore they opt for different approaches and priorities. If this is true of Belgium today, how much truer is it, *mutatis mutandis*, of the very different Member States of the European Union, for example the United Kingdom and Romania?

It would be one thing if this report were only a catalogue of good intentions, but the European institutions have been intending to appropriate the field of social policy for years, and that is not a good thing.

Gabriele Stauner (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, in contrast to some of the speakers immediately before me, I believe the Commission is only to be congratulated on the communications on which this discussion is based. They are not only a rich source for Member States seeking social facts and data but also, in my opinion, a sure sign that the EU and the Commission are serious about a stand-alone social policy.

If we declare our commitment to the European social model, in the sense of not only extolling it as a tradition and historical achievement, but also of making it into a trademark for a united Europe for the future, then a stocktake of our social reality is a basic prerequisite. Particularly as a result of the enlargement rounds of 2004 and 2007, we must finally distance ourselves from the view that European social policy is an adjunct to the internal market.

However, this is not entirely self-evident, for in many areas the dominance of economic policy in Commission proposals is, unfortunately, conspicuous. In this connection, I would remind the House of the Green Paper on 'Modernising labour law to meet the challenges of the 21st century' and the flexicurity debate. The former was shelved by the Commission yesterday, news I can only welcome wholeheartedly while recommending the same course for the flexicurity proposals, which are directed at hard-won employees' rights in the employment relationship.

All the points addressed in this report – many thanks to Mrs Lynne – are highly topical. I am thinking of the minimum-wage debate in my country and the wage claims that are supported by the current strikes on the French and German railways. When it comes to wages policy, we are right in saying that a full-time job must provide a living for the man or woman who does it. Anything else falls short of the Christian responsibility of employers for their employees. Work must be worthwhile – that must be the basic principle.

What always upsets me is child poverty, which I lament even in my own country. I believe we must pay special attention to this. It should not exist. Actually, I should like to see rapid efforts in the Member States making it redundant for us to declare 2010 the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

IN THE CHAIR: MR MARTÍNEZ MARTÍNEZ

Vice-President

Jan Andersson (PSE). – (SV) Mr President, Commissioner, I would also like to begin by thanking Mrs Lynne for an excellent job and an excellent report. I was myself invited to the conference in the Azores where we, the Commission and Parliament, together had a dialogue with civil society concerning these issues.

I would also like to commend the Commission for taking these issues seriously through its new communication on social exclusion and by presenting a recommendation next year which takes up these issues. It is precisely as Mr Špidla says, the situation in Europe is generally very good with increased growth and more jobs, but at the same time the gulfs are increasing. The gulfs are increasing and poverty is increasing. There are big differences between Member States. In a number of countries the differences are extremely large, and I am not just talking about new and old Member States – there are new Member States with small gulfs and old Member States with large gulfs. We must deal with this.

I think the Commission's strategy with three pillars is very good. When it comes to work, jobs are not enough, because there are also bad jobs from which it is not possible to support oneself and which are not empowering. We must have good jobs which pay decent wages. We on the Committee looked at the situation regarding minimum incomes and saw big differences between Member States. We need an exchange of experience here to find best practice. Then there are the public services to which everyone must have access: social

services, housing, health care and so on. The methods are the open method of coordination which we shall strengthen.

I would also like to mention, before I finish my remarks, that today we are going to vote on Parliament's position on, among other things, the forthcoming Integrated Guidelines. We must also include the social dimension in the Integrated Guidelines in order to combine growth issues and employment issues with a social dimension so that we see these issues not in isolation from each other, but as a whole.

Siiri Oviir (ALDE). – (ET) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I thank Mrs Lynne for raising a very important matter. I welcome the report's aim, namely to focus various stakeholders' attention on discussing what constitutes Europe's social reality. This is a wide-ranging topic and for that reason I can dwell only on a couple of crucial points.

At the Nice Summit in 2000, the Member States undertook to bring about a significant, measurable reduction in poverty and social exclusion by 2010. Regrettably, action on that objective has not been particularly successful.

An open Europe based on free movement and free trade has contributed to the economic progress on which people's well-being and a better quality of life depend. It has, however, become clear over the last few years that for many Europeans it is a matter for debate whether the net effect of globalisation, liberalisation and greater competition does anything to improve their well-being.

Today, in the 21st century, the level of poverty and social exclusion in Europe are worryingly high. Mr Špidla recently said that about 20%, in other words one in five of our citizens, is in danger of falling into poverty. All the Member States have social services and social benefits, yet even after receiving them one sixth of people live in poverty.

Have we asked ourselves why this is the way things are in a Union which was not forcibly brought together? Why now, 62 years after the end of the war and 50 years since the Union came into being, have we been unable to guarantee people's basic rights? My question is: is a successful economy an end in itself or should it be a means of improving people's well-being?

Furthermore, by providing social aid the Member States are committed to providing benefits equivalent to the minimum amount needed on which to live; to providing aid sufficient to fulfil this objective. We do not need to formally transpose reams of directives – there lies no more than self-delusion. This raises the question as to whether timely implementation of adopted texts is guaranteed at the level of the European Union institutions, including in the 'soft policy areas'.

In Europe we should not focus solely on economic results and competition; we should also consider establishing greater social solidarity and sustainable social measures. And where we have adopted a decision to that end, we must also see to it that it is implemented. Our citizens expect that much of us.

Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, unfortunately economic development, which we all crave so much, is accompanied by an increase in income stratification, which weakens social cohesion and creates serious problems where the weaker groups are concerned – those affected by unemployment, those receiving a low wage or those who have difficulty accessing education and health care.

The tasks adopted at the Nice European Council have been carried out inadequately. There are still groups of people whose income is below the minimum needed to survive. Lack of economic independence also interferes with people's sense of dignity. A general ban on discrimination, and a guarantee of equal opportunities, chiefly for disabled people, are obviously needed, but they do mean a rise in expenditure on social aims. Our populations are ageing, which gives rise to fears about the financial capacity of pension insurance systems.

I congratulate Mrs Lynne on an excellent report, which draws attention to these and other important social problems in our countries and also to methods that could be used to deal with them. I most definitely support this draft.

I would, however, like to draw attention to a contradiction in the European Union's approach to social and economic problems. The pressure to restrict expenditure on social aims prevents numerous social problems from being dealt with. One example that could be quoted is the reform of the pensions system in Poland.

Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am not alone in congratulating Elizabeth Lynne on her report, partly because I know that in taking stock of everything that is socially flawed in Europe, she found so many things that were wrong that parliamentary officials were forced to drag her away from her desk so that she could be here with us this morning, and she still had not finished.

It is true that there is much poverty in Europe. When I came in and saw my colleague Fernando Fernández, I remembered what he said in Puebla, Mexico, a few years ago, when we were both attending a conference on world poverty. He said then that poverty can be predominantly blamed on bad government, which exists all over the world. Therefore, those responsible for poverty are first and foremost national governments, and not the European Union. This is a call for national governments, who expect and demand so much from Europe but do so little themselves, especially where it is most needed, to accept responsibility.

I also met a friend of mine, Mr von Wogau, as I came into Parliament, and he asked me whether it was true that in Italy, the state pension for a widow or for someone is completely incapacitated is EUR 50 a month for life. Mr President, I had to tell him that unfortunately this is true. For this reason, as the only elected representative of pensioners in this Parliament, I say yes to a minimum wage for anyone lucky enough to work, I say yes to a minimum pension in Europe for all old-age pensioners and I say yes to anyone who is unemployed, out of work or without a pension, that they too should also be entitled to receive a minimum income.

Karin Jöns (PSE). – (DE) Commissioner, Mrs Lynne, I am much obliged to the Commission for the initiatives and to Mrs Lynne for her most excellent report. Anyone who wants to combat poverty – as Mr Fatuzzo has already said – must really focus more intensely on the older generation. We must stay abreast of demographic changes and also ensure, despite steadily rising costs in the health system, that it will be just as possible to age with dignity in the future. Older people have just as much right to comprehensive, quality-assured health care and long-term care regardless of their income or where they live.

We urgently need a targeted exchange of experience amongst Member States as to how best to organise and secure high-quality, affordable care. In particular, we must take into account the problem of increasing numbers of people suffering from dementia. However, to do this, we need sound data; that is also why we are asking the Commission to provide us with these data as quickly as possible.

In a social Europe, all patients must have equal access to evidence-based medicines and medical products. It is simply unacceptable that the very same antibiotic costs EUR 3 in Belgium and EUR 34 in Germany, for example. Therefore I am glad that, with this report, we are calling for the Commission and the Member States to enter into intensive dialogue with us, and with the pharmaceutical industry and patient groups, in order to develop balanced guidelines for greater transparency as far as the effectiveness and price of medicines are concerned. This is another contribution to reducing the costs of health care for us all.

Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, I, too congratulate you on your two communications and I hope that you will continue with your constructive proposals.

My colleague, Mrs Lynne, with her sensitive approach to social issues, and all of us with our amendments, have been involved in all the OMC actions included in the national action plans. The report on social reality stocktaking will give direction to the social policy of the Member States. It should take account of the fact that in Europe today there are serious demographic problems directly affecting social cohesion and solidarity between the generations.

The family is still not taken into account by Member States in terms of the support it should be given, although it forms the basis of society. Poverty is increasing, in single-parent families as well as in large families, not only because of lack of income, but also because of a lack of social support and equal treatment, especially in taxation.

Families' living conditions directly affect children, especially in the more vulnerable categories. Inequality of access to resources and opportunities is growing, limiting both personal development and the future economic development and cohesion of Europe. Would the EU, for each child born there, not be able to guarantee an income to cover those children's living expenses and upbringing, equivalent to the per-capita income of each Member State?

Policy on the promotion of social cohesion must be based on participation in the employment market. It must also contribute to the social integration of individuals not in employment and those offering informal services within the family. For this reason, the Member States are called up on primarily to investigate ways

of recognising the unofficial skills acquired when caring for children and dependent persons, such as preliminary training and work experience. This will facilitate their integration into the employment market and provide pension and insurance rights.

Solidarity between the generations must be maintained by making use of the knowledge and experience of older people and through its dissemination and use by younger generations. The Member States are called upon to promote systems for the exchange of services between the generations and to invest in voluntary schemes, whether of an educational, cultural or business nature.

This will be achieved by creating suitable infrastructures and providing information on increased opportunities for older people to participate in such activities, so that they do not become marginalised or fall victim to social exclusion.

Alejandro Cercas (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, Mrs Lynne, Commissioner, thank you very much for offering us this communication and this document, which are undoubtedly going to enable us to improve our knowledge of changes and trends, and the agenda that we need to have for the future.

We should not, however, make a mistake. We have many documents, we have many analyses, we have many debates and we have many words, but here, as for diseases, we need not only a diagnosis but also treatment.

It is true, as you said, Commissioner, that we need European treatment, through the Union, its institutions and its mechanisms, in order to respond to the problems of today and tomorrow, taking into account that if we do not do it at Union level it will be impossible to do it solely at the level of the Member States.

Some Member States that are making fast progress, such as mine, are beginning to be threatened by policies that are seeking to slow down, or, in other Member States, to establish unfair competition with the supply and social change that is taking place in our countries. Commissioner, please take account of the fact that the feeling is beginning to spread that European social policy, which in the 1960s and 1970s, as a Spanish trade unionist said to me in a letter today, was aimed at harmonising progress, and in the 1980s and 1990s limited itself to ensuring minimum requirements, is now beginning to slide towards a social policy in which there is competition between the Member States to achieve the lowest common denominator.

Commissioner, the risks that we face for the future include not only ageing and globalisation, but also the contagious lack of solidarity and aggressive, xenophobic and anti-European nationalism that is threatening both Europe's current social victories and its future ones.

Agnes Schierhuber (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to add my voice sincerely to the thanks to our rapporteur, Mrs Lynne. Social protection and social inclusion help to combat poverty and exclusion in preventive health care and many other areas, and are among the most important challenges for the future.

The term 'minimum income' is often discussed in different ways in the Member State that I come from. However, I fully support Mrs Stauner's approach with regard to jobs, full-time working and income. The social partnership is strongly established in Austria, which gives us a great opportunity, indeed one that is used in attempts to find a solution with the agreement of all those involved. This means we do not have as many strikes as in other EU states, where these are frequently the order of the day.

This is precisely why a regulation at EU level must be approached very carefully. The different national social welfare systems mean that we must proceed very judiciously with any harmonisation.

Our concern must be to offer social protection to all employees and to enable their social inclusion. Naturally, it must also be possible, within the framework of subsidiarity, that Member States should, must and can have higher standards.

Proinsias De Rossa (PSE). – Mr President, the social reality of Europe is that poverty is rife. Seventy-two million men, women and children are below the poverty line, many are homeless and many disabled or confined to their homes because of lack of services. Many people are trapped in poverty by inflexible welfare rules.

I am afraid that communications and guidelines will not solve these issues. While I do not underestimate the difficulties faced by Commissioner Špidla, we need to establish legal obligations on Member States to achieve the necessary changes.

Working people are seeing their pensions devalued and their job security undermined, and many fear the race to the bottom. The problem is that inequality is built into many Member States' economic models. For many of them, including Ireland, the attitude is 'Let us create the wealth. Then we will sort out the social problems'. This is to ignore the reality that social inequalities are a brake on economic progress and that we cannot have long-term sustainable prosperity for everyone if we treat social policy as an afterthought and fail to avail of the wasted talent of 72 million people, not to mention the human misery that hides behind that statistic.

Tomáš Zatloukal (PPE-DE). – (CS) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, European societies are undergoing dramatic changes in relation to the nature of work and family life, the social status of women and social mobility. Social values are changing and societies are becoming more and more multicultural. The current developments have expanded people's horizons and given them more options when making decisions about their lives.

Although the Member States of the European Union are among the richest countries in the world, new types of poverty and inequality are still emerging. Tens of millions of European citizens continue to live in poverty. Social inclusion and social protection are basic values of the European Union and fundamental rights for all individuals. However, the Member States must step up their efforts to combat child poverty. Unless there are significant improvements in the inclusion of children from disadvantaged social groups even at pre-primary level, the number of pupils who drop out of school early will not decrease; nor will we be able to increase the number of people completing secondary school and thus gaining key skills. An increasing number of citizens will have to cope with social exclusion, unemployment and other socially undesirable phenomena that are harmful to themselves as well as to the economy and society.

From this point of view, it is also crucial to combat youth unemployment. It is important to remove the obstacles in some professional training programmes so that they are more flexible and effective and reflect the needs of the labour market. This will significantly improve the opportunities for disadvantaged people to assert themselves. Strengthening social cohesion and eradicating poverty and social exclusion must be political priorities for the European Union and its Member States.

Richard Howitt (PSE). – Mr President, I welcome this debate and report on social reality and, though we must of course welcome stocktaking and exchanges of best practice and the open method of coordination, the reality that we have to understand is that these devices have not yet stopped: women having 24 % less pay compared to men in Germany; nearly one in three children living in poverty in Poland; and wealth inequality in my own country, the United Kingdom, at a 40-year high.

I do think that European social funding and national programmes like the New Deal in the UK are essential active labour market measures to tackle the real barriers which prevent groups in our society from progressing from worklessness to work and that work is still one of the best devices for us to combat poverty.

I do thank Commissioner Špidla for putting a firm commitment in the Commission's work programme for new legislation on Article 13 discrimination, which I have long discussed with him. I and this Parliament look forward to working with him on the detail, not least in the Presidency conference next week.

But all of us – he and us together – must guard against this talk on stocktaking delaying the new social agenda in Europe, or deregulation in one area actually leading to increases in inequality and injustice, not combating these evils.

Trade unionists, social NGOs and of course disabled people, with whom I have worked for more than 20 years, are sceptical about what we are doing for social Europe. We have to listen to their concerns and we have to respond to them.

Vladimír Špidla, Member of the Commission. – (CS) Mr President, this debate has been extremely comprehensive and detailed. It would be very difficult to give a detailed answer to the individual comments, so allow me to provide a brief summary in response.

First of all, it seems to me that the debate has clearly shown that Parliament's welcomes the idea of social reality stocktaking, and though I agree with Mr Cercas that diagnosis is not the same as therapy, I am also of the opinion that no therapy is possible without diagnosis. Our society is constantly changing and we have to find new methods to adapt to it or reform the old methods. For this to be effective, we need to understand the global picture.

I think that the debate has another common denominator, and that is that although the social reality has its own dynamism to some extent, we also have our own values: a general European concept of a European social model that encompasses social inclusion and social protection and activity in general. It is therefore not acceptable in our model of thinking and acting to adopt a passive view. There is always the possibility of trying out active politics and active intervention.

There is also a third idea that I would like to stress. There is no doubt that, like most policies, the majority of European decisions also comply with the principle of subsidiarity, according to which the policies to solve a given problem are dealt with in the best and most effective manner. This means that there is no doubt in relation to the position of the Member States on social policy. On the other hand, the debate also clearly shows that the goal cannot be reached at Member State level alone, without efforts at European level. It is therefore our duty to find the most advantageous and effective synergy in this area.

The debate brought to light a concern that I also share to some extent: a concern that there is a risk that inequality and the incompatibility of the social policies in individual Member States may lead to competition that possibly lowers social standards. The European Commission does not want to open this door. Our fundamental concept is to make individual European social policies compatible in such a way that will ensure competition and development from the bottom up, with a view to progress that always includes a social dimension.

Ladies and gentlemen, the debate also clearly shows that social and economic policies cannot be designed on an 'either/or' basis. The only possibility is 'not only/but also', which means the balanced development of both policies together, without making giving preference to one over the other. The usual trend is to give priority to the economic policy. However, I could see clearly from the debate that this approach is not favoured by the European Parliament.

Ladies and gentlemen, you mentioned a wide range of individual problems, notably the issue of the health service, including access to medicines and its overall organisation. You discussed the effects of demographic ageing and the importance of services of general interest. I am glad that all these views are represented in the European Commission's strategic documents. We aim to integrate them into a general global strategy.

Ladies and gentlemen, allow me in conclusion to express my thanks to Mrs Lynne, whose report, which is currently being discussed here, is without doubt an important element of the global effort to ensure progress across the European Union.

President. – Thank you, Commissioner. As President I would also like to congratulate Mrs Lynne on a report that has had a huge impact among civil society.

I have been a privileged witness to how the convoys of young people standing against poverty and for inclusion, who travelled across Europe, took Mrs Lynne's document and went from city to city, from European capital to European capital, honouring the European Parliament, thanks to the work of our colleague.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place at 12 noon.

(The sitting was suspended at 11.35 and resumed at 12 noon)

IN THE CHAIR: MR POETTERING

President

José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra (PPE-DE). – (ES) Mr President, I would like to ask you, along with Mrs Mann, who cannot be here today with us in Parliament, and other colleagues, to pass on the solidarity of the citizens of the European Union that our Parliament represents with the victims of the tropical storm, which then turned into a Christmas hurricane, which has devastated Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Jamaica, Cuba, Barbados and other areas of the Caribbean, leaving a trail of destruction, disease and death.

Also, Mr President, please express our solidarity with the victims of the floods in the Mexican states of Oaxaca, Chiapas, and also, above all, Tabasco. I would like to ask you, Mr President, not only to pass on our solidarity but also to urge the European Commission to mobilise the tools at its disposal to alleviate this situation and remedy the damage, which always affects the most disadvantaged areas.

President. – Thank you very much, Mr Salafranca. As far as this relates to Parliament, we shall proceed in this manner, and we shall also pass your thoughts on to the Commission.

4. Communication of Council common positions: see Minutes

5. Voting time

President. – The next item is voting time.

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

5.1. Regulations governing political parties at European level and the rules regarding their funding (vote)

- Leinen report (A6-0412/2007)

- Before the vote:

Jo Leinen (PSE), rapporteur. – (DE) Mr President, last Friday, the Council accepted the essential content of this Regulation on the funding of parties and foundations at European level. In addition, this morning, a dialogue took place with the Commission and the Council, and we reached agreement on the questions that remained to be settled. Therefore, there is a realistic chance of adopting this project at first reading and creating the prerequisites for better financing even for 2008.

I therefore suggest that we postpone the vote until 29 November, at the next plenary, in Brussels.

(Parliament approved the proposal)

5.2. Quarterly statistics on Community job vacancies (vote)

- Athanasiu report (A6-0335/2007)

5.3. Full application of the Schengen acquis (vote)

- Coelho report (A6-0441/2007)

5.4. Recovery plan for bluefin tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean (vote)

Braghetto report (A6-0408/2007)

5.5. The European Interest: succeeding in the age of globalisation (vote)

- Joint motion for a resolution: B6-0435/2007

- Before the vote on the heading above paragraph 1:

Margarita Starkevičiūtė, on behalf of the ALDE group. – I would like to suggest changing the heading of the first part to read: 'External Lisbon dimension'. That is to say, to change 'External policies' to 'External Lisbon dimension'.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

- Before the vote on paragraph 5:

Hartmut Nassauer (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, due to the withdrawal of an oral amendment to paragraph 5, the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats wishes to vote 'no', contrary to what is stated in its lists.

– *Before the vote on paragraph 14:*

Udo Bullmann (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, there are Members who have a problem with the central section, the part from ‘points out that one’ to ‘domestic demand’. In agreement with Mr Caspary from the Group of the European People’s Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, I therefore suggest adding the words ‘in some Member States’ after ‘European economy’, and I hope that this will deal with the problems with the central section. I believe this could also be of assistance to the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

– *Before the vote on paragraph 30:*

Daniel Caspary (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, there is no objection to postponing the text, but I would still ask that we hold a vote on it. If Parliament votes in favour of the text, the text belongs elsewhere, but it could be that it is not endorsed, which is why I am asking for a vote on the original text.

President. – There has been no request for a split vote.

– *After the final vote:*

Jan Andersson (PSE). – (SV) Mr President, Parliament has now voted in favour of updating and amending the Integrated Guidelines. This concerns, for example, the social dimension. So far the Commission has chosen not to pay attention to this.

I would like to hear Mr Špidla’s comments on the decision which Parliament has now taken and whether he is going to push the issue of updated and amended Integrated Guidelines within the Commission.

Vladimír Špidla, Member of the Commission. – (CS) The decision taken by Parliament has a certain weight and the Commission must take it into account when preparing further documentation. Therefore, Parliament’s vote naturally carries the appropriate weight and the issue of the Integrated Guidelines was fundamental in the debate we held with Parliament.

President. – We interpret ‘certain weight’ to mean ‘great weight’ and recommend that the Commission adopt our assessment.

5.6. Application of Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of citizens of the Union and their families to move and reside freely within the territory of the Member States (vote)

Joint motion for a resolution: B6-0462/2007

– *Before the vote:*

Joseph Daul, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I refer to Rules 19 and 166 of the Rules of Procedure. Before Parliament votes on the joint motion for a resolution by certain groups on freedom of movement, I would like to condemn most firmly on behalf of my group the personal attack in paragraph 13 thereof on the Vice-President of the Commission, Franco Frattini.

I wish to denounce a politically undignified manoeuvre by the Italian Socialists, taken up by certain of my fellow Members, which is unworthy of the challenges we face. More serious still, this untruthful distortion of Mr Frattini’s comments, which our institution must reject, will mean we cannot make a composed decision.

If our group were to vote against this resolution because of this manoeuvre, this would not in any way diminish our support for all the Romanian and other EU nationals who obey the law and respect their host country.

Europe is founded on the rule of law, something we reaffirm in the resolution my group has signed on the joint initiative of our Italian and Romanian colleagues. The question of freedom of movement is not just a national matter, but a European one. It is not a case of settling political scores, but a question of values, ladies and gentlemen.

(Applause)

Martin Schulz, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, we held an extensive debate in this Chamber in which Commissioner Frattini took part. The Commissioner responded very moderately in his own comments and in his answers to speeches from various Members. The resolution criticises only one point; that is, that it can be proved that Commissioner Frattini gave the public incorrect information on a specific point of European law.

The fact that our resolution corrects this and also clarifies that the Commissioner responsible for the legal protection of the citizens of Europe made an incorrect statement in public on an essential question of citizens' rights is the duty of this Parliament and has nothing to do with any conspiracy theories. However, we know very well, Mr Daul, that you are a pitiful Member, because you were pressured by Forza Italia to make that statement. That is all there is to be said on the matter.

(Applause from the left)

President. – We do not want to conduct a debate here now.

Monica Frassoni, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I think that we should comment on the statement by the chairman, Mr Daul, separately. This Parliament will express itself with a majority and has every right to criticise or censure the Commissioners. It is the sovereign right of this Parliament.

If we did what we did, it was because Mr Frattini misinterpreted Community law, and although it is difficult to make myself heard above all this shouting, I would like to repeat that we are acting here as MEPs towards a European Commissioner and we will continue to do so!

(Applause from the left)

President. – Please could we be a little less emotional in dealing with this matter.

Graham Watson, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, I wish to speak briefly on a point of order. Independently of any party political debate, it is highly unwise of Commissioners to get involved in party political matters in their own countries or in anybody else's country. I think it is not unreasonable that this House should remind the Commission of its duties in this regard.

(Applause from the left)

President. – I now have three more speeches and then we shall close this short debate.

Francis Wurtz, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (FR) Mr President, I think I do not need to add much to what Monica Frassoni, Graham Watson and Martin Schulz have said. I would simply like to say this: it would be sensible, when any Commissioner has his words challenged by four groups who are not all from the same half of the Chamber, for him to reflect on what he should avoid doing again if he wants to have Parliament's trust.

(Applause)

Antonio Tajani (PPE-DE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in accordance with Rules 151 and 19 of the Rules of Procedure, I ask you to assess the admissibility of paragraph 13, which contains an unmotivated and unfounded personal attack on the Vice-President of the Commission. This is a text which, if approved, after the statements by the spokesperson of the Commission President defending Mr Frattini, would cause an unseemly conflict between Parliament and the Commission for internal political reasons. Therefore, I ask you to put the text of the motion to the vote without paragraph 13 and at the same time I ask the authors to retract the text via an oral amendment.

– *Before the vote on paragraph 1:*

Roberta Angelilli (UEN). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to add the following oral amendment: 'Expresses its deep regret at the murder of Ms. Giovanna Reggiani in Rome on 31 October 2007, and sends its sincere condolences to her family'.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

– *Before the vote on paragraph 13:*

Roberta Angelilli, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to add the following amendment: ‘Considers education and the fight against school drop-out within Roma communities to be one of the fundamental tools for combating social exclusion, exploitation and crime’.

(The oral amendment was not accepted)

– *Before the vote on Recital F:*

Roberta Angelilli (UEN). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, considering the importance of the conditions set forth in Articles 5, 6, 7 and 8 of Directive 2004/38/EC on the right of entry and residence.

(The oral amendment was not accepted)

5.7. Application of the Schengen acquis (vote)

Motion for a resolution: B6-0448/2007

5.8. Pakistan (vote)

Joint motion for a resolution: B6-0472/2007

– *Before the vote on paragraph 1:*

Robert Evans, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – Mr President, as Chairman of the Delegation for relations with the countries of South Asia, I led negotiations on this compromise text. I recognise that it is a sensitive issue and it is important that we all recognise the situation in Pakistan. I think the whole House will want to send a strong, unified message to General Musharraf.

In the spirit of compromise and, I hope, to win the support of the whole House, I would like to propose the following oral amendment. In recital A, we refer to President Musharraf ‘suspending the Constitution and the rule of law and replacing them with martial law’. I would like to propose that we say that he has replaced them ‘by the state of emergency, de facto martial law’. Then, in line with the suggestions made by other colleagues, in three other places, paragraphs 1, 10 and 11, we should replace ‘martial law’ with ‘the state of emergency’. I hope that will command the full support of the House.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

5.9. Bali Conference on Climate Change (vote)

Motion for a resolution: B6-0432/2007

– *Before the vote:*

Satu Hassi (Verts/ALE). – (FI) Mr President, I would just like to say that one important point in the Finnish version of this resolution has been translated wrongly. In section 1, which concerns the Bali negotiating mandate, there is a misunderstanding in the Finnish, which suggests that this resolution would be dealing with the EU’s internal negotiating mandate before the Bali Conference. In fact, the Bali mandate means that at the Bali Conference the countries which have ratified the climate treaty will try to obtain a negotiating mandate to make it possible to establish the next climate treaty. In other words, the Finnish text in section 1 which says ‘to agree on a negotiating mandate for the conference’ should say ‘on a negotiating mandate for a treaty at this conference’.

– *After the vote:*

Gay Mitchell (PPE-DE). – Mr President, I should be recorded as voting against Amendment 7. I am afraid the wrong light came on when I pressed the button. It should have been a vote against. This does not change the result of the vote, but it is a sensitive issue for me. I would therefore ask that my vote be recorded as a vote against.

President. – It will be noted as you have said.

5.10. Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy (vote)

Obiols i Germà and Tannock report (A6-0414/2007)

– Before the vote on paragraph 14/2:

Hélène Flautre (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, excuse me, I would just like to make it clear that the deletion of the term 'readmission agreements' only concerns the first section of paragraph 14, to remove any ambiguity over the interpretation of the vote.

– Before the vote on Amendment 3:

Charles Tannock (PPE-DE), rapporteur. – Mr President, I would like to add for paragraph 19a the following wording: 'underlines the need to involve and work together with the EEA countries (Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein) and Switzerland and to make full use of their experience of working with the European Union'.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

– Before the vote on paragraph 42:

Charles Tannock (PPE-DE), rapporteur. – Mr President, this is just to confirm that the oral amendment is to delete the paragraph, so that should be taken first, before Amendment 13, which means that the order of voting in the list needs to be changed.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

5.11. Trade and economic relations with Ukraine (vote)

Zaleski report (A6-0396/2007)

– Before the vote:

Zbigniew Zaleski (PPE-DE), rapporteur. – (DE) Mr President, before the vote I, together with my colleagues from the Committee on International Trade, should like to say thank you for the successful work that has been done, which allows us to save time due to the absence of amendments.

This report should send a clear signal to the new government and the parliament in Ukraine that, for our part, we have done everything necessary to ensure that the negotiations for the free-trade area can take place. We are trusting partners in this dialogue. If there is a representative from Ukraine here today, please would he or she tell the national parliament that the European Parliament recommends voting without delay on the application by Ukraine for accession to the WTO, and ratifying this accession as soon as a decision has been made in Geneva.

For the mutual benefit of both the EU and Ukraine, I would ask you all now please to support this report. Thank you very much.

(Applause)

President. – Mr Zaleski, if I were allowed to congratulate you on how well you express yourself in my own language, I would do so.

5.12. Situations of fragility (vote)

– Motion for a resolution: B6-0476/2007

5.13. Social reality stocktaking (vote)

– Lynne report (A6-0400/2007)

– Before the vote on paragraph 9:

Elizabeth Lynne (ALDE), rapporteur. – I propose that the word ‘women’ be changed to ‘individuals’ in paragraph 9.

(The oral amendment was accepted)

IN THE CHAIR: MR MAURO

Vice-President

6. Explanations of vote

President. – The next item is the explanations of vote.

- Report: Jo Leinen (A6-0412/2007)

Bogusław Liberadzki (PSE), in writing. – (PL) Mr Leinen’s report specifically states that the most significant innovation in the Commission proposal is to make it possible to fund not only European political parties, but also affiliated political foundations at European level from the Union budget.

I agree that the proposed regulation will improve the financial stability of European political parties and the funding of their election campaigns in the European Parliament elections in 2009.

- Report: Carlos Coelho (A6-0441/2007)

Zita Pleštinšá (PPE-DE). – (SK) A year ago it still looked like the date for the enlargement of the Schengen area would be postponed until 2009. I am glad that we have all stepped up our efforts and found a constructive solution to make the free movement of people without passport controls a reality.

I thus welcome the report by Mr Carlos Coelho confirming the accession of nine new Member States to the Schengen area. I believe that the free movement of people without passport controls is a real success story of European integration, which is why I was happy to vote for this report. The accession of the new Member States, including Slovakia, to the Schengen area, says clearly to the people of Europe that the Iron Curtain, built by the totalitarian Communist regimes between Western and Eastern Europe, will be consigned to the history books after 21 December 2007.

For me, the vote on this report is a historic event since it is taking place in the same week as the Slovak and Czech Republics will commemorate – on 17 November – the 18th anniversary of the fall of the totalitarian regime that used to prevent citizens from travelling around Europe. I believe that all European citizens will welcome this Christmas present.

Frank Vanhecke (NI). – (NL) Mr President, I voted against the Coelho report primarily to draw attention to the numerous problems with the open-border policy of the Schengen Agreement. After all, the Schengen system stands or falls by a strict, watertight control of its external borders on the one hand – which, to be perfectly clear, is not taking place – and by a rigorous approach to crime in all Member States, coordinated in all Member States, on the other – which is found far too rarely. Finally, all Schengen countries must also conduct a strict immigration policy, something that is completely at variance with, for example, the waves of mass legalisation seen in quite a few Member States in recent years.

In these circumstances, as an individual and as a politician, I cannot rejoice at no longer having to pass through border controls at internal borders, since criminals and illegal immigrants do not have to do so either, and that is pernicious to our society.

Oldřich Vlasák (PPE-DE). – (CS) Mr President, allow me to speak about the report by my colleague Mr Carlos Coelho on the draft Council decision on the full application of the provisions of the Schengen acquis in the nine Member States that joined the EU in 2004. I personally believe that this decision is absolutely vital. The accession of our countries, including my home country, the Czech Republic, should not be postponed under any circumstances. All the analyses to date objectively state that all these countries are adequately prepared for the enlargement of the Schengen area. Thanks to an incredible effort by the relevant Member States, the many experts involved in the inspections, the police, judicial authorities, officials and others, today these Member States are sufficiently prepared to apply all the provisions of the Schengen *acquis* in a satisfactory manner. I therefore assume that the Justice and Home Affairs Council will also express its support for this decision on 6-7 December this year. The symbolic importance of the elimination of the internal borders that

our citizens associate with joining the Schengen area will go down in history and can only be compared with the fall of the Iron Curtain almost 20 years ago.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE). – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, I am delighted that – in spite of the technical problem – we all joined together to vote on the report confirming that the new Member States, including the Czech Republic, will be ready to join the Schengen area as early as 2008. I appreciate the effort and openness of the Member States and the Commission during the intense technical consultations required prior to the enlargement. The enlarged Schengen area will no doubt present greater challenges for Europe's internal security, but on the other hand, and I would like to emphasise this, it is the culmination of the efforts to achieve free movement in a truly integrated area. Next year Europe will be united as it has never been before. The Iron Curtain is definitely gone and I thank you for that.

Sylwester Chruszcz (NI). – (PL) Mr President, Poland's accession to the Schengen area brings with it not only potential benefits linked to convenience in crossing borders, but also threats.

One negative phenomenon that Poland has already been experiencing for a number of years is the difficulties encountered by citizens of our eastern neighbours in entering our country, including Poles living in Belarus and Ukraine. A lack of border controls may lead to many negative phenomena associated with criminality and illegal immigration. We are also concerned about action taken to remove national border controls in Member States in favour of pan-European EU border services. That is why I abstained from voting on this matter.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) As we have long argued, we consider that the areas of Justice and Home Affairs are central competences of States, particularly of the Portuguese State. We therefore oppose their progressive transfer to the supranational institutions of the EU in a process that justifies every new 'advance' on the basis of the previous 'advance'.

Such is the case with the creation of the 'Schengen area' with its Schengen acquis, which serves as a catalyst for the communitarisation of policies or measures linked to border control – visas, asylum or immigration – or police and judicial mechanisms.

All the more so when such 'communitarisation' happens in a framework in which the major EU powers, in concert, make sure that the decision-making process gives them the possibility of defending and safeguarding their interests, which is not the case for Portugal.

As we have stated, essential international and European cooperation between sovereign States with equal rights concerning these matters is one thing, but the unacceptable handing over of fundamental elements for the safeguarding of national sovereignty and democracy to supranational institutions dominated by the major EU powers to create 'Fortress Europe' is quite another.

Hence our vote.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am voting against this report since, as I have already explained at length on several occasions, including recently, during my speeches in Parliament, I am firmly opposed to the Schengen Agreement. I am particularly opposed to it when this Agreement becomes the vehicle for illegal immigrants and dangerous movements within the EU.

The borders of these countries that want to become part of the Schengen acquis are an easy target for criminals. They would provide another means of entry for uncontrolled immigration from former Soviet bloc countries and from the Middle East, not to mention the social disorder that the free movement of citizens within the EU undeniably causes Italy and other countries.

Lars Wohlin (PPE-DE), in writing. – (SV) The Schengen cooperation must remain open to all Member States who wish to join and participate in the cooperation. On the other hand, it is extremely important that all the countries participating in the cooperation already satisfy the requirements at the time of joining, because the cooperation entails a common external border. If there are deficiencies in one country, Sweden has no way of checking the border protection. The investigations made show that there are problems which need to be tackled, and the reasonable thing would be to delay joining until all the requirements have been satisfied.

- Report: Iles Braghetto (A6-0408/2007)

Jan Andersson, Göran Färm and Inger Segelström (PSE), in writing. – (SV) With this explanation of vote, we the undersigned Swedish Social Democrat Members of the European Parliament would like to clarify how we voted on the Braghetto report (A6-0408/2007).

We think it is very important to set up a recovery plan for bluefin tuna. Bluefin tuna has been an endangered species for a long time following massive overfishing. In time this risks damaging the whole ecosystem in the fishing waters concerned. However, we think that the Commission's resolution is not entirely adequate and therefore voted against it.

We voted for the Committee's Amendments 4 and 6 – two amendments which entail the removal of two, in our opinion questionable, exemptions for bluefin tuna fishing.

We also supported Amendment 13 which would have meant that we should adopt a recovery plan worthy of the name. The proposal went considerably further than the original proposal, which is something we fully support. The level of bluefin tuna stocks is still dangerously low and the European Union must take greater responsibility for the recovery of bluefin tuna stocks.

Gérard Deprez (ALDE), in writing. – (FR) I would like to explain my vote on the report on the recovery plan for bluefin tuna in the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean.

In view of the truly critical state of bluefin tuna stocks, the European Union is reacting as follows through this regulation: a steady reduction of catch quotas, a restriction on fishing periods, and a stepping up of control measures to combat illegal fishing. I support these proposals.

I am, however plagued by a certain pessimism.

Firstly this is because scientists are already saying that the provisions in this regulation are not enough to guarantee the recovery of stocks. They believe there would be good reason to set quotas going well beyond the annual catch rates set by ICCAT (the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas). I am inclined to believe them, so I have lent my support to Amendment 13 tabled by the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance.

In view of the presence in the Mediterranean of fleets from non-EU countries such as Libya, Turkey, Tunisia, Japan and China, which are not members of ICCAT, it is clear that the regulation we are looking at will only have an effect if these countries sign up to the provisions it lays down, and there is no certainty they will.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) The establishing of an EU multi-annual recovery plan for bluefin tuna is the practical implementation of one of the measures adopted by the International Commission for the Conservation of Atlantic Tunas.

The plan provides, amongst other things, for a steady reduction in the catch quota, closed seasons, an increase in minimum size and an observer scheme on board fishing vessels and on fish farms.

The recommendation adopted also provides for financial compensation to be paid to fishermen during the closed season with a view to safeguarding the fleet and employment in the sector.

We also think it is important to improve control, periodically updating the volume of catches by the various vessels to prevent some countries from exceeding allocated quotas to the detriment of others, as happens at present. You will recall that the bluefin tuna fishing season was closed from September to December because it was suspected that some countries had already exceeded the quotas, as turned out to be the case.

Finally, we regret the rejection of our proposal underlining the fact that small-scale coastal and traditional fisheries, in addition to providing thousands of jobs, enable the sustainable exploitation of fisheries resources.

David Martin (PSE), in writing. – I voted in favour of this proposal for a Council regulation, which sets out a plan for the recovery of bluefin tuna stocks in the Eastern Atlantic and the Mediterranean. Under the proposal, fishers will be compensated for losses caused by closed seasons and quota reductions designed to allow the stock to recover. It recommends no derogations on seasons or minimum sizes. Firm action is needed to make sure this fish stock is not depleted beyond repair.

- Resolution: The European interest (B6-0435/2007)

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) We voted against this resolution that picks up the main aspects of neoliberal policies at Community level and tries to encourage their implementation at world level.

It is a resolution that accepts flexicurity as a concept to be developed and integrated into the National Reform Programmes of each Member State, that attempts to hide the real implications and objectives inherent in the Lisbon Strategy and in its guidelines for economic and employment policies, in particular the associated liberalisations and privatisations.

We cannot accept a resolution that welcomes the intention to develop an external dimension to the Lisbon Strategy, specifically the promotion of market liberalisation on a worldwide scale, accentuating its neoliberal nature and interference in the economic guidelines of third countries.

The Commission communication on its contribution to the October meeting of Heads of State or Government states that the re-launch of the Lisbon Strategy for growth and jobs has been a success, but it should have added the words 'for the large national and international economic and financial groups' who have seen their profits grow exponentially, whereas workers have had to face an erosion of their rights.

Timothy Kirkhope (PPE-DE), in writing. – I and my British Conservative colleagues believe firmly in the Member States of the European Union pursuing policies that will enhance Europe's competitive position in the globalised economy. We believe that Europe should pursue the Lisbon Agenda vigorously by securing a deal in the world trade talks, pushing for further deregulation to free industry and business to compete in world markets, driving forward liberalisation in the internal market, implementing effectively the Services Directive and adhering to a sound competition policy. All of this must be underpinned by an unshakeable commitment to free trade and open markets. Some of these elements are present in this motion and we welcome that.

Sadly, however, we believe that overall this joint motion is a huge missed opportunity. It should have set down the basic principles of an EU approach to globalisation as outlined above, but does not do so. There are elements in this motion which would take Europe in a direction which would undermine the ability of the EU to compete successfully in the globalised economy.

Marie-Noëlle Lienemann (PSE), in writing. – (FR) This resolution should have provided a chance to affirm a few urgent matters and to state what the European Parliament is actually expecting of the European Union institutions to ensure a revival of growth, shared social progress in our 27 Member States and development for the developing countries.

There is none of this, but just the same old story of what a good thing globalisation is. There is nothing about a democratic counterweight to the ECB imposing a monetary policy that favours industry and jobs. There is nothing about a strategy to counteract the EU's permeability to hedge funds and sovereign wealth funds. There is nothing about Community preference and the strict imposition of social (ILO) or environmental standards. There is nothing about development aid, which is essential for co-development.

Why are we surprised about the low growth in Europe, social problems and the people's mistrust?

David Martin (PSE), in writing. – I voted for this composite resolution which responded to the Commission paper 'The European interest: succeeding in the age of globalisation'. The resolution highlights a number of ways the Union can take advantage of the opportunities globalisation allows: promoting a level playing field in competition and trade issues; improving EU policymaking so it is more joined up; and emphasising the need for the social dimension of the EU to be reinforced.

Peter Skinner (PSE), in writing. – I welcome this resolution which draws attention to a series of interrelated issues – social rights through to financial regulations and the impact of how, as a result of expanding markets, the citizen can make sense of them. There is a balance to be had between liberal market conditions and issues of the needs of developing countries and it is absolutely necessary that we continue to debate this issue time and time again.

Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), in writing. – (NL) Europe will not succeed in combating the increasing poverty and global warming – the major challenges of globalisation – if it constantly puts the emphasis on liberalisation. Indeed, it is free trade that causes these problems. Globalisation creates the illusion that the general level of prosperity in the world is gradually increasing, but at the same time I note a steady increase in the gap between

rich and poor in the Member States. Liberalisation is also the cause of the great environmental disaster that lies ahead unless we hasten to take decisive, enforceable measures to combat global warming.

Lacking a vigorous policy in this field is criminally irresponsible. Investing in an energy-efficient economy and creating jobs in that area is nevertheless a promising course of action. The 'polluter pays' principle is disregarded all too frequently. As a Member of the Group of the Greens/ European Free Alliance I regret the absence of this input.

If Europe wants a single market with free movement of people, goods, services and capital, it should also lay down high social and environmental standards that offer protection and set an example to the rest of the world.

The proposed text remains vague and superficial and once again typifies the Commission's policy.

- Resolution: Application of Directive 2004/38/EC (B6-0462/2007)

Mario Borghesio (UEN). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it would be truly hypocritical if Parliament, after voting by a very large majority for Mrs Angelilli's oral amendment, which sends the condolences and support of the European Parliament to the family of a victim of such an unmotivated and serious crime in our country, then fails to adopt a clear position to prevent these acts, this massacre of honest citizens, which is happening due to the lack of controls.

No one wants there to be xenophobia in Italy, especially towards members of a people such as the Romanians, who, as an editorial in the newspaper *L'Avvenire* reminded us, have given us such artists as Mircea Eliade, Ionesco and Cioran. This is a great civilisation and one that is closely related to our own. The influx of criminals, and specifically the emergence of Roma groups, is another matter entirely. For these, border controls and deterrents are needed, with the introduction of a fingerprint recognition system so that we know who is coming into our country and what their intentions are, if possible, and more importantly so that we can pinpoint the exact date of entry.

Although we do not want to introduce draconian measures in Europe, if we are saying that checks must be carried out after three months, then we need to know the exact date of entry and this, as Mr Amato admitted in the Italian Chamber of Deputies, is not the case at present.

Robert Evans (PSE). – Mr President, I voted in favour of this resolution because I recognise that the free movement of persons is a fundamental principle of the European Union and one which must be respected and defended by all Member States.

Furthermore, I think we are right to emphasise yet again that the EU was actually founded on measures to combat all forms of racism and xenophobia and indeed all forms of discrimination. Equally, we should all in this House recognise that the Roma people of Europe are perhaps the most discriminated against, in some countries to totally unacceptable levels. We should understand that the assimilation, social integration and protection of the Roma minority are objectives that this European Union has yet to achieve. I think that this is an aim that we should all work for, along with the spirit of free movement.

Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted against the resolution on freedom of movement in the European Union tabled by centre-left groups – I will explain why in a minute – after declaring that I am absolutely and totally in favour of Mario Mantovani's proposal to block entry into the EU and therefore Italy for non-EU nationals for three years. For EU nationals, I am very much in favour of the right to freedom of movement of workers, citizens and tourists, provided that this is not a licence to kill.

It is inconceivable that a 45-year-old woman should die on her way home from work and a doctor a few days away from retirement should be killed during an attempted burglary at his home in Milan. Both of these events have occurred in the past few days in Italy. This is not freedom of movement!

Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE). – (RO) I voted in favour of the resolution regarding freedom of movement submitted by the PSE, ALDE, Verts and GUE/NGL Groups, although it only partially fulfils the purpose for which I believe this resolution should be drafted.

I believe the text of the resolution should have constituted an even clearer support for the European citizens residing in countries other than their country of origin, implicitly for the Romanian citizens residing in Italy who obey the Italian laws.

The voted text does not condemn the xenophobic attitudes toward Romanian citizens and does not refer to the amplification of the tension between the Romanian community in Italy and the Italian people, which is also generated by the inadequate enforcement of the decree issued by the Italian Committee of Ministries and statements of certain Italian politicians.

I also believe that, as mentioned in the common PPE-DE and UEN resolution, the efficient enforcement of the legal provisions by the Italian authorities would have prevented this situation.

I ask both the European Commission and the Italian authorities to take into consideration the provisions of the common resolution of the PPE-DE and UEN Groups as well, which are not included in the text adopted today.

Frank Vanhecke (NI). – (NL) Mr President, things are actually becoming more and more ridiculous. Now a majority in this House even deems it necessary to level an accusation of xenophobia at the people and government of Italy. In addition, the motion for a resolution states that the Italian Government's approach to the problem of crime among the Romanian Roma present there in massive numbers has contributed to rising tensions. Italy therefore has only itself to blame for all this and should have participated in the European Social Fund programmes for the integration of the Roma.

I should like to make it clear at this juncture that the people and government of Italy have a right to defend themselves, and that what has happened mainly goes to show that the Directive is unsuitable and that it must be made easier, not more difficult, to deport criminals – criminals, mark you, not decent people working to make ends meet.

David Martin (PSE), in writing. - I voted in favour of this joint resolution, which notes that the right of free movement is a fundamental one accorded to all EU citizens. Member States have an obligation to look after the citizens of other Member States living in their territories, and to ensure dignity and respect for the rights of all citizens of the Union, no matter where they are living.

Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I am strongly opposed to these motions for resolutions and want to express my firm opposition. This has all stemmed from belated and inconclusive action taken by the Italian government, which has realised that Italy is facing a crisis, unfortunately only following terrible incidents perpetrated by EU nationals.

Directive 2004/38/EC is clear when it says that 'All Union citizens shall have the right of residence on the territory of another Member State [...] if they [...] have sufficient resources for themselves and their family members not to become a burden on the social assistance system of the host Member State'.

Therefore, these motions for resolution seem pointless and pretextual. The treaties impose freedom of movement of citizens within the EU and no one wants to engage in discrimination based on the country of origin. However, once EU citizens commit serious and execrable violent crimes in another Member State or if they are unable to give a reason for their visit, as the Directive requires, it is in the interests of the entire Union that they should be sent back to their own country.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE), in writing. – (RO) I voted in favour of the resolution regarding free movement, initiated by PSE together with other political groups, because I consider it to be extremely important for the situation created in Italy not to create a dangerous precedent questioning the very respect of European Union fundamental principles.

I believe this situation should be solved immediately in order not to allow the European Union citizens to be discriminated against, irrespective of their nationality.

The measures proposed by the resolution will protect all European citizens from abuse. The EU needs all its citizens and Romanians should feel the solidarity of European people because there are thousands of Romanians working abroad who are appreciated for their hard work, honesty and correctness.

The Union's Charter to be annexed to the Reform Treaty lists the fundamental rights of European citizens: dignity, freedom, equality, solidarity, citizenship, justice. The EU guarantees democracy, rule of law, human rights, as well as the protection of minorities. In this context, the measures proposed by the resolution will contribute to the better integration of the Roma community.

- Resolution: Application of the provisions of the Schengen acquis (B6-0448/2007)

Zita Pleštinšá (PPE-DE). – (SK) To reiterate what is said in the motion for a resolution, I, too, would like to congratulate the Portuguese Government for putting forward a proposal providing a technical transitional solution – SISone4all – which will allow the new Member States to be connected to the Schengen Information System in 2007, before the Commission introduces the new Schengen Information System II.

Congratulations are also due to the new Member States entering the Schengen area on the tremendous efforts they made to meet all the Schengen requirements in such a short period of time. Enlargement of the Schengen area to include nine new states from 21 December 2007 is also the richly deserved outcome of the European Parliament's actions to stick to the original date. This is why I voted for this motion for a resolution.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) We voted against this resolution because we are opposed in principle to the communitarisation of Justice and Home Affairs, an area at the heart of state sovereignty. The 'Reform' Treaty is an attempt to turn the communitarisation of Justice and Home Affairs into a common policy.

Communitarisation – that is, the loss of national sovereignty – is all the more serious when it is promoted in a context characterised by Community policies and measures which dangerously compromise citizens' rights, freedoms and guarantees that represent the progress of civilisation and fundamental democratic achievements.

Consider the restrictive asylum policy and the increasing difficulties faced by asylum seekers in securing their rights and guarantees. Look at immigration policy with its security-orientated approach, its criminalisation of irregular immigrants, its inhuman 'detention centres' and repatriation measures, its discriminatory, exploitative and predatory treatment of human resources from third countries. Note the growing use of information and the ever-increasing storage of data – including biometric data – available to a wider set of bodies, including third countries, for example the access of US bodies to air passenger data.

- Resolution: Pakistan (B6-0472/2007)

Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV) The current political climate in Pakistan is certainly critical, since the President has declared a state of emergency and clear violations of human rights have been committed through deprivation of liberty, violence against peaceful demonstrators, and silenced media. We are firmly opposed to this but we are also opposed to the European Parliament, through this resolution, making yet another attempt to have the EU take over the independent foreign policies of the Member States.

The UN is the only body which, on behalf of its members, has the competence and authority to apply pressure in the global community. It is very important to restore stability and peace and to restore respect for human rights in Pakistan, but that is not a task which the EU should take away from the Member States.

Peter Skinner (PSE), in writing. – I agree the state of emergency declared (de facto martial law) should be ended and the state of civil law reimplemented with immediate effect and voted for this.

For many of us who are observers of Pakistani politics, it is depressing to see how badly affected the Pakistani communities without our constituencies feel.

A return to a democratic procedure is essential for credibility and the due process of Pakistani politics.

- Resolution: Bali Conference on Climate Change (B6-0432/2007)

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE-DE). – (FI) Mr President, our Group considered the amendment regarding the recognition of the role of nuclear power in our declaration on the climate conference to be an essential part of this resolution. That is why we want to express our satisfaction that Parliament confirmed this by adopting Amendment 7. We are not alone in our view. The UN's climate panel, the IPCC, also confirmed the role of nuclear power as a low-emission form of energy. Perhaps, too, we should remind ourselves that this House took an historic decision in connection with Mr Reul's report, with 509 votes in favour. The European Parliament recognised that nuclear power was, at the present, the EU's most important energy source with low carbon dioxide emissions, and at the same time highlighted its role in the fight against climate change.

On the other hand, our Group did not support section 25 in the resolution because in our opinion it needlessly linked or compared the peaceful use of nuclear power with the spread of nuclear weapons and the threat of

terrorism. We should remember that there are no moral censors in the atmosphere. It does not shun one form of energy or sympathise with another for ideological reasons. Only freedom from emissions has any importance, and now the emissions are not welcome. In any case, I wish to say we are pleased that this House sent out a clear message for the Climate Conference and recognised the seriousness of the threat of climate change.

Karin Scheele (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, my delegation, the Austrian Social Democrats, abstained from voting on the report on the Bali conference for precisely the reasons that Mrs Korhola has also raised. We support the other political messages of this report. The report is very good. My delegation cannot support the sending of a signal that nuclear power is an essential element in combating climate change. I also think that it should be up to the countries and continents themselves which strategy they follow.

I should like to reemphasise my delegation's support for all elements of this report, including the exclusion of nuclear power projects from the Clean Development Mechanism. However, we did not want to back this political signal in favour of nuclear power, so we abstained. In order to show our agreement with the rest of the report, which is good overall, we did not vote against it.

Bairbre de Brún, Jens Holm and Eva-Britt Svensson (GUE/NGL), in writing. – We support the resolution dealing with the upcoming Bali conference. The resolution expresses several important points. Among other things it clarifies the significant amount of emissions which are emitted from the livestock sector. It also emphasises the importance of relevant support to developing countries in their prevention and mitigation work to limit the negative effects of climate change. However, we do not support the proposal that nuclear energy should be seen as a tool which is necessary to prevent climate change.

Edite Estrela (PSE), in writing. – (PT) I voted in favour of the motion for a European Parliament resolution on limiting global climate change to 2 degrees Celsius – the way ahead for the Bali Conference on Climate Change and beyond (COP 13 and COP/MOP 3). Having regard to the fact that climate change is a major challenge facing societies today, I think it is fundamental for the European Union to renew its leading role in the Bali Conference and for a global post-2012 climate agreement to be reached.

Elisa Ferreira (PSE), in writing. – (PT) Amendment 7 destroys all the spirit of compromise which prevailed during the negotiations over the final text. The fact that it was adopted introduces a fundamental change in a text that should have retained a broad parliamentary consensus on the Bali challenges.

Thus, in the spirit of that overall objective and, although as shadow rapporteur I indicated to the Socialist Party that I would be voting in favour, I personally found myself forced to abstain in the final vote in protest against two aspects: the introduction into the text of the abovementioned Amendment 7 which supports nuclear energy, and the method employed by the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats in the light of the spirit of compromise which prevailed during the negotiations over the text.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) It is true that we are noticing very marked, rapid, and unnatural climate changes that result from many factors, but particularly from the predatory nature of neoliberal policies. We need effective measures to adapt human society to new living conditions.

The climate changes anticipated in various scientifically credible and reasoned scenarios might not be slow and gradual, depending on the measures taken in the meantime.

There is an urgent need to take deeper, cross-cutting measures to avoid more serious problems in the future, even the proliferation of human and environmental tragedies.

However, we also stress the need to break with neoliberal policies at European and global level, otherwise the major powers and the multinationals will continue to impose their own interests in terms of profits, both the exploitation of natural resources and in international trade, including trading in greenhouse gas emissions, which will have an extremely adverse impact on balanced human development.

Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV) Environmental problems are transboundary and therefore the UN Climate Conference is an important diplomatic arena for change at the global level. In the resolution in question, the EU aims to gather the Member States under a common flag in order to steer the conference negotiations in what the EU considers to be the right direction.

Limiting climate change is a good objective, but it is regrettable that in the EU's hands global environmental policy is overstepping the boundary into foreign policy at the same time as we dictate to third countries and

Member States how their national climate policies should look. The June List considers that every country should have its own vote at the Climate Conference and we have therefore chosen to vote against this resolution.

David Martin (PSE), in writing. – I voted for this resolution from the Climate Change Committee setting out the EU's proposed negotiating position for the start of talks on the future of global climate change cooperation post-2012. It sets out a sound and progressive EU position to drive reductions in global greenhouse gas emissions, taking note of the social impact of climate change, the EU's desired intention to restrict global warming to 2°C or less, and the vital need for global buy-in to the system.

Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE), in writing. – On behalf of the Fine Gael Delegation (EPP-ED):

Fine Gael Members voted in favour of this motion for a resolution, as we believe it is important to have the European Parliament's view on climate change stated in advance of the Bali Conference. However, we voted against Amendment 7, as we are traditionally opposed to nuclear power.

Peter Skinner (PSE), in writing. – I would like to thank the rapporteurs on this issue which brings into focus the issues surrounding one of the most important problems of our time.

Caps on emissions with targets to reductions alongside alternative non-carbon based energy production are not accepted by some jurisdictions in the way the EU has agreed. But this Conference can go a long way to unite and coordinate international action.

Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The resolution on limiting climate changes to 2 degrees Celsius is an extremely important document for our future and, for this reason, I voted in favour of its adoption.

Climate changes represent a major challenge with catastrophic consequences on the environment and human communities.

We are dealing with a problem we should address with short, medium and long-term measures. Climate changes already have disastrous effects on agriculture, hydrologic systems, forests, fauna and flora. Countries such as Greece, Romania, Bulgaria, Spain and Portugal have dealt with periods of drought, as well as with floods.

The EU should reaffirm its role as the leader in reducing climate changes. The financial mechanisms available for protecting water resources, avoiding deforestation and promoting non-polluting technologies should be increased and accessed by the Member States.

We have to allow each Member State to define its own energy mix in order to provide its energy resources. At the same time, Member States that generate nuclear energy should ensure the security of such installations and, especially, adequate waste management. Research funds for decreasing the quantity of waste and increasing the security of installations are required.

- Report: Raimon Obiols i Germà, Charles Tannock (A6-0414/2007)

Frank Vanhecke (NI). – (NL) Mr President, by no means do I want to detract from the sterling work done by the two rapporteurs on this report on the European Neighbourhood Policy, but I wish to point out that the report contains a gap. It fails to draw attention to the immense challenge presented by immigration from the south, in which regard I take the view that the North African countries themselves also bear tremendous responsibility.

I should have liked this report to include a plea for a joint policy between EU Member States and North African countries to combat illegal immigration, one that called the North African countries themselves to task and made good neighbourly relations and financial and material support from Member States dependent on goodwill, on a joint approach to this enormous challenge.

This – as I see it – fundamental aspect is lacking in the report, and I have therefore abstained from voting.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) Following the decision to take new and significant steps in European capitalist integration, specifically at the level of what is known as 'role of the EU in the world' that is reflected in the ongoing 'constitutional' project – now revived in the 'Reform' Treaty – and in the current EU policies, the majority of the EP is approving a report, which is compulsory reading..., on strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

Any doubts concerning the EU's real purposes and ambitions in relation to the ENP would soon be cleared up on reading this report. It amounts to a programme for actually interfering in and controlling the whole area of the Mediterranean, the Middle East, Central Asia and Eastern Europe. It is a programme which aims to achieve such objectives as: 'triggering and strengthening the commitment of the governments of the ENP countries to political and economic reforms'; their assimilation of EU 'common policies'; their 'alignment with EU foreign policy'; and the creation of a free trade area'.

The report also advocates 'more joint actions between the EU and the USA' for 'the promotion of democracy, the enhancement of energy security and the strengthening of regional security in the EU's neighbourhood', a point so transparent that it was toned down in the vote in plenary.

It would be best to read the report...

Janusz Lewandowski (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PL) The Neighbourhood Policy is taking on new significance at a time when further expansion of the European Union is going out of fashion. It is different in nature in the Mediterranean Neighbourhood compared with the Eastern European Neighbourhood, where many countries released from the Soviet area of influence are openly declaring a desire to accede to the European Community. In this event, as Poles, Hungarians and Lithuanians well understand, any substitute forms of involvement will not satisfy national ambitions. They have less influence on the required direction in political and economic evolution in these countries. They provide less of an incentive to reinforce the procedures of a state based on democracy and the rule of law and economic market principles and a genuine respect for citizens' rights.

Looking at this from the perspective of a European Union border country like Poland, it would appear that the best policy is maximum openness to the aspirations of countries located beyond our eastern border. This is clearly linked to creating an area of stability around the European Union and limiting the field of action of demagoguery, of which there is plenty in young democracies.

There is also justification for a budgetary effort based on ENPI, the new instrument to replace the TACIS and MEDA programmes, which supports the desired processes in our part of the world. So far, the Eastern European Neighbourhood has been less well funded than the Mediterranean Neighbourhood. The larger the European Union becomes, the greater our responsibility for the Old Continent will be.

Athanasios Pafilis (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL) The report on the European Neighbourhood Policy summarises the ways and means of imperialistic intervention in neighbouring countries. It falls within the EU's overall imperialist strategy worldwide. As usual, the report uses 'democratic reforms' and 'democratisation' in the neighbouring countries as the most suitable pretext for exerting coercion and pressure on governments that do not align themselves with its policies. This is to support and fund the action of the numerous civil society organisations, so that they can further their undermining role within these countries and promote the interventionist plans of the EU.

The European Parliament calls upon the neighbouring countries to participate in the EU's anti-migration policy by intensifying repressive measures against migrants. It calls upon them to cooperate closely with all its repressive mechanisms, such as Europol and the border protection agency Frontex; it incorporates them into the EU's plans to restrict democratic freedom and strike at popular movements, on the pretext of combating terrorism. It openly calls for 'joint actions between the EU and the USA in advancing goals', such as joint imperialist interventions and the sharing of the spoils.

It is in the interests of the people to resist and overturn the imperialist plans of the EU and USA in this area and to intensify their struggle for national independence and popular sovereignty.

Pierre Schapira (PSE), in writing. – (FR) Strengthening the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP), as detailed in this report, requires a deepening of cooperation between the two shores of the Mediterranean via a heightened dialogue between governments, local authorities and representatives of civil society. It is also essential to remember that the ENP must follow the line set by the European Union's development policy. Almost all the countries to the south and east of the Mediterranean are developing countries, according to the official list drawn up by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee. Achieving the millennium development goals should therefore be a priority of EU action in the region.

- Report: Zbigniew Zaleski (A6-0396/2007)

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE-DE). – (SK) I am in favour of strengthening the relationship with Ukraine and I support further structured dialogue with this country, which is our neighbour directly to the east.

During the last elections Ukraine showed great determination to make democratic changes. It decided to continue with a coalition that is clearly pro-European, modern and progressive. We must also remember that Ukraine is a vast country with attractive economic potential and a serious partner in economic relations. It is high time we signed an agreement with Ukraine on economic cooperation, on a free trade area. We must respond to the fact that Ukraine is going to join the World Trade Organisation.

I fully support the creation of a reliable energy transit system between Ukraine and the EU. I am very much in favour of cooperation in agriculture and environmental matters, but I would put most emphasis on scientific and educational cooperation, and on strengthening the dimension of the knowledge-based economy.

Zita Pleštinská (PPE-DE). – (SK) Ukraine is a neighbour of strategic importance to the EU and a natural 'bridge' connecting the EU with Russia and Central Asia. It is a large country whose Orange Revolution has put it on the road to democracy. Ukraine has become a key partner of the European Union's neighbourhood policy.

Our cooperation with Ukraine must improve and we must give all possible diplomatic and political support to Ukraine's accession to the WTO. Negotiations on the free trade area should start as soon as possible so that an ambitious agreement can be signed as soon as possible. We all understand how complicated the situation is in Ukraine: it is a very young and fragile democracy. Today this country finds itself facing a strategic decision: to move towards Russia or to move towards the European Union?

That is why the excellent balanced report by the rapporteur, Mr Zbigniew Zaleski, comes at the time when Ukraine needs a clear European perspective. I welcome this report and I gave it my unequivocal support during the vote. I believe that following the early parliamentary elections the country will be able to form a government that will bring Ukraine even closer to our common European house.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, the European Union's intention should be to build stronger and increasingly close relations with Ukraine. Mr Zaleski's report, which we have accepted, contains many suggestions on how this might be done.

Ukraine should be our strategic partner, not just because of its specific geographical situation and size, but particularly because of the role it plays in the region in relations with Russia and the Central Asian states. It is therefore in the EU's interests to strengthen and develop economic and political ties with this country.

We are all aware of how much more work lies ahead for the Ukrainian people on the road to achieving Western standards in their economy, in their standard of living and social matters and in strengthening the democratic system in the state. The EU should provide aid for achieving these goals, and one way of doing this would be to conclude a free-trade agreement with Ukraine, as well as to support its accession to the WTO. This would help to reinforce the market economy, democracy and the civil state, which will bring Ukraine closer to EU membership.

Bringing the EU and Ukraine together is a long and difficult process. It is one that is proceeding on a number of levels, but it is necessary nonetheless. For the two sides to come together, Ukraine must continue with the economic and social reforms it has begun, maintain its pro-European policy slant and strengthen its democracy. For its part, the EU must send out a clear signal to show that there are prospects for Ukrainian membership of the EU.

Hélène Goudin and Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV) The June List welcomes increased trade and deeper economic relations with Ukraine. Such a development would benefit both parties in the short and long term alike. However, it can be seen that the underlying purpose of this report is not only to develop economic relations but to conduct foreign policy on the part of the EU. The tone of the report is manifestly dictatorial and the proposals for cooperation given are presented almost exclusively on the EU's terms and with the EU's own interests in the foreground. Therefore the June List has chosen to vote against this report.

David Martin (PSE), in writing. – I voted in favour of this report, for which I was the Socialist Group shadow. It notes the areas where the EU and Ukraine should strengthen their relationship, discusses a free trade area with the Ukraine, energy supplies, and relations with Russia. I would like to see a stronger and deeper relationship between the EU and the Ukraine, and trade and economic relations are a vital part of that.

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) EU relations with the Ukraine fall under European Neighbourhood Policy which, as the report stresses, aims at supporting the development of the market economy in the EU's neighbouring countries, in other words, capitalism.

The report aims at the signature of a free trade agreement (FTA), i.e. Ukraine's integration 'into the EU single market' by the 'gradual adoption by Ukraine of the Community's *acquis*'.

Thus the report:

- 'Calls on Ukraine... to pay more attention to market liberalisation by guaranteeing the successful achievement of the privatisation process, the dismantling of monopolies' (read: public undertakings) 'and the independence of Ukraine's national bank';

- encourages 'the approximation and convergence of standards in the agricultural, industry and services sector' through 'conformity to Community standards', and, in the light of Ukraine's conditional adhesion to the Single Economic Space (SES) with Russia and other former Soviet Union Republics, 'recalls that certain provisions included in the SES agreement, if fully implemented, might be in conflict with the establishment of a functioning FTA with the EU'. Believe it or not, as the rapporteur states, 'the agreement with Russia would in fact prevent Ukraine from any real form of economic sovereignty and stake a heavy claim on the country's independence'.

Enough said...

- Resolution: on the EU response to situations of fragility (B6-0476/2007)

Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), *in writing*. – (PT) We find some of the trends that 'will to some extent form the EU's humanitarian approach in the future' very worrying and extremely negative, taking the form of initiatives such as the 'EU response to situations of fragility in developing countries' or the 'European Consensus on Development', aimed basically at African countries but also at Caribbean and Pacific countries.

An analysis of those initiatives reveals that the central issue of including 'development' as one of the external dimensions for achieving the strategic objectives of the EU's major powers (CFSP/ESDP), which is tantamount to saying the promotion of 'development' as an instrument for interference and control in a strategy which, significantly, does not rule out 'coercive military intervention'.

Hence a whole programme and panoply of instruments which, in our opinion, amalgamate and confuse the 'borders' between 'aid' and interference, for example in such fundamental issues as 'state-building'.

There is certainly an urgent need to show solidarity with many countries that have inherited disastrous situations from colonialism and that are the victims of decades of interference, but such solidarity, in order to be effective, must be based on respect for the principles of national sovereignty and independence and on an effective and genuine development aid and cooperation policy.

- Report: Elizabeth Lynne (A6-0400/2007)

Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE). – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, it is with great pleasure that I say I voted in favour of Elizabeth Lynne's proposal to tackle the poverty that exists in Europe.

However, before this packed Parliament here in Strasbourg, I must criticise the fact that in Italy there is discrimination against elderly pensioners, who are made to live in poverty if they become incapacitated after the age of 65, but are given a significant allowance if they become incapacitated before the age of 65.

Mr President, since on 12 December 2007 the new Treaty will be signed in Brussels, giving binding legal force to the Charter of Fundamental Rights, I ask that infringement proceedings be brought against Italy on 12 December because it is violating the right of the elderly to receive the same treatment as all other citizens.

Jan Andersson, Göran Färm and Inger Segelström (PSE), *in writing*. – (SV) We Swedish Social Democrats voted in favour of the report. It is important that the fight against poverty and social exclusion is intensified in Europe. However, we would like to clarify our position. Paragraph 32 speaks of the setting up of a decent minimum wage at Member State level. The report states clearly that this should be done together with the social partners where applicable. We therefore consider that the collective agreement model we have in the Nordic countries is covered by the formulation.

Charlotte Cederschiöld, Christofer Fjellner and Anna Ibrisagic (PPE-DE), in writing. – (SV) The Swedish Conservatives are positively inclined towards large parts of the report on social reality stocktaking. In the case of many of the proposals, such as those concerning economic migration and increased opportunities to combine gainful employment and family, we have been a driving force in national policy.

However, the Swedish Conservatives have chosen to vote against the report because several of the proposals cross the boundaries of the principle of subsidiarity. We do not, for example, consider that the European Parliament should concern itself with treatment programmes at correctional institutions or the treatment of gambling addiction. Nor should the European Parliament have opinions on the regime under which Member States choose to operate their health care, and we do not accept the assertion that deregulation would damage the quality of care. Labour market policy measures, such as the introduction of minimum wages, should also be left to be decided at the national level.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT) We voted in favour of the report because it records important data on the social situation: 78 million European citizens continue to live in poverty, 8% of the European Union suffers from in-work poverty and the gap between rich and poor in many Member States is increasing.

It also includes some positive recommendations, such as the need to fix a decent minimum wage, protect unemployment benefit and support people with disabilities, although it does not tackle the root causes of the social situation and does not call for an end to neoliberal policies, which we are proposing.

Consequently, few demands are made as regards the policy changes required. Unfortunately, it only partly includes the proposals in my opinion adopted in the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, among which I would highlight the appeal to the Community institutions and the Member States to give maximum priority to women's social integration and women's rights, by altering their respective policies accordingly, including that on income distribution policy.

Timothy Kirkhope (PPE-DE), in writing. – I and my British Conservative colleagues believe that social policy should be for Member States to decide. We are anxious that European competences should not be extended in this sphere and that countries should not be pressured to adopt policies that could be unhelpful to their well-being in economic and social terms. We also believe that the 'European social model' is a barrier to economic and social development.

There are issues in this report which we support, such as helping people out of poverty, assisting people back into work, support for disabled people and care for the elderly. Policies in these and other social matters are best delivered by Member States, taking account of national circumstances. We believe fundamentally that strong economies are the best route to obtaining social progress in societies.

Carl Lang (NI), in writing. – (FR) This report on social reality stocktaking in Europe sets out its true economic and social condition from the start. It is an admission of powerlessness within an ocean of Europeanist absurdities churned out by the ultraliberal, globalist thought police.

Since 2000, none of the measures to combat unemployment, poverty and exclusion have achieved anything. Worse still, while the European Union calls for greater economic immigration and the protection of its so-called social model, the report reminds us that 78 million Europeans are living in poverty.

It forgets to mention what accompanies the hell of poverty, which is not just economic. It is psychological for millions of Europeans who feel culturally and socially adrift on their own soil as they watch their work disappearing abroad in relocations. It is also physical, when violence and insecurity largely generated by immigrant populations frustrated by the difficulties they have in integrating aggravate the whole situation.

The solution is therefore not to recognise the hybrid ultraliberal schizophrenic European system, but to challenge it in order to put forward a Europe of recovered identities, which applies protection and Community preference to Europeans first of all!

Bogusław Liberadzki (PSE), in writing. – (PL) I agree that social integration and social security are among the European Union's fundamental values and are a fundamental right of all citizens.

The report correctly stresses the need to take ethnic and faith-based heterogeneity into account in EU legislation in order to protect all people from violence and discrimination.

I also agree with the formula that access to goods and services should be the right of every EU citizen.

José Albino Silva Peneda (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT) Social policy falls to a large extent under the competence of the Member States which is why I am in favour of promoting the open method of coordination as well as the exchange of best practices aimed at combating social exclusion.

Social security systems must be based on principles which motivate the recipients to seek employment opportunities and not act as a perverse incentive for inactivity.

The low level of education of the population and the high school dropout rate should make us stop and think, since it is the least qualified individuals who are the most vulnerable to social exclusion.

This situation is particularly worrying in my country, Portugal, where in 2005 more than 39% of young people (aged between 18 and 24) had completed only lower secondary school education.

That trend must be reversed and citizens must be given the necessary skills for a successful entry into the labour market.

Since this proposal goes along those lines, I voted in favour of it.

Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE), in writing. – (PL) I am voting in favour of Mrs Lynne's report on social reality stocktaking.

She has quite rightly commented that the revived Lisbon Strategy focuses not only on economic results and competitiveness, but also on a drive for greater social cohesion and the social dimension of sustainable growth. Social integration and social security are fundamental EU values. They are the fundamental right of everyone, regardless of their ethnic origin, age, gender, level of disability, sexual orientation or faith.

Unfortunately, part of EU society continues to live in poverty. Member States are proposing various forms of protection from poverty and social exclusion. I therefore believe that there should be a deepening of cooperation and an exchange of best practice models between Member States in this area.

Attention should also be given to the problem of youth unemployment and to the fight against child poverty, as children from poor families have less opportunity to access future employment.

Lars Wohlin (PPE-DE), in writing. – (SV) There are many praiseworthy statements about anti-discrimination and the importance of equal treatment in this report which deserve attention. Unfortunately, it also contains extremely far-reaching statements concerning, among other things, the introduction of minimum wages. Sweden is opposed to politically determined minimum wages. Quite regardless of what people think is reasonable social policy, the EU must accept that Member States choose different solutions. This must not become yet another example of where the EU goes in and regulates in detail in an area which must lie entirely and completely at the Member State level.

The EU countries are also at very different levels of development. Introducing minimum wages will prevent the poorest countries from competing.

7. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

(The sitting was suspended at 1.20 p.m. and resumed at 3 p.m.)

IN THE CHAIR: MRS KRATSA-TSAGAROPOULOU

Vice-President

8. Approval of Minutes of previous sitting: see Minutes

9. Debates on cases of breaches of human rights, democracy and the rule of law

9.1. Christian communities in the Middle East (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on seven motions for resolutions on Christian communities in the Middle East⁽²⁾.

Mario Mauro (PPE-DE), author. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, religious freedom is an objective factor in recognising respect for human rights. The violence suffered by Christians around the world is both an affront and a challenge to human dignity.

I intended to table this draft resolution at the last plenary in October, but the coordinator of the political groups asked me to postpone the resolution until the November plenary, to give us time to prepare a more detailed text backed by a broader consensus. In the text that we will be voting on this afternoon, which is the result of a compromise between socialists, liberals, the Union for Europe of the Nations Group and the Independence and Democracy Group, the salient features of the initial draft resolution have remained.

We have also been able to insert concrete references to acts of violence and abuses committed this year not only in the Middle East, but in other parts of the world against Christian communities. These events mainly concern Iraq, Egypt, Pakistan, Turkey, China and Vietnam, and in fact the intense coordination carried out in the last few days and the consequent unearthing of numerous episodes that have occurred outside the Middle East has led us to find a new, more fitting title, which is 'serious events which compromise Christian communities' existence and those of other religious communities'.

Obviously the text does not include all violence perpetrated against Christians, such as in Eritrea and North Korea. However, ladies and gentlemen, I would ask you to recognise the political message of this text, which is also aimed at those countries and incidents that have not been mentioned. From the outset, having to liaise with other groups has allowed me to clarify that this resolution in no way intends to rekindle conflict between civilisations. Europe has always been first in line when it comes to protecting minority rights and cannot continue to ignore the increasing harm being inflicted on so many Christians.

Today, ladies and gentlemen, our Parliament can express itself on an urgent and important subject, for the protection of life and religious freedom, not only of Christians, but of millions of people of all faiths. I would therefore ask...

(The President cut off the speaker)

Glyn Ford (PSE), author. – Madam President, I speak on behalf of the Socialist Group to give our total support to this joint motion for a resolution on religious persecution.

In one minute I can only touch on some elements of that resolution, and want to focus on the plight of the indigenous Christian community in Iraq, which at one time represented almost 10 % of the population. As someone who supports and is supported by the Save the Assyrians campaign, I have to say that this Parliament is wont to rest on compromising consensus, which sometimes results in a levelling and a loss of meaning.

That is true of this resolution. Recital K deplores the situation of Assyrian villages in Turkish border areas. Why? Because the Turkish Government is actually shelling Assyrian villages, claiming that they contain PKK militants, which seems to be an unlikely situation. In recital S it also refers to the situation in Syria, to where tens of thousands, if not hundreds of thousands, of refugees have fled from Jordan and Iraq, but the border is now being closed.

What is needed is help and assistance.

Adam Bielan (UEN), author. – (PL) Madam President, may I begin by expressing my satisfaction and by thanking the other co-authors of the resolution dealing with such an important problem as the events surrounding Christian communities in certain Middle Eastern states, as well as on a world scale.

At the same time, as one of the signatories to this resolution, I would like to emphasise that a guarantee of religious freedom is the first step towards assuring fundamental human rights, and the instances of persecution of Christians that occur around the world are a basic example of violation of these rights.

⁽²⁾ See Minutes.

Furthermore, while mindful of the fact that we are seeing a lack of any reaction on this matter from authorities, institutions and political movements around the world, I would like once again to stress the significance of the resolution under discussion for defence of the rights of Christians and to emphasise that the Union for Europe of the Nations Group fully supports it.

Hélène Flautre (Verts/ALE), author. – (FR) Madam President, I dare not think what the expressions on the faces of my PPE fellow Members would be if they found out that a resolution on Muslim communities in Europe had been adopted by the Gulf States or by ASEAN. It would be felt as a nasty shock, a sign of aggression, an unacceptable intrusion by a religious authority in a non-EU country into relations between our Member States and religious minorities. Do not do unto others what you would not have them do unto you is also a Christian precept.

Seriously, would such a resolution be perceived as a call for tolerance and intercultural and religious dialogue? Certainly not! The European Union, so proud of its values, would be well advised to demonstrate on these ultra-sensitive issues a modicum of discernment and respect for international conventions.

To tackle violations of the rights of people from religious minorities, to condemn the murder of Christians or restrictions on freedom to worship, we have a choice between two equally well-founded approaches. The first is to talk to a country, on the basis of its international commitments and the agreements between us, and ask it to investigate, try those responsible, and ensure the rights of religious minorities are respected, and that is what we do here regularly.

The second approach is that taken by the United Nations, through a resolution tabled by 12 countries and by all the EU states, concerning the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion, beliefs, and freedom of thought and conscience because, in international law – and this is very valuable – they are linked. An individual's rights to belief, to religion, to thought and to conscience are interdependent.

What will we be doing today if we adopt this unacceptable text you are proposing? We will be ignoring the work being done by our Member States at the United Nations and taking a different approach which is likely to encourage certain countries to exploit religious issues in their international relations. We will be going against the balanced approach recommended, for example, by Mrs Jahangir, United Nations Special Rapporteur, currently under house arrest in Pakistan, and at the end of the day we will also be making the situation of religious minorities throughout the world, including Christians, more fragile.

Once again, together with experts working on religious freedom, such as Christian Solidarity Worldwide, I say that this resolution simply increases the danger for those we want to protect.

Bastiaan Belder (IND/DEM), author. – (NL) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, if we really have fundamental rights at heart, we cannot fail to be concerned by the precarious position of Christian communities in the Middle East. The present motion for a resolution spurs all the European institutions on in this regard.

A recent delegation visit by our Parliament gave us more insight into the daily life of Lebanese Christians. They fear ending up in a kind of second-class position like their co-religionists in almost all the countries of the region.

They are faced with a direct choice between personal safety and personal dignity, their religious convictions. Today's Lebanese Christians want to retain both.

The actual political violence of recent years is now directly affecting Christians in the land of the cedar. An informant in Lebanon said just this week that, even though Christians are not the primary targets, the majority of politicians assassinated are from Christian backgrounds, as are the journalists who have become the target of attacks, and this intimidates the Christian population in Lebanon.

Marios Matsakis (ALDE), author. – Madam President, for thousands of years man's presence on earth has been subjected to the perils of lethal forces outwith his powers of defence or understanding. Such forces range from disastrous natural phenomena to incomprehensible somatic and mental illnesses. Man's powerless status has been made easier to cope with through his belief in a superpower entity he called 'God'. Different human groups developed a different understanding and a different approach to God.

The result has been the creation of a large number of religions. Such religions are, of course, man-made and not God-made and therefore suffer from several weaknesses. Such weaknesses include fanaticism, dogmatism

and failure to accept other people's right to believe differently. These weaknesses differ in number and in intensity amongst different religions and unfortunately they have often been exploited by extremist religious leaders and unscrupulous politicians.

This has led to religious wars and to the committing of despicable crimes against human beings in the name of religion. Both Christianity and Islam, two of mankind's main religions, have not been exempt from these sad afflictions and history is full of shameful examples to illustrate the point. Of course, with the passage of time, most religions became more mature and more humanistic and this is certainly true with Christianity. But this change has not happened with some other religions, unfortunately.

This is why in some countries, mainly Islamic countries, Christians are being persecuted, sometimes with extreme criminal vigour and sometimes with the consent of political groups and even governments. This is indeed a very sad state of affairs, which involves a range of countries or regions worldwide – some of them have already been mentioned in this Chamber today – but it is more specific in the Middle East.

With this resolution we hope to bring attention to the persecution of Christians in these countries and hopefully to help in making sure that the authorities, both political and religious, in such countries fully understand that such aggressive behaviour is neither compatible with the principles of respect for human rights nor with the true teachings of a caring religion.

Thank you Madam President, as you can see I still have 20 seconds to spare!

Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL), *author*. – (NL) Madam President, the Christian communities in the Middle East date back to the early years of Christianity. They predate both Christianity in Europe and Islam in the Middle East.

Yet these days they are often seen as an alien element in what is now a predominantly Islamic area. This is not merely the result of religious intolerance from certain quarters within Islam; the blame also lies with Europe.

Three times in history, Europe and Christianity have aroused aversion and hatred in that region. The first time was the crusades in the late Middle Ages, when occupying European armies took control of sites holy not only to Christians but also to Jews and Muslims. The second time followed the collapse of the Ottoman Empire at the beginning of last century, when Egypt, Sudan, Jordan and Iraq came under British colonial control and Syria and Lebanon under French colonial control.

We are currently in the third phase. Europe's positions on Israel, Palestine and Iraq arouse great opposition in the Middle East, where Europe is suspected of focusing primarily on its own energy supplies, on safeguarding its own transport routes and on giving preferential treatment to those ethnic or religious minorities best disposed towards it.

One possible consequence is that Christian minorities may be unable to hold their own in the Middle East in the long term and be doomed to flee to Europe. Giving Christians and Jews in the Middle East leeway is a better solution, as indeed Europe must do to its Islamic minority.

Bernd Posselt, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, if you will pardon my saying so, Mrs Flautre is talking nonsense. Muslims do a huge amount for Muslim minorities. We support Muslim and other religious minorities. However, it is unfortunately true that if we do not do anything for Christians, nobody will.

The Islamic or Arab League has never championed the rights of Christians as we have the rights of Muslims. It is therefore high time that we put this matter on the agenda. It is an act of justice, whereby I must say emphatically that the problem is not Islam. Christians in the Middle East have survived 1 200 years under Islamic rule. It is in our supposedly so advanced age that they are seriously endangered, especially in Iraq, which is occupied by the West.

We must acknowledge our own responsibility to make it possible for them to survive and live in freedom and dignity. Most religious persecution takes place in communist China, in pseudo-Christian nationalist Russia, in communist dictatorships – and also under Islamic regimes. For me, Islamism is simply a perverse dictatorship and ideology of the twentieth century. We Europeans have a duty in this regard, and we shall perform it.

(Applause)

Paulo Casaca, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (PT) Madam President, congratulations to the authors of this joint motion. I should like to mention that it is appropriate to remember that before the persecution of Christians we had the persecution, for example, of the Jews, and we had and still have persecution of the Yazidis, the Mandians and the Muslims themselves, whether Shiite or Sunni, in Iraq.

It would not be fair or proportionate to compare what is happening in Iraq to what is happening in Europe. In fact it must be remembered that those who are persecuted in Iraq unfortunately do not have, in Europe, the protection to which they are entitled, whether Christian or non-Christian. There are absolutely incredible cases of a total lack of sensitivity on the part of our European Union as regards persecuted Iraqis. May I end by reminding you, not to detract from all others, of Father Ragheed Ganni and the entire congregation of the Church of the Holy Spirit in Mosul, perhaps the most monstrous crime committed this year.

Marcin Libicki, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Madam President, we are talking here today about the brutal persecution of Christians, particularly in the Middle East. We should not lose sight of the fact that Christians are persecuted throughout the world, however, and I do not agree with what Mr Casaca said about there being very many religious minorities who are persecuted.

Please could he provide examples of where these minorities are being persecuted on any major scale; I am not talking about the chance killing, however reprehensible, of an infidel, but of cases where another religion is persecuted in the way that Christians are persecuted. I fully agree with Mr Posselt, and I agree with much else that has been said, where dozens of examples of persecution of Christians have been mentioned, but not, as Mr Casaca claims, of many other religions. It is not true. Christians are the main objects of persecution, and it is mainly Christians who are persecuted.

Yesterday in Parliament we heard a speech from President Sarkozy, who spoke of the need to defend Europe's identity. What is this identity? Who will defend us if we do not defend ourselves and the roots of our identity? Christians in the Middle East bear witness to our European identity. They have been there for 2 000 years and we must defend them if they are to remain there.

Giusto Catania, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I believe that today, with this motion for a resolution, we are taking an important step, because this Parliament must always condemn acts and events that endanger the lives of men and women on the grounds of their faith, religious beliefs or political opinion.

Religious freedom is a value that we must bring to the fore. Although it is true that in some cases Christians risk persecution and criminalisation, it is for this reason that Parliament must protect and defend them, just as this Parliament has always protected and defended Muslim citizens who have been the victims of discrimination in the West. We believe that all religions can play a positive role, a peacekeeping role, to encourage respect for diversity. For this reason we must strongly condemn any form of religious fundamentalism, which is so often a factor in conflict. I believe that this Parliament must always endeavour to listen and promote interreligious dialogue.

There are some notable examples that show how it is possible to construct a solution in which religions can listen to each other and build on common ground. I am also anxious to recall the sacrifice of some Catholics, some Christians, who have fought to free the poor, for peoples and for social liberation. This is why our group is voting in favour of this resolution, in memory of priests such as Peppino Diana and Pino Puglisi, who died because of their stance against the mafia and organised crime in general.

Kathy Sinnott, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – Madam President, I welcome this joint motion for a resolution, since I regard it as vital that we protect Christian minorities in Africa, Asia and the Middle East. It is important that we protect all religious communities from persecution. I regard it as appalling that people have to face constraints in their daily routine, in what they can do and where they can go, in their ability to own property and to get an education or a job, as well as threats on their life, because of their Christian affiliation.

The freedom of religious observance is a fundamental human right and thus it is essential that governments ensure that even the religious minorities in their countries can practise their beliefs free from any restraint, that is to say without there being a threat to their life or anything else.

Muslims must realise that they must promote the principle of religious freedom and tolerance, the same freedom and tolerance for their adherence that they enjoy and expect to enjoy in our countries, many of which have large Christian populations.

Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE-DE). – (FI) Madam President, I set great store by Mr Mauro's initiative. Every day peace-loving Christians are under threat of systematic oppression and are used as scapegoats in crises they are not involved in. This is totally reprehensible and an issue it is necessary to highlight. Actually to improve the position of Christians, however, it is important to understand the problem as part of a wider whole. It is not only Christians who are having difficulties, but in many countries Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Jews, Sikhs and Ahmadis also have problems. The list is long.

Freedom of religion is essential for a society which respects human rights and civil liberties. It is, as it were, a meta-right, in practice a prerequisite for the existence of other human rights, which reflects the condition of society as a whole. If a society starts to get ill, it is visible first in the shape of restrictions on freedom of religion and in the status of religious minorities. For this reason we have to show our firm support for the United Nations General Assembly Resolution on freedom of religion.

It is worth noting that in many countries, like Pakistan and Indonesia, religious communities are striving jointly to establish freedom of religion and the protection of minorities. Religion itself might therefore also be a solution. A pluralist dialogue always leads to less tension and benefits freedom of religion and society as a whole.

Ana Maria Gomes (PSE). – (PT) The persecution of religious minorities in many countries should make us reflect upon the fragility of the aspects of civilisation which we think we have achieved. Religious freedom is an essential and inalienable pillar of universal human rights. Despite the laudable intentions, this resolution is incomplete.

The EP must speak up about the persecution of Christian minorities in particular, but first on all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on faith or religion which, in fact, affect all religious communities. We should also be worried about Islamophobia and anti-Semitism which are on the increase in Europe and elsewhere. If we focus almost exclusively on discrimination against Christians, we might give the wrong impression. It therefore needs to be stressed that the EP fully supports the resolution on the eradication of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief presented by the EU Member States to the UN General Assembly.

Mieczysław Edmund Janowski (UEN). – (PL) Madam President, the Middle East also has its Christian roots. Regardless of the differences between them, the Christians there have managed on many occasions to demonstrate that they are able to live alongside Muslims, Jews or followers of other religions in peace and mutual respect.

Lately, however, we have seen actions by adherents of the Islamic faith that have come down to a practical implementation of the false notion that being anti-Christian shows what a good Muslim you are. The Lebanese journalist Hazem Saghie made this point recently. Numerous and often drastic instances of violations of the rights of people who, solely because of their Christian faith, are treated as second-class citizens are evidence of the violation of the fundamental principle of human freedom: the freedom to practise a faith.

The question needs to be asked: What can we in the European Union, which is open to and respects the rights of Muslim co-citizens, do for Christians who do not even have a modest fraction of such rights in those countries? Where is there the slightest reciprocity? There is none to be found in religiously motivated murders, nor in widespread discrimination, nor in the failure to give consent to the building of Christian churches, nor in the ruination of memorials to Christian culture.

The whole world wants peace, and people want freedom, including religious freedom.

Bogusław Sonik (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, the current political situation in the Middle East means that Christians who live in that region are feeling increasingly threatened. One reason for this is the rise in the influence of Islamic fundamentalists, who heap blame on them for every failure suffered by the people of the region. Because of their religious ties with people in the West, they are also accused of westernising the traditional social structures, about which people in the Middle East are very unwilling to speak.

One way in which the fundamentalists express their dissatisfaction is by organising anti-Western demonstrations, during which they destroy symbols associated with Christianity and shops run by Christians. In extreme cases even murders are committed. The passiveness of governments means that increasing numbers of Christian families are deciding to emigrate.

The resolution outlines a number of problems encountered by Christians in the Middle East. These are not all the examples, however, so in my view the European Parliament should prepare a full-scale report on the

situation of Christians in the Middle East, or the situation of religious faiths generally. We should also give some thought to how to conduct a dialogue between civilisations that enables Christian society and Muslim regions to be involved effectively.

Jerzy Buzek (PPE-DE). – (PL) Madam President, I congratulate Mr Mauro. I have no doubts whatsoever about this resolution. I support it wholeheartedly. The only problem is whether we are effective, whether we will be effective and whether we will change anything. There are three ways in which we can act.

The first way is through diplomatic pressure. That is what we are currently doing. European governments need to be mobilised too, however. Every diplomat should bear this in mind. We must push for such actions in bilateral and multilateral talks. The only way to get a good result here is through large-scale diplomatic pressure.

The second way is through economic sanctions. I know from my own country's experience 20 or 30 years ago what economic sanctions meant for the Communist government in Warsaw – well selected sanctions, so as not to cause harm to citizens. We must use this method too.

The final way is through thorough analysis of our actions, because countries in the Middle East and other parts of the world have their ups and downs. This also depends on our actions, which are not always very coherent or prudent. This means intervention, cultural events, and also speeches from diplomats. We do not want to hide our convictions. Quite the contrary – we want to show them clearly. However, we must act not only firmly but also judiciously.

Danuta Hübner, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, the Commission is aware of and strongly condemns discrimination on the grounds of religion and belief. Our policy is to fight all types of discrimination, and we do it in bilateral relations and multilateral forums such as the UN.

At the UN General Assembly, the EU has taken the approach of tabling its customary resolution on the elimination of all forms of intolerance and discrimination based on religion or belief. Last year, the consensus on the text of the resolution gathered a record 99 co-sponsors.

Together with the Member States, we are paying very close attention to the human rights and democracy situation in partner countries. We raise those issues in political dialogue meetings via demarches and public statements, reminding partners of their commitments under international law prohibiting discrimination on any grounds.

The EU is actively seeking to advance the cause of human rights protection under the Neighbourhood Policy. The European Neighbourhood Policy action plans cover a wide range of issues in this regard. The individual meetings of the Subcommittee on Human Rights with Jordan, Israel, Morocco, Lebanon and Tunisia have already reviewed the progress made in the implementation of the ENP action plans' commitments on human rights and fundamental freedoms. The first meeting of the Human Rights Subcommittee with Egypt is scheduled for later this month.

In parallel with bilateral contacts with governments and support for political reforms, we are supporting non-governmental organisations worldwide that are active in protecting and promoting human rights. We believe that human rights defenders play an indispensable role in society.

We find it equally important to maintain and further increase freedom of religion in Europe. The EU can show and share good practices.

President. – Mr Casaca has asked to make a personal statement, in accordance with Rule 145 of the Rules of Procedure.

Paulo Casaca (PSE). – (PT) Madam President, I am sorry if I did not make myself sufficiently clear. I stand in total and unreserved solidarity with the Christian communities persecuted throughout the Middle East, especially in Iraq. I merely pointed out, and I intend to provide my fellow member with everything he regards as necessary, that such persecution was unfortunately not confined to the Christian community and that the Yazidi community, the Mandian community, the Shiites and Sunnis themselves, who are outside the majority communities, have also been subject to terrible persecution in that country; that is a fact that no one can ignore. I just wanted to stress that and say that I am willing to provide all the documentation required.

President. – Mr Casaca, you have exceeded the time limit for making a personal statement.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place at the end of the debate.

9.2. Uzbekistan (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on six motions for resolutions on Uzbekistan.⁽³⁾

Katrin Saks (PSE). – (ET) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to recall what the French President, Nicolas Sarkozy, said in this very Chamber a couple of days ago: all those who have failed to respect our values, preferring instead to win contracts, have lost out on all fronts as a result. Where Uzbekistan and more broadly the whole of Central Asia are concerned, there is a danger that in assessing the region's energy resources the interests of individual countries will begin to prevail over our common values. Unfortunately, this is also apparent in the inability to agree on a motion for a resolution in support of the EPP and the UEN on the Council Decision suspending the visa ban on Uzbek officials for six months without a genuine change in the human rights situation.

The motion for a resolution also refers to the very critical human rights situation in Uzbekistan. To date, however, there has been an understanding in Uzbekistan, and I heard this with my own ears, that human rights are an internal matter for that country. We cannot agree to this approach and I urge you to support the first, more critical version of the motion for a resolution.

Elisabeth Jeggle (PPE-DE), author. – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, as a democratic institution, we cannot allow human rights to be trampled on anywhere in the world. However, we find it equally unacceptable if, within this very House, diplomatic relationships and interparliamentary cooperation between the EU and Uzbekistan are risked without giving it a thought. When I look at the motions for resolutions presented by the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe and the left-wing groups, it is tantamount to a diplomatic demolition derby.

In Parliament's last resolution, dated October 2006, we committed ourselves to a constructive, dialogue-oriented solution. Today, however, we are not seeking dialogue but slamming a door shut. My group cannot answer for this, so I ask you to reject the motions for resolutions by the PSE Group, the ALDE Group and the left.

The motion for a resolution presented by our group together with the Union for Europe of the Nations Group has the following in its favour. The political situation in Uzbekistan is by no means satisfactory. The human rights situation continues to be alarming in many respects. Yet some progress is being made in spite of everything. For example, the first round of the human rights dialogue between the European Union and Uzbekistan took place in Tashkent on 8 and 9 May of this year. Any resolution by the European Parliament must illuminate the current situation, and the present resolution can only be based on this.

Adam Bielan (UEN), author. – (PL) Madam President, I would like to begin by thanking the co-authors of the resolution. At the same time, bearing in mind the Community guidelines on the protection of human rights adopted in 2004, I would like to emphasise the need to improve relations between the European Union and Uzbekistan. I would like to stress, however, that these relations should be based on the principles of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, with particular emphasis on the latter.

Furthermore, with regard to the decision to suspend for a six-month period certain sanctions imposed on Uzbekistan, I support the initiative to monitor progress in respect for human rights in that country. The negative decision of the Uzbek Ministry of Justice regarding recognition of the office monitoring these rights is evidence that we should bring further efforts to bear in this area.

As Vice-Chairman of this Parliament with responsibility for the Neighbourhood Policy *inter alia* in Uzbekistan, I appeal to international institutions, and particularly to the Uzbek authorities, to take supporting action that leads to the development of a civil society.

Hélène Flautre (Verts/ALE), author. – (FR) Madam President, the aim of this resolution is simple: it is to tell the truth. That is what the Uzbek people and human rights activists are asking us to do.

⁽³⁾ See Minutes.

The urgency derives from the assassinations of journalists and dissidents that have occurred over the last few months, and from the conclusions of the Council on 15 October, which were wrongly presented as a diplomatic victory by President Karimov. The important fact is that the sanctions have been extended for 12 months because no investigation has been carried out into the Andijan massacre and the meetings of experts on the matter have not produced any result.

As regards the lifting of visa bans for six months, we agree that the visa bans should automatically be renewed if the excellent criteria introduced – the visits by United Nations special rapporteurs, for example – are not met within six months.

On the other hand, we are not happy with the conclusions on the alleged progress made on human rights. For example, the abolition of the death penalty has still not actually come about, and the EU-Uzbekistan dialogue on human rights is suspended.

Finally, in this resolution, we condemn the assassination of several independent journalists and dissidents, and demand that serious and impartial investigations are conducted.

I am concerned about the intentions of the PPE and the UEN. They are proposing to go further than all the Member States by interpreting the Council's conclusions not only as a suspension of the visa bans but actually as removal of the visas altogether. Their paragraph 3 states that the ineffectiveness of the sanctions is an encouragement to the Uzbek regime, which makes no sense either intellectually or politically. The text does not even mention the 13 human rights activists whose immediate release President Pöttering demanded by letter.

Finally, my last point is that paragraph 9 mentions the difficult situation of Human Rights Watch. That is fine, but the organisation made it known clearly that it did not want to be mentioned in a resolution that was technically incorrect and as harmful for human rights activists as for the Uzbek people and that in the end, as everyone realises, would be used as a propaganda tool by the dictator, President Karimov.

Consequently, I am asking the MEPs from the PPE and UEN to subscribe to the serious attitude we need to adopt on this matter and with regard to the Uzbek people, and support our motion for a resolution, which says nothing more than the truth about the human rights situation in Uzbekistan.

Marios Matsakis (ALDE), *author*. – Madam President, the persistence since 1989 of the tyrannical governing regime of Uzbekistan under Mr Karimov is a cancerous inflection on democracy. Mr Karimov's regime is responsible for the implementation of a policy of terror and corruption in his country, with the victims being, of course, mainly the people of Uzbekistan. These people are subjected to arbitrary arrest and detention, to torture and ill-treatment and, while there have been numerous demands for democratic reform, both by the international community and the EU, Mr Karimov carries on taking no notice whatsoever.

This reminds me of another individual who is governing his country in a similarly totalitarian manner and takes no notice of those who call for democratic reforms to be implemented. I am talking about King Abdullah of Saudi Arabia, a country where women have no right to vote, and even no right to drive a car, and where serious human rights abuses are part of everyday life.

In this respect, sadly, some EU governments are guilty of double standards: they attack Mr Karimov ferociously – and quite rightly so – but are very gentle indeed with King Abdullah. In fact, recently King Abdullah was given an extravagant welcome on state visits to Britain and Italy.

The main difference between Uzbekistan and Saudi Arabia is money – lots of it – and as long as King Abdullah spends his billions in Britain and Italy, his involvement in gross violations of human rights and democratic institutions in his country can be conveniently overlooked. That, I suppose, is why, when I suggested that the situation in Saudi Arabia be discussed here today, it was turned down ceremoniously by almost all the groups. Perhaps more sensitivity might be shown next time, I hope.

Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL), *author*. – (NL) Madam President, Uzbekistan is in need of radical change. The initial impetus in this direction was nipped in the bud on 13 May 2005, with brute force that claimed the lives of hundreds of demonstrators. Since then, the outside world has remained silent for a conspicuously long time. Little happened initially following our earlier topical and urgent debate on 27 October 2005.

Yet it was not only in better-known states such as Ukraine, Georgia and Belarus that authoritarian regimes took power following the collapse of the Soviet Union; this was particularly also the case in Turkmenistan

and Uzbekistan. There, it was not democracy that had triumphed, but a small group of people who had gained experience in the old state apparatus and the security forces.

Having no objective other than to stay in power, these people turned state enterprises into their own private property, manipulated electoral results, gave the opposition as little leeway as possible, hampered free organisations, restricted the press and, if need be, used violence against their own people. Sadly, this state of affairs persists in Uzbekistan.

To date, Europe's attitude towards Uzbekistan is influenced far too much by economic and military interests. It appears that the dictatorship in Uzbekistan has been allowed to stay on because it proved itself useful in the military intervention in Afghanistan. Such an attitude would completely destroy the credibility of Europe's pretensions with regard to human rights and democracy. Europe must not make the rights and freedoms of the Uzbeks secondary to other considerations.

Karin Scheele, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Madam President, under the German Council Presidency, after explicit influence from the German Federal Government, the sanctions against Uzbekistan were relaxed under the condition that Karimov's government would improve the human rights situation in the country. However, torture is still used in Uzbek prisons; the human rights situation in Uzbekistan has not improved at all. We hear this from international organisations, which are observing serious attacks on civil society. Not only human rights organisations, but also women's organisations, information centres and many other organisations are being affected. Human rights activists are being condemned to long-term sentences and numerous activists, including journalists, have had to flee.

We must not soften the sanctions; we must not lift them. We are seeing once again that, even in this Parliament, there are different discourses on human rights when it comes to access to raw materials compared to when raw materials are not at stake. We must send a clear signal that we do not accept this.

Raül Romeva i Rueda, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (ES) Madam President, I would also like to use the opportunity of this debate to alert the House and draw its attention to a group of people that is particularly persecuted in Uzbekistan, and not only in Uzbekistan, but also in Turkmenistan. This is, basically, the LGBT population.

Gays and lesbians are usually doubly persecuted, because they are activists, in many cases, but also because they are gays and lesbians. Between two and five years in prison await many of those who publicly acknowledge that they are part of this group, or are denounced as members of it.

I think that within this context perhaps, when we are talking about human rights in general, we normally take into account all human rights, but often we forget about this particular group, which has specific needs and which also tried at the last meeting of the OSCE, held in Madrid, to present these claims in the face of incomprehensible opposition from many governments.

I think that this is something that we should remember, and which, in any case, we should go return to in the debate on relations between the European Union and Central Asia.

Józef Pinior (PSE). – Madam President, first of all, I am really worried about the PPE-DE Group's attitude concerning the human rights situation in Uzbekistan. We should not be taken in by the hypocritical efforts to achieve respectability undertaken by the Uzbek Government with the aim of giving the impression of democratic progress and improving relations with the European Union.

No, Uzbekistan has not progressed in the last two years. The government has still not authorised an independent investigation into the killings in Andijan. Human rights are still mocked and torture is still used, according to the UN report. Political opponents still do not have the right to express themselves freely. The press is still at the command of the government. We denounce that, and we also question the government on two murders, those of a theatre director and a journalist, both known to have criticised the Uzbek Government.

We must not support the subterfuge of the self-re-election of President Karimov on 23 December and we must remain very cautious and attentive regarding the Uzbek political situation, even if some national interests within the European Union suffer because of it. Human rights must never give way to economic relations in the European Union.

Danuta Hübner, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, the recently adopted new strategy for Central Asia reflects the commitment of the European Union to enhanced long-term engagement and cooperation

with the region. The EU and Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan, have agreed to make human rights, the rule of law, good governance and democratisation key elements of the strategy.

We intend to step up support for the protection of human rights and the creation and development of an independent judiciary, thus making a sustainable contribution to the consolidation of the rule of law and respect for international human rights standards in Central Asia.

EU-Uzbekistan relations have to be put in this context, where encouragement to take positive steps to improve human rights and democratisation are the basis of dialogue and cooperation. Our relations with Uzbekistan have gone through a difficult phase over the last few years, notably since the events in Andijan in May 2005, and we remain seriously concerned about the human rights situation.

It is our firm belief that we stand a better chance of encouraging progress in the human rights situation in Uzbekistan by engagement rather than isolation. Isolation has not worked. We welcome the gradual re-engagement that has taken place over the past year, since the EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Council agreed to establish a regular human rights dialogue, the first round of which was in May this year. Two rounds of expert-level talks have also taken place on the Andijan events. We are also planning a dialogue with Uzbek civil society on freedom of the media, which should take place in Tashkent early next year. We also welcome Uzbekistan's introduction of habeas corpus and the abolition of the death penalty, which should come into effect in January 2008.

At the last meeting of the General Affairs Council, the EU Member States agreed on the renewal of restrictive measures but, at the same time, agreed on the conditional suspension of the visa ban. The Council urged Uzbekistan to fully implement its international obligations relating to human rights and, in particular, to allow unimpeded access by relevant international bodies to prisoners, to engage effectively with UN special rapporteurs, to let all NGOs operate without constraint in Uzbekistan and to release human rights defenders from detention and cease harassing them.

The Council stated that the lifting of the visa restrictions would be reviewed after six months, to assess whether Uzbekistan had made progress in meeting these conditions. The Uzbek authorities agreed to continue the discussion on human rights issues in the context of the EU-Uzbekistan Cooperation Committee early next year.

Uzbekistan has also shown itself open to discussing with the Commission ways to further enhance Community assistance in supporting the reform of its political institutions, such as the parliament, and the reform of the judiciary, all of which we will discuss further in the Cooperation Committee. The fact that the EU's restrictive measures remain in place clearly signals both to the Uzbeks and the broader public our concerns about the situation in Uzbekistan.

Uzbekistan has a long way to go in the area of human rights and we will continue to stress to the Uzbek side, in line with the Council conclusions, that we expect to see concrete progress in the human rights situation on the ground.

Human rights will continue to be an important and difficult issue in our relations with Uzbekistan, but the Commission believes that engagement is the best way to promote positive developments.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place at the end of the debates.

(Abbreviated in accordance with Rule 142 of the Rules of Procedure)

Véronique Mathieu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (FR) When Europe speaks, freedoms improve.

The European Union absolutely must pursue the policy begun in 2005 after the blind and totally unpunished repression at Andijan, which according to the OSCE and Human Rights Watch left between 500 and 1000 people dead. The many challenges ahead (energy, terrorism, freedoms) mean that Europe must mobilise more than ever on its periphery. Its most pressing mission is to act to promote human rights and to make calm relations with Uzbekistan dependent on progress with fundamental freedoms. The EU cannot ignore the reality of a chimerical rule of law and the hateful assassination last September of the director Mark Weil, known for his opposition to the regime in Tashkent. The Uzbek parliament has recently made several steps towards the abolition of the death penalty and civil justice. Although these decisions are still very inadequate, the European Union's firmness has not been in vain and runs counter to the principles of an unacceptable

and dangerous realpolitik. We need to go even further to achieve democracy and political stability, but we have finally begun to hope. It is up to the vast country of Uzbekistan not to ruin this hope, by building a genuine partnership with Europe.

9.3. Somalia (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on six motions for resolutions on Somalia.⁽⁴⁾

John Bowis (PPE-DE), author. – Madam President, for many generations people from Somaliland and Somalia have been coming to my constituency of London. They have a long tradition of working in the British Merchant Navy and sending monies back home. During my time in the British Parliament, I was Co-Chairman of the British-Somali All-Party Group. Sometimes we took up problems and sometimes we took up personal issues and so forth. There were many of these. The Somalis were wonderful people but were not served by particularly wonderful leaders.

Now things have gone from bad to worse. We now have a failed state. We have a situation where the country has some of the worst health statistics in the world. Its people face violence every day and continually rising child and maternal mortality rates. They are being caught in the crossfire between Ethiopian and government troops and the court militias. That is why this issue is on the agenda today. We can see how awful it is to live in Somalia today. We can see the glaring necessity to get humanitarian aid there, and yet we cannot get it there. We can see the need for peacekeeping forces, and we welcome what the African Union has promised, but we do not welcome what it is actually providing. It is nothing like what has been promised.

At the moment all we have there is Ugandan troops. Until the promised figure of 8 000 troops is reached, the Ethiopians will not leave. We have to see how we can get people talking – talking across borders, talking across some of our traditional prejudices – because, if people do not talk, there will be no stability, and if there is no stability then there is no future for that country. If there is no future, then more people will die. We will not be responsible, but we will have played no part in preventing that happening.

Raül Romeva i Rueda (Verts/ALE), author. – (ES) Madam President, I also obviously want to stress the importance of this resolution, especially in the context of the debate that we had this morning. We are talking precisely about how to deal with the situation of fragile states. Somalia is not only a fragile state, it is actually a failed state.

However, on this point we must not forget, as Mr Bowis was saying, that the enormous level of violence that exists in the country at the moment is primarily fuelled by the continuous entry of arms, mainly light weapons and ammunition, which come from other countries in the region, and in many cases directly from Western countries, which include the European Union.

We therefore must not forget that, as well as reacting to the current immediate consequences of what is happening in Somalia, we also have a responsibility for this situation, and when we talk about the obligation and responsibility to protect, which is what we are used to doing in this type of debate, we also need to take our own responsibility for prevention, for example by controlling arms exports.

Ana Maria Gomes (PSE), author. – (PT) Yesterday in Mogadishu there were incitements to attack African Union forces – such is the scale of the tragedy and loss of control that are destroying Somalia and inflaming the entire Horn of Africa. The EU must, as a matter of urgency, bring pressure to bear on all parties to the conflict to commit themselves to an inclusive process of national reconciliation, capable of tackling the political issues at the root of the crisis. The ‘transitional government’ will remain a fiction if it continues to take no action to protect the civilian population and facilitate humanitarian aid.

Somalia is more awash with arms than ever, according to a recent UN report. It is essential for countries and dealers who breach the arms embargo imposed in 1992 to be stopped and held accountable. Finally the African Union peacekeeping force urgently needs to be strengthened and the occupying Ethiopian troops need to leave. It should be acknowledged that the Ethiopian intervention, instigated by the Bush administration with the passive complicity of the European Union, did not bring peace or government or even help to combat terrorism in Somalia. It only brought more suffering, poverty and death to the people of the whole region.

⁽⁴⁾ See Minutes.

Marcin Libicki (UEN), *author*. – (PL) Madam President, we are talking here today about the tragedy that has taken place in Somalia. It is generally said that there are three intervention measures that can be taken in such a case: diplomatic pressure, an economic embargo and, if necessary, armed intervention. There is, however, a fourth possibility that we do not mention, and that is that EU countries should start by removing the potential for their own pseudo-business to corrupt bureaucrats in various post-colonial countries, who then set about starting civil wars, often in the basic interests that the pseudo-business is pursuing.

Let me say something else on the same subject that Mr Romeva i Rueda and Mrs Gomes: surely the weapons used in these countries, including Somalia, are produced in and exported from so-called democratic countries, countries that are economically developed. States in this part of the world should specifically put pressure on their own arms producers and pseudo-businessmen to ensure that they do not provoke or play a role in the worst disasters unfolding on the planet today.

Marios Matsakis (ALDE), *author*. – Madam President, Somalia has been the subject of European Parliament and UN resolutions in the past. Unfortunately, the situation there has not improved and the prolonged destructive civil war has carried on unabated. The resulting tragic human suffering continues, with hundreds of thousands of poverty-stricken refugees, thousands of malnourished and dying children, and the reported emergence in the region of contagious diseases like cholera and hepatitis. That country is in a desperate situation, where anarchy and the law of the jungle prevail.

In this joint motion for a resolution, as in previous ones, we make a series of useful suggestions, such as the cessation of all foreign military intervention in Somalia – mainly from Ethiopia and Eritrea – and full implementation of the arms embargo against Somalia, which, although imposed 15 years ago, is sadly still to become truly effective.

We also make a call for protection of freedom of the press by strongly condemning the Somali Government's systematic harassment of the media and its shameful failure to investigate the killing of journalists whose reporting was deemed to be critical of the government.

We make these calls conscious of the fact that the chances of them being listened to are very slim indeed. Still, we must persevere in the hope that perhaps common sense and a humanistic attitude will at last prevail and that the Somali people eventually will see more peaceful and prosperous days.

Erik Meijer (GUE/NGL), *author*. – (NL) Madam President, since 1991, Somalia has no longer existed in practice as a country, at least in the sense of the territory of the former Italian colony. Only in the north, in the former British colony of Somaliland, does a kind of state exist, but this state is not recognised internationally.

The place of the state has been taken by a number of warlords, who alternate between fighting and cooperating with each other. The army of neighbouring Ethiopia has appointed itself their joint protector. The Union of Islamic Courts, on the other hand, is their joint adversary and wants to reunite Somalia on the basis of traditional Islamic rules, without the warlords.

All attempts so far to establish a generally accepted unity government and to help Somalia function again as a state have failed. The Commission's financial support for the Transitional Federal Institutions that were created in 2004 appeared justified at the time but led to the accusation that the European Union was taking sides in an armed conflict and thus cooperating with Ethiopia against the forces that would prefer to see a strict Islamic regime in power.

Such a European policy, however well meaning, cannot succeed without the support of the inhabitants of Somalia. For this reason, it is good that the motion for a resolution on which we are soon to vote calls for the cessation of foreign military intervention and for dialogue and reconciliation at domestic level.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (PL) Madam President, since the fall of the Siad Barre regime in 1991, Somalia has not had a properly functioning government. The internal situation is one of chaos and anarchy. As a result of the conflict between the rebels of the Islamic Courts Union and provisional government troops, 850 000 people were made homeless and there were many deaths.

The situation in Somalia is dramatic. Cholera is spreading throughout the region, more than 1.5 million people require urgent medical aid and tens of thousands of children are suffering from malnutrition. There is a real risk that this conflict could lead to destabilisation throughout the region. Of even more concern is the fact that of the promised 8 000 African Union soldiers, only 1 600 have so far been deployed in mediatory action.

Because of this, the African Union, the United States, the European Union and the UN should increase humanitarian and logistical aid for the Somalians as well as step up diplomatic efforts aimed at accelerating the peace process and establishing a stable government through free elections in 2009.

Leopold Józef Rutowicz, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Madam President, Somalia lies on the Somali Peninsula, known as the Horn of Africa, and is an ethnically and religiously homogeneous state. Somalians constitute 97% of the population, with almost 100% professing Islam.

With its natural resources it had the conditions necessary to achieve economic development and a decent life for citizens in the Republic of Somalia, which came into being in 1960. Sadly, a coup d'état, a civil war, changes in political orientation, tribal divisions and the involvement of the Islamic Courts Union with its links to the Taleban in the struggle for power have combined to create hell on earth for the people of Somalia.

How can we help these people? The solution to the Somalia issue lies with the UN and the African Union. In the interests of Africa, the African Union should step up its political and military activities to protect people and create the conditions necessary for the absolutely essential humanitarian aid to be provided by the UN and the European Union. In Somalia's situation a debate on human rights violations, which are occurring on a massive scale in that country, will not change anything. What is needed is action that would be supported by the European Union.

Danuta Hübner, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, I fully agree with Mr Bowis that, as long as people talk, there is always hope. We consider it very timely to have this wake-up call on Somalia today, since the situation currently poses a significant threat to peace and security, not only in the region but also beyond. It also causes immense suffering for the people of Somalia.

As you know, the Union has taken a lead role in the Somali peace process and the establishment of the transitional federal institutions. We have always strived for a political solution involving all Somali parties, and Commissioner Louis Michel carried out a last-ditch peace mission to rescue the peace process prior to the Ethiopian intervention in December 2006 and has been instrumental in linking EU support to the African Union peace mission to Somalia and to the launch of a genuine National Reconciliation Congress.

We have an unfolding humanitarian disaster and a diminishing humanitarian space in Somalia, including a crackdown on the independent media and journalists, who are dying in targeted killings. The current levels of humanitarian distress in south and central Somalia have reached alarming proportions. An estimated 1.5 million people are in need of humanitarian assistance, including more than 730 000 internally displaced persons, of whom one-third are estimated to be at extreme risk. An estimated 173 000 Mogadishu residents fled the violence in the past two weeks alone.

I also wish to inform you that, in response to the current humanitarian crisis, the Commission's Humanitarian Aid Office, ECHO, is working with implementing partners to support 1.5 million people, providing the local population, internally displaced people and host communities with access to water, sanitation, nutrition, drugs and support for livestock and livelihoods. This year, it has allocated the highest ever budget for assistance to Somalia, amounting to EUR 20 million.

We are also very concerned about the evolving security situation in Mogadishu and other regions in south-central Somalia. Insurgency operations appear to be expanding and all parties have significantly increased their military capabilities in the past weeks. The EU is committed to following a multi-pronged approach that entails supporting a comprehensive security strategy, including a ceasefire process and a full deployment of the African Union Mission in Somalia that would facilitate Ethiopian withdrawal, and encouraging the nomination of a representative and effective Prime Minister and government while engaging and providing reassurances to the opposition, to facilitate their involvement during the remainder of the transitional period leading up to elections in 2009. The EU will also urge all parties to respect basic human rights and international humanitarian law.

Finally, we need to take into account the regional dimensions of the crisis and engage with Ethiopia and Eritrea, which are fighting a proxy war in Somalia, which risks provoking their own border conflict. The Commission has nominated an EC Special Envoy for Somalia and is driving forward proposals for EU action at the General Affairs and External Relations Council. It remains committed to working closely with the European Parliament to stem violence and to find a political solution to this crisis.

President. – Mr Matsakis will speak on a procedural matter.

Marios Matsakis (ALDE). – Madam President, on a point of order before we proceed with the vote, I note once again that there is no Council representation in this Chamber. This is now becoming almost a permanent situation, and perhaps something needs to be done about it.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place at the end of the debate.

Written declarations (Rule 142)

Glyn Ford (PSE). – The situation in Somalia is a reflection of a collapsed state and failed economy. There has been no functioning government since the overthrow of the Said Barre regime in 1991 which led to anarchy, inter-clan fighting and banditry.

The recent fighting between the Union of Islamic Courts and allied Ethiopian and Transitional Federal Government troops has displaced at least 100 000 people and famine threatens. Yet the worsening security situation in Mogadishu has prevented international NGOs from coping with this unfolding humanitarian catastrophe.

I welcome the efforts by the African Union to assemble a peacekeeping force to help with national reconciliation, but only 20% of the promised 8 000 have actually been deployed. The African Union must honour its commitments. However, the European Union must in parallel increase its efforts to provide political, financial and logistic support.

The international community, including the EU, must step up the provision of humanitarian aid to the displaced people. The ultimate solution, however, to restoring Somalia to a functioning state requires the International Somalia Contact Group, including the African Union, the UN, the EU and the US, to engage with actors inside Somalia to support the implementation of the Transitional Federal Charter and Institutions.

10. Voting time

President. – The next item is Voting Time.

(For results and other details of the votes: see Minutes)

10.1. Christian communities in the Middle East (vote)

– (EL) Joint motion for a resolution B6-0449/2007

10.2. Uzbekistan (vote)

– (EL) Joint motion for a resolution B6-0451/2007

After the vote on the first motion for a resolution:

Evgeni Kirilov (PSE). – Madam President, I could not vote in time. Please put my vote in favour.

10.3. Somalia (vote)

– (EL) Joint motion for a resolution B6-0454/2007

11. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

12. Documents received: see Minutes

13. Decisions concerning certain documents: see Minutes

14. Written declarations for entry in the register (Rule 116): see Minutes

15. Forwarding of texts adopted during the sitting: see Minutes

16. Dates for next sittings: see Minutes

17. Adjournment of the session

President. – I declare the session of the European Parliament adjourned.

(The sitting was closed at 4.20 p.m.)

ANNEX (Written answers)

QUESTIONS TO THE COUNCIL (The Presidency-in-Office of the Council of the European Union bears sole responsibility for these answers)

Question no 8 by Colm Burke (H-0794/07)

Subject: Reform agenda in Turkey post elections

The recent election result in Turkey gave the new Government of Turkey a strong mandate for political and economic reforms. How is the Council supporting the Turkish Government through the political and economic challenges that lie ahead in order to ensure that Turkey increases the momentum of reform?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

There was a high turnout for the Turkish parliamentary elections. The composition of the new Parliament is more representative of the Turkish population than the previous one and Prime Minister Erdogan's government has an absolute majority. As the honourable Member states, the government has now had its legitimacy renewed and has a clear mandate, which will allow it to press on resolutely with the reform process.

The European Union has taken – and will continue to take – every opportunity, in particular within the framework of the different political dialogue meetings, to draw the Turkey's attention to the EU's expectations that the new government will give reforms a new impetus after the slowdown witnessed over the last year and in the run up to the elections. In that context we would draw attention to the parliamentary majority's intention to draft a new Constitution – a process that we shall follow closely.

Progress in the reform process, both in terms of adopting new legislation and implementing it, is essential for accession negotiations to move forward and the Union remains ready to help Turkey along that path. Much work lies ahead, especially regarding political criteria. We have pointed out the need for significant progress in areas such as freedom of speech, religious freedom and civil-military relations. Obviously, we view the situation in the southeast of the country with great concern; we roundly condemn all acts of terrorism and we underscore the need for continuing respect for the primacy of law and maintaining regional stability.

In addition, we continue to encourage Turkey to move forward in normalising relations with the Republic of Cyprus and we call for full implementation of the Additional Protocol to the Ankara Agreement, as mentioned in the EU Declaration of 21 September 2005 in conjunction with the Council conclusions of 11 December 2006. We also urge Turkey to step up its efforts to ensure it fully and unequivocally meets its commitment to maintaining good-neighbourly relations and its commitment to solving any outstanding border disputes in accordance with the principle of peaceful settlement of disputes pursuant to the United Nations Charter, including, if necessary, the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice.

Economically, we hope that Turkey will continue on the path of sustainable economic growth whilst simultaneously implementing the structural reform programme.

Summing up, I should like to point out that the Union has drafted a pre-accession strategy providing Turkey with the framework to prepare for accession. The Association Agreement is an important instrument for cooperation between both parties. The Accession Partnership, which is soon to be reviewed, sets priorities for subsequent work and also serves as a reference for tailoring EU assistance to the applicant country's specific needs. As regards financial assistance, under the new IPA financial instrument, the average annual allocations for Turkey will increase from EUR 497 million in 2007 to EUR 653 million in 2010.

Furthermore, accession negotiations themselves are the most valuable and powerful instrument for generating reform.

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Question no 9 by Mairead McGuinness (H-0795/07)**Subject: Liberalisation of postal services in the EU**

The full liberalisation of postal services was agreed during a meeting of the Council on 1 October. It was decided the opening of postal services in the European Union should be achieved by 31 December 2010 at the latest. Could the Council make a statement on this issue?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

As the honourable Member quite rightly pointed out, the Council, at its 1 October 2007 meeting, reached a political agreement on the proposal for a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Directive 97/67/EC concerning the full accomplishment of the internal market of Community postal services, which is due to be approved through co-decision and thus with Parliament's full participation.

One of the key features of the agreement is the final deadline of 31 December 2010 for implementation of the amending directive. In this respect, certain Member States (listed in the new Article 3) may be able to extend this deadline to 31 December 2012 at the latest, with the proviso that they notify the Commission beforehand. Further points include clarification and important adjustments that have been made to the relevant definitions, as well as the safeguarding of the universal service, including funding for that service and the authorisation system.

Additionally, the agreement takes account of amendments to the Commission proposal by including a considerable number of amendments suggested in the European Parliament's opinion in first reading.

Jurist/linguists are putting the final touches to the text of that agreement so that the Council is able to adopt a common position at a forthcoming meeting.

The Council warmly welcomes the excellent cooperation and joint vision it has shared to date with the European Parliament on this crucial subject.

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Question no 10 by Avril Doyle (H-0797/07)**Subject: EU nationals repatriation fund**

Could the Council investigate the possibility of a fund being established for EU citizens to cover the costs of repatriation in the case of death when the family is shown not to be in a financial position to do so?

In Ireland, the recent growth in the population of citizens from other Member States has highlighted the financial problems that some families may face in repatriating the body of a relation after death in another Member State. In many cases, local communities raise funds to cover the costs. What happens when this is not the case? Could a 'repatriation fund' to deal with such cases be established?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The question raised by the honourable Member is an interesting one and mirrors one aspect of the broader subject of 'repatriation of corpses between States' currently governed by the Strasbourg Convention of 1973, which only some of the Member States have signed and which sets strict rules governing the transfer of corpses. This topic was dealt with in the Commission's Green Paper on consular protection of European Union citizens, but only in terms of transferring corpses from States outside the European Union.

The question of repatriation of corpses is the responsibility the Member States, which vary in their positions on this issue. Most, if not all, do not have any obligation, or legal possibility for repatriating the corpses of their citizens. The Presidency therefore thinks it is unlikely that a decision will be taken on these matters in

the short to medium term, namely in terms of setting up a fund to cover costs which most Member States at least regard as the responsibility of private individuals.

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Question no 11 by Jim Higgins (H-0799/07)

Subject: Prevention of cardiovascular disease

As the Council will no doubt be aware, CVD causes the death of 1.9 million citizens in the EU per annum, and given that the key to reducing the deaths from CVD is a plan implemented along political, social and economic lines, could the Council outline what action it is taking to ensure the prevention of cardiovascular disease?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding the Council or the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council is placing the emphasis on preventing CVD (cardiovascular disease) by dealing with specific health questions affecting the incidence of CVD.

– Nutrition and physical activity: in 2005 the Council approved Conclusions on promotion of healthy lifestyles and prevention of type 2 diabetes and also approved Conclusions on Health promotion by means of nutrition and physical activity at its meeting of 31 May 2007. It is currently drafting a new set of conclusions on the application of the EU strategy on nutrition, overweight and obesity-related health issues. The High Level Group set up to implement the strategy will discuss cutting the amount of salt in food products as a matter of priority, since salt is a key determining factor in CDV.

– Smoking: an exchange of opinions took place at the Council meeting of 31 May 2007 on strategic options for a 'Smoke-free Europe' policy. Reducing active and passive smoking may result in major progress as far as cardiovascular health is concerned.

– Alcohol: in November 2006, the Council approved its Conclusions on the EU strategy to reduce alcohol-related harm. Excessive alcohol consumption and the harmful effects which it causes are one of the main priorities of the German, Portuguese and Slovene Presidencies' programme.

It is also worth mentioning the European Heart Health Charter, which was drawn up by the European Heart Network and the European Society of Cardiology, with the support of the European Commission and the WHO, and which aims to reduce the impact of cardiovascular disease in the EU and the WHO European Region, as well as decreasing disparities between countries in this area.

Those actions are helping to reduce the main risk factors for contracting CDV set out in the European Parliament's Resolution of July 2007 and they highlight the importance of prevention through a healthy lifestyle.

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Question no 12 by David Martin (H-0803/07)

Subject: Resolution on EPAs during the ACP JPA in Kigali

In light of the concerns from civil society and ACP countries over the December deadline for the conclusion of the Economic Partnership Agreements, what plans does the Council have to negotiate with their African colleagues during the next Joint Parliamentary Assembly of the ACP countries to be held in Kigali on 17-23 November?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Responsibility for negotiating Economic Partnership Agreements on behalf of the EU lies with the Commission, based on the Guidelines approved by the Council in June 2002. Negotiations are normally conducted at regional level. At the level of all the ACP countries, the ACP-EC Council of Ministers is responsible for approving the political guidelines and for taking the necessary decisions to implement the provisions of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, (Article 15 (2) (b)), including those related to the EPAs. In this context, the ACP-EC Council of Ministers of 25 May 2007 endorsed a review of the EPA negotiations, as required by Article 37 (4) of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement.

The ACP-EU Joint Parliamentary Assembly is not a formal negotiation forum for the EPAs, instead it plays a broader and extremely important role in the Cotonou system. Under the provisions of Article 17 (2) of the Cotonou Partnership Agreement, its role, as a consultative body, is namely to promote democratic processes through dialogue and consultation and to discuss issues pertaining to development and the ACP-EU Partnership.

The Council of the EU is strongly committed to providing political guidelines on behalf of the EU to the EPA-related process. The Council therefore approved Conclusions in April 2006 and May 2007 underscoring its commitment to the EPAs as development instruments which help to eradicate poverty in ACP States.

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Question no 13 by Cristobal Montoro Romero (H-0806/07)

Subject: Exchange rate

The European Union is the world's major exporter and importer of goods, its main exporter of services, and its second-largest source and recipient of direct investment; the EU is therefore one of the major beneficiaries of the global economy, and has a major responsibility when global challenges have to be tackled. One of these, the appreciation of the euro vis-à-vis the rest of the world's main currencies, is the result of imbalances in the world economy and the low rate of EU economic growth due to a lack of domestic demands within the Union.

Does the Council believe that the EU has no responsibilities whatever with regard to the appreciation of the euro, and that everything stems from the action of the other trade blocs, China or the USA?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or the Member States, was not given presented during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

As the honourable Member rightly points out, the European Union is a global economic leader in various aspects, in terms of the trade of goods and services, and in the area of internal and external investment. I cannot, however, agree with the honourable Member's assessment of economic growth and domestic demand in the Union: if the available European Commission forecasts are proved correct, GDP will rise above potential both in 2007 and 2008 and domestic demand will increase even more this year (and will be above that of the United States).

If truth be told, the European Union takes its responsibilities very seriously in terms of solving imbalances in the world economy and hopes that the same is true of its world partners. The EU has been pushing through the economic reforms laid down in the Lisbon Agenda for seven years to try to solve a large number of questions related to both economic demand and the general programme for competitiveness in the global economy. The successful reforms that the Member States have introduced in the context of the Lisbon Agenda are now yielding results and the EU economy is at present in a stronger position to deal with the current period of global economic uncertainty. However, we are not complacent: our structural reform efforts must and will continue, in accordance with the Lisbon Agenda priorities.

As far as the specific question of the euro exchange rate is concerned, I can inform the honourable Member that the Council has not discussed trends in exchange rates as regards the euro or the currencies of Member States not using the euro as their national currency.

Nevertheless, I can inform you that Eurogroup approved and decided to release a statement on exchange rate issues at its meeting on 8 October, reiterating that the 'Euro area is playing its role for an orderly reduction of the imbalances by implementing structural reforms and contributing to a rebalancing of growth.'

The economic situation and exchange rate developments were also discussed at the G7 Finance Ministers meeting held in Washington on 19 October. The G7 Finance Ministers' statement included the following paragraph: 'We affirm that exchange rates should reflect economic fundamentals. Excess volatility and disorderly movements in exchange rates are undesirable for economic growth. We continue to monitor exchange markets closely, and cooperate as appropriate. We welcome China's decision to increase the flexibility of its currency, but in view of its rising current account surplus and domestic inflation, we stress its need to allow an accelerated appreciation of its effective exchange rate.'

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Question no 14 by Dimitrios Papadimoulis (H-0811/07)

Subject: Possible intervention by the Turkish armed forces in northern Iraq

On 10 October 2007, the Prime Minister of Turkey, Mr Erdogan, announced his intention of submitting a resolution to the Turkish National Assembly in the immediate future seeking approval for military intervention in northern Iraq.

In the light of a statement by Mr Solana, the European Union High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy, giving his views on this situation and indications that 'any possibility of complicating even more the security situation in Iraq is something that should not be welcome and therefore that's the message that we passed on to our Turkish friends', what immediate action will the Council take to prevent any military incursions by the Turkish armed forces into northern Iraq? What would be the implications of such action regarding Turkish accession to the European Union?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

We are following the situation very carefully and are in close contact with the Turkish authorities. The Presidency strongly condemned the recent terrorist acts in southeastern Turkey and thus expressed our solidarity with the Turkish people. The international community and all the main stakeholders in the region in particular must support Turkey's efforts to protect its population and combat terrorism, whilst at the same time respecting human rights, fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, maintaining international and regional peace and stability and refraining from taking any disproportionate military action. It is also worth mentioning that the Presidency took part in the Ministerial Conference of the Neighbouring Countries of Iraq, which took place in Istanbul on 2-3 November, where participants voiced their appreciation of the efforts undertaken by the Iraqi government to combat terrorism, including efforts to prevent Iraq from being used as a base for terrorist attacks on its neighbouring countries and recalled the bilateral agreements signed between Iraq and its neighbouring countries with respect to combating terrorism. Reinforcing dialogue and cooperation between the Turkish and Iraqi governments is of the utmost importance in trying to solve this problem.

As an applicant country negotiating for EU accession – and in accordance with the Negotiation Framework – Turkey must undertake to maintain good neighbourly relations and respect the international legal order.

In this context, I can assure the honourable Member that we shall continue to follow the situation very closely and advocate a solution based on cooperation between Turkey and Iraq.

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Question no 15 by Chris Davies (H-0815/07)

Subject: Scrutiny of implementation of EU legislation during the Portuguese Presidency

Will the Presidency-in-Office state whether it has arranged for the issue of inadequate implementation of EU legislation by Member States to be placed on the agenda of any meetings of the Council of Ministers scheduled to take place during the current Presidency?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Portuguese Presidency does not intend to discuss this question in the Council at present.

It is pointed out that the Commission, in its role as 'guardian of the Treaties', monitors the implementation of Community law in the Member States. The Commission presents a report on a twice-yearly basis, entitled 'Internal Market Scoreboard' on the implementation of legislation in different countries in the Union. The sixteenth implementation Scoreboard was published on 5 July 2007.

The Presidency does not have any information on the Commission's publication date for the next scoreboard.

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Question no 16 by Nikolaos Vakalis (H-0822/07)**Subject: Measures to reduce urban automobile emissions**

In view of the fact that atmospheric pollution caused by traffic in major European city centres has for a long time been a major issue, can the Council indicate what progress is being made in adopting the proposal for a directive on passenger car related taxes (COM(2005)0261) seeking to introduce a system of vehicle taxation based on carbon dioxide emissions?

In view of the relevant European Parliament resolution of 5 September 2006, why has adoption of the above directive been delayed for over a year? Does the Presidency intend to expedite procedures for the adoption thereof?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Portuguese Presidency has taken the view that fiscal policy needs to make a greater contribution towards improving environmental sustainability. The Presidency is therefore launching a debate on all the initiatives which might promote the efforts undertaken to fight climate change and reach the EU's objectives for the overall reduction of greenhouse gas emissions, in the realisation that fiscal measures can have a positive impact on pollution and consumer behaviour.

With this backdrop in mind, the Portuguese Presidency has intensified discussion of the proposal for a Directive on passenger car related taxes [COM(2005)0261] in the Working Party on Tax Questions and has presented a compromise text that gives Member States more flexibility, namely in choosing the environmental performance criteria to be used as a basis for tax differentiation (grams of CO₂ per kilometre, fuel consumption or other aspects that may help cut emissions). The Portuguese Presidency instigated a general discussion on this topic in the Council (ECOFIN) on 13 November, the goal being to adopt the proposal for a directive by the end of its mandate, if possible.

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Question no 17 by Brian Crowley (H-0823/07)**Subject: Combating youth and long-term unemployment in Europe**

Could the Council make a statement outlining what new and innovative initiatives it has pursued this year at a European level so as to help combat youth and long-term unemployment in Europe?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Member States are responsible in the first instance for devising and implementing their employment policies. Nevertheless, the Council has several responsibilities in the area of employment and has this year reviewed Member States' employment policies⁽⁵⁾ underscoring, through employment guidelines, the importance of fighting youth unemployment and long-term unemployment in the Member States.

Pursuant to Article 130 of the Treaty, the Council set up the Employment Committee, an advisory body that began analysing Member States' employment policies in October 2007 - using the 'Cambridge analysis' and paying particular attention to the youth aspect.

This year a new instrument is available to the Union – the European Globalisation Adjustment Fund – to combat long-term unemployment where there have been mass redundancies. As the honourable Member will know, Parliament and the Council agreed on this instrument at the end of last year.

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Question no 18 by Eoin Ryan (H-0825/07)

Subject: EU aid to Sierra Leone

In light of the very peaceful and fair Presidential and Government elections in Sierra Leone this year, will the Council review upwards the level of funding that the EU is giving the people of Sierra Leone so as to help rebuild this country, which has been ravaged by war and which according to the United Nations is the second poorest country in the world?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Once the definitive results from the elections in Sierra Leone were announced on 17 September, the Presidency, on behalf of the EU, congratulated the new President, Ernest Bai Koroma. The Council is looking forward to an improved political dialogue with the new government.

The people of Sierra Leone have shown a laudable strong commitment to democracy throughout the entire electoral process. Sierra Leone's fundamental institutions and the NEC (National Electoral Commission) in particular, played an important role in the success of the electoral process.

EU aid to Sierra Leone is essentially channelled through the European Development Fund (EDF). The amount allocated to Sierra Leone under the 10th EDF for programmable aid is EUR 242 million (as opposed to EUR 220 million under the 9th EDF), plus EUR 26.4 million in non-programmable aid (unforeseen situations). This amount may be reviewed under the mid-term review, based chiefly on the results which the country achieves as compared with the commitments undertaken by its leaders. This new feature of EU cooperation under the EDF will actually make it possible to provide appropriate support to those countries most committed to reforming their governance. We hope that the new leaders of Sierra Leone will help to give a new boost to the country's development so that they can receive more support.

The EU and several of its Member States also generously support the Special Court for Sierra Leone. Heeding the recent calls of the Special Court on the need to cover its funding for 2008, the Council's preparatory bodies recently discussed additional support that could be given resulting in new commitments for the 2008 budget.

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⁽⁵⁾ By means of the Joint Employment Report approved in February 2007.

Question no 19 by Liam Aylward (H-0827/07)**Subject: Combating climate change**

Can the Council state what concrete administrative and political structures are being put in place between EU governments and the American Government so that we can all work together in a common manner so as to bring forward the necessary and specific measures to arrest climate change?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The EU has decided to send out a clear signal to the international community on its determination to fight climate change and its commitment to starting negotiations on a global post-Kyoto agreement for the post 2012 period.

Climate change has systematically featured on the EU's diplomatic agenda and last year it played a prominent role at various summits and meetings between the EU and third countries, including the USA.

The most recent EU-USA summit on 30 April 2007 approved a joint statement on energy security and climate change which underlines our mutual interest in ensuring secure, affordable, and clean supplies of energy and tackling climate change with the ultimate objective being to stabilise concentrations of greenhouse gases.

The EU and the USA held a High Level Dialogue on Climate Change, Clean Energy, and Sustainable Development in Helsinki on 24 and 25 October 2006 on using existing initiatives as a basis for progressing with the Gleneagles G8 Action Plan. The third ministerial meeting of the Gleneagles Dialogue on Climate Change, Clean Energy, and Sustainable Development took place in Berlin on 9-11 September 2007 and was attended by representatives from 20 countries with high energy needs, including the USA, to discuss innovative ideas so as to develop an integrated energy and climate change policy outlook.

The G8 process begun at Gleneagles yielded an important result in Heiligendamm this year: recognition by all G8 parties that the UN climate process is the appropriate body for negotiating global action on climate change. Also in the scope of the G8, it is worth mentioning the Special Meeting of Sherpas (technical advisors) on Climate Change (Berlin, 16 October 2007).

Another event which also offered an opportunity to move forward work in the area of cooperation in bilateral EU-USA meetings was the High Level Event on Climate Change hosted by the United Nations' Secretary General (New York, 24 September 2007).

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Question no 20 by Seán Ó Neachtain (H-0829/07)**Subject: The 7th EU Research and Development Framework Programme**

Can the Council give an assurance that peripheral and regional areas in Europe will benefit from funding initiatives under the operation of the 7th Research and Development Framework Programme between now and the year 2013?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The 7th RDT Framework Programme is anchored on the premise that regions are among the most important stakeholders in innovation and research policy.

Under the 'Capacities' Specific Programme, EUR 126 million is allocated specifically to the 'Regions of Knowledge' initiative, in addition to a further EUR 340 million earmarked for the 'Research Potential' initiative, which is specifically geared around the European Union's convergence and outermost regions.

In theory, the aforementioned initiatives (which are targeted on the regions) are due to run throughout the entire Framework Programme. A mid-term review is planned for the 7th FP, which will be carried out during the programme. This might possibly then have some impact on certain aspects of the programme. Nevertheless, it is most likely that the initiatives aimed more specifically at the regions will continue.

Of further note are the 'ERANet' projects under the 'Cooperation' Specific Programme, which are worth mentioning with regard to the regional dimension, given that one of the priorities of the corresponding mechanism consists of supporting the creation of networks between regional (and national) public S&T programmes.

Therefore, Europe's regions in general (and the outermost regions in particular) should have the benefit of funding initiatives under the Seventh Research and Technological Development Framework Programme until 2013.

Moreover, it will probably be possible to achieve greater synergy between the RTD Framework Programme and Structural Fund-related programmes for European regions, chiefly by allowing the regional bodies to take part in the FP and making it possible for the European regions to develop at local level the results obtained by participating in projects covered by the Programme.

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Question no 21 by Marcin Libicki (H-0832/07)

Subject: Right to the people of Balochistan

Pakistan has championed the cause of Kashmiri self-determination. Does the Council believe that Pakistan needs to give the same right to the people of Balochistan and the tribal regions of Pakistan instead of indulging in the use of armed force to suppress its own people?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or on the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council has never taken any position on the question of self-determination for the people of Baluchistan.

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Question no 23 by Johan Van Hecke (H-0834/07)

Subject: Enforced removal of 1.5 million Chinese for the Olympic Games

Yang Chunlin, a Chinese activist campaigning for land rights, has been tortured in a Chinese prison. According to his sister, Yan Chunping, the activist spent days at the prison chained up in the same position and was forced to clear up other prisoners' excrement. The reason for his arrest was a petition which he had organised against the Olympic Games. He collected more than 10 000 signatures, mainly from expropriated farmers, under the slogan, 'We don't want the Olympic Games, we want human rights'. Illegal expropriation of land is commonplace in China. One and a half million people are said to have been forced to leave their homes to make way for the new sports complexes.

For a long time it was thought that holding the Olympic Games in China would have a positive effect, because the event would present an opportunity to expose China more to external influences. Now, however, it is felt that a boycott of the Olympic Games is the only remaining instrument available to Europe to bring pressure to bear on China. Is the Council considering boycotting the Games in order to make it clear to China that serious violations of human rights are unacceptable?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or on the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

In accordance with the EU guidelines on human rights defenders, the EU Heads of Mission in Beijing are following the situation of human rights defenders closely, including that of Yang Chunlin, and the Council regularly raises individual disturbing cases with the Chinese authorities through different channels.

The Chinese authorities were also given a list of individual cases before the last talks held in Beijing on 17 October. At that meeting, the EU voiced its concern at the harassment and ongoing imprisonment inflicted on human rights defenders. The EU regretted the increasing surveillance and control of the media, including via the Internet, and defended freedom of expression. It also raised the question of torture. As has happened in previous dialogues, the EU called on China to ratify the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, which China signed nine years ago and which enshrines and protects citizens' rights and offers them protection against abuse.

In its human rights dialogue with China, the EU regularly raises many of the claims set out in the open letter entitled: 'Human rights wanted, not Olympic Games' which formed the subject of Yang Chunlin's campaign. During the last round of talks, the items broached included the following questions: giving national journalists the same access and independence as foreign journalists, protecting Chinese workers' rights on construction sites and ending discrimination against migrant workers. The Council is also concerned with the removal and forced relocation of people due to urban development whether or not in relation to the Olympic Games.

To sum up, the Council agrees with the honourable Member that the human rights situation in China continues to give cause for concern. However, some modest progress has been seen in some areas, for example the reduction in the number of executions following the reviewing of death sentences by the Supreme People's Court, fewer restrictions on the foreign media since 1 January 2007 and promulgation of the new labour contract law.

The Council therefore believes that it is worthwhile continuing the dialogue with China on these subjects, even if the results are not always quantifiable after each round of talks and do in fact move only gradually.

As regards human rights and the Olympic Games, China has undertaken a series of commitments in this area as part of its bid to host the Olympics in 2008. The Council will thus monitor the situation closely and raise any questions that cause concern. As for the possibility of boycotting the games, it is not up to the Council of the EU to take a decision (as this is a question for each IOC Member State to decide).

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Question no 24 by Justas Vincas Paleckis (H-0836/07)

Subject: Ratification of the Reform Treaty

The Reform Treaty was adopted at the European Council meeting of 18-19 October, and it is to be signed on 13 December in Lisbon. The agreement that was reached will make it possible to put an end to six years of discussions on institutional reform and to concentrate on tackling the EU's main tasks. As the experience with the EU Constitutional Treaty showed, however, the Reform Treaty still has to negotiate a difficult passage before it is ratified in the 27 Member States. According to sociological research, about 60% of the Constitutional Treaty's opponents in France gave as one of their reasons that the text of the Treaty was very complicated and difficult to understand. In comparison with the Reform Treaty, the Constitutional Treaty was significantly shorter and easy to understand. This gives rise to doubts as to whether the Member States will be able sufficiently to explain the content and meaning of the new Treaty to their citizens.

Does the Council plan to take steps at European level to assist the Member States in presenting the Treaty text to EU citizens?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or on the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Ratification processes are the exclusive responsibility of each Member State.

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Question no 25 by Ryszard Czarnecki (H-0839/07)**Subject: Ratification of the EU-Albania Stability and Association Agreement**

When will the process of ratifying the Stability and Association Agreement between the EU and Albania that was signed in 2006 be completed?

To date, only 10 of the 27 Member States have ratified the agreement – six 'new' Member States (Poland, Hungary, Slovakia, Slovenia, Lithuania and Latvia) and four 'old' Member States (Spain, Ireland, Sweden and Luxembourg).

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or on the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Such legal and parliamentary ratification procedures vary from one Member State to another. Consequently, the Council cannot predict when the said procedures will be finalised. It very much hopes that progress will continue to be made to finalise those procedures over the coming months.

As regards the current situation, in addition to the 10 Member States mentioned, two more have recently ratified the Stabilisation and Association Agreement between the EU and Albania (the United Kingdom and Estonia).

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Question no 27 by Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou (H-0844/07)**Subject: Pension reform in Europe and its implications for women at work**

In Greece, as in other Member States, a public dialogue concerning pension reform and possible amendments to 'protectionist' legislation for women has recently commenced. In view of the forthcoming pensions reform debate to be held on 13 and 14 November in Lisbon⁽⁶⁾, what picture has emerged to date from deliberations in the Council of Ministers for Employment and Social Affairs (EPSCO) regarding pension arrangements for women in each Member State? Which arrangements do they consider have produced the best results in terms of remuneration, employability and career prospects for women? Will the Council ask the Commission to draw up a comparative survey with a view to identifying best practices for improving employment levels among women and making it easier for them to combine family and workplace?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or on the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Member States were asked to provide information on recent trends in their pension systems as a contribution to the Council and Commission Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion drafted by the Social Protection Committee for approval by the Council and presentation to the Spring European Council. The honourable Member will find some information on the present reform situation in Greece in the corresponding analytical entry from the Addenda to the 2007 Joint Report.⁽⁷⁾

Issues related to reconciling professional and family life are one of the Council's priorities and let me take this opportunity to recall that the concerns voiced by the honourable Member are exactly those broached at the last Informal Meeting of Ministers responsible for promoting gender equality (4 October), which analysed the following topics in particular: incorporation of the gender dimension in growth and employment; women's entrepreneurial spirit and integration in working life; reconciling professional, private and family life for men and women.

⁽⁶⁾ 'The paths of sustainability and the reform of pensions systems'.

⁽⁷⁾ 'Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion 2007 – Country profiles' (SEC (2007) 272).

During the course of the 'Reconciling Professional, Personal and Family Life: New Challenges for the Social Partners and for Public Policy' conference held on 12 July, the strategic importance of reconciliation was highlighted, namely in terms of fulfilling the Lisbon Strategy's employment objectives, in particular with regard to access conditions for women (equal opportunities, social services, flexitime).

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Question no 28 by Athanasios Pafilis (H-0846/07)

Subject: Incidence of cancer among military personnel serving with NATO in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan

The Greek press has recently reported that 23 members of the Greek armed forces who served with NATO in Bosnia, Kosovo and Afghanistan after 1996 have been diagnosed as suffering from cancer. Suspicions are growing that this is linked to periods of exposure to depleted uranium, resulting in cancer of the digestive system in three cases, of the testicles in two cases and of the lymphoma in three cases. No details have been given concerning the other 15 cases. Similar cases of cancer affecting military personnel sent to conflict areas have also come to light in other countries, for example Italy, where 225 cases have been officially recorded, 37 of which have already proved fatal.

What view does the Council take of the responsibility of the EU and NATO for the use of banned weapons during the war in Yugoslavia? Does it intend to compensate the military personnel and civilians who were contaminated?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or on the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Questions related to NATO military operations do not come under the competence of the European Union, which does not have any details on the questions raised by the honourable Member.

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Question no 29 by Paulo Casaca (H-0848/07)

Subject: Doris Lessing and the Iranian dictatorship

The winner of the 2007 Nobel Prize for Literature has told the newspaper El País that nobody is daring to criticise the Iranian dictatorship for oil-related reasons, thus demonstrating that she has a perfect grasp of the motivations underpinning the EU's pacificatory policy towards Teheran.

Does the Council not believe that this policy of pacification towards Teheran is resulting in serious repercussions for the citizens of Iran, and jeopardising world peace?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or on the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council condemns the continuing deterioration of the human rights situation in Iran. The Presidency of the EU has been following this situation closely and has repeatedly called on Iran by means of démarches, both in Lisbon and Teheran, and declarations to ensure that Iran fulfils its international human rights obligations.

The EU has issued several declarations since the beginning of the Portuguese Presidency, specifically on youth justice, capital punishment cases and freedom of expression and will continue to do so whenever necessary and in accordance with the European Union's Guidelines on the Death Penalty, Torture and Human Rights Defenders.

Five démarches have been carried out thus far dealing with our principal areas of concern, such as use of the death penalty without the internationally-defined minimum rules being fulfilled (execution of minors,

executions by stoning and public executions); the increased restrictions on freedom of expression, freedom of the press and media; as well as persecution of certain minorities and religious communities, namely the Baha'i; and persecution of human rights defenders.

The EU has therefore co-sponsored and is strongly committed to backing the resolution put forward by Canada currently under discussion in the 3rd Committee of the United Nations' General Assembly.

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Question no 30 by Danutė Budreikaitė (H-0850/07)

Subject: Fate of the Villa Lituania

It is already sixteen years since Lithuania regained its independence from the Soviet Union. Ever since, Lithuania has been waiting in vain for the return of its embassy building in Rome, the Villa Lituania, which has been its property since 1937. Disregarding the note handed over by the then Lithuanian Ambassador, Stasys Lozoraitis, the Italian authorities allowed the Soviets to occupy the Villa Lituania. The Russian flag now flies outside the building.

Although Rome has always stated that Lithuania has not lost the rights to the Villa Lituania, the Italian Foreign Minister Massimo D'Alema has now declared that Lithuania will never have its property restored to it. In 1999 Lithuania was offered the chance to rent the Stozzi Palace on the outskirts of Rome. However, this does not solve the critical diplomatic issue – the restoration of Lithuania's lost embassy building. The Villa Lituania is now worth 20 million euros.

How, in the opinion of the Council, can Lithuania assert its justified claims?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or on the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The Council has not discussed this issue, as it is not a matter which falls within its competence.

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Question no 31 by Pedro Guerreiro (H-0852/07)

Subject: Community funding of the future European maritime policy

The Commission recently presented its proposals on a future 'integrated maritime policy' at EU level. Given that any initiative in this area should safeguard the powers of the Member States with regard to managing their own territory, and specifically their territorial waters and economic exclusion zones in matters such as exploitation of resources, transport, research, border management and security, planning, the environment or economic activities such as fisheries,

how does the Council intend to fund this policy from the Community budget, in the light of the principle that fresh financial resources should be provided for new priorities?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or on the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

In its communication on an integrated maritime policy for the European Union, which was approved on 10 October 2007, the Commission outlines its ideas on a global policy for maritime affairs and announces the initiatives and actions it intends to put forward in the future, making it possible to formulate an integrated maritime policy for the European Union.

It is hoped that the European Council will comment, at its meeting due to be held in December 2007, on the Commission's communication and the ideas which it sets out.

The Council looks forward to hearing any proposals on future maritime policy which the Commission might like to table under its right of initiative, and will analyse them in accordance with the relevant procedures and with full respect for Community rules. If any such proposal should entail Community funding for the measures it suggests then the Council, working in close cooperation with the European Parliament, will analyse the question in accordance with the budgetary rules applicable.

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Question no 32 by Diamanto Manolakou (H-0855/07)

Subject: Interference with the integral organisation of the Hungarian Communist Workers Party

The internal organisation of the Hungarian Communist Workers Party has been interfered with by a judgment handed down by a court in Budapest which went as far as to order the cancellation of the 21st party congress. The party executive protested at the political nature of the judgment which is unprecedented in the last two decades of legal history. Following the refusal of the party leadership to comply with the order to cancel the congress, the President of the Court indicated the party chairman Gyula Thurmer and six members of the executive for contempt with the possibility of a two-year prison sentence. This judgment infringes the principle of freedom of speech embodied in the Hungarian Constitution and is a further addition to a number of other anti-Communist measures being taken in eastern Europe.

Does the Council condemn the inadmissible stance adopted by the Court in Budapest regarding the Hungarian Communist Workers Party?

Does it consider that indictments levelled against it constitute a serious infringement of political and democratic rights and freedoms and illegal interference with the internal affairs of a perfectly legal political party?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or on the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

It is not the Council's responsibility to voice its opinion on a judicial decision proffered by a court in a Member State.

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Question no 33 by Vural Öger (H-0859/07)

Subject: Bilateral relations between Turkey and Cyprus

No progress has yet been made towards the normalisation of bilateral relations between Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus. Whereas in 2006 the Finnish Council Presidency made the so-called 'Cyprus problem' one of the focal points of its foreign policy efforts, the Portuguese Council Presidency has thus far ignored it.

What steps does the Portuguese Council Presidency plan to take before the end of 2007 to overcome the impasse in the talks?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or on the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The question of normalising bilateral relations between Turkey and the Republic of Cyprus is being followed closely and dealt with at the appropriate levels. Ratification and subsequent implementation of the Adaptation Protocol of the Ankara Agreement on the accession of the ten new Member States of the EU is an obligation which Turkey has undertaken but has still not fulfilled. Much attention has been given to that question, for instance at the meeting of the EU-Turkey Political Directors' Troika held in Lisbon on 18 September. The question will also be dealt with at the next meeting of the Ministerial EU-Turkey meeting, which is being

held in Brussels on 20 November. Moreover, the Council regularly asks Turkey to change its policy with regard to the Republic of Cyprus' participation in international organisations and forums.

Furthermore, the Council will analyse the situation on the basis of the progress report published by the Commission on 6 November. Pursuant to the Council conclusions of 11 December 2006, the Council will analyse the questions covered by the EU Declaration of 21 September 2005. Full implementation of the Protocol is also a short-term priority under the Accession Partnership, which will be reviewed over the course of this year. Turkey's fulfilment of its obligations to the EU and the Accession Partnership priorities will affect the negotiating process.

As regards the situation in Cyprus, the Union is still committed to contributing towards a resolution of the Cyprus problem in the scope of the UN that is inclusive, viable and compatible with the principles upon which the EU is founded. In this regard, we support the rapid implementation of the agreement reached on 8 July 2006 under the aegis of the UN and we are still eagerly awaiting the start of the technical committees and expert groups' work on the in-depth issues.

I can assure the honourable Member that the Presidency and the Union will continue to support the efforts made in this regard.

Let me also state that the Union is still committed to contributing towards a resolution of the Cyprus problem in the scope of the UN that is inclusive, viable and compatible with the principles upon which the EU is founded. The Presidency is continuing to conduct inquiries as regards reaching a consensus towards full application of the GAERC conclusions of April 2004 and January 2007.

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Question no 34 by Robert Evans (H-0861/07)

Subject: Flights to Northern Cyprus

Has the Council discussed allowing direct flights to Ercan Airport (the only international airport to service northern Cyprus), located close to the divided Cypriot capital Nicosia?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or on the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

Flights are regulated at the national level by the Member States' competent authorities. The European Commission is charged with ensuring that regulating is carried out in compliance with Community law and this includes respect for international obligations. This subject is therefore not discussed in the Council.

I can add that the government of the Republic of Cyprus, exercising its sovereign right to designate the legal airports and ports of entry and departure for the Republic and in accordance with international law (Chicago Convention) has deemed operations at Tymbou (Ercan) airport illegal. That airport is located in the area of the Republic of Cyprus over which the government of the Republic of Cyprus does not have effective control and yet it operates without the necessary authorisation from the competent authorities designated by the government.

Let me also state that the Union is still committed to contributing towards a resolution of the Cyprus problem in the scope of the UN that is inclusive, viable and compatible with the principles upon which the EU is founded. The Presidency is continuing to carry out demarches with a view to reaching consensus for the full application of the GAERC conclusions of April 2004 and January 2007.

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Question no 35 by Georgios Toussas (H-0863/07)

Subject: Immediate lifting of the embargo against Cuba

The President of the United States announced new measures against Cuba a few days prior to the meeting of the UN General Assembly on 30 October 2007 to discuss a draft resolution and condemn the continued economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed by the USA against Cuba. At the same time he

announced financial and political aid for 'transfer to democracy in Cuba' that is to say the overturning of the socialist government. He also intimated through the international media that he intended to take a number of initiatives, including the creation of an international 'freedom fund' to assist Cubans in rebuilding their country, authorisation for private initiatives to facilitate Internet access for Cuban students and opportunities for young Cubans to participate in scholarship programmes.

Does the Council endorse international calls for the adoption of a resolution by the UN General Assembly to lift the embargo imposed by the USA on Cuba? Does the Council condemn repeated US interference in Cuban internal affairs?

Answer

This answer, which was drafted by the Presidency and is not binding on the Council or on the Member States, was not presented orally during Questions to the Council at the November part-session of the European Parliament in Strasbourg.

The EU considers this question first and foremost as coming under the scope of bilateral relations between the USA and Cuba. Nevertheless, as was the case last year, the EU voted in favour of Resolution 61 of the United Nations' General Assembly on the need to end the economic, commercial and financial embargo imposed on Cuba by the USA. The Council adopted Regulation (EC) 2271 protecting against the effects of the extra-territorial application of legislation adopted by a third country and actions based thereon or resulting therefrom and joint action based on Articles J.3 and K.3 of the TEU on measures protecting against the effects of the extra-territorial application of legislation adopted by a third country and actions based thereon or resulting therefrom. The EU continues to call for the Helms-Burton legislation to be repealed.

Additionally, the Council conclusions on EU policy vis-à-vis Cuba, of 18 June 2007, state that: 'the EU recognizes the right of the Cuban citizens to decide independently about their future and remains ready to contribute positively to the future development of all sectors of Cuban society, including through development cooperation instruments.'

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QUESTIONS TO THE COMMISSION

Question no 43 by Liam Aylward (H-0828/07)

Subject: The EU peacekeeping mission to Chad

Could the Commission make a comprehensive statement outlining the progress that has been made to date in mobilising the 4 000 strong EU peacekeeping force to Chad, and could the Commission state how many European countries have committed to sending peacekeeping forces on this mission?

Answer

The planning process is still on-going, and the formal Force Generation process will start once the Concept of Operations is agreed by the Council, which according to the information available to the Commission is expected in the next weeks. The force generation process will take place under the responsibility of the Operation Commander. Informal indications regarding contributions to the peace keeping forces have been provided by some EU Member States, but they are not binding at this stage.

As the Joint Action comes under the European Security and Defence Policy, the Honourable Member may also wish to refer to the Council for further information.

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Question no 44 by Seán Ó Neachtain (H-0830/07)

Subject: Providing primary education in the Third World

Could the Commission make a statement outlining what programmes it is pursuing to provide primary education to children in Third World countries, and to state the financial level of this support and to explain how these programmes are administered in a general sense?

Answer

The Commission is contributing to achieve the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) of universal primary education, this through a mix of instruments. This is clearly upheld by the MDG focus of the European Consensus and the Africa Strategy.

In its bilateral cooperation, the European Commission currently supports developing countries' efforts in the field of education through over 400 bilateral and regional ongoing projects in almost 100 countries. In 2006, the EC allocated €517 million for the education component of its development policy and external assistance: 43% to basic education, 15% to secondary education, 24% to post secondary, and 18% specifically to institutional support.

In addition to support through projects, the Commission provides general budget support to 28 countries from the 9th European Development Fund. This instrument is important because it helps to pay for salaries and other running costs covered by the budgets of the governments of those countries. About 30% of the funds going to these 28 countries is planned to be provided in this way. The Commission gives crucial support to education through this instrument, which provides a strong financial incentive to implement sound policies in the social sectors since part of the disbursement of general budget support is linked to indicators that contribute to the achievements of the MDG.

In line with the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and Harmonisation, the Commission intends to increase the share of its programmable bilateral development aid channelled through budget support – be it sector or general one – to 50% if possible.

A purely accounting approach to development aid based on sector allocations is not really complete. For example in Rwanda budget support is delivered by a coordinated group of donors engaged in a permanent sector dialogue with the authorities. The results are visible as public spending has successfully been reallocated to social sectors (while reducing military expenses). Between 1998 and 2004 social spending grew from 2.5% of Gross Domestic Product to 7.5%. Specific operations allowed school fees to be eliminated, with a corresponding upsurge in the primary enrolment ratio which rose to 93%.

As for the new programming cycle, an estimated €1.8 billion is programmed for education from the EC budget and the 10th European Development Fund (all regions). The Commission is improving the ways to link funding commitments to MDG progress. The MDG Contract is an enhanced form of General Budget Support with outcome indicators linked to education and other MDG relevant sectors. The aim is to have a longer term predictability where the support to education will not be undermined by the “stop and go” dynamics which have often characterised the disbursement of budget support.

Finally, the thematic programme “Investing in People” will also provide additional assistance to developing countries in cases where regular channels of financial support are not sufficient. Such additional support will be used to accelerate progress towards the core Education for All goal of Universal Primary School Completion (UPC) through a financial contribution to the Fast Track Initiative (FTI).

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Question no 45 by Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou (H-0845/07)

Subject: Community assistance for the humanitarian crisis in Myanmar

A number of reports have recently been coming in from NGOs operating in Myanmar concerning widespread poverty and warning that the situation is likely to get worse in view of the increase in oil prices, the lack of welfare services and public spending curbs in the health and education sectors. They also consider international aid programmes to be too limited and inadequate to the task. The meeting of the Council of Ministers for General Affairs and External Relations of 15 and 16 October 2007 concluded that a substantial programme of humanitarian aid for Myanmar was necessary and announced that the EU was ready to step up aid subject to an assessment of the humanitarian situation.

What is the level of European presence in the country and what action is it taking in cooperation with the populace, local organisations and international bodies? Has the Commission been given an appraisal of the current humanitarian situation and the possible impact of an international embargo? Does it intend to take further measures and initiatives on the humanitarian and diplomatic fronts?

Answer

The Commission shares the concern of humanitarian organisations about the general vulnerability of the Burmese population, which has only deteriorated over the last few years. In view of this development, the Commission has responded by constantly increasing its humanitarian aid in the last few years. In 1997, less than EUR 4 million per year was dedicated to the Burmese crisis – this covered not only aid for the populations living inside the country but also aid for Burmese refugees housed in camps in neighbouring countries. In 2007, the programmes under way reached EUR 15.5 million.

The sectors for priority action in Burma are protection, basic healthcare, water and sanitation, food aid and nutrition for pregnant and breastfeeding women and children. In the refugee camps in Thailand – there are approximately 1 50 000 of these – the Commission's support covers basic needs: food, healthcare, and access to drinking water and sanitation. These actions are implemented by the agencies of the United Nations, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and partner non-governmental organisations (NGOs).

Furthermore, the Commission can inform the honourable Member that further support of EUR 1 million for the World Food Programme (WFP) has just been approved, and that its services are currently preparing a new programme worth EUR 18 million covering the end of 2007 and the whole of 2008, to meet the need for protection, basic healthcare, water and sanitation of the most vulnerable Burmese populations, particularly ethnic minorities, and the needs of Burmese refugees in Thailand.

This humanitarian aid will be supplemented by the budget line on aid for uprooted people, providing EUR 16 million for the period 2007 to 2010 for Myanmar and Thailand, and from 2008 by the new Food Security Thematic Programme, which has been given EUR 16 million for Myanmar alone.

In addition to humanitarian aid in the strict sense, the Commission has also developed programmes to fight poverty. For the first time in 2007, a multiannual indicative programme (2007-2010) has been adopted for the benefit of the people of Burma. This programme is worth EUR 32 million and will be used to support the activities of the Three Disease Fund, which aims to fight the ravages of tuberculosis, malaria and HIV/AIDS⁽⁸⁾ in Myanmar. The other sector of intervention of the programme will be basic education, through UNICEF's Education For All programme⁽⁹⁾.

Furthermore, on several occasions the Commission has expressed its concern, both publicly and through discreet diplomacy, about the reduction of the humanitarian space in Myanmar – such as the ICRC's difficulty with fulfilling its mandate in Myanmar, especially with visiting those in detention and visiting conflict areas in the east. The restrictions on work and conditions of access for humanitarian aid workers in Myanmar are also a major obstacle to increasing the aid programmes.

The Commission can assure the honourable Member that it will persist with its efforts at persuasion of the Burmese authorities and will continue its humanitarian aid.

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Question no 46 by Nirj Deva (H-0866/07)

Subject: Health expenditure by developing countries and in EU financial aid

The Abuja Declaration of 27 April 2001 includes a commitment by African governments to allocate 15% of annual public expenditure to health, yet over six years later the vast majority of countries are investing a far smaller percentage of their budgets on health.

Given the critical importance of health in development, what is the Commission doing to encourage developing countries' governments to increase national investment in health systems and to meet the Parliament's target of spending 20% of EU financial aid commitments on health and education?

(8) Human Immunodeficiency Virus/Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome

(9) United Nations Children's Fund

Answer

In 2001 at the African Summit on HIV/AIDS⁽¹⁰⁾, Tuberculosis and Other Related Infectious Diseases in Abuja, Heads of State and Government of the Organization of African Unity pledged indeed to set a target of allocating at least 15% of their annual budget to the improvement of the health sector.

In his question the Honourable Member suggests that six years later, the vast majority of countries are investing a far smaller percentage of their budgets on health. However, the picture is not quite as black. The World Health Organisation Regional Committee for Africa reported in August 2007 that half of the countries of the region are now allocating between 10% and 15% of their national budget to health. Furthermore, ten countries of the Region have been able to raise their health spending to between 30 and 40 US dollars per capita.

The Commission supported the original Abuja Declaration and has continued to engage African governments – ministries of finance and health - through policy dialogue on various development issue including health and health expenditure. The Commission continues to pursue this dialogue but the decision about resource allocations must be made by the partner countries and cannot be made in Brussels.

Two weeks ago (24-26 October 2007) the Commission was involved in the first African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) States' Health Ministers' Meeting that took place in Brussels and where over 40 ministers of health discussed the challenges of ACP progress towards the health Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). The issues of financing and management of health systems have been key areas of concern and discussion. The declaration from this meeting has recommitted once again to progress on the Abuja Declaration.

The policy dialogue with partner countries in Africa is underpinned by the work on aid effectiveness and aid predictability. The Commission has been the driving force behind the adoption of EU's new development policy, which reflects European ambition to make a decisive contribution to the achievement of MDGs through delivery of better coordinated Official Development Assistance in a less volatile and unpredictable manner.

Performance based budget support, which strengthens the overall ability of partner countries to develop and execute their development plans, is an important step in this respect. Under the 9th European Development Fund (EDF) two thirds of the countries which received budget support had performance targets linked to health sector financing improvements. Under the 10th EDF, some 40% of programmable aid, at national level, will be through budget support, part of which will be linked to outcomes and budgetary performance in health sector.

But even budget support, does not always allow for substantial fiscal space that countries need to have to finance high recurrent costs in health. Unless the Commission provides long-term, predictable and coordinated support, it will not be able to give partner countries sufficient opportunity to strengthen their health systems, ensure predictable numbers of health workers and deliver health programmes that are key for the achievement of health MDGs.

This is the reason why under the 10th EDF a new modality of budget support – the MDG Contract – will also be introduced which will provide longer term (six years) and more predictable aid, with a focus on results as a mean to improve effectiveness of budget support in accelerating progress towards the MDGs.

The 20% benchmark that the Honourable Member refers to is an undertaking by the Commission to dedicate by 2009, 20% of spending under the Development Cooperation Instrument to "basic and secondary education and basic health, through project, programme or budget support linked to these sectors, taking an average across all geographical areas under this instrument."

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⁽¹⁰⁾ Human immunodeficiency virus / Acquired immunodeficiency syndrome

Question no 50 by Frank Vanhecke (H-0808/07)**Subject: Turkey and the European Court of Human Rights**

In its 2006 progress report on Turkey the Commission argued that the reforms that Turkey effected in 2004 and 2005 have had positive effects as regards the implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). The Commission also said that Turkish legislation can sometimes stand in the way of the re-opening of a national legal procedure.

In early October 2007 the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe voiced strong criticism of, among others, Turkey for its very poor cooperation with the ECHR. Turkey was criticised in particular for making access to a given legal procedure very difficult for the ECHR. The Parliamentary Assembly was insistent that the governments concerned should place plaintiffs under protection.

What are the positive effects as regards implementation of judgments of the European Court? What action is the Commission taking further to the findings and conclusions of the Parliamentary Assembly?

Answer

The 2006 Progress Report on Turkey mentions indeed that reforms undertaken by Turkey in 2004 and 2005 have had positive consequences on the execution of judgements of the European Court of Human Rights.

These reforms include the amendments to the Turkish Constitution of May 2004 abolishing, among other things, the State Security Courts and giving precedence to approved international agreements over domestic law in the field of fundamental rights.

They also include the 2005 amendments to the Criminal Code and the Criminal Procedure Code regulating, for instance, the offences of torture, torment and ill-treatment. Under these amendments, torture in Turkey is defined more in line with international law. The Council of Europe Committee for the Prevention of Torture has praised Turkey's new legislative framework for being amongst the most comprehensive in Europe.

Through these reforms Turkey has provided remedies to a number of cases where the European Court of Human Rights has found Turkey responsible for violations of human rights. This has had positive effects as regards the implementation of the Courts' judgements.

The Commission follows up closely the work of all bodies of the Council of Europe including its Parliamentary Assembly and informs its positions through this cooperation.

The Commission will continue to follow up closely the situation on human rights in Turkey and to cooperate with all Council of Europe bodies.

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Question no 51 by Edit Herczog (H-0809/07)**Subject: Energy security in the Balkans**

As a result of the European expectations and decisions consequent upon Bulgaria's accession, a shortage of electricity will arise in the Balkan region. With particular reference to the uniform obligation of the EU institutions and the Member States to preserve Europe's energy security, what will the Commission do, or what does it propose should be done, to deal with the situation which has come about due to European decisions and to forestall, prevent and remedy the disruptions of supply which can be anticipated in the region?

Answer

Manifestly, the Honourable Member's question relates to the consequences of the closure, at the end of 2006, of units 3 and 4 of the Kozloduy Nuclear Power Plant.

The Bulgarian government took the decision to close these units eight years ago, in 1999. This decision was based on the absolutely overriding consideration of nuclear safety, and is in line with Bulgaria's obligation under the Accession Treaty.

It was known that this would have consequences.

The EU has provided very substantial financial assistance not only for decommissioning, but also to mitigate the consequences of the closure. €550 million has been put in as grants, mainly via the Kozloduy Decommissioning Support Fund managed by the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD). Half of this sum should finance projects leading to substantial energy savings, including the improvement of lignite-fired power plants such as Pernik. Moreover, there is a €212.5 million Euratom loan for the modernisation of units 5 and 6 of Kozloduy, which consequently operate at a higher utilisation rate of power capacity. According to conservative estimates provided by the EBRD, the combined effect of the energy savings the Commission is financing will exceed the loss of supply from Kozloduy units 3 and 4.

But the security of electricity supply also requires better interconnections between countries. This is primarily a matter of Transmission System Operators working together. In addition, in the Balkan region, there is a structural problem of underinvestment in generation capacity. Considering the importance of the needs it is necessary to attract private investment. For that reason, the Commission is strongly supporting the full implementation of the Energy Community Treaty providing a common legislative and regulatory framework in the region. Market integration and clear market rules are indeed a key precondition for investments in the region.

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Question no 52 by Yiannakis Matsis (H-0819/07)

Subject: Turkish military operations in northern Iraq

Having already commenced military operations in northern Iraq, Turkey has now received the green light from the Grand National Assembly for a military invasion of the territory in question. Armed aggression and border violations committed by one country against another constitute an infringement of international law and European Union principles.

What measures does the Commission intend to take against Turkey, which has already commenced military operations in northern Iraq? Will this have an adverse effect on Turkish accession proceedings? Will the Commission include in its assessment report the question of Turkish military operations in Iraq?

Answer

The Commission condemns the violence perpetuated by the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) in Turkish territory.

Since September 2007 such attacks have caused numerous victims among civilians and military personnel. The International Community, in particular all the main stakeholders in the region, must support Turkey's efforts to protect its population and fight terrorism, while respecting the rule of law, preserving the international and regional peace and stability and refraining from taking any disproportionate military action. Any endeavour in disregard of these values would be a success for the PKK's strategy of provocation and violence.

The Commission considers of utmost importance the strengthening of the dialogue and cooperation between the Governments of Turkey and Iraq to address this problem and calls on the Iraqi Government and the Kurdish Regional Government to ensure the respect for the Turkish border and guarantee that the Iraqi territory is not used for any violent actions against Turkey.

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Question no 53 by Ryszard Czarnecki (H-0840/07)

Subject: Macedonia's and Bosnia and Herzegovina's incorporation into EU structures

When will be able to talk about a realistic time frame for Macedonia's and Bosnia and Herzegovina's incorporation into EU structures, given the progress those countries have made over recent years?

Answer

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia and Bosnia and Herzegovina, as Western Balkan states participating in the Stabilisation and Association Process (SAP), have been given the perspective of eventual

EU membership. Before joining the EU, the two countries will need to comply with the Copenhagen Criteria and the conditions established within the framework of the SAP.

In its 2005 Strategy Paper, the Commission outlined the consecutive steps for the Western Balkan countries on their way towards the EU. The Stabilisation and Association Agreements (SAAs) aiming to prepare the countries for the future EU membership mark an important point on this road. A satisfactory track record in implementing the SAA obligations will be an essential element for the EU to consider any membership application.

As regards the time frame of the integration process of the two countries with the EU, the European Council stated in December 2006 that the Union would refrain from setting any target dates for accession until the accession negotiations were close to completion.

The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia applied for membership in 2004 and was given status of the candidate country in December 2005. The Commission will be in a position to recommend the opening of accession negotiations once the country has met all the necessary conditions.

In particular, before accession negotiations can be opened, the country will need to achieve concrete progress in fulfilling the Copenhagen Criteria and in the effective implementation of the SAA. The political criteria must be met and significant progress towards meeting the economic criteria and the obligations of membership must have been achieved.

In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, the technical negotiations on the SAA were finalised in December 2006. In May 2007, the Member States endorsed the outcome of the negotiations, but reiterated that to conclude the SAA, Bosnia and Herzegovina will need to meet the four key conditions set out by the EU in October 2005: i) police reform; ii) full cooperation with the International Criminal Tribunal for former Yugoslavia (ICTY); iii) reform of public broadcasting; and vi) public administration reform. The progress made by Bosnia and Herzegovina up to date has not allowed for concluding the SAA. The conclusion of the SAA is a prerequisite for further approximation of Bosnia and Herzegovina to the EU.

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Question no 54 by Diamanto Manolakou (H-0856/07)

Subject: Agreement between the United Kingdom and Turkey

The United Kingdom has recently signed an agreement with Turkey known as the 'Turkey United Kingdom Strategic Partnership for 2007/2008', which is distinctly dichotomous in nature, since it constantly refers to provisions and principles recognising as a *fait accompli* the occupation of 37% of the Cypriot Republic by the Turkish military, in flagrant violation of UN Security Council Resolutions 541/83 of 18 November 1983 and 550/84 of 11 May 1984, condemning the 'Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus' as illegal and secessionist and calling on all governments to refuse to recognise any Cypriot state other than the Republic of Cyprus. At the same time, it has been reported that this agreement effectively sacrifices the interest of Cyprus to those of Turkey and has been agreed by the United Kingdom in exchange for Turkey refraining from incursions into Iraq.

What view does the Commission take of this and what does it think of the agreement? Does it consider that the agreement infringes international and Community law and creates problems between the EU Member States?

Answer

First of all, the Commission would like to recall the well-known and longstanding position of the European Union which recognises only the Republic of Cyprus as a subject of international law. The self proclaimed "Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus" is recognised neither by the European Union nor any of its Member States.

The Commission is not in a position to intervene or comment on agreements between Member States and third countries as long as they do not infringe with the *acquis communautaire*.

The Commission strongly believes that such issues highlight once again the urgent need for a comprehensive settlement of the Cyprus issue. It calls once again all parties involved to resume as soon as possible fully fledged negotiations under the auspices of the United Nations to reach such a comprehensive settlement.

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Question no 55 by Vural Öger (H-0860/07)**Subject: EU enlargements and the failure to provide the European public with adequate information**

When EU enlargements have taken place, European decision-makers have often failed to make the public in Europe properly aware of the historic import of accessions to the EU and the potential they represent. Following the enlargement to incorporate the countries of Eastern Europe, public debates were instead dominated by warnings that labour markets would be overrun by migrant workers from the new Member States. As regards the EU membership prospects for the countries of the Western Balkans, the objectives of European enlargement have never been explained to the public, the result being a striking lack of awareness of the issues at stake and a dramatic loss of support for the EU's enlargement policy. What steps does the Commission plan to take to remedy this lack of information?

Answer

The Commission regrets the negative attitude concerning the EU's Enlargement policy which seems to prevail in a number of Member States.

The Commission has repeatedly stressed the importance of better communication and the need to tackle myths with facts. It is essential to raise awareness about both, the challenges as well as benefits of Enlargement policy.

However, it is a fact that the Commission cannot on its own bring about a change of public perception, but that all institutions of the European Union have to play their part. Much more needs to be done in this respect by the Member States, themselves, be it at national, regional or local level.

The Commission is of course ready to support their efforts by making available factual information, and by creating synergies with the EU institutions and interested Member States. It has in this respect, increased its activities for which the following examples may offer an illustration:

On the occasion of the 3rd anniversary of the 2004 Enlargement, a number of specific web pages were published with illustrations of the positive impact of the last enlargement.

A brochure on Enlargement policy for the general public is about to be published in all official languages.

Organisation of a number of events involving in particular young people.

As regards the specific issue of free movement of workers from the new to old Member States (explicitly addressed in the question), the Commission has published a report on the issue.

Enlargement led to a gradual implementation of the free movement of workers within the EU. Those Member States which immediately opened their labour market to new ones benefited in various ways: migrants helped fill vacancies and jobs moved from the grey to the white sector. Building on this positive experience, a number of other Member States are moving towards the full free movement of workers. Fears of a tidal wave of labour migrants from the new Member States disturbing seriously the labour markets of old Member States have not materialized.

For 2008, projects informing on the impact of enlargement will be continued and complemented by communication activities aimed at providing a platform for networking between Civil Society actors in Member States and candidates and potential candidate countries.

Increasing public support for future enlargements to the countries in Southeast Europe will require a concerted effort. In the Commission's opinion, it will in particular be necessary to provide factual information about the considerable benefits of the 5th enlargement.

The Commission appeals to all actors to help provide information and support efforts to better communicate, not least does it welcome support from Members of the Parliament.

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Question no 59 by Inger Segelström (H-0810/07)**Subject: Experts Group on Trafficking in Human Beings**

The Experts Group on Trafficking in Human Beings, which has existed since 2003, has an important task to perform as part of the EU's efforts to combat such trafficking. Apparently the Commission is currently appointing new members to the group. Hitherto, the group has consisted of the same members ever since it was set up. What timetable does the Commission have for appointing new members and what procedure will it use for the purpose? How can the Commission guarantee that the appointment procedure will be transparent? How will the national experts be chosen and will every country have a representative in the group? Will the group's remit remain the same or will it be altered? How will the Commission ensure that NGOs, for example women's organisations, are represented in the group?

Answer

The Commission shares the Honourable Member's view with regard to the important task of the Expert Group on Trafficking in Human Beings. Since its appointment, the current Expert Group has provided the Commission with opinions and views about many important subjects. In 2004 it issued its Report, which still constitutes a source of inspiration for further activities.

The Commission is now in the process of appointing a new Group of Experts, taking into account the necessary changes deriving from enlargement, and the need to ensure specific expertise especially in the field of labour exploitation. On 17 October 2007, the Commission adopted a Decision to set up a new Group of Experts on Trafficking in Human Beings⁽¹¹⁾.

The Group of Experts will be composed of 21 members, out of whom up to 11 members from administrations of the Member States, up to 5 members from inter-governmental, international and non-governmental organisations, up to 4 members from social partners and employers' associations, 1 member from Europol⁽¹²⁾, up to 2 members from universities or other research institutes. The member from administrations of Member States will be appointed by the Commission on the proposal of Member States. The others will be appointed by the Commission from among those who have responded to the call for applications.

In order to ensure transparency, the call for application will be published in the Official Journal and on the website of the Directorate-General for Justice, Freedom and Security.

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Question no 60 by Katerina Batzeli (H-0814/07)**Subject: Future EU action on juvenile delinquency**

On 21 June 2007 the European Parliament adopted resolution P6_TA(2007)0283 on juvenile delinquency, calling for the creation of a uniform strategy at Community level.

Incorporating measures to combat juvenile delinquency and create a network between the competent authorities into Community programmes of a more general nature, such as the Daphne II programme and the programme to prevent and combat crime, is only a temporary solution. Practical action to deal with the worrying rise in juvenile delinquency across the EU requires a Community programme specifically focusing on juvenile delinquency.

Does the Commission intend to draw up a European strategy to combat juvenile delinquency?

In particular, is it planning to produce a study and publish a communication with a view to drawing up a Community framework programme focusing on the three basic pillars of prevention, judicial and extrajudicial action and the social reintegration of offenders, as proposed in Parliament's resolution?

What are the Commission's views on the tendency in certain Member States to turn to prison sentences rather than alternative sentences of a educational nature, and to what extent does it consider it advisable to promote common European minimum standards and guidelines on issues relating to juvenile delinquency?

(11) 2007/675/EC: Commission Decision of 17 October 2007 setting up the Group of Experts on Trafficking in Human Beings, OJ L 277, 19.10.2007.

(12) European Police Office

Answer

The Commission has taken note of the recommendations in the resolution adopted by Parliament on 21 June 2007, on the basis of the report by the honourable Member on juvenile delinquency.

There is no doubt that all the stakeholders – mainly those from civil society and the local and national authorities – need to step up their efforts to prevent and combat the causes that set young people on the road to delinquency and to reduce the effects of their social marginalisation.

The Commission fully supports the multidimensional approach to preventing and repressing juvenile delinquency. It is necessary to strengthen cooperation between all the public and private services with responsibilities in the field of training, education, employment and social integration, focusing particularly on preventive measures. Facilitating the exchange of information and best practices should be a cornerstone of the European Union's action, possibly leading to the development of models for intervention or minimum guidelines.

The Commission continues to support cooperation between different local and national bodies through financial instruments with various different objectives. Given the cross-cutting nature of the causes of juvenile delinquency and its treatment, it does not seem appropriate to develop a single financial support programme. The diversity of public policies likely to prevent the desocialisation and marginalisation of young people demands different types of financial support from the Community.

A major study is currently being conducted on juvenile crime and statistical data will be collected on criminal justice, on the basis of reliable and comparable indicators. The European Crime Prevention Network (ECPN) is a worthwhile consultation and coordination tool for forthcoming developments.

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Question no 61 by Brian Crowley (H-0824/07)**Subject: Combating drug importations via the west coast of Europe**

Could the Commission make a statement outlining what progress is being made to combat drug importations being made along the western coast of Europe under the programme known as the Maritime Analysis Operations Centre (MAOC)?

Answer

The Maritime Analysis and Operation Centre – Narcotics (MAOC-N) is an intergovernmental military supported law enforcement initiative, set up by seven EU Member States (Spain, Portugal, France, Italy, Ireland, the Netherlands and the UK) aimed at tackling drug trafficking, namely cocaine, from Latin American countries to Europe, via the Western Africa Seaboard, by air and by sea. MAOC-N headquarters is located in Lisbon, Portugal, chosen as appropriate location where to coordinate counter-narcotics operations, given that the operational area is mainly focused on the Atlantic Ocean, with the possibility of extending it into the Western Mediterranean Sea.

MAOC-N has been operating de facto since 1 April 2007 and by means of a Treaty, which has been under ratification process since 30 September 2007. Since April 2007 MAOC-N has successfully coordinated, through the exchange of tactical information among the contracting parties, the execution of 27 operations and seized the total amount of 16,638 kg of illegal drugs, of which 13,038 kg seized by partner countries and 3,600 kg disrupted by operational activities.

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Question no 62 by Eoin Ryan (H-0826/07)**Subject: Combating the prevalent use of cocaine in Europe**

Could the Commission make a statement outlining what are the present levels of cocaine use within the European Union and what programmes are being put in place in a co-ordinated manner at an EU level so as to combat cocaine abuse within the European Union?

Answer

The 2006 annual report on the state of the drug problem in the European Union published by the European Monitoring Centre on Drugs and Drug Addiction (EMCDDA) indicates that cocaine has replaced synthetic drugs (ecstasy/amphetamines) as the second most used illicit drug after Cannabis. This can be explained by a stabilisation on decrease of synthetic drug use in most EU countries and to an increase of cocaine use in some. The use of cocaine varies considerably between Member States, and remains at low level in most.

All EU Member States carry out research and collect data on the prevalence and spread of cocaine use on regular basis. This data is collected in accordance with reliable and standardised monitoring methodologies and is processed, analysed and further processed by the EMCDDA so that an EU wide picture is created.

The EU Action Plan on Drugs 2005-2008 promotes the exchange of best practices and the improvement of the EU's knowledge infrastructure in the field of prevention. Most Member States run universal prevention programmes that combine information, education and communication targeted at the general public but also selective programmes that target specific groups (i.e. youth at risk, recreational settings, etc). Cooperation at EU level is supported by the Community Action Programme for Public Health and – as of this year 2007 – by the Drug Prevention and Information Programme.

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Question no 63 by Justas Vincas Paleckis (H-0837/07)**Subject: Enlargement of the Schengen area**

At their meeting at the beginning of October in Lisbon the home affairs ministers from the EU countries decided to propose the abolition of checks on people and vehicles at the EU's internal borders as of 21-22 December 2007. At the same time, there are reports in the media regarding an unofficial EU communication notifying the new EU countries of weaknesses in controls at borders with neighbouring EU countries.

What is the Commission's position on the shortcomings in controls at the land borders of some EU countries with the neighbouring countries Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Serbia and Croatia?

Answer

The process of the Schengen evaluation in the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and Slovenia before the lifting of controls at internal borders has been accomplished. Although experts of the Commission participate in the evaluation visits, it should be underlined that this evaluation process is carried out under the responsibility of the Council.

The evaluation process of the state of preparations in the Member States concerned started in 2006. Since then, a number of visits to verify the correct application of the Schengen acquis at external borders (but also to consulates, police stations and data protection authorities) of the concerned Member States took place.

As a result of this two-year long process of evaluations and verifications, it has become evident that the Member States concerned have proved to be sufficiently prepared to apply the whole Schengen acquis. There are no remaining difficulties or problems with the control of the land borders with Russia, Ukraine, Belarus, Serbia and Croatia.

Parliament is consulted on the draft Council decision confirming this positive evaluation and determining the date for the lifting of border controls at the borders with and between these new Member States.

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Question no 64 by Athanasios Pafilis (H-0847/07)**Subject: New era of 'biometric' monitoring**

The final draft framework decision by the EU Ministers for Home Affairs and Justice legally endorses a new era of 'biometric' monitoring of individual beliefs and convictions. This involves increased immunity for the secret services and facilitates on 'pre-emptive' grounds also, the more widespread processing and exchange of sensitive personal data with any interested third parties, be they governments, international organisations or private bodies, together with exchanges of information regarding suspects for the prevention, investigation or penalisation of criminal acts. Such information covers not only political and trade union activity but also

extends to personal data concerning health, religious and philosophical beliefs and ethnicity for the ostensible purpose of averting a potential threat to public safety within a Member State but also for scientific and statistical purposes.

What view does the Commission take of this decision, which infringes the protection of personal data and democratic rights?

Answer

The Commission's proposal for a Council Framework Decision on the protection of personal data processed in the framework of police and judicial cooperation in criminal matters has not yet been adopted by the Council.

The draft Council Framework Decision does not regulate the biometric monitoring of individual beliefs and convictions. Article 7 of the draft Council Framework Decision regulates the processing of special categories of data: sensitive personal data. Personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs or trade-union membership and data concerning health or sex life are considered as special categories of data. The processing of special categories of data shall be permitted only when this is strictly necessary and when domestic law provides adequate safeguards. The Commission is of the opinion that this does not contribute to more widespread processing and exchange of sensitive personal data. The European Data Protection Supervisor has signalled that he is satisfied with the current wording of Article 7.

The draft Council Framework Decision provides a clear set of rules on the processing of personal data between Member States. In addition, it clearly regulates the transfer or making available of personal data received from another Member State to a third State or international body. Finally, the Framework Decision regulates the transmission of personal data received from or made available by the competent authority of another Member State to private parties in Member States.

The draft Council Framework Decision does not allow onward processing of personal data to any interested party. The purposes allowing onward processing of personal data for the purpose of the prevention, investigation, detection or prosecution of criminal offences or the execution of criminal penalties are well set out in detail in the Framework Decision. Regarding the averting of a potential threat to public security, the draft Council Framework Decision does allow the onward processing of personal data in the interest of the prevention of an immediate and serious threat to public security insofar as this is not incompatible with the purpose for which the data were collected. The competent authorities are only authorised to process such data in accordance with the legal provisions applicable and the processing is necessary and proportionate to that purpose. As regards the processing of personal data for scientific and statistical purposes, the draft Council Framework Decision provides that the competent authorities may further process the transmitted data for historical, statistical or scientific purposes, provided that Member States provide appropriate safeguards, such as, for example, making the data anonymous.

To conclude, the Commission does not think that the draft Council Framework Decision infringes the protection of personal data or democratic rights. Since the Framework Decision only provides a minimum set of data protection requirements, the Commission is of the opinion that the evaluation of the national measures taken to ensure full compliance with the Framework Decision, which is foreseen in Article 27 of the draft Council Framework Decision should be used to examine whether the level of data protection could be increased.

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Question no 65 by Barbara Kudrycka (H-0867/07)

Subject: Hague Conference on International Private Law; Civil Law Conventions

The European Community has recently joined the Hague Conference on International Private Law. The Member States need Community authorisation to accede to a range of international civil-law arrangements. The European Commission has submitted a number of proposals to the Council for signature or ratification. In the case of some conventions, the decisions have been pending for several years. Some conventions are operational exclusively between those Member States that managed to ratify them prior to their accession to the Union.

Does the Commission consider it a good policy to refuse European citizens the benefits of modern conventions, frequently negotiated at the request of, and with active participation by, the Member States, as

well as Commission, to distance Europe from global instruments of cooperation, and to delay such moves ad infinitum? Does the Commission consider Community accession to the Hague Conference compatible with the virtual standstill on accession to instruments developed by its members? Does the Commission believe that the EU can be viewed as a reliable partner by others in international negotiations if it is unable, for several years, to make up its mind and decide on a course of action? Is the Commission planning to take any steps to resolve this problem?

Answer

The Commission understands that the Honourable Member is referring to international conventions the ratification of which is pending for reasons relating to the dispute between the United Kingdom and Spain over Gibraltar and does not refer to the accession to the Hague Convention on the Law Applicable to Certain Rights in Respect of Securities held with an Intermediary where the Council is substantially divided as to the desirability of a ratification, since the Parliament itself, in a resolution adopted on 14 December 2006, urged the Council not to sign this Convention until a comprehensive impact study had established that such accession would not create distortions in the internal market in financial services.

As already set out in reply to written question E-2576/07, the Commission fully shares the concern that the differences between Spain and the United Kingdom over Gibraltar are currently blocking the accession of the Community to several important conventions, namely:

- 1996 Hague Convention on Jurisdiction, Applicable Law, Recognition, Enforcement and Co-operation in respect of Parental Responsibility and Measures for the Protection of Children (Hague Convention on child protection);
- 2001 Unidroit Cape Town Convention on international interests in mobile equipment and the Protocol thereto on Matters specific to Aircraft Equipment;
- 2002 International Maritime Organisation Protocol to the Athens Convention relating to the Transport of Passengers and their Luggage by Sea;
- 2003 United Nations Protocol on Civil liability for Damage and Compensation for Damage caused by Transboundary Effects of Industrial Accidents on Transboundary Waters;
- 2003 Council of Europe Convention on Contact with Children.

Since these Conventions fall, wholly or partly, under exclusive Community competence, Member States are not allowed to ratify them without having been authorised by the Community to do so. Consequently, the bilateral problem between Spain and the United Kingdom indeed prevents all other Member States from ratifying these Conventions.

As the list shows, this problem does not only concern conventions adopted in the framework of the Hague Conference on Private International Law but also other international organisations such as UNIDROIT and the Council of Europe.

The Commission has already undertaken considerable efforts to remedy that situation. Concerning, in particular, the Hague Convention on Child Protection, the Commission has written to the Member States concerned several times since 2005, urging them to unblock the situation which is becoming increasingly unacceptable for the other Member States keen on ratifying this valuable convention. The issue also was raised at a number of JHA⁽¹³⁾ Councils directly with the Ministers concerned.

The Commission has been assured by the two Member States concerned that negotiations on this issue are ongoing and that a resolution of the problem is expected in the near future.

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⁽¹³⁾ Justice and Home Affairs

Question no 66 by Stavros Arnautakis (H-0868/07)**Subject: Framework Programme on Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows**

What stage has been reached regarding the implementation of the new funds set up under the Framework Programme on Solidarity and Management of Migration Flows (European Fund for the Integration of Third Country Nationals, European Refugee Fund, External Borders Fund and European Return Fund)? Have the fund guidelines and allocations to each country been decided? Will regional and local bodies and non-governmental organisations be involved in the planning and implementation of fund actions, and to what extent?

Answer

The purpose of the Strategic Guidelines is to provide guidelines for programming the EU funds in the Member States. For the External Borders Fund and the European Integration Fund, the Strategic Guidelines were adopted by the Commission in August 2007⁽¹⁴⁾. The Strategic Guidelines for the implementation of the European Return Fund and the European Refugee Fund are expected to be adopted in November 2007.

L'adoption des orientations stratégiques ne souffre pas d'un retard particulier. Les actes de base créant les Fonds n'ont été adoptés qu'au printemps 2007. Pour trois des Fonds, l'adoption de ces orientations se fait sur la base de la procédure de réglementation avec contrôle dont c'était d'ailleurs la première utilisation.

As far as the allocations to the Member States for each of the four Funds are concerned, the Commission transmitted to the Member States, in July 2007, the final allocations on the budget year 2007 and the provisional ones for the budget year 2008.

90% to 93% of the amounts of the Funds must be implemented under shared management. Therefore, it is now up to the Member States to involve regional and local bodies, as well as non governmental organisations in the process of elaboration and implementation of their multi-annual and annual programmes.

En effet, les décisions créant les Fonds prévoient explicitement que les Etats membres sont responsables de la sélection et la mise en œuvre des projets cofinancés, dans le respect des grands objectifs européens de programmation. C'est au niveau national et local que les besoins prioritaires spécifiques liés à la politique d'asile, d'intégration, de la gestion des retours et des frontières extérieures peuvent être le mieux défini.

As far as the shares of the Funds to be implemented directly by the Commission as "Community actions" are concerned, calls for proposals will be published on a regular basis. Non-Governmental Organisations and regional and local bodies can send applications especially for the Integration Fund, the European Refugee Fund and the Return Fund.

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Question no 67 by Mairead McGuinness (H-0796/07)**Subject: State of negotiation of EPAs with the ACP group of countries**

Can the Commission outline how far the negotiations on the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPA) with the ACP group of countries have progressed?

There is growing concern, particularly in certain African countries, that these new agreements will undermine the process of sustainable development which has underpinned all previous trade agreements. In addition, there is a perception that these agreements will disproportionately benefit the EU, at the expense of its trading partners in the ACP. Does the Commission believe that this is in the EU's long-term interests?

Is it likely that new EPAs with the ACP group of countries will enter into force on 1 January 2008, as planned? If not, does the Commission intend putting transitional measures in place until an agreement can be reached? If so, what type of transitional measures would the Commission consider putting in place?

⁽¹⁴⁾ Commission Decision of 27 August 2007 implementing Decision No 574/2007/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council as regards the adoption of strategic guidelines for 2007 to 2013, OJ L 233 of 5 September 2007, and Commission Decision of 21 August 2007 implementing Council Decision 2007/435/EC as regards the adoption of strategic guidelines for 2007 to 2013 as notified to the Member States.

Question no 68 by David Martin (H-0804/07)**Subject: EPA deadline: safeguards for ACP countries**

Next month is the deadline for the conclusion of the Economic Partnership Agreements (EPAs) which will replace the current system of trade preferences for ACP countries under the Cotonou Agreement. Civil society has campaigned strongly against concluding these agreements by the end of this year on the basis that many key aspects of the agreements have not yet been properly negotiated. In effect, the conclusion of these agreements would force some of the world's poorest countries to accept deep liberalisation of their vulnerable markets. In order that these agreements are fair, ACP countries need more time to negotiate and to be allowed to retain the flexibility to decide, plan and sequence their own trade reforms. If EPAs are concluded this year, it could mean the collapse of exports from the ACP countries to the EU. In turn ACP countries would then have to find new sources of revenue to finance their health and education systems.

What plans does the Commission have to safeguard ACP countries in the event that EPAs are not concluded by the end of the year?

Question no 69 by Elspeth Attwooll (H-0817/07)**Subject: EPA Deadline: Safeguards for ACP countries**

The current negotiations regarding Economic Partnership Agreements, which will replace the current trade system for ACP countries under the Cotonou Agreement, reach their deadline at the end of next month. The reason for civil society's campaign against the conclusion of these agreements by then is the fact that key aspects of the agreements have not yet been sufficiently discussed. With a too speedy conclusion to the negotiations, the already fragile markets of some of the world's poorest nations would have to suffer a liberalisation that could have seriously adverse effects on ACP exports to the EU, and considerable repercussions for the funding of their health and education systems. ACP countries therefore require more time to negotiate, maintaining flexibility to plan their own trade reforms. It is imperative that these negotiations remain fair.

If, however, the EPAs are not concluded by the end of the year, what does the Commission propose in order to protect the countries affected?

Question no 70 by Alain Hutchinson (H-0858/07)**Subject: Economic partnership agreements**

In its communication of 23 October 2007 on economic partnership agreements (EPAs), the Commission clearly states that if the economic partnership agreements are not signed within the agreed deadlines by the regions with which it is negotiating, it would be prepared to sign EPAs with just some of the countries. Up to now, however, the Commission has always stressed that EPAs were to be negotiated and concluded at regional level, emphasising that the signing of such agreements was only of value if it was done with a view to regional integration. In acting this way, the Commission would be responsible for the serious tensions which would certainly come about between countries of the same region that were treated differently, in a spirit which would be quite contrary to the objective of regional integration, depending on whether or not they had signed such agreements.

How does the Commission intend to prevent such agreements from being directly damaging to the countries that do not sign them? How can the Commission explain this new position, in view of the priority it has always given to regional integration as an argument for the signing of EPAs?

Joint answer

Based on the Cotonou Agreement and its objectives of sustainable development, regional integration and enhanced participation of African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) countries in the multilateral trading system, the EC has been conducting Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) negotiations with the ACP Group of States and ACP regions since 2002. These negotiations are now in their final phase ahead of the end of 2007 deadline when the current Cotonou preferences and the World Trade Organisation waiver protecting them expire. The 2007 joint ACP-EC review of EPA negotiations reaffirmed the parties' commitment to meeting the deadline.

The EC's objective remains to replace the current Cotonou trade regime by full, comprehensive EPAs covering issues relating to trade in goods as well as services, investment and trade-related areas important for ACP

development with a view to establishing effective regional markets and special relationships between these regions and the EU. At the same time, progress across the EPA negotiations has been uneven. Where a full EPA cannot be completed on time, the parties have to capture those issues negotiated so far in an agreement with a good market access arrangement at its core and then move on to finalise negotiations in other areas in the early part of 2008. This will help avoid trade disruption without compromising the objective of negotiating comprehensive EPAs with a full development package.

Similarly, where only certain countries within a region wish to proceed with negotiations, the Commission is prepared to work on this basis, in order to reach agreements on market access as a step towards full EPAs. To maintain the momentum of ongoing regional integration plans any such agreement will be a stepping stone to a full EPA open to all countries of the region in question.

The Commission believes that at present there is no alternative to this pragmatic approach, set out in its Communication of 23 October 2007, and it will continue to pursue development objectives rather than EU offensive interests.

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Question no 71 by Georgios Papastamkos (H-0785/07)

Subject: European Security Strategy

How does the Commission assess the effectiveness to date of the link established between the internal and external security dimensions in applying the European Security Strategy? What institutional shortcomings mar the implementation of the internal aspect of the European Security Strategy, which is based on a number of institutional pillars? Does it consider that the security regime which, on issues relating on the European area of freedom, security and justice, is based on a cross-pillar security regime is institutionally and operationally complete?

Answer

The European Security Strategy states that: 'The post Cold War environment is one of increasingly open borders in which the internal and external aspects of security are indissolubly linked'. EU intervention has covered both the internal and external aspects of the threats identified by the European Security Strategy, particularly through the 2005 European Anti-Terrorism Strategy from an internal point of view and through international cooperation and assistance with strategic partners in third countries. As regards the fight against organised crime, the European Union is pushing for the ratification of the international agreements that constitute the frame of reference for our assistance in third countries. Europol is supplying annual reports and statistics that are helping to improve information and knowledge about the areas in question.

The implementation of the European Security Strategy is more effective when EU and Community instruments work towards the same objectives. The Commission has been trying to achieve this by taking account of the external aspects of internal policies as well. This will become easier with the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon, which removes the current division between the first and third pillars, introduces the codecision procedure and increases the role of Parliament.

Actions under the CFSP⁽¹⁵⁾ and the ESDP⁽¹⁶⁾ will continue to take account of external threats in parallel with Community action outside the EU and internal measures in the area of freedom, justice and security.

More generally, the Commission believes its internal and external policy objectives are more than ever intertwined, demanding a renewed vision of the way in which the EU's interests and values, obviously including the security of its citizens, are planned, promoted and protected.

All our instruments are working together to deal with the challenges highlighted in the European Security Strategy: our enlargement policy, which extends peace, stability, prosperity, democracy and the rule of law across Europe; our neighbourhood policy, which aims to build relations based on shared interests and values with neighbouring countries; our trade policy, our development and humanitarian aid policy, and our action on climate change and energy security.

⁽¹⁵⁾ Common Foreign and Security Policy

⁽¹⁶⁾ European Security and Defence Policy

Any revision of the European Security Strategy should take account of these new global challenges and incorporate all the responses to them at European level, regardless of institutional considerations, as the Commission stated in its 2006 Communication 'Europe in the World – Some Practical Proposals for Greater Coherence, Effectiveness and Visibility'⁽¹⁷⁾.

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Question no 72 by Glenis Willmott (H-0787/07)

Subject: Health and safety in third countries

I refer to the recent reports of a repeat tragedy in a Bangalore garment factory where an Indian worker who fell ill at work but had to wait hours for permission to leave died in hospital later that day. It resembled a previous incident which I am told occurred at the same factory just three months ago, in which a pregnant woman worker gave birth unassisted outside the factory gates after being denied assistance when she went into labour during her shift. I understand the baby died.

Can the Commission say whether it considers health and safety at work to be a fundamental right and can it say what action it is taking in dealings and agreements with third countries regarding the importance of good health and safety, in order to avoid a further repeat of these appalling and most tragic incidents?

Answer

The promotion of health and safety at work at international level is one of the main objectives of the recently-adopted Commission Strategy on health and safety at work⁽¹⁸⁾. The strategy stresses the need to improve labour standards throughout the world. In this context, the EU intends to promote prevention in the area of health and safety at work through multilateral cooperation with the competent international bodies (ILO⁽¹⁹⁾, WHO⁽²⁰⁾) and bilateral activities as part of the Commission relations with third countries, and in particular emerging economies such as India.

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Question no 73 by Avril Doyle (H-0798/07)

Subject: Equine identification legislation - recognition of horse passports

There are many problems at Member State level concerning the proper implementation of existing European directives on the identification of equidae. In some cases that have been brought to my attention, identification documents (passports) issued by the competent authority in one Member State are not recognised in another Member State, and in other cases passports are not even checked properly during transit between Member States.

Could the Commission comment on the need to improve implementation of the existing legislation and how this might be done?

Answer

Council Directive 90/426/EEC⁽²¹⁾ lays down the rules for veterinary checks for equidae moved between Member States. When moving between Member States, an equine animal must not only be accompanied by its identification document (passport), but also by an official veterinary attestation or certificate, issued at the place of departure. However, in accordance with Article 6 of the Directive, certain Member States have granted each other derogations from these certification requirements.

⁽¹⁷⁾ COM(2006) 278 of 8 June 2006

⁽¹⁸⁾ Communication from the Commission "Improving quality and productivity at work: Community strategy 2007-2012 on health and safety at work" COM (2007) 62 of 21 February 2007

⁽¹⁹⁾ International Labour Organisation

⁽²⁰⁾ World Health Organisation

⁽²¹⁾ Council Directive 90/426/EEC of 26 June 1990 on animal health conditions governing the movement and import from third countries of equidae, OJ L 224, 18.8.1990

Commission Decision 93/623/EEC⁽²²⁾ established the passport accompanying registered equidae during their movements. Commission Decision 2000/68/EC⁽²³⁾ amended 93/623/EEC and extended the provisions for equidae identification to equidae for breeding and production.

To ensure a more uniform application of Community legislation, the Commission has prepared a draft Regulation to replace these two Decisions. Once adopted, this new and directly applicable Commission Regulation will directly address the various stakeholders responsible for identifying equidae and ensure that equidae are identified, within a certain time after birth or imports, by a single lifetime passport that is linked to the animal by an electronic transponder.

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Question no 74 by Cristobal Montoro Romero (H-0807/07)

Subject: Ownership of companies in the electricity and gas markets

According to what the EP adopted in resolution P6_TA(2007)0326 of 10 July 2007, it believes that public ownership in the electricity and gas markets represents one of the main sources of distortion of competition within the EU; and that competitiveness incentives in other markets are undermined when public companies are involved, due to the fact that most of them, thanks to their status, are less transparent, provide less information for potential investors, and are dependent on political decisions taken by the governments of the Member States.

What measures does the Commission plan to take in order to include this principle in its policy, within the limits which the Treaty lays down on the ownership of companies in this sector? Does the Commission believe that it is possible to continue to progress towards establishing a single energy market when the public oligopolies or monopolies encouraged by some European governments are present in this sector?

Answer

As set out in the explanatory memorandum to the Commission's internal market proposals adopted on 19 September 2007, the package and, more specifically, the proposal for more effective unbundling apply in the same manner to publicly and privately owned companies. This means that irrespective of its public or private nature, no person or group of persons would be able alone or jointly to influence the composition of the boards, the voting or decision making of transmission system operators and at the same time the supply or production companies. This ensures that where supply or production activities are in public ownership, the independence of a publicly owned transmission system operator is still guaranteed; but these proposals do not require state owned companies to sell their network to a privately owned company. For instance, to comply with this requirement, any public entity or the State could transfer the rights (which provide the "influence") to another publicly or privately owned legal person.

The important issue is that in all cases where unbundling is carried out, the Member State in question must demonstrate that in practice, the results are truly effective and that the companies operate entirely separate from one another, providing a real level-playing field across the whole of the EU. Moreover, the Commission's proposals oblige Member States to guarantee the independence of the regulatory authority by ensuring that the regulatory authority is legally distinct and functionally independent from any other public or private entity.

These provisions should ensure that irrespective of the ownership of transmission system operators or supply companies, all market players should be faced with the same level playing field and should receive an equal treatment from the regulatory authorities.

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⁽²²⁾ 93/623/EEC: Commission Decision of 20 October 1993 establishing the identification document (passport) accompanying registered equidae, OJ L 298, 3.12.1993

⁽²³⁾ 2000/68/EC: Commission Decision of 22 December 1999 amending Commission Decision 93/623/EEC and establishing the identification of equidae for breeding and production (notified under document number C(1999) 5004), OJ L 23, 28.1.2000

Question no 75 by Manolis Mavrommatis (H-0812/07)

Subject: Fraud in airline ticket prices

According to research some of whose findings were published recently, some 433 airlines and tourist agencies fail to provide correct information about low cost deals (including their actual cost) so that citizens who use websites are misled about proposed ticket prices. As current information shows, half of airlines mislead the public: some 217 airlines in 14 Member States and Norway fail to respect Community rules, including the obligation of each country to ensure that the real price of the ticket as well as charges (airport taxes, etc.) are given on websites in the official language of that country and not only in English, as occurs today.

When does the Commission intend to publish the detailed findings of this research? Which airlines infringe Community consumer protection rules? What measures does it intend to take? Finally, does it intend to draw up a legislative proposal to protect consumers from fraud and ensure that they receive compensation as one of its next objectives?

Answer

The Consumer Enforcement Network – which has been established by the Consumer Protection Cooperation Regulation⁽²⁴⁾ less than a year ago – has carried out end of September 2007 its first joint market surveillance exercise in the form of a "sweep" on air ticket selling sites. This is a new and powerful enforcement tool. This time 15 Member States and Norway participated in the exercise. The Commission intends to build on this pilot action and repeat such enforcement actions in the future.

Authorities checked the sites for compliance with European and national laws detecting those that were not fully compliant with requirements. These sites are now being further investigated by the authorities who will decide on the required follow-up measures. In cases of confirmed breaches of law, authorities will ensure that appropriate enforcement measures are taken.

The Commission understands the interest to share the results of this exercise widely. Since Member States are responsible to take enforcement actions, it is discussing with them what follow up should be given to the sweep, in particular regarding the detailed publication of findings.

The preliminary sweep results point to the fact that enhanced enforcement based on the present legislation may protect consumers from deceptive commercial practises. The level of protection will be raised further with the implementation of the Unfair Commercial Practices Directive⁽²⁵⁾. The Commission therefore intends to intensify enforcement of legislation in the future with the help of the Consumer Enforcement Network. Before any new legislative proposal is envisaged, the Commission should explore the potential of present instruments to their full capacity.

In particular, the Commission welcomes the current legislative discussion between Parliament and the Council on its proposal to revise the Air Transport Third Package⁽²⁶⁾. When this new regulation is adopted, price transparency will be improved by clarifying that the final price is to be understood as including all applicable fares, charges, surcharges, taxes and fees which are unavoidable and foreseeable at the time of publication. All flights within the EU will be covered, as well as the flights of all companies departing from an EU airport.

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(24) Regulation (EC) No 2006/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 27 October 2004 on cooperation between national authorities responsible for the enforcement of consumer protection laws (the Regulation on consumer protection cooperation)

(25) Directive 2005/29/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 11 May 2005 concerning unfair business-to-consumer commercial practices in the internal market and amending Council Directive 84/450/EEC, Directives 97/7/EC, 98/27/EC and 2002/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council and Regulation (EC) No 2006/2004 of the European Parliament and of the Council ('Unfair Commercial Practices Directive')

(26) Proposal of a regulation of the European parliament and of the Council on common rules for the operation of air transport services in the Community (recast) (COM(2006)396).

Question no 76 by Willy Meyer Pleite (H-0813/07)**Subject: Repression in Oaxaca (Mexico)**

In Mexico 2004, Mr Ulises Ruiz Ortiz succeeded in becoming Governor of Oaxaca by means of electoral fraud. Mr Ruiz Ortiz is responsible for numerous human rights violations - as denounced by Amnesty International - against the indigenous population, school teachers on strike for food and improved working conditions, and anybody who dares to denounce the repression being perpetrated.

The Mexican Supreme Court decided in June 2007 that human rights violations under Ruiz Ortiz's government should be investigated.

How does the Commission intend to exert its influence to insist that these human rights violations be investigated?

Given that this situation has been going on for over three years, and that in the EU-Mexico Association Agreement, there is a clause on respecting human rights and the rule of law, has the Commission considered the possibility of reviewing the Association Agreement itself?

Answer

The European Union and the Commission are particularly attentive to the development of the Oaxaca situation and have closely monitored the unfolding of events. The Commission has therefore been kept regularly informed about events in Oaxaca by its Delegation in the country, by organisations from civil society and by the Mexican authorities.

The Commission raises the issue of human rights whenever it has the opportunity, as it has done since the beginning and strengthening, since 2004, of exchanges with Mexico within the framework of the political dialogue. Obviously it will continue to do this within the framework of forthcoming high-level contacts provided for under the Global Agreement, and will continue to pay particular attention to the situation in Oaxaca.

In parallel with our various actions under the Agreement, the EU Delegation in Mexico assisted and accompanied Erika Mann, MEP and Chairwoman of the Delegation to the EU-Mexico Joint Parliamentary Committee, during the parliamentary mission to Oaxaca in September 2006. There, Mrs Mann met representatives from the Popular Assembly of the Peoples of Oaxaca (APPO), among others.

The Commission also keeps itself informed of reports and observations by various national and international human rights NGOs, including on the conflict in Oaxaca. The Commission also organises meetings with these organisations to find out the results of their research and analyses of the situation. MEPs who are members of the EU-Mexico interparliamentary delegation have been involved in these meetings. At the meeting of the interparliamentary delegation in Mexico at the end of February 2007, the Commission Delegation in Mexico organised a session on human rights, during which the problem of Oaxaca was discussed.

More recently, the EU Council requested information on the human rights situation in the State of Oaxaca. A mission of representatives from the embassies of the Member States and from the Commission Delegation in Mexico was therefore organised from 27 to 28 August 2007. This mission held meetings with the chairman of the State Human Rights Commission (CEDHO), human rights NGOs, the President of the Supreme Court, the Attorney General, the Secretary of the government, and the Under-Secretary for Human Rights of the State of Oaxaca. A representative from the Office of the Secretary for Public Security also spoke at the monthly political advisors' meeting in September 2007, at which the situation in Oaxaca was examined.

It should be pointed out that the Commission is cooperating actively with the United Nations High Commissioner on the subject of human rights in Mexico. It is engaged in two projects to support human rights, one of which concerns the situation of natives in the Oaxaca prison system. In this context, the issue of the conflict in Oaxaca is discussed during exchanges between the High Commissioner's Office and the Commission, and forms part of our joint policy to defend human rights.

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Question no 77 by Chris Davies (H-0816/07)**Subject: Scrutiny of implementation of EU legislation during the Portuguese Presidency**

Will the Commission state whether it has requested that the issue of inadequate implementation of EU legislation by Member States be placed on the agenda of any meetings of the Council of Ministers scheduled to take place during the Portuguese Presidency?

Answer

The Commission has not yet requested that the issue of the inadequate implementation of EU legislation in the Member States be placed on the agenda of any meetings of the Council of Ministers held during Portuguese Presidency.

It should be recalled that the Commission has recently adopted a Communication on the application of Community law⁽²⁷⁾, which was submitted to the Institutions. The Commission is actively working on the implementation of the actions announced in its Communication. A group of national experts is being convened by the Commission to discuss the Communication during the Portuguese Presidency, with the possibility that some issues identified in the Communication will be put into an agenda for a formation of the Council meeting in 2008.

Moreover, a general debate could take place in one or other formation of the Council on other occasions, such as the presentation of an annual report on the implementation of a programme or an action plan.

Concerning in particular the Internal Market Scoreboard, the Commission presented its first report for 2007 last July 2007. A second report is foreseen for December 2007 and is expected to contribute to the debate with a view to the next Spring European Council in 2008.

In the Justice, Freedom and Security area, a yearly Scoreboard is also presented by the Commission since June 2005 that assesses in its second part the implementation of EU legislation in these matters at national level.

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Question no 78 by Georgios Georgiou (H-0818/07)**Subject: The future of Olympic Airways**

In the policy statements made by the Greek Government to the Greek Parliament, hardly anything was said regarding the fate of Olympic Airways and no specific government commitments were given on its future. The current Greek Government has now been in power for four years and the disastrous situation bequeathed to it by Pasok affecting one of the world's oldest and safest airlines has deteriorated still further.

Exactly what progress has been made with discussions between the Commission and the Greek Government concerning the future of Olympic Airways?

Answer

Since 1994, the Commission has adopted five decisions on State aid concerning Olympic Airways. The first three were 'conditional' decisions authorising aid to be used for restructuring the company before the end of the 1990s, subject to certain conditions.

Unfortunately these decisions were not complied with, and the restructuring did not produce the anticipated results. Therefore in December 2002, then in September 2005, the Commission had to adopt two 'negative' decisions stating that Greece had given Olympic Airways and Olympic Airlines illegal aid incompatible with the common market. The first of these decisions was substantially confirmed by the European Court of First Instance, apart from a few minor aspects. It should also be mentioned that the Court of Justice stated that Greece had failed to implement the first decision. Because the Court decision declaring this failure was not implemented, the Commission has brought a case under the terms of Article 228 of the EC Treaty.

As it has done for a number of years, the European Commission is continuing discussions with the Greek authorities in order to find a solution to the problems concerning the implementation of the 2002 and 2005

⁽²⁷⁾ COM(2007)502

decisions. The Commission's objective is to ensure that EU law is complied with, both as regards the implementation of the 2002 and 2005 decisions and as regards any other measures that may involve the use of public funds for the benefit of Olympic Airways/Airlines.

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Question no 79 by Markus Pieper (H-0820/07)

Subject: Action taken following the own-initiative report on the effects of future enlargements on the effectiveness of regional policy (P6_TA(2007)0130)

What action has the Commission taken further to the suggestions made in the European Parliament's own-initiative report on the effects of future enlargements on the effectiveness of regional policy (P6_TA(2007)0130)?

What conclusions were drawn from it?

Have concrete plans for the graduated model that was called for already been drawn up and a reform of pre-accession assistance initiated in consequence? If not, what is the Commission's schedule for doing so?

Answer

The Commission fully shares the two main starting points of the report: the importance and the success of Cohesion Policy in curbing disparities and thus in contributing to the EU's social, economic and territorial cohesion; and the fact that, as the result of recent enlargements, the range of such disparities are greater. The Commission is also very much aware of the pressure that globalisation poses on European economies in terms of relocations, demographic change, migration flows and other related issues. In response to these challenges, Cohesion Policy for 2007-2013 has been reformed and modernised while aligning it with the Lisbon and Gothenburg agenda.

The Commission also agrees that, if Croatia and the Western Balkans countries were to access the EU before the end of this programming period they could be accommodated into the current framework for Cohesion Policy without major disruption. The Honourable Member should note that eligibility rules for 2007-2013 for the EU-27 were fixed in 2006 and are being applied. As regards Turkey, the Commission agrees that a specific impact assessment needs to be conducted at the appropriate time from the point of view of its likely impact on EU Cohesion Policy. According to the Negotiating Framework, accessions negotiations with Turkey can only be concluded after the establishment of the Financial Framework for the period from 2014 together with possible consequential reforms.

The Commission will therefore assess, at the appropriate moment, the impact of all future enlargements on the EU Cohesion Policy and propose the corresponding modifications. Until this assessment has taken place, the Commission is not in a position to comment on any estimate of associated costs.

The Commission considers that a sufficient financial allocation is an essential pre-requisite for ensuring the success of the policy, in line with the Commission proposals for the 2007-2013 Financial Perspectives, and is very keen on taking on board proposals aiming at increasing the leverage effect of Cohesion Policy in the current Member States, like enhancing private capital participation or using innovative financial instruments beyond subsidies. However, at this point in time, the Commission is not in a position to comment on estimates of amounts needed for any specific policy in the future.

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Question no 80 by Milan Gaľa (H-0831/07)

Subject: Classification of formaldehyde as a carcinogen

The European Chemicals Bureau is preparing to issue a new classification of chemical substances (the 30th ATP). According to the latest research presented by the International Agency for Research on Cancer, the chemical formaldehyde (CAS number: 50-00-0) constitutes a carcinogen. The author of this question expects the Commission, when implementing the REACH legislation on chemical substances, to do all in its power to ensure that formaldehyde is classified as a carcinogen.

He would also like to know whether the Commission is working with the European Chemicals Bureau on the establishment of a new classification of chemical substances (the 30th ATP) and whether efforts are being made to classify formaldehyde as a carcinogen in order to protect the general public against what constitutes a hazardous substance.

Answer

Formaldehyde is classified as a Category 3 carcinogenic since 1996 when the 22nd Adaptation to Technical Progress⁽²⁸⁾ of Directive 67/548/EEC⁽²⁹⁾ on the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances was adopted. Category 3 includes substances which cause concern for man owing to possible carcinogenic effects, but in respect of which the available information is not adequate for making a satisfactory assessment.

France, taking into account the recent decision of the International Agency for Research on Cancer, proposes to classify formaldehyde as Category 1 carcinogenic. Category 1 includes substances known to be carcinogenic to man. In fact, in September 2004, the International Agency for Research on Cancer concluded that formaldehyde is carcinogenic to humans and listed it in its Group 1. This is a higher classification than previous evaluations made by the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

The French proposal has been discussed in November 2005 by the Technical Committee of Classification & Labelling under Directive 67/548/EEC⁽³⁰⁾ on the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances. The recommendations made by this Technical Committee are used by the Commission to elaborate a proposal for an Adaptation to Technical Progress to update the list of substances of the Directive on the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances by comitology. These substances are included in Annex I.

However, due to ongoing research on the carcinogenicity of formaldehyde, in particular an update of an epidemiology study of the United States National Cancer Institute, it was decided to postpone any decision to a future meeting. The results of the updated study of the National Cancer Institute should be available shortly.

Therefore, as the Technical Committee of Classification & Labelling did not finalise its discussion on the carcinogenicity of formaldehyde, it was not possible to include it either in the draft proposal of the 30th Adaptation to Technical Progress voted in February 2007 or in the 31st Adaptation to Technical Progress, which will go through the comitology procedure by the end of 2007.

However, the French proposal will be discussed again under the REACH⁽³¹⁾ legislative framework by the Risk Assessment Committee, which should be established by June 2008. On the basis of the recommendation of this Risk Assessment Committee, the Commission could then elaborate a new proposal on the Adaptation to Technical Progress to modify the current classification of formaldehyde, if needed.

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Question no 81 by Johan Van Hecke (H-0835/07)

Subject: Piracy of products remains common in China

CDs by European artists are offered on internet auction sites which have clearly been made in China (they have Chinese writing on them) and have unmistakably been counterfeited. Despite promises by the Chinese authorities and although the law has allegedly been tightened up, more stringent monitoring of counterfeiting and piracy clearly remains more theoretical than real. The consequence is that, according to the customs services, more than 70% of all counterfeit products come from China.

⁽²⁸⁾ Commission Directive 96/54/EC of 30 July 1996 adapting to technical progress for the twenty-second time Council Directive 67/548/EEC on the approximation of the laws, regulations and administrative provisions relating to the classification, packaging and labelling of dangerous substances, OJ L 248, 30.9.1996

⁽²⁹⁾ OJ 196, 16.8.1967

⁽³⁰⁾ OJ 196, 16.8.1967

⁽³¹⁾ Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals

The audiovisual sector is the biggest victim of this. What is particularly annoying about it is that it is not only the big American stars who have their products counterfeited in China but also less well known European artists. Will the Commission again raise the issue of piracy with the Chinese authorities? Will it consider sanctions, as the USA has, which has for example lodged a number of complaints with the WTO?

Answer

Effective protection and enforcement of intellectual property rights in China is an EU priority. The Commission is aware of piracy encountered by the audiovisual sector in China and regularly addresses this issue in its bilateral talks on intellectual property matters with the Chinese authorities. For example, this issue was on the agenda of the last EU-China Intellectual Property Working Group which took place in Beijing on 27 September 2007. The Chinese authorities have made efforts to tackle this issue but these efforts are insufficient. This issue will also be on the agenda of the EU-China Summit scheduled on 28 November 2007 in China.

The Commission has favoured dialogue and co-operation with China to tackle piracy. This co-operative approach has produced limited results. The Commission has made it clear to China that significant progress was needed. In this respect, the EU-China Summit will be crucial to measure China's determination to meet the EU concerns. If China continues to pay insufficient attention to EU concerns regarding intellectual property issues, the Commission will consider lodging a complaint with the World Trade Organisation.

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Question no 82 by Linda McAvan (H-0838/07)

Subject: Healthcare-associated infections

Given that an estimated three million EU citizens are being infected with healthcare-associated infections each year and that around 50 000 people die as a consequence, it is clear that an urgent response is required. Can the Commission state whether the planned publication of a recommendation on healthcare associated infections can be brought forward from autumn 2008?

Answer

As stated by the Honourable Member, healthcare-associated infections constitute an important burden of disease and mortality in European societies.

The Commission is currently reflecting on a draft proposal for a Council Recommendation on the prevention and control of healthcare-associated infections.

This proposal is being prepared with the help of an international group of experts and incorporates comments from:

the surveillance authorities of the Community network on communicable disease, and

those which were made by stakeholders in the course of a public consultation in December 2005 to January 2006.

The principal recommendations will be establishing or strengthening:

Control and preventive measures to support containment of infections

Infection prevention and control programmes in healthcare institutions,

Surveillance systems according to commonly agreed standards,

Education, training, research and information exchange.

In the 2008 Commission Legislative and Work Programme, the proposal is identified as a strategic initiative, underlining the importance the Commission attaches to this proposal.

The objective is to put the proposal to the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs (EPSCO) Council during the French Presidency in 2008.

Given the time needed for the steps leading to adoption by the College and transmission to the Council, it is not realistic to bring the proposal forward half a year to the EPSCO Council during the Slovenian Presidency.

The Commission however wishes to assure the Honourable Member that it is determined to avoid any delay on this strategic initiative.

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Question no 83 by Bill Newton Dunn (H-0841/07)

Subject: Europe's ancient trees

Will the Commission allow the Natura 2000 designation to be extended to include sites with ancient trees, as already happens in Scandinavia, and will it review the species associated with ancient trees and schedule the most threatened under the Habitats Directive?

Answer

Directive 92/43/ECC of 21 May 1992 on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora⁽³²⁾ (Habitats Directive) has as its objective the protection of biodiversity throughout the EU and in particular the protection of key species and habitats of EU conservation concern that are listed in the Directive. The Directive includes many forest habitat types that specifically refer to characteristic tree species which are present and for which the designation of Natura 2000 sites is required. Furthermore, the protection of trees is also important for the conservation of species such as woodpeckers and beetles, which may be dependant on mature and old trees. Therefore, the Natura 2000 network may include ancient trees, where they contribute to the conservation objectives of these sites.

However, there is no specific reference to the inclusion of sites in Natura 2000 exclusively on the basis of the presence of small numbers of very old trees. While such trees may have an important ecological, cultural or historical importance they are not systematically considered to be the key determinants of overall biodiversity. For this reason, the Commission does not have any plans to amend the Directive to include consideration of ancient trees among the criteria for site designation. Member States are of course free to establish national measures for protecting such important living monuments.

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Question no 84 by Ivo Belet (H-0842/07)

Subject: Price ceilings for energy

Gas and electricity prices are continuing to rise excessively, partly because of a lack of competition, particularly in Belgium. This could lead national regulators and national authorities to impose price ceilings in order, at least somewhat, to reduce the prices paid by the final consumer.

Does the Commission agree that price ceilings (perhaps temporary) would be an acceptable and effective way of dealing with the lack of competition on the energy market for the benefit of consumers?

Answer

The EU legal framework, in particular Articles 3(3) of the Electricity⁽³³⁾ and the Gas⁽³⁴⁾ Directive, allows price regulation in limited circumstances - namely, to ensure universal and public service obligations, i.e. the right for households and, if the Member State deems this appropriate, small enterprises, to be supplied with electricity of a specified quality within their territory at reasonable, easily and clearly comparable and transparent prices. However, such price regulations cannot impede the opening of the market.⁽³⁵⁾

⁽³²⁾ OJ L 206, 22.7.1992

⁽³³⁾ Directive 2003/55/EC of the Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2003 concerning common rules for the internal market in electricity and repealing Directive 96/92/EC, OJ L 176, 15.7.2003

⁽³⁴⁾ Directive 2003/55/EC of the Parliament and of the Council of 26 June 2003 concerning common rules for the internal market in natural gas and repealing Directive 98/30/EC, OJ L 176, 15.7.2003

⁽³⁵⁾ See also section 2.6 "Issues relating to households and smaller commercial customers" in the January 2007 Commission Communication to the Council and the Parliament "Prospects for the Internal Gas and Electricity Markets" (COM (2006)841 final).

Indeed, in order for markets to work, it is essential that supply, production and investment decisions are made using the most relevant and undistorted information. Prices are the most important piece of that information.

Price ceilings outside the legitimate objective of ensuring universal service as set out in the Directives may pose a significant threat to the emergence of competitive energy markets. If price ceilings are set too low or, if costs increase while regulated prices remain unchanged, electricity and gas suppliers can easily be caught in a price squeeze in which retail prices no longer allow them to cover their costs. New entrants are essential for bringing competition into previously monopolised markets, and these new entrants are particularly vulnerable as they have to rely on energy wholesale markets for sourcing electricity and gas. This risk is not theoretical. It has already occurred in several Member States.

This is why the Commission has had to open several infringement proceedings against Member States who have introduced regulated prices or price caps beyond the legitimate universal service objective. The Commission has also had to launch proceedings under other legal instruments including the state aid rules.

It should be added that properly functioning markets and price signals are also a prerequisite for guiding investment decisions. Price caps may render a market unattractive for investment and stifle capacity increase as private operators can no longer recover their costs or, at least, cannot realise the returns possible in other markets. Investments, such as in generation capacity, are however important to secure the replacement of existing capacity. So properly functioning markets and price signals are not only important for realising an internal energy market, but are at least equally important to achieve other policy objectives, in particular, secure energy supplies, reaching the Kyoto targets as agreed during the 2007 Spring European Council and targets for energy savings⁽³⁶⁾.

The Commission therefore considers that action needs to be focussed on the core issue, namely, measures improving competitive conditions. The Third Liberalisation Package presented by the Commission on 19 September 2007 as well as the increased enforcement action under the EC competition rules reflect the high priority the Commission attaches to bringing about truly competitive energy markets.

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Question no 85 by Paulo Casaca (H-0849/07)

Subject: European legislation and regional products

The real or presumed existence of European legislation banning the small scale manufacturing of traditional products such as cheese, sausages and all of oil, or imposing a compulsory ban on wooden spoons or cruet stands in restaurants, has raised enormous uproar and turned into one of the most significant factors in grass-roots unhappiness with regard to the reality of European integration.

Can the Commission not take steps to distinguish clearly and unequivocally between what constitutes the corpus of European law and what does not, so as to allow the man in the street to grasp what is actually European legislation and what is not?

Answer

The Commission considers that the food hygiene rules in fact introduce the necessary flexibility to ensure and support the continued existence of the diversity of European food production.

In addition, the Commission would like to emphasize that there is no European ban on small-scale manufacturing of traditional foodstuffs and for restaurants there is no European ban on wooden spoons or cruet-stands.

Regulation (EC) No 852/2004 and Regulation (EC) No 853/2004 are applicable in the area of food hygiene. However, in order to accommodate processing on the farm or in order to maintain the possibility of producing food with traditional characteristics and, moreover, to use traditional methods at any stage of production, processing or distribution of food, Member States may introduce national measures.

⁽³⁶⁾ Artificially low energy prices lead to lower investments in energy saving as it reduces the revenues (the energy no longer in need to be purchased) such investments create.

Useful tools, such as the Commission guidance documents on implementation of the Hygiene Regulations and national guides to good practice, have been developed and are available to assist Member States and food business operators to understand European legislation in the area of food hygiene.

From 2008 onwards, the Commission will organise training courses for the official inspectors in the Member States. These courses will also aim to inform them of the flexibility that is offered in the food hygiene legislation.

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Question no 86 by Danutė Budreikaitė (H-0851/07)

Subject: Stage reached in implementing the 'Via Baltica' project

Can the Commission indicate what stage has been reached in the 'Via Baltica' long-distance road construction project following suspension of work on the building of a by-pass around the town of Augustov, the route for which passes through the Rospuda Valley, a Natura 2000 protected area?

Answer

As already indicated in the replies to previous oral questions on Via Baltica project (H-0157/07, H-0158/07 and H-0202/07), it is the Commission's duty, in accordance with Article 211 of the Treaty establishing the European Community, to ensure that the provisions of the Treaty and the measures taken by the institutions pursuant thereto are applied.

With regard to the Augustow by-pass, which is a part of the 'Via Baltica' project, the Commission decided on 21 March 2007 to refer the case to the Court of Justice. The decision of the Commission of 21 March 2007 also provided for interim measures on the basis of Articles 242 and 243 of the Treaty. The construction of the Augustow by-pass would lead to the destruction of a unique ecosystem and annihilation of rare Rospuda marshlands. The project encroaches upon Special Protection Areas designated under Directive 79/409/EEC on the conservation of wild birds⁽³⁷⁾ ('the Birds Directive'), and sites proposed as Sites of Community Importance (pSCIs) under the Directive 92/43/EEC on the conservation of natural habitats and of wild fauna and flora⁽³⁸⁾ ('the Habitats Directive'), as well as sites intended to be proposed as pSCIs to the Commission.

Following the announcement by Polish authorities that works in Rospuda Valley would start on 1 August 2007, a request for interim measure was submitted to the Court on 27 July 2007. It must be noted that Poland confirmed later to the Court that the works in Rospuda Valley would not be initiated until the Court delivers its ruling. The Commission closely monitors the situation regarding the execution of the project. The information available shows that the works in Rospuda Valley have not been initiated.

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Question no 87 by Pedro Guerreiro (H-0853/07)

Subject: Continuing liberalisation of the textile and clothing trade, and its consequences for the industry within the European Union

Given the recent developments surrounding the expiry of the so-called 'Memorandum of Understanding' on Chinese exports of certain textile and clothing products to the countries of the European Union on 31 December 2007, and the pursuit of total liberalisation of trade in textiles and clothing,

how does the Commission assess the consequences of the liberalisation of trade in textiles and clothing as far as this strategic industry within the European Union, and particularly on the economic viability of the companies (and specifically the SMEs) concerned, and on employment?

What is the Commission's assessment of the consequences of the liberalisation of trade in textiles and clothing on the major importers and distributors, specifically as regards their exponential increase of their profit

⁽³⁷⁾ OJ L 103, 25.04.1979

⁽³⁸⁾ OJ L 206, 22.07.1992

margins by forcing lower prices on the producers, while maintaining or increasing their margins as far as consumers are concerned?

Answer

After the expiry of the Agreement on Textile and Clothing (ATC) in 2005, to deal with the surging levels of textile imports from China, the Shanghai Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) provided for agreed levels for imports from China into the EU of ten product categories. The agreed levels apply to imports shipped from China by 31 December 2007. The MoU itself remains valid until the end of 2008.

That was a once and for all deal with China based on the provisions of their World Trade Organisation (WTO) entry and gave an extra breathing space to the EU industry to adapt to the new challenges posed by China as a major world player in the textile sector.

The Commission, fully aware that other countries have concluded MoUs with import limitations which will continue until the end of 2008 and that the textile sector needs a smooth transition towards full liberalization in 2008, has held discussions with China on the best way to achieve such transition. In this spirit the Commission and China have decided to put into place a joint monitoring mechanism for trade in eight textiles product categories for 2008 (cat 4 T-shirts, cat 5 pullovers, cat 6 trousers, cat 7 blouses, cat 20 bed linen, cat 26 dresses, cat 31 brassieres and cat 115 flax and ramie yarn). The surveillance covers the economically important categories and those with particular sensitivities. The two categories not covered are those where the utilization of the agreed levels has been and remains lowest in the period 2005 to 2007.

By this joint surveillance, China has de facto accepted that it shares with us the responsibility to ensure a smooth transition after the expiry at the end of this year of the MoU agreed levels.

Member States, the textile industry and the trade sector have welcomed this agreement as they all agreed that a repeat of the 2005 situation was in nobody's interest.

More generally, even if trade issues are very important with respect to the liberalisation of trade in textiles and clothing industry, this sector in EU is facing structural changes that go beyond trade issues.

In fact, structural adjustment process started years before the dismantling of quotas. This made clearer that the competitive advantages of EU textiles and clothing industry lies mainly in innovation, research, labour force skills and access to markets. In this industrial sector, the reinforcement of these competitiveness strengths represents a major contribution to our Lisbon strategy.

The textiles and clothing industry can maintain its strategic role in the EU economy. However, the sector could provide fewer but better jobs in future. There is therefore a need for initiatives related to innovation, research and skills as the main means for the increase of viability of the sector companies.

After the liberalisation of the textile sector in 2005, the Commission was interested in the liberalization impact on consumer prices and has commissioned a study on the subject.

The study showed clearly that consumers have benefited from the progressive liberalisation of textiles trade to a considerable extent. Across the EU, clothing prices fell by 16.2% relative to the overall price level over the ATC phase-out period. There is a direct link between the progressive liberalization under the ATC and the price reduction: in average, 60% of the drop in import prices has been passed through to consumers in terms of lower prices. Consumer price being a composite of service input prices and imported products prices the drop is less than perfect.

The study also found evidence of a partial capture of these benefits by the distribution chain, pointing out issues of dysfunction of the Internal Market and of competition in the distribution sector. Some Member States have experienced a great decrease in consumer prices (a 50% drop of clothing prices relative to the overall price level) while others have remained largely unchanged. This overall variation across Member States in terms of consumer price reductions is linked to the structure of national service sectors and in particular the retail sector.

The study is the beginning of a process whereby the Commission is considering the question of how to ensure a fair distribution of the benefits of trade opening and has to be seen in the wider context of our Global Europe strategy.

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Question no 88 by Silvia Ciornei (H-0854/07)**Subject: Emissions Trading Scheme after 2012**

The Commission has announced a proposal for the Emissions Trading Scheme after 2012. EU-wide or national caps are discussed; certificates may be allocated by extended auctioning or with the help of benchmarking. The scheme has the potential strongly to influence the use of fuels in the EU and in the Member States, the security of EU energy supply and opportunities for investment, particularly in more efficient coal-fired power plants.

By what means does the Commission intend to ensure that the Member States' decisions on the structure of their energy mix are respected? How could the Emissions Trading Scheme be designed to contribute to the continuous modernisation of coal-fired power plants, as well as to the construction of highly efficient power plants until Carbon Capture and Storage is on the market after 2020?

Answer

The Commission's proposal for the review of the EU Emissions Trading Scheme is still under preparation. Following the experience gathered during the first trading period of the Scheme, one of the aims of the review will be to achieve further harmonisation and increased predictability, in particular as regards the allocation of allowances to installations covered by the Scheme.

The structure of the energy mix remains a decision for Member States. The EU Emissions Trading Scheme only serves as an instrument to ensure that the price of carbon is taken into account in investment and production decisions. Investments in modern and more efficient power plants are thus incentivised under the Scheme, as such plants will have either spare allowances to sell, or will have to buy less allowances to cover their emissions.

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Question no 89 by Roberta Alma Anastase (H-0857/07)**Subject: Proposed measures to protect language rights, including those of Romanians, and to promote multilingualism in the context of the Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008**

2008 has been declared the Year of Intercultural Dialogue, and cultural diversity and mutual tolerance are among the EU's fundamental values. At the same time, specific cases of failure to respect the rights of national minorities and, above all, their language rights are being reported both in EU Member States and in neighbouring countries. A flagrant example is the situation of Romanian communities and the neglect of their language rights in numerous European countries, with the risk of decay and oblivion for Romanian, an official language of the EU.

In view of the attention paid since January 2007 to multilingualism and the declaration of 2008 as Year of Intercultural Dialogue, what action does the Commission intend to take to promote dialogue and cultural diversity and to contribute to the improvement and consolidation of the level of protection of the language rights of national minorities, including minority Romanian communities? What instruments will be used in this sense, in the context of both the internal and the external policies of the Union?

Answer

In its Communication "A new framework strategy for multilingualism"⁽³⁹⁾ adopted in 2005, the Commission reaffirms its commitment to multilingualism, underlining that respect for linguistic diversity is in fact a core value of the European Union. The Commission's multilingualism policy encourages the full expression of all languages, which have the same rights and an equal value.

The Action Plan "Promoting language learning and linguistic diversity" (2004-2006) was the first comprehensive policy statement on languages, setting out actions at European level to make further progress in this field. These actions address all languages present in the European Union, official languages as well as national, regional, minority and migrant languages.

⁽³⁹⁾ COM(2005) 596

Both the Action Plan and the Communication on Multilingualism stressed the need to consider linguistic aspects of other European policies and programmes, for example in the areas of culture, media and social inclusion. In order to define the contribution of multilingualism to the 2008 European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, the Commission set up a high level group of intellectuals that will produce its recommendations by the end of 2007.

One of the main objectives of the European Year of Intercultural Dialogue 2008 is to provide means for intercultural dialogue and dialogue between citizens to strengthen respect for cultural and linguistic diversity. Its preparation has led to the development of a wider strategy to promote intercultural dialogue, involving EU programmes and instruments, as well as mobilizing Member States and all interested parties. Third countries will also be involved.

The school curricula for language learning fall under the responsibility of the EU Member States. Regional and minority languages are protected by the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages. Member States of the Council of Europe are signatories to this Charter.

The promotion of language learning and linguistic diversity is an objective of the programme Lifelong Learning 2007-2013. In the past Community support to organisations for the promotion of regional and minority languages was limited to the http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/languages/langmin/ebul_en.html and the http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/lang/languages/langmin/mercator_en.html. Now the Lifelong Learning Programme has been opened to other such organisations. In 2008 the transversal activity for languages in the programme will give priority to projects that reinforce the acquisition of competence in languages in order to improve intercultural dialogue in Europe. It is open to practically all languages (official languages of Member States, regional, minority, migrant, "non-EU languages", etc.). Application for projects and organisations to support and promote Romanian also as a language of minority communities are eligible under this new programme.

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Question no 90 by Robert Evans (H-0862/07)

Subject: Human rights abuses in Sri Lanka

In light of the serious allegations of human rights abuses perpetrated by the Sri Lankan Government, is the Commission going to reconsider Sri Lanka's position as regards the Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) Plus?

Answer

Under the current Generalised System of Preferences (GSP) Regulation⁽⁴⁰⁾ the GSP+ arrangement was granted, for the period from January 2006 to the end of 2008, to those countries that by the end of the year 2005 fulfilled the requirements stated in its Article 9.

Sri Lanka was one of the 15 countries that in 2005 fulfilled both vulnerability criteria and ratification of the Conventions of Annex III of the GSP Regulation.

In order to be able to continue to benefit from the GSP preferences under the next GSP Regulation, which will enter into force on the 1 January 2009, the beneficiaries will have to prove compliance with requirements of Article 9 of the GSP Regulation: vulnerability criteria, effective implementation of the international Conventions, and undertaking to maintain the ratification of the Conventions and their implementing legislation and measures.

The list of GSP + beneficiaries for the years 2009-2011 will be adopted in December 2008 after careful examination of compliance with the eligibility criteria stated in Article 9.

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⁽⁴⁰⁾ Council Regulation 980/2005 – OJ L 169, 30 June 2005 and rectification OJ L 79, 20 March 2007.

Question no 91 by Georgios Toussas (H-0864/07)

Subject: Calling into question the maternity entitlements of young women

At a time when most Member States are being faced with a serious problem of low birth rates among working-class families, business associations are calling into question the maternity entitlements of young women and the rights of workers in general. A case in point is the unlawful measure being adopted by the 'Varvaresos' textile manufacturing company in Naousa, where an internal memorandum has been circulated to plant managers instructing them to single out workers 'due to give birth in 2007 or 2008', since the 'Varvaresos' plant, like other undertakings in general, is seeking to avoid the need to grant parental leave and pay prenatal and childbirth allowances, entitlements which workers have had to struggle to obtain. This is not unrelated to the company's plan to shut down one of its three plants, involving the immediate release of workers or the modification of employment contracts, of which the first victims are likely to be young women and women with children. This is the policy generally being followed and is the one adopted by business associations for the purpose of hiring and firing.

Does the Commission condemn these illegal practices by business associations which infringe the individual and collective rights of women and of workers in general?

Answer

Article 10 of Directive 92/85/EEC⁽⁴¹⁾ prohibits the dismissal of pregnant workers "during the period from the beginning of their pregnancy to the end of the maternity leave (...) save in exceptional cases not connected with their condition (...)."

Moreover, Directive 2002/73/EC⁽⁴²⁾ defines direct discrimination as "where one person is treated less favourably on grounds of sex than another is, has been or would be treated in a comparable situation" (Article 2) while Article 7 states that "less favourable treatment of a woman related to pregnancy or maternity leave within the meaning of Directive 92/85/EEC shall constitute discrimination within the meaning of this Directive".

Therefore, a practice consisting of singling out pregnant women to be dismissed would be in breach of Community law.

The Commission would emphasise that it is the role of the competent national authorities to ensure that Community law is applied by employers at national level. Member States must also ensure that means to obtain real and effective compensation or reparation is available for the persons injured as a result of discrimination.

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Question no 92 by Rumiana Jeleva (H-0865/07)

Subject: Pollution of the Black Sea

The DABLAS Task Force was set up in November 2001 with the aim of providing a platform for cooperation on protection of the Danube and Black Sea. The efforts of the DABLAS Task Force are targeted towards the following beneficiary countries: Bulgaria, Romania, Turkey and Croatia. According to experts in the field, about 50% of the pollution of the Black Sea is caused by the Danube, but the river basins of the Dnieper and Dniester rivers, which flow directly into the sea, each cause about 20 per cent of the water contamination.

What measures are being taken by the Commission to prevent environmental pollution caused by the Dniester and Dnieper river basins and the other rivers flowing directly into the Black Sea, and will the DABLAS initiative be replicated to cover them?

⁽⁴¹⁾ OJ L 348, 28.11.1992

⁽⁴²⁾ OJ L269, 5.10.2002

Answer

The Danube Black Sea (DABLAS) initiative was launched following a 2001 Commission Communication⁽⁴³⁾ that highlighted the land based pollution problems faced by the Danube-Black Sea region and outlined the Commission approach to deal with it.

As tributaries to the Black Sea, the two rivers Dniester and Dnieper are already within the overall scope of the initiative, even though their river basins are not shared by any Member State of the EU.

The Communication underlined that the two relevant environmental conventions (Convention on Co-operation and Protection and Sustainable use of the Danube River and the Convention on the Protection of the Black Sea against Pollution or Black Sea Convention) should be the basis for regional cooperation. The Black Sea Convention has continued to be actively involved in DABLAS throughout its development.

The importance of the Black Sea Convention as the forum for regional environmental cooperation has also been acknowledged in the recent Black Sea Synergy Communication⁽⁴⁴⁾. Following this then Commission has been exploring the possibility for the European Community to become a Contracting Party to this Convention. This will require an amendment to the Convention to allow the possibility for regional economic integration organisations such as the European Community to become a Contracting Party.

Furthermore, the European Parliament and Council are currently negotiating the proposed Marine Strategy Directive, which will aim at ensuring good environmental status by 2021 in the seas surrounding the EU, including the Black Sea. To this end, the Directive will require an additional effort of cooperation at regional level to properly involve other concerned countries in its implementation, including for tackling land-based pollution. In this context, the Black Sea Convention appears a privileged forum upon which such cooperation could be built up in the region for the purpose of the Directive.

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Question no 93 by Jörg Leichtfried (H-0869/07)

Subject: Animal transport

Innumerable animals are still being subjected to unspeakable suffering when being transported on European roads, e.g. watering times are not adhered to, calves injured during transport have to be put down. The EU Directive lays down a maximum journey time of 8 hours, yet a sheep transport from Spain to Greece is recorded as taking a full 96 hours. Austrian animal conservationists have now set up an internet site (<http://www.gegentiertransporte.at>)

) and have already collected over 60 000 signatures in support of their stand against these abuses.

How can these 60 000 and more signatures be used most effectively so as to ensure that Parliament and also the Commission and Council take firmer action on the issue of these abuses in the transportation of live animals? When can a report on animal transport be expected from the Commission?

Answer

The Commission shares the views of the Honourable Member regarding the importance for EU institutions to take into account the concerns expressed by the EU citizens on animal welfare.

Among those issues the correct implementation of the Regulation on the protection of animals during transport is a top priority for the Commission.

But it is not an issue falling solely under the responsibilities of the Commission.

Member States have the full responsibility to find proper solutions to ensure rapidly adequate enforcement of the rules.

EU rules on animal transport foresee strict requirements for vehicles, drivers and loading/unloading conditions.

⁽⁴³⁾ Communication from the Commission "Environmental Co-operation in the Danube - Black Sea Region" COM(2001) 615

⁽⁴⁴⁾ Communication from the Commission "Black Sea Synergy - a new regional cooperation initiative" COM(2007) 160

At the last October 2008 Council of Ministers of Agriculture the question of better enforcement of the EU animal transport legislation was discussed. Ministers called for stringent respect of EU legislation in all Member States.

Meanwhile the Commission vigilantly monitors enforcement of the Regulation on transport in Member States.

Both missions of Commission veterinary experts and complaints from Non-Governmental Organisations are highlighting that there is an urgent demand for coordinated actions. At the same time the Commission is aware that corrective actions to remedy shortcomings have been undertaken in certain Member States.

The Commission is always ready to initiate action against Member States which do not implement measures to enforce EU rules on animal welfare.

The use of navigation systems for long distance transport will improve controls and make targeted actions possible. The establishing of national contact points for animal transport and the creation of networks of competent authorities in Member States will facilitate the prevention of such episodes of mistreatment of animals. It is however not only a matter of sanctions and controls. Strong political will is necessary to reinforce the importance of animal welfare in the operators in the food chain.

Concerning the future Commission proposal on the revision of travelling times and space allowances, a specific impact assessment will be carried out in 2008. This impact assessment will in particular include a comprehensive study on the current state of play of the implementation of the above mentioned aspects of the legislation.

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Question no 94 by Marusya Ivanova Lyubcheva (H-0870/07)

Subject: Dissemination and advertising of products containing narcotic substances

Various publications recently announced the market release of a product labelled 'C-Ice Swiss Cannabis Ice Tea' in a number of countries across Europe. Launched first in Switzerland, the beverage is now available in Germany, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Romania and Bulgaria (non-exhaustive list). The producer explains that, to make it legal, the narcotic elements of the plant have been removed from the tea, and it is described as containing five per cent hemp flower syrup and a tiny (0.0015 per cent) quantity of THC (tetrahydrocannabinol). However, this is not clear to consumers. There is a great concern that selling the product is dangerous and will lead to 'normalisation of cannabis as an image in young people's minds'. It even seems to be marketed as a health drink.

Does the Commission consider such marketing strategies appropriate at a time when the use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco, especially among young people, is turning into a serious problem for society?

Does the Commission envisage specific measures with regard to influencing control over advertising and marketing practices that could promote positive connotations of products or substances known in any other form or quantity to be of an illegal or harmful nature?

Answer

A brand name or a name, under which a foodstuff is sold, that contains the word "Cannabis" is indeed of concern from a public health point of view.

Firstly, labelling, presentation and advertising of foodstuffs sold to the ultimate consumer is regulated by the general food labelling directive 2000/13/EC. The general rules prohibit the use of information that would mislead the consumer.

Secondly, cannabis is classed as an illicit drug in all Member States and is scheduled as such in the relevant United Nations Conventions. To market a product that even claims to contain this substance is inconsistent with the fight against drug trafficking and consumption in the EU which is a priority for all Member States and is based on a number of legislative instruments at EU level as well as on the EU Drugs Strategy 2005-2012 and the EU Action Plan on Drugs 2005-2008.

In addition to existing efforts under the EU's Public Health Programme, considerable funding is moreover being released this year under the EU's Specific programme on Drug Prevention and Information, designed

to support the Member States in their efforts to counter drug consumption. The marketing of products by appealing to an attraction for those drugs therefore runs counter to anti drug policies pursued by all Member States. It is also the reason, why some Member States have prohibited the placing of concerned foodstuffs on their market on the basis of Article 30 of the EC Treaty, which can justify a ban on grounds of public morality as well as public health.

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