

MONDAY, 16 JUNE 2008

IN THE CHAIR: MR PÖTTERING

President

(The sitting was opened at 5 p.m.)

1. Resumption of the session

President. – I declare resumed the session of the European Parliament adjourned on Thursday, 5 June 2008.

2. Statements by the President

President. – Ladies and gentlemen, I wish to make two statements. The second of these is made on behalf of the Conference of Presidents at its request.

The result of the referendum of 12 June 2008 in Ireland confronts the European Union with one of the most difficult challenges in its history. The Reform Treaty of Lisbon, born of the Constitutional Treaty which was drafted by a convention comprising Members of national parliaments and the European Parliament, meeting in public, serves to make the European Union more democratic, more effective and more transparent. It strengthens the European Parliament, gives national parliaments more responsibility for shaping EU policy, enables citizens of the European Union to present initiatives to the European institutions and guarantees the role of local government.

The Treaty of Lisbon is the response to public criticism of the shortcomings of the European Union. The Treaty brings the European Union closer to its people. There can be no doubt that the application of the Reform Treaty is absolutely imperative if the European Union is to defend its values and interests in the 21st century. Without the reforms made possible by the Treaty of Lisbon, the accession of other countries to the European Union is scarcely conceivable.

We call on the participants in the EU summit in Brussels this coming Thursday and Friday to take every appropriate step to implement the Reform Treaty. The ratification process must be continued without restriction. We urge the Irish Government, for its part, to propose ways in which we can work together to emerge from this difficult period in the political life of Europe.

The European Parliament will strive with all its might and with passionate commitment to meet these challenges. We expect the European Commission and the Governments of all Member States of the European Union to do likewise. We also expect them to involve the European Parliament fully in their efforts. Our goal remains the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon in time for the elections to the European Parliament in June 2009. With your agreement, I shall resolutely defend these principles before the European Council in Brussels on 19 and 20 June.

(Applause)

The debate will take place on Wednesday morning with the Council and the Commission. The intention is not to discuss the matter now. The debate on the preparation of the European Council meeting is on Wednesday morning, and that is the logical time to discuss the issue, when the heads of the Council and the Commission will be present.

We must conduct a highly structured debate, and I have presented you with my firmly held views on this issue. Another reason why I have done so now is that a former President of the European Parliament, Simone Veil, who will be presented with a distinguished award in Spain on Wednesday, has asked me personally to deliver the *laudatio*. I could not but accede to her request, and I wanted to ensure that you were aware of my personal views on the events in Ireland and on the challenges that face us.

The Conference of Presidents has asked me to make a statement on the Middle East. A 14-member delegation from our working group on the Middle East, headed by Veronique De Keyser and Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck, visited Israel and Palestine from 30 May to 2 June 2008. During its visit, the delegation assessed the practical implementation of the objectives that were publicly proclaimed in a joint statement by all parties to the Annapolis Conference six months ago as part of the effort to achieve a two-state solution by the end of this

year. Among the main focal points were the strengthening of the security forces by the Palestinians themselves, the issue of the development of settlements, especially around Jerusalem, economic development, restricted freedom of movement in the West Bank and, lastly, the humanitarian situation in the Gaza Strip, which is cut off and subject to international sanctions.

The report, which the delegation adopted unanimously – and it was a representative cross-party delegation – was presented last week in the presence of the Commission and the Council, then transmitted to the Conference of Presidents, and it paints a depressing picture. While some encouraging advances have been made, these have been sectoral in scope and limited in their effects. The general sequence of events gives no grounds for optimism. As things stand, the ambitious Annapolis targets are scarcely achievable.

The delegation was unanimous in its view, which the Conference of Presidents endorsed, that the blockade of the Gaza Strip must be lifted, that controlled cross-border movement of persons and goods must be reinstated and that the violence must be curbed.

In the West Bank too, a new course must be pursued, in which the credibility of the Palestinian Authority is bolstered and the conditions for sustained economic development are systematically established. Israel's policy of constant division and geographical separation must be opposed. Like the US Administration, which expressed this view yesterday through Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, we call for an end to the spread of settlements, particularly in East Jerusalem.

We believe that no one has the right to evade the obligations agreed in Annapolis. The Israelis and Palestinians committed themselves to negotiations in good faith and in a spirit of reconciliation. They must resume the rigorous pursuit of this path. They need to show the courage and strength to engage in political renewal. It is up to us Europeans to accompany and support our partners in this process. The European Parliament will exercise its responsibility with determination.

The European Union's relations with Israel and the Palestinian Authority must be developed in such a way as to promote the overall peace process. The Barcelona process – a union for the Mediterranean – could be an additional factor in the effort to foster peace. The European Parliament expects to be duly consulted in the framework of the European quest for peace in the Middle East.

While we are meeting here, the fishermen of the Gaza Strip are putting out to sea. Because of the blockade, environmental pollution is rife to an alarming degree. It is threatening the livelihood of the fishing crews, and they are protesting about it. They have been demonstrating for their right to catch fish, to earn their living and to live in freedom and peace. Our delegation promised to support the fishermen. On behalf of all of us, may I therefore convey to these fishermen the solidarity of the European Parliament.

Thank you, ladies and gentlemen, for listening to my own statement and this second statement which the Conference of Presidents asked me to make.

3. Approval of Minutes of previous sitting: see Minutes

4. Composition of political groups : see Minutes

5. Parliamentary immunity: see Minutes

6. Composition of committees and delegations : see Minutes

7. Signature of acts adopted under codecision : see Minutes

8. Documents received: see Minutes

9. Declaration of financial interests: see Minutes

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

11. Transfers of appropriations: see Minutes

12. Petitions: see Minutes

13. Action taken on Parliament's positions and resolutions: see Minutes

14. Referral to committees: see Minutes

15. Change of interinstitutional classification number: see Minutes

16. Decision on urgent procedure: see Minutes

17. Order of business

President. – The final draft agenda for this part-session has been distributed. The following amendments have been proposed:

Monday/Thursday:

No amendments

Wednesday:

The IND/DEM Group has moved that the debate on the preparation of the meeting of the European Council be named as follows: 'Preparation of the European Council after the Irish referendum'.⁽¹⁾

Gerard Batten, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group.* – Mr President, I should like to propose that the title 'Preparation for the European Council' be expanded to: 'Preparation for the European Council after the Irish referendum'.

(Parliament approved the request.)

Hannes Swoboda, *on behalf of the PSE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, we have just amended the title of the debate, and because of the implications – on which there are divergent views – of the decision in Ireland, it would be reasonable to give the House some time to discuss these problems. For this reason we move that the second item on the morning agenda be moved to the afternoon. Now I know that we shall be pushed for time in the afternoon, but in view of the urgency and the importance of this meeting of the Council, postponement makes good sense. We would have no objection to one item or other being deferred to a later sitting, but our motion at this instant is that we devote the entire morning to the substance of the renamed debate to give us enough time to discuss the issue.

Richard Corbett (PSE). – Mr President, having been rapporteur on the Lisbon Treaty, I should like to support this proposal. We must have a wide-ranging debate to show that we are listening both to the views expressed by the Irish people and to the views expressed in every other Member State, most of which, if not all of which, wish to proceed with this Treaty.

Carmen Fraga Estévez, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.* – (ES) Mr President, the Treaty of Lisbon and events in Ireland are very important, but should not prejudice discussion of an issue like fishing.

I have to say that many deputies are not very interested in fishing. However, if ever the fishing industry suffered a real crisis, it is the one it is going through right now.

On 23 June, the European Union Council of Fisheries Ministers will take a series of decisions on the crisis in the fishing sector, which is conjunctural and structural. I think that the European Union fishing sector would not understand it if this Parliament did not take the time to examine this issue and take a position on it.

I therefore ask the political groups to show some sensitivity and, once and for all, to contribute to a good debate on the crisis in the fishing sector.

(Parliament approved the request.)

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

Francis Wurtz, on behalf of the *GUE/NGL Group*. – (FR) Mr President, I would like to put two questions.

The first is the same question put by Mr Swoboda, who asked for more time for the debate on the European Council and the issue of the referendum.

The second question is whether we should separate the debate on oil prices from the fisheries debate or hold a single debate on both.

Those are two separate questions. I suggest you should take the question of speaking time for the debate on the European Council first, and only then take the question about fisheries.

(Parliament approved the first request and rejected the second.)

(The order of business was thus established.)

18. One-minute speeches on matters of political importance

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

Georgios Papastamkos (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, I have listened most attentively to your message about the Irish ‘no’ vote. I fully endorse your statement on the need to continue the ratification process.

It is indeed perplexing that the Irish ‘no’ comes at a time when the EU is increasingly democratic, transparent and effective. However, Mr President, we need to decode the message from the factors supporting the ‘no’ vote. Irish citizens have made their decision and exercised their democratic right; however, this ‘no’ also calls on us to engage in some constructive self-criticism. I suggest focusing this self-criticism on two points: we are bombarded, Mr President, by the Commission’s over-regulation; we, the European Parliament, cannot concern ourselves with every detail of this legal technicality and over-regulation.

Mr President, I know your dedication to European affairs, and I call on the European Parliament to rise to the occasion as a political body, a *corps politique*, a rallying point for the declared directions of the course of European unification.

President. – Thank you for your words of encouragement, Mr Papastamkos, but I must also ask you to adhere to the time limit of one minute that is assigned to explanations of vote. Moreover, I was informed that you wished to speak on a different subject.

Teresa Riera Madurell (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, although there was no time for my speech in the last sitting and a month has gone by since then, I feel I must mention that 12 May was World Fibromyalgia and Chronic Fatigue Syndrome Day, two diseases that mainly affect women.

They are both gender-specific diseases, difficult to diagnose and for which few resources are available for research and treatment. They usually cause problems at work because people do not understand the way they reduce the capacity of sufferers and make them unfit for work.

We should take this situation seriously and urgently try to find out the causes of these diseases, provide more intensive treatment and compare the results, as well as raising social awareness and providing more information about their social, legal and employment impact.

Sufferers must not feel they have no protection. We owe this to our citizens.

Metin Kazak (ALDE). – (BG) The upcoming French Presidency of the European Union comes at a critical time for the European intergration process on the Old Continent. Topics such as the Sustainable Development Strategy, the European Immigration Pact, Europe of Defence and the reform in the Common Agricultural Policy are crucial for Europe. But the main question now is how to continue the Union reform and deepen the integration process in the aftermath of the Irish ‘no’.

Ireland’s rejection of the Lisbon Treaty has once again put to the test the common will of Europeans to overcome the challenges of globalisation together. As a founder of the European Union, France and its president, Nicolas Sarkozy, have the task to pool the efforts of all twenty-seven member states together again, and come up with a legal formula and an action plan to find a way out of the Lisbon crisis because unless we overcome it, we run the risk of centrifugal and nationalistic passions taking the upper hand and putting a freeze on the process of further enlargement of the European Union. This watershed moment calls for us

to realise these threats and deliver on our responsibilities and the expectations of the majority of European citizens for whom the Ode of Joy has already become a second national anthem.

Hanna Foltyn-Kubicka (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, today I would like to speak of an incident that recently took place in Warsaw. A person closely associated with the Chinese Embassy in Poland attacked a woman distributing the opposition periodical *The Epoch Times*. Similar incidents have been observed for some time now in New York, where groups organised by the Chinese Consulate have been attacking Falun Gong believers as well as people demonstrating peacefully in favour of Tibet.

If similar practices start occurring in other countries, we shall be faced with a glaring breach of the Vienna Convention on Diplomatic Relations that was adopted in 1961. What is more, despite the fact that the Chinese regime is doing all it can to show its positive side during the Olympic Games, it is continuing to persecute any groups that represent non-Communist ideologies. It is going even further, in that it is redoubling its efforts and is exporting this activity to the territories of democratic Western nations.

For this reason I am calling on the EU authorities and on Member States to monitor the situation with care and to react decisively if the circumstances I have described should be repeated.

Kyriacos Triantaphyllides (GUE/NGL). – (EL) Mr President, the General Affairs Council is meeting today. I do not yet know the result, but among the topics being discussed is the proposal to upgrade the EU's relations with Israel.

Furthermore, the fishermen of the Gaza Strip are today demonstrating against the inhuman measures the Israeli Government is imposing on them. Israel not only forbids them to fish in their open marine waters, but also deprives them of adequate fuel, so that they are forced to fish in the shallows where raw sewage is discharged without check. This situation threatens, immediately and alarmingly, to lead to epidemics.

I submit to you, Mr President, the request of these fishermen that under such conditions the EU should not go ahead and upgrade relations with Israel.

A further reason why this upgrading should not happen now, especially for us MEPs, is the fact that Israel recently showed, once again, that it does not respect even our human rights. Its forces tried to violently suppress peaceful demonstrations against the racist dividing wall from being built; they injured demonstrators, including our fellow Member Mrs Morgantini.

Dimitar Stoyanov (NI). – (BG) In this House, at the Commission, and in Bulgaria, there is a lot of talk about fighting corruption at the top levels of government. Yet 'corruption' is not just a word that exists in and of itself. There are real people behind it. I want to show you the face of official corruption at the top in Bulgaria.

Yesterday, the largest Bulgarian daily published photos of the leader of the Turkish ethnic party, MRL, Ahmed Dogan, who, three years ago, was granted a mandate to form the Bulgarian government. These shocking pictures reveal that Dogan lives in a huge seraglio which is registered as a four-star hotel, and there he indulges in luxury. This same individual, Dogan, authored the phrases that his party was surrounded by a circle of companies and that buying votes is an European practice. He told the *Trud* Daily that his main occupation was to run his business, something which he cannot do legally while a member of Bulgarian Parliament.

Mr. President, ladies and gentlemen of this House, Commissioners, Dogan is one of the heads of the lamia of corruption in Bulgaria. The destruction of this monster begins with investigating Ahmed Dogan's circle of companies and his business.

Mr. President, I submit to you the newspaper so that you can read about this yourself.

Gerard Batten (IND/DEM). – Mr President, I would like to congratulate the 862 415 Irish people who voted 'no' to the Lisbon Treaty in last Thursday's referendum. They voted for freedom, democracy and common sense. Were the British people to be allowed a referendum, they would undoubtedly vote 'no' in even greater numbers than the Irish. Given the chance, many of the other European nations would also vote 'no', just as the French and the Dutch proved in 2005.

With breathtaking arrogance and disregard for democracy, the European political elite intend to bulldoze onwards with the ratification of the Treaty. The Treaty is dead but the EU refuses to bury it. The EU's ongoing love affair with the Treaty is an act of political necrophilia. But the body is beginning to stink and, the longer it is unburied, the worse the stench is going to get. We must bury the Treaty. It is polluting the political atmosphere.

President. – Mr Batten, your comparison is entirely inappropriate, if I may add my own comment. You are in a Parliament that is very much alive. If this Parliament did not speak, you, as a living being, could not have addressed it.

(Applause)

Pál Schmitt (PPE-DE). – *(HU)* Thank you, Mr President. I will speak in Hungarian. In Slovakia a new education act has been passed by Parliament, and all that is needed for it to enter into force is the signature of the President of the Republic. The new act means that from now on, names of places and historic figures in history books intended for students whose mother tongue is Hungarian will have to conform to Slovakian spelling rules, thereby ignoring our centuries-old historic and linguistic traditions. The new act seriously infringes the rights of the Hungarian community in Slovakia to use their language. Slovakia signed and ratified the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in 2001. Commissioner Leonard Orban himself believes that fostering national minorities' mother tongues is a matter of strategic importance. In this European Year of Intercultural Dialogue, it is lamentable and unacceptable that Slovakia is acting in a manner that runs counter to European practice. Instead of broadening minority rights, it is doing the opposite and curtailing them. As a result of the Treaty of Trianon, several thousand Hungarian-speaking settlements ended up outside the country's borders, and we have a right to call these places by their Hungarian names. Linguistic diversity is part of Europe's cultural legacy and a unique treasure that we all have a responsibility to protect. Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

Inés Ayala Sender (PSE). – *(ES)* Mr President, in the early morning of 8 June, the terrorist group ETA attacked the offices of the daily newspaper *El Correo* while 50 staff were in the building and preparing the Sunday edition. Fortunately, no one was injured but there was significant material damage.

I would be grateful if you would send a message of solidarity. However, I would also like to comment on and have recorded in this Chamber the urgent need to eradicate the terrorist violence perpetrated by ETA against the media and guarantee the full exercise of freedom of expression. This is a good reason for Europeans to support the Treaty of Lisbon, which will make it possible to develop common policies for justice, security and anti-terrorism and not to depend exclusively on bilateral and intergovernmental cooperation. Our solidarity should therefore also be expressed in support for ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon.

President. – Mrs Ayala Sender, since you addressed me personally, let me say that we are a community based on solidarity, and that solidarity applies in every case, including the present one. I am grateful that you appreciate this point.

Viktória Mohácsi (ALDE). – *(HU)* Ladies and gentlemen, at the previous plenary session the Leader of our Group, Graham Watson, addressed this Parliament in a one-minute speech because of the anti-Roma atrocities taking place in Italy. Today, too, I regret to have to inform you of similar incidents, this time in my own country, Hungary. A few weeks ago, 70 kilometres from Budapest in the village of Pátka, three vigilantes threw a dozen Molotov cocktails at three houses where Roma people lived. On 16 April in the village of Fadd in Hungary's Tolna district, unidentified individuals threw Molotov cocktails at two homes. A week ago my own colleague was attacked in Nyíregyháza by extremists yelling: 'Filthy gypsy, get out of our country!' Most of the residents of Pátka stand by their claim that the vigilantes are innocent, although one of the suspects has confessed that he was involved. Despite this, on Friday a demonstration was held by around 150 uniformed individuals proclaiming Nazi principles, and later on a number of unidentified persons wearing hoods again tried to mount an attack in the presence of 100 riot police. I too was present. At the same time, the police covered up the identity of the person injured in the Pátka incident. In Italy, our fellow EU citizens are living in prisons reserved for refugees; they too are Roma, of course. Commissioner Barrot, I hope that once your new cabinet is formed we Roma, too, will be able to enjoy the security provided by European Union democracy, and that the definition of EU citizenship will apply to me and my children as well as to my non-Roma fellow citizens. Thank you very much.

Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN). – *(PL)* Mr President, even in situations where the issues are completely clear, the solutions that should be adopted should take into account the context and relations between different objectives, the importance of the issue in question and the costs involved in achieving the objectives. In every issue, especially one that affects the lives of billions of people in the way that climate change does, it is important to act with moderation, common sense and some degree of fairness when trying to resolve the problem.

I do not see any fairness in the proposal to reduce emissions of carbon dioxide. There are two solutions that are particularly offensive in this regard: treating highly developed countries that have been responsible for

a large proportion of carbon dioxide emissions to date and for much pollution, but have better technological capabilities, in the same way as less developed countries, especially those whose economies are based on coal; and secondly, treating manufacturers of large vehicles, where reducing carbon dioxide emissions by 20% is easier, the same as manufacturers of vehicles with small engines and low levels of emissions, so that reductions incur higher costs. It looks as if the issue of climate change is not what is important here, just business issues.

James Nicholson (PPE-DE). – Mr President, Europe's bees face extinction within a decade. Diseases and viruses have already wiped out one third of the colonies in America and now threaten our own. The American situation offers a dangerous snapshot of what we potentially face in Europe unless we act now. At least 70 crops that contribute significantly to the overall economy depend directly on pollination by the bees.

The US is having to import bees to make up the losses. In the current climate there are serious questions over the EU's capacity to produce enough food to satisfy demand, and the implications of a similar outbreak here would be disastrous.

Beekeepers across Europe already know about the threat caused by the varroa mites that have decimated bee colonies. They are having to deal with Colony Collapse Disorder, which is when hives are systematically abandoned and the bees effectively disappear off the face of the earth.

We need to provide funding and proper scientific research in this area. The UK Government currently provides just GBP 250 000 towards bee research. That is a drop in the ocean for such an important issue. Bees are an integral part of the food chain: without bees, beekeepers, crops, fruit and nuts will be adversely affected.

Gérard Onesta (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, I see from the agenda that we will be considering a codified version of the directive on static testing of roll-over protection structures of wheeled agricultural or forestry tractors. I feel that following the Dublin vote history dictates that we consider other, more urgent issues. We cannot subcontract a matter such as the Lisbon Treaty to the European Council alone. We MEPs may legitimately become involved, especially if we know the necessary ingredients for finding solutions.

First of all, the key questions must relate to certain vital institutional aspects and not cover several hundreds of pages. We need validation by European referendum, with an opt-out for countries that do not wish to follow that course and, finally, as the President said, we need a very tight timetable – 2009 – otherwise the electoral campaign will become impossible. Let nobody tell me such a scenario is impossible; it is no more improbable than the one on which the chancelleries are currently working. In any case, I, for my part, am ready.

Richard Corbett (PSE). – Mr President, the Commission is currently examining complaints made by certain private businesses in Spain, France and Italy against cooperatives, and against the cooperative movement as regards its statute and tax treatment.

I would urge the Commission, in examining that complaint, to take due account of the particular needs and characteristics of cooperative movements. They are not like profit-making shareholder organisations. A cooperative is owned by its members and profits are distributed equally, not paid out simply to shareholders.

The European Union recognised the particular nature of the cooperative movement in 2003 in adopting the Regulation on the Statute for a European Cooperative Society. I would urge the Commission to take due account of that and thereby earn the gratitude of the 55 million people in Europe employed by cooperatives and the 163 million people who are members of them.

Milan Horáček (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, last week China demanded an end to the Tibet protests as the condition for further talks with representatives of the Dalai Lama. According to the Chinese Foreign Minister, the Tibetans must ditch their attempts to ruin the Olympic Games.

The protesting Tibetans, however, surely cannot be expected to accept meekly the crushing of their demonstrations in March. The Chinese Government has the opportunity to change the situation in Tibet radically. Given an honest dialogue without prior conditions, the Tibetan people will take part in a constructive process of change. The first priority is to send out a clear signal, not least by allowing foreign observers into the country to assess the situation for themselves.

President. – Thank you, Mr Horáček! May I also refer to our resolution of 10 April, in which we called on all EU politicians not to attend the opening ceremony on 8 August unless the rights of the Tibetans had been guaranteed. I once more commend that statement of 10 April to everyone.

László Tőkés (Verts/ALE). – (HU) Mr President, when Pope Benedict XVI spoke to the Hungarian bishops regarding the burdensome legacy of the long era of Communist rule, it was most apposite. His comments are particularly topical today, which is the 50th anniversary of the execution of Imre Nagy, the martyred Prime Minister, and 60th anniversary of the start of the brutal religious persecutions and imprisonment of Cardinal József Mindszenty. The ghost of this painful era, in which state violence was coupled with militant anti-religious sentiment, was raised by Magda Kósáné Kovács, post-Communist Member of this House, in her most recent intervention here in plenary, in which she sought to defend European values from Pope Benedict, or rather from the Catholic Church. A few years ago, former party chairman Mrs Kósáné Kovács made the defamatory claim that the Vatican, then under the leadership of Pope John Paul, was keen to get its hands on the whole of Europe and bring it under its control. As a bishop of the Reformed Church, knowing that the Christian churches themselves have helped shape genuine European values in this European Union which has its roots in the Christian Democrat movement, I reject every manifestation of anti-religious ideology and intolerance. Let us invite Pope Benedict to the European Parliament.

József Szájer (PPE-DE). – (HU) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, fifty years ago today in Hungary, on 16 June 1958, Imre Nagy, Prime Minister of Hungary's 1956 revolution and struggle for freedom, was sentenced and executed following a summary show trial along with defence minister Pál Maléter and colleagues Miklós Gémés and József Szilágyi; Géza Losonczi, meanwhile, was killed while still in prison. Their corpses, tied with wire and wrapped in paper, were buried face down. Their trial was one of the most shameful events and biggest injustices of the twentieth century. Imre Nagy was a fervent Communist, and yet he opted for his country to return to free Europe rather than remain in the Soviet camp. This made him a national hero, a martyr of the revolution, a politician of European standing. His moral stance made him an emblem of freedom and of a European Hungary. The reburial Imre Nagy deserved did not take place until 16 June 1989, but by then the Communist regime had come to an end and Hungary was able to rejoin the family of free European nations. The message of these events is clear: freedom and national independence were what Hungary aspired to as it shook off Communism. This is what those who died fifty years ago gave their lives for; their sacrifice was not in vain.

Martin Schulz (PSE). – (DE) Mr President, I listened very attentively to the Member who spoke before Mr Szájer and attacked my colleague Magda Kósáné Kovács in a totally inappropriate manner.

Mrs Kovács is my deputy on the executive of the Socialist Group. She is not present here, which means that she cannot defend herself against that attack. I know that Mrs Kovács is a convinced democrat and a committed campaigner for European unity. She certainly does not deserve to have any Member abuse the privileges of this House in order to settle some domestic score or other that may exist between them in Hungary. I consider the remarks in question to be totally inappropriate and a grievous slur on the character of Magda Kovács, a slur which I reject with the utmost repugnance.

Brigitte Fouré (PPE-DE). – (FR) Mr President, first I want to welcome the Commission's initiative to grant fishers emergency aid. Even if that aid is certainly not enough to resolve the problems in the sector, it does at least seem necessary at this point. The current situation is indeed critical: in the space of a year, the price of diesel oil has risen from 35 to 73 centimes a litre. So there is a heavy bill to pay for the oil price rise and in my constituency, the Baie de Somme, professional fishers are very much concerned and very bitter. Aside from the question of oil prices, fishers want above all to sell their fish at the right price and are opposed to the unjustified margins taken by intermediaries. This is more than a crisis; it is a structural issue for the fisheries sector that we must tackle at European level. As we have seen, the protest movement has taken on a European dimension. That is only logical given the fact that the fisheries policy is one of the oldest European policies. We must help the fisheries sector to modernise so that it can rid itself of the constraints imposed by the price of diesel oil, while respecting our obligation to protect the environment and manage fishery resources. With that in mind, I hope the plenary debate scheduled for Wednesday will conclude with a resolution that benefits the European fisheries that are now at risk.

István Szent-Iványi (ALDE). – Mr President, Chee Soon Juan was released from Queenstown Prison in Singapore two days ago. He has been convicted and imprisoned several times in the last few years. Chee Soon Juan is not a criminal. His 'crime' is very simple: he is leader of the democratic opposition. He is constantly struggling for freedom and democracy in his country.

Since his last release, the state-controlled media in Singapore started to discredit him, to destroy his credibility, with baseless personal attacks and character assassination. We have a strong solidarity with Mr Chee Soon Juan and his fellows, who are struggling and fighting for democracy and human rights in Singapore.

We call on the Singaporean authorities to stop harassing the democratic opposition, to stop the violation of human rights and to start respecting the basic right of free expression. We hope very much that Singapore will go along with our strong wish to respect basic rights.

Eoin Ryan (UEN). – Mr President, last week the Irish people made a democratic decision on the Lisbon Treaty which must be fully respected. While many of us who voted or campaigned for a ‘yes’ vote are disappointed in the result, I think it is important that we reflect on that result.

In response to Mr Batten’s remarks, I want to emphasise that Ireland is not anti-European. Ireland remains completely committed to the European idea. We are mindful of the fact that Ireland is one of 27 Member States, but this is not just an Irish problem. It is a problem for all Member States. Europe has faced many challenges in the past and it has overcome those challenges through mature and wise leadership. I would ask for the same to be shown here on this issue and on the challenges that we face. We are in uncharted waters and I think it is very important that we avoid knee-jerk reactions or hasty decisions. We need some reflection and maturity to make sure that we can fully address the present situation and try to get Europe back on the road so that it is fully accountable to the citizens of Europe.

Manolis Mavrommatis (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, the European Parliament’s offices in the Member States are the line of communication between Parliament and the citizens. One of the main purposes of these offices is to inform public opinion, through various activities, about what is happening in the European Parliament. One such activity involves inviting journalists to come to Strasbourg to cover proceedings in plenary.

On 24 January 2008, Mr President, I submitted a question to the European Parliament about the decision to reduce the budget for inviting the press. In spite of this, about five months have passed and I have not yet received an answer. Something similar is happening to other committees, so that legitimate questions put by MEPs remain unanswered. I wonder whether this policy can have any positive effect on the operation of Parliamentary institutions and the competent departments, at a time when the EU is in need of fully functioning procedures as provided for in its Rules.

Hélène Flautre (Verts/ALE). – (FR) Mr President, I want to draw MEPs’ attention to Sami Essid’s expulsion from Italy to Tunisia on 3 June, in total violation of Italy’s commitments under the European Convention on Human Rights and, in particular, Article 3 thereof. Why? Because Mr Essid is accused of terrorism and the European Court of Human Rights has established without any doubt that any person accused of terrorism was without fail tortured in Tunisia.

That is why the European Court asked Italy to suspend the expulsion measure. Nonetheless, Italy expelled him on 3 June, in total violation of its commitments. I ask both that Italy be reminded of its obligations as a party to the European Convention on Human Rights and as a Member State of the European Union, and for assurances that Mr Essid, now deported to Tunisia, will not suffer inhumane and degrading treatment there.

(Applause)

IN THE CHAIR: MRS ROTHE

Vice-President

Bairbre de Brún (GUE/NGL). – (GA) Madam President, the Irish vote last Thursday against the Treaty of Lisbon was not a vote against Europe. Ireland’s place is in the European Union, where it has obtained social and economic benefits – both north and south – due to its Membership.

People were concerned about the weakening of Ireland’s voice, and that of other small countries, in the European Union; about neutrality and military affairs; about workers’ rights and public services. Not only were those concerns raised on the doorsteps, but they were also voiced in the opinion polls published throughout the campaign. Their automatic right to a referendum on future significant changes is also important.

Some of those issues have already been raised in France and the Netherlands. We must address those concerns.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE). – (HU) Madam President, I speak now as a Member representing a country whose Parliament, supported by all the political parties, was second to ratify the Treaty Establishing a Constitution for Europe and first to ratify the Lisbon Treaty. In this capacity I would like to remind you that

the greatest danger in Europe today is national egoism, or nationalism. We must give some thought to whether we should be rewarding those who constantly demand more, or should we instead be sanctioning this kind of behaviour? Protecting national interests is a fundamental duty of every country's government and its representatives in the European Parliament, but the European Union cannot function unless sober compromises are reached among the various national interests, and unless there is solidarity among its nations and peoples. I therefore strongly urge our Polish friends to lend their support, as the other twenty-six Member States have done, to establishing the European Institute of Innovation and Technology in Budapest. In the case of Frontex in Warsaw, Hungary too seemed to be in the running for a while, but did not use its veto. It would therefore be unfair if our Polish friends did not reciprocate with a similar gesture. Hungarian and Pole are two good friends; as the saying goes, 'Magyar and Pole, two friends so fine; together they fight and drink their wine'.

President. – That concludes this item.

19. Revision of the framework directive on waste (debate)

President. – The next item is the recommendation for second reading (A6-0162/2008) by Caroline Jackson, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, on the Council common position for adopting a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on waste and repealing certain Directives (11406/4/2007 – C6-0056/2008 – 2005/0281(COD)).

Caroline Jackson, rapporteur. – Madam President, following your ruling that there is no time for points of order, I will continue with my speech on the Waste Framework Directive. It is a little difficult to do so against this background, but I will persevere.

Since certain comments have been made on this point in the British press recently, may I begin by drawing attention once again to my declaration of interests, which I made on the record, and which cites my membership of the Environmental Advisory Board of Shanks plc. That company operates a wide range of waste technologies in Britain and on the continent, and the primary purpose of its Environmental Advisory Board is to provide independent audits of the operation of its plants.

My fellow board members include the chairman of the EU Scientific Advisory Committee on Emerging and Newly Identified Health Risks and a member of the Green Alliance.

Like many Members, I value the opportunity this kind of experience has given me to learn at close hand about the issues and problems facing this industry and those who work in it.

Turning to the Directive, it has been a long and tortuous road to this second reading and I congratulate those of my colleagues who have accompanied me on it to the very end. The issue is a very important one. Various judgments in the Court of Justice regarding the status of waste destined for treatment in energy-from-waste plants needed to be clarified. New definitions were needed. Two existing directives on hazardous waste and on waste oils were repealed and their provisions transferred to the Waste Framework Directive. However, the committee was not content with those original proposals, and went on to transform the Directive from a technical one into a campaigning one. I congratulate my colleagues on that.

I have to say that the mood in the Council was very bleak, possibly mirroring our economic times. There was much resistance to what we wanted to do and the Council drove a very hard bargain, but we achieved the following.

Firstly, we have added recycling targets to the text. That is a very significant achievement since these were not in the original proposal, and this is the first time that recycling targets for household waste have appeared in EU legislation. It is entirely due to Parliament that they are there.

The new Article 8a requires Member States to take the necessary measures designed to achieve an overall recycling rate of 50% by 2020 for paper, metal, plastic and glass from household and similar waste. There are some Member States, such as Germany, for which this is a conservative target, but there are many for which it is very demanding, and we need to take them into account too.

The same article also requires that by 2020 70% of construction and demolition waste be recycled. The Greens and their supporters are putting it about that the targets are not enforceable. They may even believe that, but they are – extraordinarily – rejecting their own achievement. The Commission has issued a statement to help them, and Mr Dimas will confirm this. The statement says quite clearly that if in 2020 the targets are

not achieved, this will be a serious indication for the Commission that a Member State has not taken the necessary measures designed to achieve the targets. On this basis, supported by conclusions in the tri-annual national progress reports, the Commission can take Member States to court for non-compliance with the requirements of the Directive.

It may be important to the Greens not to be happy, because Greens are eternal campaigners, but they should take some account of what the Commission has said in that statement.

Secondly, we have added new provisions on the prevention of waste, in Article 8a. These will mean that the Commission has to report on the evolution of EU waste generation and the scope for waste prevention by 2011, and by 2014 must produce proposals for waste prevention, and decoupling objectives for 2020. It proved impossible to get the Council or the Commission to agree to quantitative waste prevention targets in this Directive, partly because the data necessary for those targets is missing, but Parliament has, through its amendments, created momentum for future policy that may contain waste prevention targets.

The new article therefore represents a significant achievement. It is something for our successors to build on. We cannot do everything in this Directive, but have to hand things on to our successors in the next decade.

Thirdly, we have firmly placed the famous EU waste hierarchy in EU law for the first time. We have been talking about this for years, but if you look at EU law it is not there. However, it will be soon, and we can celebrate a minor victory in getting the Council to agree that the hierarchy shall apply 'as a priority order' in waste prevention and management legislation.

Fourthly, we have secured agreement to place better emphasis on hazardous waste management, as several colleagues wanted.

Fifthly, we have also ensured that priority will continue to be given to the regeneration of waste oils – although there was no support for a policy, which I know some colleagues wanted, that would have made regeneration mandatory in all Member States. We secured Council support for the amendment put forward by Mrs Hennicot-Schoepges and colleagues designed to make it easier for SMEs to use the waste list, and we also obtained support for a new article on biowaste.

In conclusion, the Directive specifies the energy efficiency criteria for incineration, with energy recovery to be classed as a recovery operation rather than disposal. That is the best deal available. Anyone who thinks that we could get anything better by going to conciliation would be deceiving themselves. In the famous words of Jack Nicholson, 'this is as good as it gets'.

Stavros Dimas, *Member of the Commission*. – (EL) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, let me first thank and congratulate the rapporteur, Mrs Jackson, on her excellent contribution to the revision of the Waste Framework Directive, and the shadow rapporteurs and the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety for their positive and constructive contribution.

With this Directive, the Community is taking the first substantial step towards creating a recycling society. The Directive introduces a modern approach to waste management, treating waste as useable raw materials and providing clearer definitions, simplified regulations, and new, ambitious targets.

Thanks to the incorporation of the provisions of the Directives on Hazardous Waste and Waste Oil, this Directive contributes to the broader effort in improving legislation and simplifying the *acquis communautaire*. The next step, of course, will be its successful implementation.

Parliament's considerable efforts and perseverance have been rewarded. It was not easy to persuade the Member States to accept the new recycling targets and agree to the waste prevention objectives. Nevertheless, this aim has been achieved in full.

Some doubts have been expressed regarding whether these targets will be implemented by the Member States. I should like to underline that with the current formulation of the quantitative targets, the Commission has the ability and the political will to refer Member States to the European Court of Justice if they have not taken the measures that are essential for achieving the recycling targets.

Parliament has incorporated many other significant points into the text of the Directive. Among these are the hierarchy of five categories of waste, new provisions on the separate collection of biowaste and hazardous waste, and many useful clarifications. These points enrich the Commission's original proposal and improve the text, so that it becomes an ambitious legislative instrument for future generations. The fact that it has

been possible to achieve agreement at second reading is, of course, particularly satisfying. I should like to emphasise once more the European Parliament's constructive role in this process.

This Directive creates a new framework for waste management and provides a solid foundation for other Community policy initiatives. The European Commission is in a position to support the compromise package in order to achieve agreement at second reading.

John Bowis, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Madam President, Caroline Jackson referred to a quotation I think from Jack Nicholson. Knowing her golfing prowess, I thought it might have been from Jack Nicklaus, but no doubt they would have had the same sort of quotation: 'This is about as good as it gets'. That is a great tribute to our rapporteur and I salute her on behalf of our Group.

It is necessary that we support her and take action. It is not as good as we might have envisaged it being at one point. However, we have made enormous progress. Commissioner, it is up to you now to ensure that it is implemented and to bring forward the subsequent provisions on prevention with your target of 2014. I know you will put this process in motion and that is important too.

It is important because we have had a whole raft of waste proposals in my time in this Parliament: we have dealt with vehicles, electrical and electronic equipment, batteries, packaging and so forth. However, waste goes on rising; it rises faster than the growth of our economies. It grows fastest in some areas like municipal waste, and that is why we need to take action.

My own country sets one of the worst examples in terms of waste. The Netherlands we salute as setting the best example. However, we all need to catch up. We all need to have more recycling so as to meet the terms of the hierarchy: we need to meet the recycling targets and prevention targets and so forth. I believe that this is a measure which will at least send us down that road in a better frame of mind than we have shown in the past with our wasteful economy, wasteful society and wasteful policies.

Guido Sacconi, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I am helped by the fact that Mrs Jackson and Commissioner Dimas have given a full explanation of the main elements of this compromise, which I also support. Let me therefore put forward some eminently political thoughts.

I am a negotiator and I always ponder whether or not the compromise that has been reached is valid. I therefore read the texts again with a fresh mind, following the night of the negotiations. Goodness only knows why negotiations always have to end at night. Is an agreement reached in the morning of less value? There is food for thought there as well. In all sincerity – and I say this to our Green and GUE colleagues, and to Karl-Heinz Florenz who I see has re-tabled an amendment from the Environment Committee which bore my signature and which I cannot therefore but support – in all sincerity, looking at both the compromise and the Environment Committee texts, we have achieved – and the main credit goes to you, Mrs Jackson – a really amazing result.

Are we aware that there was nothing about recycling in the Commission proposal and then in the common position? Nothing apart from a recital which mentioned the recycling society without going into further detail. There was nothing! Now we have precise targets; we have a review in 2014 when other materials, not covered at present, could be included; we know for sure, as Commissioner Dimas has just confirmed it, that legal action can be taken against States failing to implement the measures planned to achieve those targets.

That seems a very important fact to me. It is also very important that a political and legal process has finally been set in motion to compel States to draw up genuine waste prevention plans, and that a hierarchy of waste disposal which respects the environment has finally been included in European law, and is legally binding, making waste no longer just a problem but a resource.

In all honesty, therefore, and shouldering our full responsibility, I believe that rejecting this compromise and heading for a risky conciliation would not be in the interest of European citizens, but would turn the achievement and establishment of these targets, set out here in a clear and absolutely incontrovertible way, into a kind of Russian roulette.

Mojca Drčar Murko, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Madam President, with this text we hope to reverse the trend of producing more waste than we recycle. It is the result of several years of debates and taking account of the reality of two major groups of Member States as regards waste management systems: recycling states and landfilling states.

The achieved compromise must be seen in this light. For the first time, prevention and recycling have been given a central role in the Directive. Furthermore, the text includes the necessary dynamics to adapt higher targets as well as targets for new waste streams. It is a carefully balanced compromise: achievable and realistic. Amendments: we do not consider that in their entirety they endanger the general agreement.

With regard to by-products – the article in the body of the Directive and the article on end of waste – most critics fear sham recovery. As the issue is not internationally agreed, the danger is real. It must, therefore, be made clear that the Commission will use the guidelines from February 2007 in order to prevent this.

I would much appreciate it if Mr Dimas would give us today an assurance that a substance or object will be shipped as a by-product outside the Community only once the conditions of Article 4(1) are met in the Community.

Similarly for end of waste. When certain waste ceases to be waste, the substance or object resulting from it can be shipped as such outside the Community only once the conditions of Article 5 are met in the Community. It would make it easier for many MEPs to vote for the compromise.

To conclude, I wish to extend many thanks to the rapporteur and shadow rapporteurs for fruitful cooperation to the benefit of the citizens of Europe.

Jill Evans, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – Madam President, I would also like to thank Mrs Jackson. We may have ended up in disagreement about the tax, but I think that there is no doubt that there has been excellent cooperation throughout the discussions. We are not happy today – I wish we were – and I would like to give some of the reasons why we are not happy with the compromise.

We have supported 30 of the compromise amendments and we have tabled others to try and strengthen the compromise in the areas of hazardous waste, end of waste, by-products and separate collection of biowaste. But from the very start, the main issues for us were the adoption of binding targets on waste reduction and recycling and opposition to the reclassification of incineration as energy recovery. The final compromise does not have a legally binding target for waste reduction. A study on waste prevention is no alternative to stabilisation measures; the continuous growth in waste is unsustainable and without this measure it will continue to grow.

Although recycling and reuse targets have been set at 50% and 70% and the Member States are legally obliged to put measures in place to achieve these targets, the targets themselves are not binding. I am grateful for the explanation that we have had from Mr Dimas, but why was there such a debate over the wording of this? The reason was to avoid making those targets binding.

Manufacturing and industrial waste, which have a huge potential for reuse and recycling, have been left out altogether. Incineration cannot be viewed as a waste management option on a par with recycling and reuse; this will just attract further investment into incinerators and directly undermine the waste hierarchy. If the weak compromise is adopted, we will have missed the opportunity to ensure real EU action and leadership on waste policy when we so desperately need it.

Bairbre de Brún, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (GA) Madam President, I would like to thank Mrs Jackson for her work. We have worked well together to make some improvements to the original Commission proposal, although we do not agree on everything.

Many people throughout the Union will be concerned about the proposal to ‘re-brand’ incinerators as a form of recovery if they meet certain efficiency criteria. We remain opposed to the ‘re-branding’ of incineration and have put down an amendment to have this deleted.

With regard to recycling, the latest proposed deal sets out targets which may be very difficult to enforce due to vagueness in the wording which states that, “member states shall take the necessary measures designed to achieve recycling targets.”

Good legislation demands that we be more precise in our wording on targets and do not leave interpretation to the European Court of Justice. Therefore we want to defend and keep the wording as voted by the committee.

Proposals on waste prevention have weakened to the point where they will not be able to make a substantive enough contribution or to clearly help Member States in stabilising and reducing their waste. The weakness of the reference to prevention targets means that a harmonised prevention initiative and indicators is not yet enshrined in legislation

Therefore, we can be cosignatories to some of the work we have done together. However, regarding other parts of it, we believe that we must table amendments. I would like, once again, to thank Mrs Jackson for the open and inclusive way she corresponded with the shadow rapporteurs.

(Applause)

Johannes Blokland, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group.* – (NL) Madam President, the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety has produced a very good report as a recommendation for second reading. I am thinking in particular of the prominent place given to the waste hierarchy, the scrapping of the by-products category, the careful handling of the end-of-waste concept, the protection rules on hazardous waste and the prevention, reuse and recycling objectives.

The only negative aspect of the report by the Committee on the Environment was the amendment to encourage waste incineration by regarding it as efficient use if enough energy is recovered.

In the negotiating result achieved after two months, not all that much remained of the recommendation by the Committee on the Environment and that was due not to the rapporteur, but to the uncompromising position of the Council.

The article on by-products was not amended and Member States can decide on their own initiative when waste ceases to be waste, with all the disruption to competition that that entails. Furthermore, no prevention objectives have been set and the reuse and recycling objectives are considerably weakened. It was for those reasons that I did not support the compromise package. However, I hope that we still adopt the better parts of the Committee on the Environment report when we vote tomorrow. I am referring in particular to the amendments by the GUE/NGL Group and the Greens. The environment deserves that we go through a further mediation procedure to that end, in which we actually get the Council to make the necessary improvements. If we, as a Parliament, are convincing, it should be possible, with the leadership of Mrs Jackson, to do more than is the case at present. I should like to thank Mrs Jackson and the other shadow rapporteurs for their excellent cooperation and I hope we shall see a successful outcome from the vote tomorrow.

Luca Romagnoli (NI). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I welcome and support all the amendments intended to introduce targets which are indispensable for prevention with a view to improved recycling. Naturally, I also support the insistence on a clearly defined and clearly structured waste hierarchy. It is also indispensable to be able to draw on sound and comparable statistical data if further progress is to be made as regards both prevention and recycling of industrial waste.

Ladies and gentlemen, I consider that we in Parliament must staunchly support the application of the hierarchy principle as a general rule, and not as a guiding principle as preferred by the Council. The directive must clarify in detail the criteria to be used for any departures which, in my view, must where necessary be framed in an ordered and distinct way, so that there can be no doubt about what is considered as recovery and what is considered as disposal of waste.

I agree with the rapporteur that energy from waste plants can play an important part in dealing with residual waste and that we are now faced with an important choice in this respect, bearing in mind the European Union's dependence on insecure imports of energy from so many other parts of the world. I would conclude by saying that I also welcome the amendments relating to the regeneration of waste oils, which had initially been taken out.

Karl-Heinz Florenz (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, may I say to Caroline Jackson that I am unhappy with the compromise, but that is not because of any flaw in Mrs Jackson's negotiating skills. On this occasion, I have to say to Stavros Dimas that my displeasure is directed at the Commission for a change.

In the case of aircraft, industry and motor vehicles, the Commission is extremely strict, haggling for every gramm by which it can reduce CO₂ emissions, and rightly so. In the case of waste-management policy, however, CO₂ does not enter the equation at all. The evidence points to a potential cut of 100 million tonnes of CO₂. That is a golden opportunity, but it has been squandered in this document.

My second cause for regret is that we have become a kind of concreting firm. We concrete over the divergences in Europe instead of aiming for harmonisation. Although we define targets, they are not binding. Over the next 20 years we shall not obtain any genuine harmonised targets in Europe. That is what disturbs me about

this report. Twenty years is almost half a generation. We ought to have been far more innovative, and we could have been.

I believe, Commissioner, there is only one major problem, namely Article 14. I would be delighted if you could say some more about that provision. In a federal state, it may be a highly complex matter. It is about the question of mixed or unmixed waste management and how it is dealt with in accordance with the principle of self-sufficiency. I beg you earnestly to comment on this matter again in your concluding explanations.

At the present time, of course, one or two people are saying that we shall secure a large majority, but, if these questions are not resolved, some of the large countries will undoubtedly agonise over their vote. Please consider that we do not only have tomorrow's reading; we have a third reading too, and 64 amendments on the table are quite a lot for a conciliation procedure.

So if you take the opportunity, Commissioner, to explain one or two things about these unresolved issues, I could imagine that we might reach a successful outcome.

Gyula Hegyi (PSE). – Madam President, in Europe we are currently recycling only 27% of our waste and almost half of our waste ends up in landfills. This shows that we have to fundamentally change our waste management. Most importantly we should encourage waste prevention, strengthen reuse and recycling and minimise the amount of landfill waste. Therefore I welcome the fact that the waste hierarchy remained in the new compromise text after some debate.

As regards prevention – the main aim of the legislation – I miss the waste stabilisation targets in the latest text, but we had already adopted them in the first reading. In the old Member States one person generates almost twice as much household waste – 570 kg per year – as a person in the new Member States – 300 to 350 kg per year. So the rich nations should start to decrease waste production first.

The amount of generated waste is increasing on a European scale. Therefore prevention programmes, as proposed in the compromise, are not enough: we must set binding targets to halt the growing waste generation. That is why I consider supporting Amendment 48 which reintroduces the waste stabilisation target. I welcome the mandatory waste reuse and recycling targets, but I am afraid that the new text, which says that Member States 'shall take the necessary measures' to achieve the targets is not enough. We need concrete, enforceable and binding targets, both for household and industrial waste. Therefore I propose to support Amendment 82, to ensure the enforcement of the recycling targets.

Having made these comments, I welcome the report and the work of Mrs Jackson, my friend Guido Sacconi and others.

Chris Davies (ALDE). – Madam President, this agreement is as good as it gets, the rapporteur says, and I pay credit to what she has achieved. There are gains to be made at 3 o'clock in the morning during a conciliation session that cannot be achieved at other times during the negotiating process.

We all recognise that the size of our waste mountain needs to be reduced. One British supermarket has recently announced that by 2012 it intends to reduce the use of packaging by 25% and its use of carrier bags by 33%. It wants to ensure that waste food is converted to energy by anaerobic digestion. It wants to restrict the number of materials used in packaging to just four which are easy to recycle or compost and it wants to print simple symbols on all packaging to make it easy for customers to recycle or compost their waste.

Now all this is a matter of political will. Reducing waste is a matter of political will and that will can be strengthened by European Union law.

I suspect that we could have got the Council to at least agree to bring forward the date by which it will publish proposals for waste reduction from 2014 to a few years earlier. Parliament has done well. It could, perhaps, have done better.

Hiltrud Breyer (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the proposal is a disappointment. It is nothing short of a failure to meet the need for more efforts to tackle climate change and conserve resources. We know that the European Environment Agency has predicted a 50% increase in the volume of waste by 2020. In this respect, the fact that binding stabilisation levels or binding recycling targets have not been prescribed represents a flop, a caving-in to pressure from the Member States. The instrument that was needed has unquestionably been watered down in response to that pressure.

It is also disappointing that waste incineration is increasingly becoming the *ultima ratio* at the expense of waste avoidance. It was precisely to redress this imbalance that these recycling quotas and the stabilisation of waste volumes would have served. I hope that, by adopting amendments, we can still make some improvements to this draft and actually do what is necessary, namely to formulate the sort of ambitious waste-management policy we need in the European Union.

Roberto Musacchio (GUE/NGL). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I am sorry but I have to criticise some of the compromises reached as, in some cases, they run the risk of undermining what Parliament very rightly voted for at first reading.

I am also sorry because these changes for the worse have been imposed by the Council and are mistaken and dangerous. I say this from my own standpoint, living, as I do, in Italy. In this case, Italy unfortunately offers a bad example of waste management, failing to respect the spirit and the letter of European law under which a virtuous hierarchy, ranging from reduction to recycling, has for some time been consolidated.

That hierarchy has to be strengthened by quantified and certain targets – for reduction and recycling – for industrial waste as well, and not weakened, as is to some extent the case, by leaving scope for disposal policies which undermine its philosophy. Italy has, for instance, offered billions of euro in incentives for waste incineration in recent years, with results that are evident to all and can in no way be seen as positive.

Jim Allister (NI). – Madam President, across Europe, every Member State is struggling with runaway energy prices. Therefore seeing waste as potentially important fuel is, I believe, both sensible and necessary. It is surely a win-win situation – both dealing with our massive stockpiles of waste and providing an alternative energy supply source, particularly as we face an energy crisis and increasing dependence upon insecure foreign supplies of oil.

I therefore do not therefore understand the reticence of some in facing up to the obvious advantage of promoting energy from waste. I fear some colleagues feel so precious about their recycling and anti-incineration dogmas that they would sacrifice the opportunity of heat and power from waste. In that, I have to say, I believe they are profoundly mistaken.

On a related note, could I say that I very strongly favour maximising the definition of ‘recovery’ under the Directive, making it indisputably clear that energy from waste represents recovery, not disposal, of waste. We should particularly apply that to our agricultural sector, where there is much opportunity in that regard.

Françoise Grossetête (PPE-DE). – (FR) Madam President, first I want to offer warm thanks to our rapporteur, Caroline Jackson, for the remarkable job she has done, which reflects the quality of her expertise on the delicate issue of waste management. I also congratulate her on listening so attentively, which she has done throughout the negotiations, and thanks to which we have achieved this difficult compromise with the Council and the Commission.

We have a new directive that endeavours to clarify a number of points. We welcome the waste management and hierarchy and the ambitious recycling targets set for the Member States – 50% for household waste by the year 2020. Waste management must be based on prevention, reuse, recycling, recovery and, lastly, disposal, and this hierarchy must be a guiding principle. It is also important for incinerators to be subject to energy efficiency criteria, as set out in the text, provided of course that incineration is used only when no other method is feasible.

On that basis, I regard it as very positive that the text also provides for very tight controls on hazardous waste and more stringent traceability measures.

This is, of course, a compromise and we would have wished to go much further on certain points, such as adding environmental criteria in the definition of recovery and setting more stringent conditions for departures from the status of waste; then there is the issue of by-products, where the definition poses some problems. Nonetheless, we absolutely must support this compromise because we know full well that it was difficult to reach and that if we want to go to conciliation we would be taking the risk of defeat and delaying matters hugely. We must realise that since our European waste policy has been a failure to date, it is far preferable to agree a solution that seems reasonable, and the European Commission must be very vigilant in ensuring that this directive is implemented properly. We will see if we can go further in a few years’ time.

Anne Ferreira (PSE). – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, for my part I am not satisfied with either the form or the substance of this compromise text.

On the form, I believe we cannot do our job properly when, after spending two years working on drawing up a text, we find that the final decisions – which are more than just adjustments – are taken on the quiet and go far beyond what was adopted in the Committee on the Environment and only land on Members' desks a few hours before the vote.

On the substance, this compromise text is a cop-out that fails to give a clear definition of recovery, no longer tries to stabilise the volume of waste, no longer sets out ambitious recycling targets and unfortunately reflects the inability of the Commission and the Council to translate the highly ambitious declarations made at European and international level into actions.

No, I am not satisfied, and I am in fact concerned at our political incapacity to take genuine environmental action or action to improve our health, which is also why I have voted against the text.

Anne Laperrouze (ALDE). – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, first of all I want to pay tribute to the work done by our rapporteur, Caroline Jackson, and by Mojka Drčar Murko, rapporteur for our ALDE Group.

The question of hazardous waste raises vital issues of traceability, non-dilution, homogeneous storing of information on waste movement over a long period, i.e. five years for all parts of the chain; yet all those issues have been treated rather lightly. That is more than regrettable in terms of health and the environment.

In regard to by-products, I am most disappointed. I am not against the concept of by-products: on the contrary, I recognise their importance; but I do feel that the definition given in the Council's common position does not offer enough guarantees and that at the end of the day it risks destroying the very concept as a result of the possible abuses.

Other questions, such as the status of end of waste and the recovery of waste, seem to me to have been sacrificed in the name of an agreement at second reading.

Friedrich-Wilhelm Graefe zu Baringdorf (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Madam President, Commissioner, Mrs Jackson, we shall be tabling a cross-party amendment that attracted majority support in this House at first reading. It addresses the following problem: in many countries of the EU untreated, unsterilised food scraps are repeatedly fed to livestock or fly-tipped. Time and again, this kind of behaviour poses the risk of diseases such as foot-and-mouth disease. It is therefore essential to ensure that food waste is sterilised and safely disposed of by approved companies using suitable methods. Member States should only be allowed to authorise its use in pig feed if it has been sterilised for 20 minutes at a temperature of 133°C and a pressure of 3 bar and if all other requirements of Regulation 1774/2002 have been met in full. I firmly believe that, if Parliament adopts this amendment, the Council will incorporate this rule into the compromise.

Umberto Guidoni (GUE/NGL). – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, the compromise that has been reached is a retrograde step from the text approved by the Committee on the Environment.

The original text said that waste production should be reduced to 2009 levels from 2012, introducing a genuine policy of prevention with measures staggered over time. That objective has been rescinded in the compromise, leaving everything vague. The Committee on the Environment had set minimum targets for the recycling of domestic and industrial waste, to be achieved by set – albeit far-off – deadlines. Those targets have also been watered down, limiting them solely to some types of material and excluding industrial waste.

Another negative aspect is the promotion of incinerators over a certain efficiency from disposal plant to recovery plant. This directive seems to be giving in to what powerful lobbies want. The outcome of the Irish referendum has shown that you are either on the side of citizens and their concerns, or you run of risk of rejection of the idea of Europe and paralysis of the integration process.

Parliament must take heed of the thousands of emails from European citizens calling for greater commitments and binding targets, otherwise we risk losing another major opportunity to enhance the credibility of the European institutions.

Péter Olajos (PPE-DE). – (HU) Thank you very much, Madam President. I welcome the compromise package, but at the same time I would like to emphasise that the compromise is a rather fragile one. It is therefore vitally important that each of the Member States behaves responsibly and does not go looking for any loopholes that might have remained in the legislation. In Hungary at present, separate collection of waste accounts for 2% of the total. In my view, there is nothing more to say about this other than to express the hope that the impact of the Directive will finally help to shift the situation forwards from this low position.

In the eastern half of Europe, investment in waste management has increased in recent years, largely thanks to funding obtained from the Instrument for Structural Policies for Pre-Accession (ISPA) and the Cohesion Fund. Construction of landfill sites has been a major activity, but in a number of communities waste separation programmes have been initiated, including measures aimed at separate collection of organic waste in some instances. On the other hand, genuine measures and investment aimed at waste reduction have not been forthcoming at all, and a distinct industry for processing recyclable materials has yet to emerge. The nature of the guidelines set out by the European Union will therefore be crucial, not least for Hungary. According to the statistics, every community could basically achieve a 50% reduction in the waste it produces as soon as it introduces dry waste recycling and separate door-to-door collection of organic waste. When setting out the new obligations, however, we must also consider their enforceability and associated costs. For example, can the additional investments be put in place in the same areas as the ISPA projects? Can the original contracts be amended? If not, then it makes little difference whether demand exists to expand waste separation or whether legislation is in place to reduce the amount of waste that goes to landfill; under the twenty-year contracts the waste collected must be taken to the landfill sites that have been constructed. In addition to approving this directive, therefore, we must not delay in getting to work on potential ways of amending the existing contracts. I congratulate the rapporteur on her outstanding work. Thank you very much.

Horst Schnellhardt (PPE-DE). – (DE) Madam President, I believe we can congratulate the rapporteur. She has certainly managed to achieve an acceptable outcome with the Council. I particularly wish to emphasise the inclusion of the divergent waste hierarchy.

There are, however, minus points, which are truly incomprehensible and which were put into this document by the Council. The first of these relates to animal by-products. We had established in committee that animal by-products would be dropped from this framework waste directive. What the Council has now done is to erect the sort of bureaucratic obstacle that drives farmers to the barricades. It lays down that slurry processed into biogas suddenly becomes a waste product. Do you know what this means? It means that farmers will need a waste-treatment licence and will have to specify the precise volume and nature of the waste to be treated and the place of treatment.

The Animal By-products Regulation lays down explicitly that exceptions apply to slurry. It would now therefore be easier for a farmer to spread slurry on his fields than to process it into biogas. In other words, we are creating bureaucratic obstacles to a practice we actually seek to encourage.

The second point concerns waste oil. The Waste Oil Directive – which, as you know, is now to be repealed – stipulates that waste oils are to be treated and regenerated. There are large volumes being processed under that directive. It has already been established, of course, that waste oils need not be treated in cases where regeneration is not economically viable or technically possible. It has now been laid down that the Member States are to decide. Well, are we now a European Union or have we reverted to a collection of Member States? The fact is that we are quite clearly breaking up the market again. I find that very disquieting. Let me move on to the question of increased self-sufficiency. Local authorities will now determine who may dispose of what and when. Needless to say, there was a great deal of pressure from local authorities with spare incineration capacity. That, however, is the wrong way to go. It is not an option, and this extension is causing the market economy to grind to a complete halt in the realm of waste management.

Frieda Brepoels (PPE-DE). – (NL) Madam President, I think it is clear that this compromise is an important step forward for European environmental law. All the same, I am not entirely happy with the compromise. Why not? My own region, Flanders, along with, for instance, the Netherlands, has the best waste policy and is excellent at sorting and recycling, so we find the proposed recycling and prevention targets totally inadequate. It really does not give us any encouragement at all to do better in the future.

We are also not entirely happy about the possibility of household waste incinerators being regarded as an efficient use on the basis of the energy efficiency formula, which we believe might, in practice, create a great deal of confusion. All the same, I am certain that the overall result has to be seen as very positive and I therefore want to thank Mrs Jackson sincerely for her huge contribution. We shall be supporting the compromise.

Csaba Sándor Tabajdi (PSE). – (HU) Madam President, in its present form, unfortunately, the Waste Framework Directive threatens the expansion of biogas use. I completely agree with our fellow Member Mr Schnellhardt from the PPE-DE Group that the present directive is inadequate with regard to biogas production, as also with regard to the use of slurry or municipal waste. In its present form, unfortunately, the Waste Directive will jeopardise expansion of biogas use. This calls the Jackson report into question.

Within the framework of the Waste Directive, the definition of animal manure used for biogas production as waste is ambiguous. If the scope of the directive were to include this, it would make it impossible to produce biogas from animal manure, despite the fact that this would have major advantages from the point of view of energy management, the environment and climate protection. We must clear up this muddle and restore legislative consistency as soon as possible, and therefore we must adopt the Commission's position on the directive as regards biogas.

Adam Gierek (PSE). – (PL) Madam President, congratulations to the rapporteur on a realistic appraisal of the growing waste problem. The basic assumptions in the proposed regulations are waste prevention and material recycling. Recovery of energy is simpler, but it should not replace material recycling, which is more difficult.

For this reason it is necessary to create the conditions to enable material recycling to take place and to make more precise legal distinctions describing, for example, when scrap metal does not constitute waste, but becomes a raw material. We need better and cheaper material recycling technologies. Products should be designed in such a way as to simplify recycling. Selective collections are needed and these need to be adapted to the market in such a way that both households and potential users of secondary materials can benefit.

Without these solutions we face the risk of a repeat of the present situation in Naples, where, unfortunately, the incineration of waste may turn out to be the only option.

Stavros Dimas, Member of the Commission. – Madam President, I would like to thank all the speakers in this debate for their positive contributions.

On the basis of the agreed text, Member States will now have to take a number of measures in order to improve their waste management. The Directive lays down clear definitions and waste management principles, which I trust will resolve the existing interpretation problems, reduce the number of court cases and set a sound legal basis for the functioning of the waste treatment sector.

A number of key elements have been included in the overall compromise package that is now proposed. The most important are these.

Firstly, the environmental objective of the Directive is now clear and ambitious. The level of environmental protection has not only been maintained but also strengthened in several cases, such as hazardous waste.

The co-legislators have agreed on a number of cornerstone definitions, including definitions of waste, prevention, recycling and recovery. These definitions are clear and understandable. In addition, the Directive successfully incorporates the provisions of two other directives to make the legislation more accessible while maintaining the high standards of environmental protection.

A distinction between recovery and disposal has been made clear, with a possibility for the Commission to further delineate this distinction should there be such a need.

A clear five-step 'waste hierarchy' has been set up which promotes waste prevention and allows for disposal of residual waste only as the last resort. At the same time, it allows for the necessary scope of flexibility justified by sound life-cycle considerations.

I would like to recall the importance given by Parliament during the negotiations to strengthening the upper levels of the 'waste hierarchy' by introducing the recycling targets. If these targets are not met in 2020, the Commission can take Member States to court for non-compliance with the requirements of the Directive. In addition, the current formulation introduces a more regular and thorough process of monitoring the measures taken by Member States to attain the required targets in advance of the 2020 deadline, instead of a simple check of the actual compliance levels in 2020 when waste management systems are already in place. Such an early enforcement process can help to avoid unpleasant surprises in 2020.

Last but not least, the Directive introduces a completely new dimension on waste prevention which the Commission is keen to pursue immediately after its adoption and transposition. The Member States will now have to establish their national waste management plans and networks which need to reflect the principles and new obligations set out in the revised Directive.

Article 14 of the Waste Framework Directive does not prescribe whether private or public authorities should participate in the setting-up and in the operation of such networks, nor does it affect in any possible way the ownership – public or private – of waste-management operations and infrastructures. The division of

responsibilities between the public and private sectors is an internal matter that can only be decided by the Member States. If an adequate network of disposal and recovery operations is already in place – be it private, public or mixed – there is no need for additional measures to set it up.

Regarding the concerns relating to the lack of a recycling target for manufacturing and industrial waste, my services will look into the possibility of setting such a target as the first priority within the context of the 2014 review, which is foreseen in Article 8a (point 4).

Regarding the issue of feeding animals with animal by-products such as catering waste, this is regulated by the Animal By-Products Regulation, which is currently under review. It should be addressed in that regulation as the Waste Framework Directive is not the right place to regulate the use of catering waste.

Concerning the question of whether by-product requirements and end-of-waste criteria must be fulfilled in the European Union before shipment to third countries, the Commission confirms that this is the case.

Regarding the question of whether manure should be excluded from the scope of the Waste Framework Directive, manure is not considered waste when it is used as a fertiliser. However, it is considered waste when it is destined for further treatment or disposal operations, for instance incineration, production of biogas or compost and landfilling. Excluding manure from the scope of waste legislation would create a serious gap in environmental protection, since there would be no legal means to control issues such as emissions to air and water, landfilling requirements, noise, odour etc.

Finally, the European Union should promote the production of biogas and the composting of waste. However, biogas and composting plants are not environmentally neutral. They also emit to the air and water and can be a source of nuisance, for instance in terms of odours or noise. Excluding manure destined for biogas production or composting plants from the scope of the Waste Framework Directive would result in excluding such plants from the scope of the IPPC Directive.

To conclude, I should like once again to congratulate and thank Mrs Jackson for her excellent work. The Commission is very pleased with the outcome of the negotiations and can accept the proposed compromise amendments in full.

Caroline Jackson, rapporteur. – Madam President, just briefly I would like to thank all those colleagues who took part in the debate. There is only one colleague that I want to respond to, and that is Mr Davies – hereinafter known as ‘Chris ‘Newsnight’ Davies’, for the programme that he likes appearing on – who said that I gave in too easily in the Council. I hope that my colleagues will reinforce me when I say that I did not give in too easily and that I have never given in easily on anything. As Mrs Laperrouze will attest on the water issue, the Council is getting increasingly difficult to negotiate with. As the recession bites, it realises that this legislation is going to cost money and it is reluctant to accept Parliament’s amendments.

We have a choice tomorrow morning. We can agree to the package of amendments before us and I hope very much that is what will happen. We can vote through some major amendments, for example on by-products, which will mean that the package falls and we all go into conciliation. Won’t that be fun! Or we can agree perhaps to some minor amendment, or to an amendment which is characterised by its movers as minor, such as Amendment 88 on which I await the Commission’s opinion, perhaps overnight.

I think it is very doubtful indeed as to whether the Council will accept any amendments, however minor, so I am in favour of the package itself, unamended. After all, the package must mean something, otherwise why did the Council fight so strongly over it? It is not a meaningless package as the Greens are trying to make out; it is a package with teeth.

I would like in conclusion to thank the shadows – Caroline Jackson and the Shadows, it sounds like a 1960s band – for their cooperation, without necessarily wishing to see them again and again and again in conciliation. I think we ought to try to put this issue to bed tomorrow morning.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow, Tuesday, 17 June.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Richard Seeber (PPE-DE), in writing. – (DE) With the new framework directive on waste, Parliament has now won acceptance for the establishment of high and binding recycling quotas. There was, indeed, an urgent need for these, and I look forward confidently to a future in which waste separation and recycling

will be practised to an ever-increasing extent throughout Europe. I believe that 50% recycling of household waste and 70% recycling of building and demolition waste by 2020 are very good targets that pave the way towards a functioning system of environment-friendly and climate-friendly waste management in the whole of Europe. Precisely because the Austrians are already exemplary in separating and recycling waste, I am delighted that all the other Member States will now be taking part in these operations, thereby bringing us another step closer to efficient protection of the environment. We should not forget that waste products are also raw materials and that more efficient use of these materials can help to combat climate change too.

It is now a matter of waiting for the Commission to make its specific proposal as to how we can ensure that economic growth does not mean growing volumes of waste.

20. Environmental quality standards in the field of water policy (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on the recommendation for second reading (A6-0192/2008) by Anne Laperrouze, on behalf of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, on the Council common position for adopting a directive of the European Parliament and of the Council on environmental quality standards in the field of water policy and amending Directives 82/176/EEC, 83/513/EEC, 84/156/EEC, 84/491/EEC, 86/280/EEC and 2000/60/EC (11486/3/2007 – C6-0055/2008 – 2006/0129(COD)).

Anne Laperrouze, rapporteur. – (FR) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, the report we are presenting today at second reading is the outcome of teamwork, thanks to which we have reached an agreement with the Slovenian Presidency and the European Commission. For me, it was a real pleasure to work on seeking a compromise with my co-rapporteurs from the political groups. I was fortunate to have competent and experienced colleagues, who listened carefully and were present at the negotiating meetings. I would like to offer them my warm thanks, and I also want to thank the secretariat of the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, the political group advisers and my assistant, Sylvain Maréchal.

I am using the phrase teamwork because we did excellent work together with the representatives of the Slovenian Presidency, who took account of Parliament's recommendations, and with the representatives of the European Commission, who gave us answers that made it easier for us to understand this proposal for a directive. I think we can all recognise the fruits of our cooperation in the compromise amendments that will be tabled for the vote tomorrow. So I thank everybody for having helped me in my job as rapporteur on this technical dossier.

I come now to the substance. The framework directive on water sets out a strategy to combat the chemical pollution of water. This proposal for a daughter directive aims, by establishing environmental quality standards, to guarantee a high level of protection against the risks that certain substances pose to the aquatic environment.

Let me highlight the main advances of this compromise text. We have introduced two major principles: the polluter pays principle and the principle of priority correction at source. The most significant aspects are practical ones. For example, the transitional areas of exceedance – redefined as mixing zones – are no longer simply zones that are established but now serve as a tool for underlining a problem, and it follows that it is up to the Member States to describe the corrective measures.

The main object of this directive was to harmonise standards at Community level. As a matter of course, it would therefore be up to the Commission to define the guidelines for harmonising inventories, emissions, discharges and mixing zones. We achieved that. We have also managed to ensure that more account will be taken of the situation of transboundary surface water bodies between Member States but also from third countries.

In regard to additional substances, Parliament had hoped to add a consistent number. On the basis of a preliminary filtering, the Commission has selected 13 substances it regards as giving cause for concern. The compromise clearly stipulates that on the basis of scientific data the Commission will have 24 months to pronounce on the final classification and to propose the relevant limit values. That represents fairly considerable progress, because in the main these substances are PCBs, free cyanide, EDTA, dioxins and bisphenols.

On the thorny question of sediments and biota, in the absence of scientific consensus, the compromise provides that Member States must monitor them in order to assess the long-term trends of the substances that accumulate there.

Finally, surprised that the proposal contained no new measures to monitor emissions, MEPs secured the compromise that stipulates, in Article 7, that the Commission shall, on the basis of reports from Member States, evaluate the effectiveness of existing legislation and progress in the reduction of the extent of the mixing zones, and then make amendments or propose the relevant legislation.

In view of those advances, I would ask Members to support this compromise package.

IN THE CHAIR: MR BIELAN

Vice-President

Stavros Dimas, *Member of the Commission*. – (EL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, today we are discussing one of the most crucial challenges of environmental policy: the protection of our water resources for our own benefit and that of future generations.

Let me begin by congratulating the rapporteur, Mrs Laperrouze, and the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety on the excellent work they have done, and their collaboration on this directive.

As you will remember, in the Water Framework Directive, the main legislative instrument for EU policy on the protection of water, allowance was made for further legislation being necessary on two issues: EU quality standards for groundwater and EU quality standards for priority substances in surface water.

The Groundwater Directive was approved at the end of 2006 by means of the conciliation procedure. Today the European Parliament is to decide at second reading on the proposed directive on environmental quality standards for priority substances in surface water. The directive lays down harmonised quality standards for the 33 listed substances, so that the basic concept of good water quality is expressed in fixed numerical values based on the best available scientific data and knowledge. The directive will thus contribute towards achieving a high level of protection of the aquatic environment and human health. This is, moreover, the aim of the Water Framework Directive.

The Commission is determined to keep a close eye on the enforcement of this directive and the Water Framework Directive. It also aims to monitor and evaluate the available information on the presence and impact of substances not included in the priority list or the list of priority hazardous substances. It intends to submit proposals for the adoption of further necessary measures, as appropriate.

Throughout the negotiation process, Parliament's interventions on various important issues have contributed towards securing the ambitious level of targets originally proposed by the Commission. This applies especially to key points such as: the future revision of the priority substances list, which is now clearly linked to environmental quality standards and will be proposed within two years of the entry into force of this directive; the list of candidate substances to be examined when the existing list is revised; and the criteria for the inventory of emissions, discharges and leaks, and for mixing zones.

Let me also briefly mention the issue of pollutant emission control. As you know, the Water Framework Directive provides for an approach linking emission controls and environmental quality standards. Emission controls are to a large extent covered by existing Community legislation. In addition to emission controls under the directives on urban waste-water treatment, pollution caused by nitrates from agricultural sources, and integrated pollution prevention and control (directives that were already in force when the Water Framework Directive was approved in 2000), more than 30 Community legislative instruments have in the meantime been enacted or proposed by the Commission. Let me mention some of these by way of example: the REACH Regulation, the Regulation on Persistent Organic Pollutants, the Mining Waste Directive, and the restrictions on use of substances under the Pesticides Directive, and the Directive on Restriction of the Circulation and Use of Certain Hazardous Substances.

We therefore believe that the Member States have sufficient legislative tools at their disposal to achieve the aims of the Water Framework Directive.

In addition, the Commission will assess the need for further control measures at Community level and, if necessary, submit proposals when revising the list of priority substances. The Commission will also assess

the need to class priority substances as priority hazardous substances, taking into account the new information that will be available, and the latest developments within the scope of the REACH Regulation.

Let me end by once again expressing my satisfaction with the work that has been jointly accomplished, particularly by the rapporteur. I reaffirm the Commission's full support for the compromise package of measures that has been agreed on this very important legislative instrument at second reading.

Robert Sturdy, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Mr President, I would like to congratulate Mrs Laperrouze. She has been an outstanding rapporteur and I have very much enjoyed working with her. I am delighted that the Commission has said that it will endorse this report.

The proposed directive – and I will not go over all the ground that Mrs Laperrouze has covered, but I have to add some of my own comments – a daughter directive to the Water Framework Directive – ensures the final piece of legislation for good-quality water for different Member States. Together with the rapporteur, the Council and Commission, we have had a lot of discussions, and I think we have finally agreed on a compromise package on which we are all in agreement. I urge – as did the rapporteur – everyone to vote in favour of it. I believe it is a balanced package: the environment will be protected, the water quality of our citizens will be increased, and the burden on the economy will be reasonable – and I think that is also important. Through the negotiations we had many discussions with NGOs and industry and came up with a proposal which is excellent.

The proposal limits the concentration of chemical substances, hazardous groups including heavy metals, some pesticides and other hazardous chemicals in surface water. It is based very much on the principle of preventative actions. The Member States may designate – as the rapporteur said – mixing zones, where concentrations of chemical substances may exceed the relevant environmental quality standards under certain circumstances, but of course they will have to reach and be monitored with great care. We have zones which may be designated as mixing zones in transboundary water bodies – an excellent piece of legislation. It says here that Member States shall collect information, including maps. I think we might have difficulty in getting the maps, but nevertheless we will sort that out. It provides for the establishment of a river basin management plan, dredging and shipping – even this leads to discharges and emissions. Losses of priority substances can now take place, providing it reaches the Water Framework Directive.

Ladies and Gentlemen, I leave you with one last thought. Water is the staff of life – this directive is so important. Even on Mars, it is the staff of life.

Marie-Noëlle Lienemann, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, let me in my turn thank Mrs Laperrouze and all the shadow rapporteurs, as well as the Slovenian Presidency, for the work they have done.

This is the last daughter directive under the framework directive on water, and it was very important for us to reach a compromise that represents genuine progress in terms of our ambition to combat pollution, and in particular the chemical pollution of water. It is clear from the news every day how much the presence of PCBs damages our Community's water resources.

Mme Laperrouze has listed all the points on which we have made progress. Of course, as ever with compromises, we would have preferred to achieve more, but I believe we have secured a good basis. Quite simply, we will remain vigilant because much will now depend on the Commission, and we hope that when it takes measures to support the findings of scientific experts, it will prove to be very ambitious in classifying future priority substances and priority hazardous substances, the famous 13 substances that are to be classified in the very near future. We will also take care to ensure that the current scientific uncertainty as regards sediments and biota will not create a kind of soft focus that will in the long term exempt the European Union from endeavouring to understand and improve the quality of those biota and sediments.

Lastly, there is a need to improve the mixing zones and the knowledge of pollutants and sources of pollution, together with the monitoring of emissions. We will ensure that Parliament remains vigilant, and I thank the Commissioner for pointing out that alongside the provisions in the compromise on which we will be voting, the Commission wanted to provide information on the implementation of the framework directive on water and, if necessary and if any delays build up in the Member States or any doubts need to be raised, to present complementary measures to ensure that we do indeed achieve environmentally acceptable water in 2015, in line with our vote in 2000.

Chris Davies, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, as the rapporteur is a member of my group and a close colleague, the House will understand if I defend her agreement. Perhaps we could have done more, perhaps another chemical here or there could have been included in the package, but scientific opinion is divided; political will is not always strong. In the words of the previous rapporteur, this can reasonably be described as ‘as good as it gets’.

I think water policy is one of the successes of European environment policy. I think that we should pay tribute to the work of the Commission over the years and indeed to Mrs Lienemann for her work on the Water Framework Directive some seven years ago. Even when no transboundary issues are involved, the collective determination to address the pollution of both past and present years has brought about levels of investment to secure improvement in water quality that have far exceeded what would have been achieved if Member States had been left to act in isolation. The laws we have put in place are clear in this instance. Pollution is identifiable and measurable. The requirements to prevent it are enforceable and this legislation takes us a step forward by introducing further prohibitions on a range of chemicals, pesticides, pollutants that present a risk to aquatic and indeed human life.

But we also see reports from the European Environment Agency that there are many instances of Member States still failing to enforce the legislation as effectively and as adequately as should be the case. So on this note of agreement across the House about the nature of this legislation and the positive direction in which Europe is going when it comes to water quality, let us also look to the Commission to say, ‘You have the powers to investigate, to act and to enforce – please use them’.

Margrete Auken, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DA) Mr President, I should also like to thank Mrs Laperrouze for her friendly, obliging cooperation. It did prove possible to retain a vestige of the positive outcome of first reading in spite of everything but, all the same, what we have here today is a poor show. Most of what had been achieved has been lost following lobbying by the agrochemical industry and the less efficient among the public regulatory authorities. What we are discussing today are the sad remains.

Our overarching aim is to progressively improve water quality in European rivers and lakes. Copious pesticide use in agriculture and toxic industrial discharges must be curbed, and tough requirements must be enforced regarding the quantity of the priority substances or priority hazardous substances permitted in water. The weakness of the present report is that there is no real political will to scrutinise any more substances. It has already become clear that the present system, under which substances on the list are to be examined and new ones added, at best works too slowly. If the precautionary principle were to hold force, a number of other substances would have to be examined, but we are letting that possibility slip through our fingers.

In addition, it is not clear what it takes for a substance to be declared so hazardous that it has to be banned completely. We have ended up with a number of substances that are in all likelihood extremely hazardous, yet the Commission balks at finally banning them. This is unacceptable: if a substance is hazardous, it is hazardous. We must monitor whether the Commission gets going with the examination of these substances or whether it just continues to put off taking a position on the grounds that it does not have enough data. If that is the case, it should go and get the data.

There are some improvements. For example, countries must now chart sources of pollution and also include concentrations in sediment and biota. In addition, the Commission is not permitted to wait until as late as 2025, as it had wished, to review the situation. It must produce such a review in 2018.

Yes, we shall be voting in favour of this report. We are thankful for small mercies following a downturn of the kind seen after first reading.

Wiesław Stefan Kuc, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Mr President, there are thousands of sources of contamination of surface and ground water, not just agriculture and the agrifood industry, mines and chemical factories, but also residential homes.

Wherever there is no water treatment plant, we are putting ever-increasing amounts of poison into our scarce water resources. Landfill sites are a source of many poisonous substances, and biological wastewater treatment plants cannot purify the waste coming from them, as the bacteria themselves get poisoned. Deposits on the bottoms of lakes and artificial reservoirs also store poisonous substances. How to clean them – this is the problem. If they flow into the seas or the oceans, they will poison the whole globe; and this is what is happening over time. Cleaning reservoirs of these deposits will be very costly and there are no technologies to do this.

I would also like to speak once again of the thousands of tonnes of outdated pesticides that are systematically poisoning our water and have already reached depths of 1 000 metres. For this reason our group believes that despite the cost, the Directive should pay more attention to protecting water.

Jens Holm, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (SV) The intention of this directive was to lay down environmental quality standards for a number of hazardous chemicals and thereby protect watercourses from chemicals and other harmful substances. Unfortunately the lobbyists have been adept at influencing both the European Commission and the Council of Ministers. Now that this matter has come up for second reading, regrettably the good intentions have been thoroughly watered down. One example of this is that only 11 of the 29 chemicals over which we wanted Parliament to have monitoring powers are now classified as hazardous substances. There will be no concrete requirement for Member States to meet reduction targets. Nevertheless this compromise is better than what the Commission had originally proposed. Hence we in the GUE/NGL Group support it, but you may be sure that we shall be following the matter closely and seeking to ensure that watercourses do get better protection in future. When the time for a review comes, we hope that there will be some further tightening up. I have a question for Commissioner Dimas, who is here this evening: how would you feel if individual Member States wanted to go further and adopt more extensive measures than are stipulated in this Directive? If individual Member States wanted to classify more substances than those listed under this compromise, would you let them go ahead and thus adopt more stringent legislation?

Johannes Blokland, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group.* – (NL) Mr President, first of all I should like to thank the rapporteur, Mrs Laperrouze, for all her work in the negotiations with the Council.

I think what we have is a very good compromise package for water quality standards. I am particularly pleased that the concept of mixed zones is retained. On that subject, I have a question for Commissioner Dimas.

From the point of view of feasibility it is an important concept, provided, of course, that it does not significantly damage the environment. The framework water directive calls for the drinking water purification effort to be reduced. Drinking water standards are strictly than water quality standards. There are various collection points for drinking water in surface water, and it can happen in practice that the collection points are fairly close to a source of pollution, so that a collection point might be in a mixed zone and the purification effort for water purification companies is increased. Can Commissioner Dimas assure me that he will do everything possible to prevent mixed zones creating problems for drinking water collection points?

Richard Seeber (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, I, too, would like to thank the rapporteur and the Commission for the very constructive work that has been done on this proposal.

I wish to remind the House that this is a compromise package. It is a very sound compromise that has been negotiated here, and it is certainly another piece in the jigsaw of excellent water quality in Europe. I do wish to stress that Europe is the continent, or the political entity, that sets great store by its environment and imposes very high standards. It may be that our goal could be achieved more quickly but, if we compare Europe with other parts of the world, we can claim to have attained a very high standard, and that standard must be maintained and further improved.

In this context, I would also like to remind the Commission that we need to be effective in selling these successes that we have incontestably achieved in the field of European environmental policy, and especially water policy. The Irish referendum in particular, however, shows that we have not managed to convey this success story. Europe is highly successful in the environmental field, but very few of its population are aware of its leading role. It may well be that lobbyists have watered down the compromise to some extent, but there are also other lobbies which have helped to ensure that the compromise does indeed impose the need for strenuous efforts on the part of industrial firms, farmers and other polluters.

In this context, let me remind you that water is certainly one of the elements on which we shall have to focus more political attention in future. I must ask the Commissioner to keep his eye on the future development of water policy, because climate change in particular is set to confront us with new problems, and the importance of water to the economy and to human life is set to increase sharply.

On the whole, it is a balanced compromise, and I ask all my fellow Members to endorse it. It was not possible to achieve any more.

Dorette Corbey (PSE). – (NL) Mr President, I should like to thank the rapporteur, Mrs Laperrouze, for her work, which has led to a satisfactory agreement at second reading. Clean surface water is, of course, very

important. There are regular reports of excessive mercury and other harmful substances in fish. That is unhealthy for people and the environment and we definitely have to do something about it. The result we have here is a good balance between protection of the environment on the one hand and, on the other hand, cost effectiveness for businesses, water companies and governments. The European Parliament has successfully pressed for a number of improvements. Thus mixed zones close to discharge points where a higher level of pollution is allowed have to be clearly demarcated and Member States have to indicate how mixed zones can be reduced in the future.

Parliament also has a policy for the future: substances that might be harmful have to be put on a separate list for further investigation. I am strongly in favour of that.

I also support the question that Mr Blokland put to Commissioner Dimas on discharge points and drinking water collection points in mixed zones.

I should also like to draw attention to a number of source measures, particularly near hospitals, and to leftover medicines. That is another important point to look at in the future.

Hiltrud Breyer (Verts/ALE). – (DE) Mr President, as we know, water is the most precious of all resources, and we must not let our water drain away by choosing not to adopt an ambitious water policy. It is very regrettable that the momentum imparted by the European Parliament at first reading to the protection of our water resources has been dissipated by the doubling of the list of hazardous substances subject to control and the obligation imposed on EU Member States to reduce their pollutant emissions. The result is therefore a missed opportunity to do more to protect our water. In the context of water protection, it is important to ensure consistency across the various fields of legislation. We need a ban on carcinogenic, mutagenic and reproductively toxic (CMR) pesticides and endocrine disrupters. That is why I find it regrettable that the Commission constantly plays the role of a shunting yard at the expense of the environment and public health. In 2006, the Commission said that, in its draft instrument on environmental quality, it did not intend to make any proposals on the reduction of the volume and toxicity of priority hazardous substances. They should be made in REACH and in the framework of pesticides legislation. But what actually happened? It was a parliamentary report, our proposal from this House, that established consistency with the Water Framework Directive and with pollutants legislation. Parliament did that, not the Commission, which had promised to do it.

Our demand, then, is that no pesticides that feature on the list of priority hazardous substances should be authorised. The simplest solution is to ensure that these hazardous substances cannot get into our water in the first place.

Cristina Gutiérrez-Cortines (PPE-DE). – (ES) Mr President, I would like to congratulate Mrs Laperrouze, who has worked extraordinarily hard with other colleagues in my Group, and with Parliament as a whole, to reach agreement and form a consensus.

I am very pleased with this Directive, which deals with several important issues. First, as Mrs Lienemann said, sustainability is a process, and water treatment, improvements in the quality of water and water policy form part of a process that we began many years ago. Above all, it is a process that has to be realistic, because it has to be put into practice.

It is much easier to legislate than implement. It is much cheaper to legislate than implement. It does not cost anything to ban something. However, implementation means that companies, farmers and local councils have to put policies into practice, which is not always easy.

I think that this is an important step forward, but we have to be realistic, because, as we saw yesterday, for example, in the referendum, it is sometimes not easy to be European. It costs money and effort and that is something we are doing right now, especially considering that this is a policy that applies Europe-wide.

The entire water policy has to be implemented throughout Europe, and we therefore have to deal with enormously complex situations, with many factors, including extremely important geophysical factors.

I would like to mention two other aspects of this directive that I think represent progress. First, it requires much more transparency from governments. Water has always been rather opaque. In the European Water Forum, one of our objectives is transparency in providing information to the public, and we are now seriously addressing our commitment to transparency of information to the public.

The same is true of the indicators, including molluscs, and I want to emphasise the importance of water analysis for health.

Justas Vincas Paleckis (PSE). – (LT) I would like to congratulate the rapporteur and express my full support for the idea that we need more stringent regulations on the quality of surface water and the effectiveness of the assessment of Community legislation.

The small EU countries situated at the outer borders are facing a very sensitive issue – water contamination from neighbouring EU countries. It is neither the wish nor the intention of the EU to fence itself off with an ‘iron curtain’ as far as ecology and other issues are concerned. Therefore, it is equally important to reduce contamination both within the EU countries and in the neighbourhood. Amendment 26 points out the Commission’s obligation to present a detailed report on the situation regarding pollution originating from third countries, one year after the date of entry into force of the Directive. The Commission should do more to encourage further implementation of environmental obligations during the course of negotiations with neighbouring countries. This issue is of the greatest importance to the countries that share river basins with neighbouring EU countries.

Christa Kläß (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, ‘Water is life’ or ‘Water – valuable as diamonds’: those were the headlines and the motivation when we launched the Water Framework Directive in the year 2000. The directive on environmental quality standards in the field of water policy is now the last major daughter instrument to the Water Framework Directive. Its purpose is to set environmental quality standards for priority substances and priority hazardous substances so as to ensure that our water, the source of life, receives a high level of protection from risks, by which I mean the highest possible level of protection – the protection that is necessary and possible on the basis of the latest scientific knowledge.

In my view, however, this also means that the protection of water is a permanent task. We shall have to keep a constant political eye on scientific studies and findings with a view to assimilating new discoveries and guaranteeing the protection of water at all times and in all circumstances in accordance with the latest science and technology. It must never happen again that – as in the present case – the Commission does not fulfil its mandate and allows time to elapse without acting. The list of priority hazardous substances must be constantly reviewed and checked without delay. The Commission’s failure to act prompted us in Parliament to take action and propose a second list – a list containing substances that require checking on the basis of the latest findings. This list must not pre-classify or prejudge substances. It should also provide an opportunity to clear substances of suspicion. Substances must not, of course, be included in such a list on a mere whim. The PPE-DE Group has called for a faster and more prioritised treatment of the substances on which data are already available that indicate high risk levels. Six months will suffice, in our view.

I do very much hope, Commissioner, that full use will not be made of the 24-month period which is currently prescribed, for it must always be possible to act on safety findings without delay. We shall support *en bloc* the compromise worked out by Mrs Laperrouze.

Péter Olajos (PPE-DE). – (HU) Thank you, Mr President. Most of Europe’s rivers are shared by several countries, which benefit from the river’s resources and share in the responsibility this entails. The water quality each Member State receives depends on the country upstream. The Danube, for example, flows through seven countries, the Drava six, and the Rhine and the Tisza five. This poses a major challenge and calls for cooperation on a large scale. Hopefully the adoption of this legislation will help to bring an end to the foam that has been present on the River Raba for the past seven years. At the moment, bathing in Hungary’s only genuine river wetland is only to be recommended if you are wearing one of the swimsuits shown in the pictures distributed to Members of this House, and which are also to be seen on flyers and posters. The River Raba of course merely act as a kind of litmus paper, showing that something is amiss with the current legislation, because if everyone is adhering to all the legal limits and there is still thick foam on the river, then something must be wrong with the legislation in this regard. This is why we must change it, and I therefore ask you all to cast your vote tomorrow in support of the compromise package.

Gyula Hegyi (PSE). – (HU) My fellow Members have already stated that fresh water is perhaps the most valuable resource of the 21st century, and one cannot disagree with this. It is also true that in Europe the situation is basically good, in terms of both fresh water quantity and quality. I would like to draw your attention to an issue that has not been raised so far, namely the fact that as a result of climate change the precipitation curve, and with it the distribution curve of fresh water recoverable from it, is becoming increasingly extreme. This means that we are having long, hot summers and torrential rainfall events throughout Europe. Over and above all the environmental considerations we have discussed, therefore, we

also need a system for managing water resources that, unlike the present system, basically captures this water and enables it to be stored for use in dry years. It is also vitally important that this should be made European Union policy, because this would enable us to maintain the quantity of fresh water in Europe; its quality, meanwhile, will be assured by the legislation. Thank you.

Marios Matsakis (ALDE). – Mr President, water pollution takes place in rivers, in lakes and in the ground, but it can also take place during transportation. This risk has been aggravated recently with the drought we are having in southern Europe, where a large number of oil tankers are now being converted for the transportation of drinking water. This is an area where, perhaps, expertise is lacking. I would like to ask the Commissioner to make sure that such transportation will be totally safe and devoid of any pollution by aromatic hydrocarbons, which, as we all know, can cause serious damage to both humans and animals.

Stavros Dimas, Member of the Commission. – (EL) Mr President, in addition to the points I mentioned in my introductory statement, the proposed directive also contributes to the process of simplifying EU legislation on water.

You will remember that the Water Framework Directive already includes provisions on the repeal of seven previous legislative acts dating from the 1970s and 1980s. The present directive will repeal five more directives and will at the same time simplify the submission of water reports under the WISE framework, the newly established Water Information System for Europe. In this way, we shall gain a better knowledge base for decision-making at political and technical level.

You will also remember that Parliament attached particular importance to the target of eliminating or phasing out certain substances included in the Water Framework Directive. The planned inventory, which will include maps, will be a necessary source of information for everyone. It will serve as an assessment tool for investigations by the Commission into whether the environmental target of progressive reduction or gradual elimination is being met.

The Water Framework Directive and its ‘daughter directive’ will provide a firm, predictable and long-term basis for decision-making at every level, from river basin and local level to European level. This is particularly important for drafting the river basin management plans and the programmes of measures to be submitted by December 2009. Last year the Commission submitted its first report on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive. The report included an assessment of achievements and shortcomings. Now it is up to the Member States to meet their obligations in time.

I should like to take this opportunity to remind you that EU financial aid is available under the regional development and cohesion policy and the rural development policy. It is the Member States’ right and also their responsibility to choose their priorities and projects.

Article 7 of the Water Framework Directive has already laid down the obligations for drinking water, and this compromise does not alter the relevant procedures and provisions.

I should like to point out that Member States must report their compliance with Article 15 of the Water Framework Directive and the measures they are taking to reduce the spread of mixing zones, as well as the international coordination on defining mixing zones. In addition, if a Member State wishes to impose stricter environmental standards, the Commission will have no objection.

To conclude, the Commission is in the happy position of expressing full support for the compromise package in order to achieve an agreement on this directive at second reading. At this point I should like once again to thank the rapporteur for the excellent work she has done.

On the problem raised by Mr Matsakis about transporting water to Cyprus, I know the problem exists and I shall answer this question later.

Anne Laperrouze, rapporteur. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, thank you for your contribution to this debate. You may ask what our final objectives are with this directive. They are, of course, to improve the quality of bodies of surface water. We do not want to find any more lead, cadmium, nickel, mercury, solvents or other highly toxic and carcinogenic substances such as PCBs in our waters. Mrs Lienemann referred to a news report a fortnight ago that showed that PCBs were bio-accumulated in fish and that man then ate those fish. We can no longer accept such a situation, and I believe that the citizens of Europe may also expect Europe to send out a strong signal that it is protecting our environment, protecting our health. I believe that we will be able to get that European message across if we respect this framework directive on water, together with its daughter directives.

Some Members have said that not enough substances were listed, that Parliament had backtracked in relation to the first reading. At first reading we had proposed 33 + 28 substances in total, i.e. 61 analysed substances. At second reading, we have a total of 33 + 13, i.e. 46, but we must point out that these are hazardous substances of particular concern that should no longer occur in river waters today. The other point of interest in this directive is that it allows us to check compliance with European legislation – I am thinking here of the implementation of the REACH regulation and of the IPPC. We now have an instrument to verify that.

The Commissioner has heard my colleagues say that if the Council and Parliament approve this text, the ball is in its court. It has an enormous amount of work to do, it has a great many analyses to conduct and inventories to draw up. I wish it all the best. In any case, we will continue to monitor this legislation.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Tuesday, 17 June 2008.

21. Reinforcing the Union's disaster response capacity (debate)

President. – The next item is a statement from the Commission on reinforcing the Union's disaster response capacity.

Stavros Dimas, Member of the Commission. – (EL) Mr President, last year, thanks to the Community Civil Protection Mechanism, the EU mobilised *en masse* to help the Member States stricken by the catastrophic forest fires.

We have identified certain points that require immediate attention in a bid to avoid similar disasters in future.

Firstly, we need to overcome the lack of available technical resources for disaster relief. This was noted during the operations in 2007.

Secondly, there must be an integrated approach to dealing with forest fires, and prevention, readiness and response.

Thirdly, the operational capability of the Commission's Monitoring and Information Centre should be strengthened.

The Commission has already adopted some practical operational measures, the main ones being:

- the establishment and training of a network of forest-fire experts;
- interoperability training for national firefighting teams;
- a large-scale exercise organised in Sardinia in April, with the participation of forces from five Member States;
- the formation of three civil protection units for aerial forest firefighting.

Funds have already been secured for the transport of aid equipment. In addition, under the 2008 pilot programme for forest fires, we are cooperating with Member States to create tactical reserves that will be on standby for emergencies in Europe.

In addition, between 2007 and 2013, approximately EUR 5.8 billion will be available under the cohesion policy programmes, for risk prevention and response to various types of disaster, including forest fires.

A further EUR 1.6 billion will be available from the rural development funds to restore forest resources and initiate preventive actions.

Lastly, for the most devastating natural disasters, the option of support from the European Solidarity Fund is retained.

In the Communication it presented in March, the Commission underlined the need for an integrated approach to disaster management, which must include prevention, readiness, response and restoration. It examined all types of natural and man-made disasters, within and outside the EU, and also all the Community resources available for disaster response.

In addition to civil protection, the Communication examined three other areas of Community action:

- strengthening European humanitarian aid;
- improving the coordination of intervention capability for disaster response;
- upgrading interinstitutional cooperation, i.e. cooperation between European agencies or institutions.

We are also developing an action plan. This will be ready in the summer and will map out a range of specific initiatives over and above those mentioned in the Communication, such as:

- analysis of the shortcomings in material and technical support capability, for both humanitarian and civil protection actions. This will enable us to determine which particular tools are available, which are the most necessary, and which are most cost-effective;
- support for initiatives to limit disaster risks in third countries;
- closer cooperation with the UN, the International Bank and various NGOs, with a view to strengthening disaster response capability at global level;
- better use of science, technology and innovation;
- an upgrade in the role of our agencies in disaster response throughout the world;
- a more effective evaluation of disaster damage.

As regards disaster prevention, there is at present no integrated European approach. To address this issue, the Commission is preparing a communication to assess the added value of instituting a Community disaster prevention mechanism. The Commission will present possible options aiming at:

- improving our knowledge of disasters and their impact;
- improving the interconnection of related policies, e.g. the interconnection between land-use planning and disaster prevention;
- improving the use of Community resources.

In addition to this initiative, which will focus on the EU, the Commission is drawing up a strategy for disaster risk reduction in developing countries.

Lastly, the Commission has taken a series of measures to strengthen the EU's intervention capability to respond to disasters that might occur in Europe. In particular, the Commission's Monitoring and Information Centre is being strengthened. Since we do not currently have detailed analyses of the gaps and shortcomings in response capability in the event of major disasters, we are in the process of analysing disaster scenarios and testing innovative arrangements. This will release civil protection resources and capabilities for operations on a European scale. By mid-2009, the Commission also intends to submit proposals for a European disaster response training network.

To conclude, I would like to thank Parliament for the constant, steady support it is giving in strengthening the Community's disaster response capability. This support is reaffirmed in the draft resolution that is to be put to the vote in plenary.

Antonios Trakatellis, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (EL) Mr President, in recent years many EU Member States have been stricken by natural disasters such as fires, floods and earthquakes. Human lives have been lost, properties, farms and houses have been destroyed, and the environment has suffered devastating damage that will take many years to repair.

One of the key principles on which the EU was founded is that of solidarity. This means that in the event of a natural disaster, it is extremely important that the EU should be able to provide not only coordinated technical assistance, but also, through the European Solidarity Fund, financial resources to stricken areas. I have listened with interest to the Commissioner's analysis of all the elements of prevention and coordinated intervention, and we expect to see corresponding action on the part of the European Commission.

Allow me to focus attention on an issue concerning the European Solidarity Fund. I consider it unjustifiable for the Council decision not to adopt the regulation on the European Solidarity Fund, and this decision should therefore be revised.

The restructuring of the European Fund will contribute significantly. Firstly, the EU will be in a better position to manage natural disasters effectively and flexibly. Secondly, citizens left homeless and insecure after a disaster will immediately be aware of European solidarity. They will understand the importance of being citizens not only of a country, but also of the EU.

Such are the policies and actions that European citizens expect of us, and I hope the regulation on the European Solidarity Fund will be adopted without delay.

Edite Estrela, *on behalf of the PSE Group.* – (PT) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, it is a sort of annual ritual, either before or after the summer: forest fires are on the political agenda. This is an increasingly serious issue, however, because natural disasters are linked to climate change. And because extreme weather events are gradually getting worse, scientists warn that natural disasters are becoming increasingly frequent and intense, which means periods of repeated and more extreme drought, heavier and more destructive flooding, more frequent bouts of excessive heat and more violent and larger forest fires which are more difficult to combat.

In 2006 the European Parliament approved three reports on this issue, in one of which the Environment Committee draftsman suggested that the Commission present a directive on fires. My question to the Commission is therefore: in view of the circumstances and bearing in mind that an integrated approach to this issue is needed – in other words, anti-climate change policy cannot be dissociated from civil protection policy – does the Commission not think that in these circumstances a directive on fires is justified?

Meanwhile, this debate is taking place at a particularly critical time: the energy crisis, the food crisis and so on. All this is also linked. Biomass, for example, should be exploited to clean up the forests, thereby avoiding fires, and used to produce energy at the same time. Another advantage of this is that it means that cereals are not being used to produce biofuels.

Marios Matsakis, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – Mr President, recitals A and D and paragraph 4 of this resolution clearly stress the value of prevention. This is extremely wise, as prevention is always better – much better – than cure. In this respect I wish to speak about a particular type of preventable mass disaster: that of building collapse. I was prompted to do so by an event that occurred in Cyprus very recently. Last Wednesday the steel roof of the 1 100-seat capacity municipal theatre of Nicosia collapsed, suddenly and without warning. The force of the falling steel beams and other debris crushed the seats below. Luckily the theatre was empty at the time; otherwise hundreds of civilians would have been killed or injured. In the previous few days this theatre was packed with children attending various school events. Two weeks ago the visiting Bolshoi Ballet performed there to a packed audience, and a few months ago President Barroso – along with many EU officials, MEPs, the President of Cyprus, ministers, MPs and many others – attended the ceremony of Cyprus's entry into the euro area in the same theatre. It is a miracle that a mass disaster of huge proportions did not occur.

It is noted that major reconstruction works costing approximately EUR 6 million were carried out in the building only three years ago but it seems that none of the responsible, esteemed and highly paid architects, engineers, government officials etc. managed to diagnose that the 50-year-old steel roof was totally unsafe. It is suspected that other public buildings in Cyprus may be structurally dangerous but, due to apparent negligence or ignorance, or corruption concerning relevant authorities or departments or private firms, corrective measures are not being implemented. A similar situation, in fact, may apply to other EU Member States. Incidentally, in Cyprus, public buildings are, mostly, totally not subject to anti-seismic legislation, although private buildings are. I call upon the Commission to make sure that, with this resolution, a check is carried out on the safety of buildings in the EU.

IN THE CHAIR: MR SIWIEC

Vice-President

Dimitrios Papadimoulis, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, we can all see that natural disasters are on the increase because they are caused by changes in both climate and land use.

The resolution I have drawn up – and I hope we shall have a near-unanimous vote on Thursday in plenary, as we did in the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety – calls on the Commission to stop procrastinating, talking idly and postponing.

I ask you, Commissioner: do you intend to take steps in the Commission to ensure that the Barnier proposal on the creation of a European civil protection force is approved, as the European Parliament repeatedly requests in its resolutions?

Do you intend to take steps to make the Solidarity Fund more flexible and less bureaucratic?

Do you intend to take steps to fill in the serious gaps in the legislation and the policies applied to allow Europe a greater and more effective presence in backing up the action taken by Member States where natural disasters are destroying properties and taking lives?

In the Committee on the Environment, we approved a series of questions to the Commission, and you told us today that in a year's time, in mid-2009, you would present proposals. The question is, when will the Commission decide to examine these issues seriously and give an answer to the European Parliament's proposal?

Which proposals do you agree with, and when will you carry them out? Which do you disagree with, and why? If the Council is holding you back and refusing to give you the funding you need, or if certain people in the Commission are preventing you, Mr Dimas, you should tell us so that we can help you. We do not want just fine words; we want action, so that this summer we will not be mourning the victims of major ecological disasters.

Dimitar Stoyanov (NI). – (BG) Earlier this evening I presented to this Parliament the face of corruption at the top in Bulgaria, Ahmed Dogan, and the party he heads, the Movement for Rights and Liberties. Now I would like to provide some specific information concerning forest fires.

It is a public secret in Bulgaria that what Dogan himself refers to as 'the circle of companies' around his party has been cutting down, for eight years now, the forests of Bulgaria. The easiest way for them to cover up this crime is to set up forest fires, and every summer thousands of hectares of Bulgarian forests are set on fire and burnt. And if that used to be a purely Bulgarian problem, today it emerges as a problem at the European level as well because Bulgaria is entitled to quite substantial subsidies to respond to disasters occurring in the forests. But where would these subsidies go through? These subsidies would be remitted to the Ministry of Emergencies, which is headed by Dogan's deputy, Mrs. Emel Etem. It is the ministry where tens of millions of euros from the European Solidarity Fund intended for the floods in Bulgaria have disappeared. And I call upon you, Mr. Commissioner, and you all, members, to come visit Bulgaria in order to see the kind of solidarity that Emel Etem has for her own constituency, that of the MRL to its own constituency, to the Muslim Bulgarians, who have been living in temporary shelter, in caravans not fit for living in, while the money from the European Solidarity Fund has sunk away somewhere in the depths of the ministry run by the MRL.

This is the reason why I bring up this issue. This is a grave crime against Bulgarian nature and against the European Union, a virtual theft of its funds. Whatever disaster may befall Bulgaria in the future, it can never compare to the disaster called Movement for Rights and Liberties.

Gerardo Galeote (PPE-DE). – (ES) Mr President, I welcome the Committee on the Environment's initiative, which we can add to a list of many others by the Committee on Regional Development in the present legislative period, even though these initiatives are not always well understood. The truth is that some developments, including some legal decisions, show our concerns were fully justified.

Nevertheless, it is sad to see the Council being so insensitive and unresponsive. It is also paradoxical that questions affecting the environment, regional policy and agriculture are the responsibility of the Ministers of Finance.

National governments should reflect on the stubborn refusal to reform the obsolete Solidarity Fund, despite the efforts of Parliament and the Commission and the clear public demand for such reform. I hope that this summer we do not suffer the scourge of fires, droughts and floods of other years. I hope the Council is not forced, once again, to issue empty communiqués of solidarity rather than offering coordinated civil protection mechanisms and funds to help people, leaving us to complain about citizens being indifferent and disinterested in what our institutions are doing.

Some members of the Committee on Regional Development have presented amendments to draw the Council's attention to the need for reforms and initiatives. We will see whether the Council, which is conspicuous by its absence today, is able to make some response.

Iratxe García Pérez (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, I would like to begin by welcoming Parliament's initiative to step up the European Union's disaster response capacity, given that, unfortunately, disasters are increasingly common and this will certainly become a fundamental challenge to our political initiative and capacity to respond rapidly.

We must adopt a wide-ranging approach that considers how to deal with, prevent and recover from disasters, so it is important we ask the Commission to urgently present proposals to prevent disasters in the European Union.

Similarly, we must take into account the need to recognise the specific nature of natural disasters caused by droughts and fires in the Mediterranean region and adapt our prevention, investigation, risk management, civil protection and solidarity mechanisms accordingly.

We know that the resources available to Member States to fight forest fires, especially from the air, are sometimes limited, so we ask the Commission to bring forward measures to finance community teams, with the aim of increasing capacity and complementing national resources.

This resolution must also make a firm request to Council to adopt a decision on the proposed Regulation of the Solidarity Fund, to facilitate a quicker and more effective response to disasters that Member States are unable to deal with alone. Neither can we forget the victims of these disasters, who need immediate aid and support.

We cannot remain indifferent to this situation, which, year after year, summer after summer, afflicts many parts of the European Union. We must be able to respond decisively to these unfortunate events and help the people who are caught up in them. The future is uncertain, and we in the European Union must get involved.

Françoise Grossetête (PPE-DE). – (FR) Mr President, it is surely regrettable that once again, on the eve of the holidays, we are meeting to discuss this same problem, which creates the impression that we are seeing no progress from one year to another. At a time when most of our fellow citizens have doubts about the effectiveness of Europe, it is urgently necessary to show them that when natural disasters, be they fires, floods or even epidemics, put people's life and property at risk, Europe can respond and that, basically, when they are in trouble, they need Europe and that Europe is there for them.

Where are we today? Once again, we talk about the need for solidarity and, of course, of the need for a binding framework. We absolutely must convince Member States of the need for a genuine, operational civil protection force equipped with financial reserves, assistance mechanisms and additional European resources. Of course we must strengthen humanitarian aid by filling the existing gaps as regards the provision of that aid and strengthening global capacity. We have to create a training network. As the Commissioner said, it is essential to train experts in emergency aid in the event of disasters, drawing on the experience acquired by Member States in the field of civil protection training. Above all, however, we need to take preventive action and in order to do that we need genuine policies relating to soil, land and forest. We need to take preventive action and only then can we prepare for disasters by taking remedial action and setting up early warning systems, for that is absolutely essential.

What is the situation with the Barnier report proposal? I would like to see practical results in the wake of that proposal.

Stavros Lambrinidis (PSE). – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, last September, many politicians expressed grief over the fire victims, but not many spoke of the responsibility they should have felt because the fires had been allowed to happen and we had suffered such disastrous results. Now, politicians should feel responsible. For this reason, before the summer and the outbreak of fires, the Socialist Group in the European Parliament requested in its oral question that we hold a debate here with the Commission on what was being done to prevent fires.

Commissioner, you said that EUR 5.8 billion would be made available for the period 2009-2013 to prevent fires. Today, in 2008, how much money have you allocated for prevention? How many governments, and which ones, have made use of this funding?

Unfortunately, last year when the worst fires occurred, the Greek Government acknowledged in its report to the Commission that there was a lack of coordination between the agencies concerned, and a lack of prevention plans. Have you, in the meantime, looked at what has been done in Greece to alleviate these problems, or are you simply allocating funds to governments that are likely to waste them?

Rolf Berend (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, as a signatory of some amendments on behalf of the PPE-DE Group and as a member and Vice-Chairman of the Committee on Regional Development, I would like to take the opportunity to present my views on the Solidarity Fund and its revision, as rapporteur of the European Parliament.

Since the report on the Commission's draft instrument on the new Solidarity Fund was adopted in Parliament by an overwhelming majority in May 2006, this draft has been with the Council, where a majority of the Member States reject the new Fund in its amended form. None of the intervening Council presidencies has included the new Solidarity Fund in its work programme. On the contrary, the revised version is being blocked in the Council by the Finance Ministers. Accordingly, the new Fund, designed to cover the period from 2007 to 2013, is not in force. Unfortunately, until further notice we only have the old Fund, which has been in existence in its present form since September 2002 and which was cobbled together hurriedly at the time. In tough negotiations and hard bargaining here in Parliament in 2006, we managed to work out compromises designed to make the Solidarity Fund a faster, more effective and, above all, more clearly defined emergency aid instrument. Now the Council wants to bury this revised version once and for all.

I fail to comprehend how we, as a community based on solidarity, can turn our backs in this way, because of the sensitivities of some Member States, on an emergency instrument whose name celebrates the concept of solidarity. We improved that instrument. We extended it. I cannot grasp why those who have already benefited from the Fund are now withholding their approval. For this reason I make an urgent appeal to the Council to reconsider its decision and finally adopt the revised version. We are a community based on solidarity, Mr President, and no one knows when or where the next disaster will occur. It will then be your responsibility ...

(The President cut off the speaker.)

Margaritis Schinas (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, it goes without saying that any substantial natural disaster management action by the EU has to be effective in prevention, response and regeneration. Yet what we find here is that, owing no doubt to pre-conceived ideas or to some fixation, there is a reaction against the EU getting involved in prevention. There is a very obvious reaction within the Commission itself, just as there is on some of the benches here, because some people think that the EU has no part to play in the matter.

I strongly object to this attitude. Without prevention we can achieve nothing. The sight of President Barroso flying in at the end in a helicopter, holding a cheque from the Solidarity Fund, is not what the EU's practice of solidarity is all about. Practice of solidarity means a comprehensive response framework. Mr Barnier has outlined a similar one, but it is still festering somewhere in the labyrinthine depths of bureaucracy. We have made our diagnosis clear and are now writing out the prescription.

Gyula Hegyi (PSE). – (HU) Under the previous agenda item, mention was made of the point that the majority of Europe's natural disasters are water-related: drought, floods, forest fires. One of the roots of the problem lies in traditional flood defence methods; to be more specific, it lies in the fact that if flooding occurs our main priority is to remove water as quickly as possible, but then a few months later when we have droughts or forest fires we are surprised to discover how useful it would have been to have had proper storage to capture the rainwater that fell when the floods or extreme precipitation events occurred. It would therefore be very important, and to some extent it could address – in other words help to prevent – the problems mentioned here, if we managed to realign the focus of water management as a whole to the principle that every drop of fresh water is a valuable resource that must be saved for more difficult, drier times. It would be especially important, particularly in the new Member States, to promote this to the level of Community policy, so that, as a Community policy, we could develop it using Community funds and thereby mitigate the damage that results from floods, drought and forest fires.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE). – (CS) Although I speak as a Member representing a country that is not going to experience serious problems with fires until we feel the full impact of global warming, I understand the importance of solidarity among European countries. Having listened to similar debates several times before, I firmly believe, as a former manager, that it is high time we had a common strategy focusing on prevention, on how to provide help when a country needs it. It is not a question of money. It is a question of capacity and targeted management, targeted aid that does not depend solely on financial means. I am also calling on the Council, all the presidencies and of course the Commission to make every effort to ensure that we in this House do not stand here empty-handed and can vote on whether we help today or in a week's time, whether the disaster is big or small.

Zbigniew Zaleski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, I am one of the five called under the catch-the-eye system. I wanted to say that there are two things we can do as regards natural disasters. The first is to prevent them to whatever degree we can, for example, flooding, and then when they occur we have to look after the people affected by these disasters. One of the activities is psychological counselling. We can see someone who has lost everything they had through flooding, their house, whatever they had; they continue living, but are destitute, and they experience an enormous sense of loss. I know from experience that the work of psychologists is very important at these times, so I believe that such disaster relief groups should include and provide funds for psychologists to go into action immediately in order to help these people.

Stavros Dimas, Member of the Commission. – (EL) Mr President, I thank all the speakers for their very positive contributions.

The Commission is committed to helping substantially towards strengthening the Community's disaster response capacity. In the Communication it issued in March, and through measures that are now in preparation, the Commission is adopting an integrated approach.

Firstly, we are examining all aspects of disasters: prevention, preparation, readiness, immediate response and long-term restoration.

Secondly, we are examining all types of disaster, both natural and man-made, within the EU and outside it.

Thirdly, we intend to integrate all the Community resources by improving coordination between EU agencies.

As for the points raised, first of all, Parliament and the European Commission agree on reforming the Solidarity Fund. Unfortunately, the Council rejects this reform. The Commission, however, does not intend to withdraw its proposal, and has high hopes that the Council will be won over.

As for the directive on forest fires, my departments are working on a communication on disaster prevention, and one option to be assessed is to institute legislation specifically on forest fires.

The Commission was the main driving force in adopting the Eurocodes on safe buildings. These are the European standards for the earthquake stability of buildings; they are now being incorporated into national legislation and are being enforced accordingly.

I am a very keen supporter of Mr Barnier's proposals. May I remind you, however, that the Council's unanimous approval is required. We all know that at present there is no unanimity among the Member States. For this reason, the preparation of our proposals is taking longer than we would wish. Let me simply remind you that under the Lisbon Treaty, a qualified majority in Council would be sufficient.

We have already financed Red Cross programmes for the provision of psychological relief, and further programmes are in preparation at technical level.

Lastly, the Commission notes the strong interest and increased role of the European Parliament in the field of disaster management. I look forward to excellent collaboration with Parliament and the Council in defining the limits of subsidiarity in order to promote and further develop the European dimension in disaster management.

President. – I have received one draft resolution⁽²⁾ submitted under Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 19 June 2008.

Written Statements (Rule 142)

Daciana Octavia Sârbu (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The forest fires in Greece, Italy and Spain during the summer of 2007 and the floods in Romania and Great Britain have led to an increase in the calls formulated for improving the efficiency of the EU response capacity in case of disasters. The frequency of disasters related to climate change has been increasing and requires multilateral and coordinated reactions to mobilize all available resources, taking into account aspects such as rapidity, efficiency and financial yield.

(2) See Minutes.

The actions proposed by the Commission, which will contribute to increasing the EU response to disasters include the strengthening of the Monitoring and Information Centre (MIC), improving the European Civil Protection response capacity and a better coordination between the UN and the Red Cross as regards the provision of humanitarian assistance. It is also intended to set up a European Disaster Response Training Network, early warning systems and the use of the European emergency number "112", which is not very well known in all Member States. In Romania, only 30% of the citizens know that this number can be called in case of emergency from any EU country and national authorities need to continue their efforts to promote this number in order to respond rapidly to problems related to climate change and other problems.

22. 1 July 2008, 40 years of Customs Union

President. – The next item is a statement from the Commission on celebrations to mark 40 years of Customs Union on 1 July 2008.

László Kovács, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, whenever we speak about international trade or European integration, we have to think of customs, which is responsible, at the EU external borders, for the correct administration of all the measures designed to tackle the dual challenge which customs is facing today: to facilitate trade while also protecting European citizens and the environment.

During the last 40 years, European customs has done its best to work efficiently together like one single administration. It has often been the *avant-garde* in European integration. It is truly remarkable that a policy which does not very often hit the front pages has nevertheless managed to play a pioneering role in opening new paths both for the economic development and the integration of the Community.

Today the role of customs remains important, difficult and, regrettably, not as highly valued by the public as it should be. However, the correct work of customs forms the basis for the success of our single market and the free movement of goods, persons, capital and services. Customs action touches the very core of Community work and impacts on the daily life of our citizens, often without people realising it.

In order to raise our citizens' awareness about the crucial role of customs, I have launched an EU-wide communication campaign on the occasion of the 40th anniversary of the Customs Union. Member States' customs authorities have backed this idea.

Last week I visited three main points of entry for goods at the EU's external borders – the Port of Rotterdam, Frankfurt Airport and the Rösztke crossing point at the Hungarian-Serbian border – with a view to highlighting the everyday work and the high motivation of our customs officials. This is the subject of a news package now available to the media in order to inform the public in the coming months.

Coming back to the core issues, customs today have to meet five strategic objectives:

The first is to protect the financial interests of the Community and its members. In 2007 the total amount of custom duties transferred to the EU budget amounted to EUR 16.6 billion, which represents 16% of the Community budget.

The second is to facilitate legitimate trade and to support the competitiveness of European companies: the modernisation of the Community Customs Code and the introduction of eCustoms are two instruments to this end. The most recent concrete achievement was the introduction of the Authorised Economic Operator concept as of 1 January 2008.

The third is to protect the safety of our citizens against terrorists, drugs and counterfeited and pirated goods that can even endanger their health and life, by controlling the supply chains used for the international movement of goods.

The fourth is to maintain, develop and enhance cooperation between the customs authorities of the Member States, between customs and other government law enforcement agencies and, furthermore, between customs and the business community.

The fifth is the cooperation between the European Union and third countries – cooperation with other target countries for fake goods and terrorist devices, like the US.

Our approach is based on exchange of information, cooperation on risk analysis and risk management, the mutual recognition of security standards, findings of security controls and the Customs-Trade Partnership; but also on cooperation with countries of origin of counterfeited and pirated goods, like China, where 60%

of the fake goods come from. In 2005, we signed a customs cooperation agreement and established a Joint Customs Cooperation Committee which meets annually. Last year we launched a pilot project on Smart and Secure Tradelanes between European and Chinese ports and recently we have started to develop a programme of action to be signed at the December EU-China Summit. We need to establish similar cooperation with other countries like India, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates and others.

Since 1993, once a consignment is cleared by a national customs authority, it is free to circulate amongst all the other Member States. This means that customs have one single opportunity to control goods and seize any illegal traffic. The result is that the Customs Union is as strong as its weakest link. By this I mean that it would be very easy for traders to spot the point where controls are less accurate or less strong and divert the illegal consignments to these points. It underlines the responsibility of the customs authorities of Member States with external borders.

In view of the ever-increasing international trade and this responsibility to combat counterfeiting, customs activity remains high. I will give you some figures to illustrate the workload in 2007: 183 million customs declarations were processed, which means around 5.5 customs declarations every second; 1 545 million tonnes of seaborne cargo and 3 million tonnes of airborne cargo were handled; 43 cases of fake goods were found and seized, which amounted to 79 million counterfeited and pirated articles, and the trend is upwards.

We will only be able to meet the dual challenge that customs are facing if we rethink our working methods. This means, for example, moving from the current transaction-based approach of customs formalities and controls to a system-based approach focusing on the internal control systems and supply chain of the economic operators.

Of course this does not mean abandoning the control of individual shipments but basing these controls on risk analysis. Such a new approach implies new working and control methods and a common risk management strategy for all EU customs services. It will also offer a platform for working with the Member States on the most appropriate operational structure to be put in place in future for an efficient functioning of the Customs Union.

New working methods also imply that all national customs authorities are well equipped with skills, competences and resources that can maintain and increase their efficiency and effectiveness.

To reach these objectives, the Commission proposed, in its communication on a strategy for the evolution of the Customs Union, the development of a strategic plan. This long-term planning should allow national authorities to forecast their needs for resources, training and equipment so as to permit the developments to be made in a synchronised and harmonised way throughout the 27 Member States. This permanent channel of communication will also help us to ensure a simultaneous implementation of the new measures.

On the eve of the 40th anniversary of the Customs Union, I am asking for your political support for the Commission's initiative for a strategy on the evolution of the Customs Union. I am glad that the text of the resolution to be voted on Thursday takes into account most of the Commission's ideas about the major axes of evolution of the Customs Union on closer cooperation, addressing security and enhancing the efficiency, effectiveness and delivery of customs for the benefit of the internal market.

I would not like to conclude this statement without thanking the European Parliament for all the support it has given to customs throughout the years.

Malcolm Harbour, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Mr President, on behalf of my group I would like first of all to congratulate the Commissioner on his leadership of the customs function within the Commission. I should also like to say that we have a very important opportunity this evening not only to recognise, as he says, the considerable achievements of the Commission and indeed all the customs authorities across the Member States on this 40th anniversary, but also to look forward. I just want to reassure him that from our side of the House we will certainly give full support to the strategy that he is talking about. You will see from the resolution that we have also called upon Member States in particular to declare their support for it and to put the necessary resources behind that very important project.

As he said in his speech, the customs forces are the authorities whose services are very much the unsung heroes of the internal market, but they are certainly not forgotten in the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection. As he will know, we have taken particular interest in the dossiers, but not only that: just as he has done over the last week, on our missions around the European Union and now further afield, particularly in China recently, we have also regularly been to visit customs authorities to get a sense of their priorities and the problems they are facing on the ground; so we are much engaged with that.

I just want to make a couple of points today about the things that we need to do. It seems to me that one of the tasks we need to engage in together is to get businesses to cooperate much more with customs in dealing with counterfeit and illegal products. Customs need information to be able to stop shipments. They need intelligence. I think businesses are not sufficiently aware of the importance of that, of giving that information.

Secondly, given the increasing scale of trade, particularly from countries like China, we really have to ask Member States to look seriously at whether they have the resources to deal with very large inflows of goods that are coming in and to inspect and deal with counterfeits and products that are trying to evade the customs system. But thank you very much indeed, Commissioner, for all that you are doing in this field.

Evelyne Gebhardt, *on behalf of the PSE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, since we are aware that the general public are increasingly sceptical of the European Union, it is particularly important that we celebrate such symbolic days, and this 40th anniversary of the Customs Union is, of course, a red-letter day. As you indicated yourself, Commissioner, it is noteworthy because major steps towards integration were taken forty years ago, when the foundations were laid for the single market and for the free movement of persons, goods and services. I believe it is important that we keep telling people, showing them clearly, how they benefit from the European Union and what we achieved back then to make it possible.

For this reason I will continue to speak in glowing terms about that event, because it was truly a good thing. The work you mentioned that you do with China and other countries outside the European Union is also important to our economy as well as to consumers in the European Union, for we naturally want safe products and secure services that we can develop. That is very important. In the most recent directives we formulated for the Customs Union, we also legislated for modern technology, introducing the electronic customs system. I believe this points the way forward. If we manage to highlight such positive aspects of the policies of the European Union and make people clearly aware of the benefits they derive from the European Union, we shall begin to restore public confidence in the Union. That is what we should be doing together. May I express my sincere thanks to you, Commissioner, for the work you are doing in this context in the European Commission.

Janelly Fourtou, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, at a time when Europe is facing difficulties, with rising doubts and declining enthusiasm, we are about to celebrate an undeniable success, the 40th anniversary of the Customs Union.

Between 1968 and 2008, customs have served as an example of resourcefulness and adaptability. You may remember the closing of border controls between Member States in 1993. Customs authorities managed to redeploy their forces and to do so in a modern way. They have a complex role to play because they have to respond to global challenges. While ensuring that the European Union and its citizens are secure, while ensuring that the logistical chain is secure, they must also maintain the right balance between controls and facilitating legitimate trade with a view to improving Europe's competitiveness.

In order to succeed in their task, customs managed to readjust radically thanks to a new customs code that is both simpler and more far-reaching as a result of the new technologies that will provide them with a paperless administrative environment, and also as a result of cooperation. That cooperation, which underpins the customs union, must apply as much to international bodies such as the WTO and the WCO as to the new administrations and industries.

The results of that cooperation are particularly evident in seizures of counterfeits. Unfortunately, there are limits to international cooperation and at present we can only deplore the US Congress's unilateral decision on 100% scanning of container cargo in EU ports.

Customs need our support in order to engage in realistic discussions. We must listen carefully to the initiatives that have been announced in the strategy for the future of customs union and be prepared to support any measure that will make them even more efficient, especially in combating counterfeiting and organised crime.

(The President cut off the speaker.)

Andreas Schwab (PPE-DE). – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, as Mrs Gebhardt mentioned, celebrating forty years of the Customs Union makes people aware that the European Union has honoured part of the pledge it made forty years ago. In the intervening years – and my political group, Commissioner, has supported all the legislative proposals you have presented to the European Parliament in recent months – the Customs Union has protected the financial interests of the European Community

and its Member States far more effectively than the Member States alone could have done. It has facilitated cross-border investments within the Union in a way that the Member States could not have managed to do if left to their own devices. By modernising the Customs Code and introducing the electronic customs system, to which you referred, we have done a great deal to ensure that such investment activity will be further simplified in future. I must add, however, that businesses have been left to bear the cost of conversion, and that is an unsatisfactory state of affairs. I believe the customs system faces formidable challenges in the coming years. That is why I believe it is important, Commissioner, that your strategy addresses these challenges efficiently and effectively and provides responses.

In my constituency, as you know, there is a problem with customs clearance at the Swiss border. I hope we can continue in future to resolve the many little questions of detail that confront our businesses from day to day as constructively as we have managed to do in the past.

Over the next few years – and this is the challenge to which your strategy must respond – the customs system will have to focus far more sharply on the security interests of the European Union than it has had to do in the past. This, of course, includes protection against counterfeit products and piracy, but there is an increasing need to create even closer links between the tasks of the customs service and aspects of the fight against global terrorism. In the realm of global trade, as Mrs Fortou pointed out, there will be an increasing need to deliberate, within the WTO and at other levels, on ways in which customs administrations can play an effective role in the protection of external borders.

My last point is that blanket scanning does not seem practical from our perspective in the light of the concept of a single transatlantic market. I wish you continuing success.

Arlene McCarthy (PSE). – Mr President, as chair of the Committee on the Internal Market and Consumer Protection with responsibility for customs policy, I certainly welcome the opportunity to speak in this debate to mark 40 years of the Customs Union. The IMCO Committee, as has already been said, attaches great importance to our customs work, because it is the pragmatic and practical face of the European Union's work. Without doubt the Customs Union has helped increase the competitiveness of EU business by simplifying and getting rid of unnecessary rules for business and legitimate traders. 175 million customs declarations are handled annually, with an average customs clearance taking only two minutes.

But there is still more to do. SMEs need more help to minimise the difficulties they face when trading in Europe. Paperless customs, centralised clearance and a single window will facilitate and support our SMEs, but it must of course be rigorously pursued by Member States if we are to reap the benefits.

This is also an opportunity to step up and reinforce our commitment to fighting the influx and flood of pirated and counterfeit goods. Fake goods and fake medicines not only undermine EU business, they are a grave and ever-present threat to our consumers' health and safety, an issue which the Consumer Protection Committee is deeply concerned about.

So, working with third countries and in particular China, we want to improve the interception of dangerous and illegal goods; but ultimately we need to make our Customs Union work better. Member States are called upon this evening to take their responsibilities more seriously for implementation and enforcement and to back this up with serious resources.

Commissioner, you can continue to rely on us in the IMCO Committee to work with you to improve the Customs Union as a cornerstone of the internal market and of course as a central element for the functioning and success of the EU economy. We must ensure that our 27 Member States work together more closely: that they liaise, share information and make Europe work better and more smoothly for legitimate business; and that we do crack down on the serious and growing problem of counterfeit and pirated goods entering our market.

Małgorzata Handzlik (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, the Customs Union is a vital part of the internal market of the European Union, which cannot function properly unless common principles are applied to its external boundaries. Apart for the obvious function of collection of duties, the Customs Union plays an enormous role in protecting the health and safety of our citizens.

Over the last months we have devoted a considerable amount of time within Parliament to debating issues such as product safety, especially with regard to the safety of toys, and to issues of counterfeiting. It is important for all of us to obtain goods that fulfil set criteria, especially as regards not being dangerous to our health or life. I would like to remind you that, despite generally accepted opinions, counterfeit goods do not

affect just exclusive and expensive products, but also car parts and everyday products such as foodstuffs and medicines.

Many such products are imported into the European internal market from third countries. Statistics give an idea of the scale of this issue. In 2007 customs authorities seized about 128 million counterfeit goods. This was an increase of 70% as compared to 2005. For medicines, it was an increase of 380%. Of course there may be various causes for this increase. It could be caused by an increase in the quantity of counterfeit goods coming into the EU, but it could also be a result of improved detection by the customs authorities.

We should remember, however, that standards by themselves are not enough if there is no effective monitoring at our borders, and, particularly, if monitoring is not carried out in the same manner at every point in our external boundary. For the fight against the flow of counterfeit goods into the EU to be effective there has to be improved cooperation between customs authorities and the supervisory authorities in the EU Member States, as well as cooperation with customs authorities in third countries. This improved cooperation has to keep up with technological change. For this reason it is very important that the customs authorities throughout the European Union have proper equipment that will enable them to carry out their duties effectively.

Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE). – (CS) Forty years ago, the Customs Union was the key to European prosperity because it offered the opportunity to establish the single market. Today we are facing new problems as a result of the globalisation of trade. We know that no more than 0.5% of the huge volume of foreign imports can be checked in European ports, and that there are counterfeit goods in one in every three containers. Goods that do not meet our technical and safety standards represent a further threat.

I want to stress that we have to provide European consumers with better protection against such goods. More effective coordination depends on rigorous implementation of new modern legislation that is (or was) our great present for the anniversary of the Customs Union. We have also enshrined in our legislation the right to dispose of dangerous goods as well as counterfeit goods. This will mean a great deal of work for customs officials and it is a perfect present for them. However, there are many other avenues to explore: closer cooperation with companies, more effective coordination between Member States through e-customs and the recent option of cooperation with third countries. We have also hopefully managed to improve slightly the conditions for small and medium-sized enterprises.

Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE). – (PL) Mr President, the Customs Union created on 1 July 1968 was the first step towards strengthening economic integration in the then six Member States. We can acknowledge this to be a success in the history of European integration. In celebrating the fortieth anniversary of the existence of the Customs Union it is worth noting that this is an excellent example, that it is possible to work effectively within a community of 27 Member States since, after all, there is not just one customs authority for the European Union, but there are 20 national customs authorities with differing areas of responsibility and various types of organisation that work together on the basis of a joint European policy and within the legal framework that sets out the relevant regulations and procedures. The customs administrations in 27 Member States have to work as a single administration.

Forty years ago the objective of the Customs Union was to abolish duties at internal borders between Member States and to make the idea of a common market a reality. Today the customs authorities work together to protect the external borders of the European Union and take steps to combat smuggling, to seize dangerous counterfeit goods as well as carrying out other responsibilities, which also, and here I would like to congratulate the Commissioner, were taken into consideration in the European Commission strategy for the evolution of the Customs Union presented in April 2008.

Marios Matsakis (ALDE). – Mr President, the Customs Union is a wonderful thing but it would be even more wonderful if it was adhered to by all countries concerned. I am of course referring to Turkey, which, despite much pressure put upon it by the EU, continues not to implement or ratify the Ankara Protocol with respect to Cyprus, thus effectively imposing an embargo on all shipping and air transport with Cyprus.

I ask you, why is the EU letting Turkey make a mockery of our rules and regulations? Why is Turkey allowed to get away with such unacceptable behaviour? Why does the Commission not force Turkey either to implement the Customs Union fully or be excluded from it altogether? How long must we put up with such disrespect and ridicule from a candidate Member State that wants to think that it is European?

Jean-Pierre Audy (PPE-DE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, first I want to pay tribute to your work and that of your administration on this dossier, which is a credit to the European Union.

I also thank my colleagues and my political group for supporting an amendment I tabled concerning the need to pay attention to SMEs, which regard the difficulties in applying import and export procedures as one of the main non-tariff barriers to trade.

I do think, however, that we need to go further than the cooperation proposed in the resolution. At a time when the Lisbon Treaty is proposing protection of the citizens as one of the Union's objectives and the WTO is in big trouble, we need to go further because, as the Commissioner said, the customs statistics are alarming and counterfeiting continues to put our health and safety and our economy at risk. The time has come to go further and to consider unifying customs administrations to a degree that goes far beyond the current cooperation, whose limits are clear today.

László Kovács, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, first of all allow me to express my thanks for the very interesting debate that has just taken place. I have carefully noted the comments made, since they are extremely useful for me and the Commission – and the customs services – in taking into account the political priorities expressed by the European Parliament.

I was very much impressed by the explicit expression of appreciation and support for the work of the Customs Union; I can assure you that it will continue. What are the guarantees? The guarantees are that we have the instruments, we have the strategy, and we have the legal basis, the modernised Community Customs Code with rules and procedures that guarantee the facilitation of legitimate trade and also the protection of the internal market, the safety, the health and the life of our citizens.

We have the ID technology in the framework of eCustoms, and we have a very wide cooperation network: cooperation among the customs authorities of the Member States, cooperation with other law enforcement agencies, cooperation with business – and referring to the contribution of Mr Harbour, I should like to say that in Frankfurt last week I had the chance to get information on the MediFake project, which is about counterfeit medicines, and if any distinction may be drawn between the different kinds of fake products, certainly pharmaceuticals are the most dangerous.

I am happy to tell you that just a couple of days ago in the country I know best, in Hungary, there was an agreement between the customs authorities and the Association of Pharmaceutical Factories in Hungary on how to prevent fake pharmaceuticals from getting onto the market.

We also have cooperation with international organisations, with third countries like China, and I must say that, in what are now more than three years of dealing with this portfolio and holding regular meetings with the Chinese authorities, I have certainly witnessed some improvement in the Chinese attitude. They are more concrete; they are speaking more to the point; they are more cooperative, more constructive.

Probably the reason is that for them it is more and more a question of political prestige. China, which is playing a more and more important role, not only in world trade but also in world politics, cannot afford to be labelled as the main source, as the main country of origin of those fake products that endanger the safety, the health and even the life of the citizens of other countries.

Another reason is that, as much evidence has proved, China is becoming more and more a target country and not merely a country of origin.

At least two speakers mentioned the 100% scanning initiative of the US Congress: I want to tell you that we are really trying to exert pressure on the US Administration, and indirectly even on US legislation, because we are absolutely certain – and we keep saying it – that this initiative would result in the disruption of international trade in maritime shipping, it would create a false sense of security and it would just divert attention and resources from the real issues. We hope that finally we will be successful.

So with your support, with the support of Parliament, with the support of committees like the IMCO and INTA Committees which have been very actively supporting the Customs Union, I am sure that the successful activities of the Customs Union in the next, fourth year will be guaranteed.

Thank you very much for your contributions and support.

President. – I have received one draft resolution⁽³⁾ submitted under Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

⁽³⁾ See Minutes.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 19 June 2008.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Sirpa Pietikäinen (PPE-DE), in writing. – There are many reasons to mark the 40th anniversary of the Customs Union. The far-reaching abolishment of customs among the Member States of the European Union is without a doubt one of the most important achievements of the Union. It has been of great benefit to both businesses and European consumers.

A lot of responsibility is placed in the hands of the customs control officials on the external borders of the Union. Counterfeit products, illegal trade in drugs and other harmful substances and smuggling of endangered species or products are challenges met by the single market with ever fewer internal border controls. Europe has one of the world's largest markets of counterfeit products. The existence and the trade volume of these products seriously violate intellectual property rights. More decisive measures to correct the situation should be identified and put into action.

Answering these challenges is above all a question of more harmonised and determined cooperation among the customs authorities of different Member States. However, all in all, the development of the European single market has been an undeniable success and deserves to be celebrated as one of the key factors contributing to the wealth of the whole of the EU.

23. European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (debate)

President. – The next item is the report (A6-0173/2008) prepared by Mrs Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou on behalf of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs on a proposal for a decision of the European Parliament and of the Council on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (2010) (COM(2007)0797 - C6-0469/2007 - 2007/0278(COD)).

Vladimír Špidla, Member of the Commission. – (CS) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank the rapporteur, Mrs Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, and the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, as well as the draftsman for the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality, Mrs Geringer, for having done such excellent work.

The European Year 2010 will play a significant role in the development of social Europe. The chosen approach, that is, one year during which the centralised and decentralised methods are combined, is an approach that should provide the best support for political cohesion between subjects and various levels of governance, and offer a certain flexibility when taking into account the specific situation of individual Member States.

The European Year 2010 will give the European Union and the Member States the opportunity to renew their political commitment, and will stress that poverty and social exclusion have an impact on the social and economic development of the Union and on our citizens' dignity. The aim of the European Year 2010 will be to show that it is possible to fight poverty and that that fight can succeed.

The European Year 2010 will also offer a platform for the debate on European values and on respect for these values as a key factor in developing public policies at both Union and Member State level. It will help to ensure that the people affected by poverty and social exclusion are perceived in a different light.

The Commission has always insisted that this concept, this approach must be preserved in the text. I think that most of the amendments tabled by the European Parliament go in that direction.

Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, rapporteur. – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, according to the Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion for 2008, 16% of the population of the EU is still living below the poverty line, and 19% of children are at risk of destitution and social exclusion, despite all the commitments made by the Member States in 2000 to drastically reduce poverty by 2010.

Poverty does not affect only women, children and certain social groups that are always particularly vulnerable. Far from being eradicated, poverty is actually reinforced by international developments in the energy and food production sectors, and by internal disparities in the less prosperous regions of the Union itself. In these places there are chronic structural disadvantages, such as remote, island and deindustrialised regions and others.

Poverty and social exclusion are a threat to development, competitiveness and the social model. They also violate human rights in a Europe that wishes to become a model of respect for human dignity and the promotion of equal opportunities for all.

The Commission's proposal for a European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2010, with a significantly higher budget than that allocated to previous European Years, is an important step in promoting solidarity, social justice, and greater economic and social cohesion.

It is our ambition that 2010 should be a milestone year for recognising the multidimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion. This recognition embraces not only material poverty but also access to health services, housing, social protection, education, training, employment and quality of life. We must accept that those who endure poverty have a right to live in dignity and participate in social and economic life. We must affirm the common responsibility of the European agencies of the Member States, and of the social partners and all citizens, to increase social cohesion. The year 2010 will lay the foundations for effective structures of collective responsibility and for a fair redistribution of wealth.

The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats took the lead in the proposals and accepted amendments to enable the cooperation of all the political groups in the European Parliament. We have thus strengthened the Commission's proposal by broadening the definition of vulnerable categories and adding issues such as meeting the needs of families with specific problems, single-parent families and large families, addressing the specific problems of people with disabilities and the homeless, and promoting active integration and access to culture and recreation.

This, of course, does not detract from the primary objective of improving the financial situation of individuals and families by allowing them access to decent, permanent employment. Good employment provides the satisfaction of participating and the self-sufficiency necessary to meet the needs of the more vulnerable members of society, such as children and old people.

As MEPs, we have paid close attention to the correct enforcement of Community legislation on equal opportunities. We have attended to the shaping and application, at national, regional and local level, of integrated, coordinated policies. These have been developed by public and private bodies with the participation of those affected, in order to maintain the principles of good governance, subsidiarity and proportionality.

Factors contributing to the success of the Year for Combating Poverty will be the strengthening of the open method of coordination, the coordination of actions between existing European programmes and the results of previous European Years, the active participation of civil society, and correct evaluation of the proposals and results by the European Commission.

The question of the participation of NGOs and the level of funding for their actions has been the subject of conciliation between Parliament, the Commission and the Council. We are glad the Council has accepted a proposal to append to the decision an additional statement from the Commission on encouraging the participation of small and medium-sized NGOs, and the possibility of fully funding their actions by national agencies.

I would like to thank the responsible officials, colleagues, and fellow Members for their contribution to the preparation of the decision.

IN THE CHAIR: MR ALEJO VIDAL-QUADRAS

Vice-President

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg, *author of the draft opinion of the Committee on Women's Rights and Gender Equality*. – (PL) Mr President, raising the quality of life of the citizens of EU Member States lies at the heart of European integration. Despite this, statistics show that 78 million people in the EU are below the poverty threshold, and the majority of these are children, women and the elderly. This means that, in addition to economic measures, the European Union must also undertake social initiatives, which is something that the European Parliament has noted on many occasions. In its resolution of 15 November 2007, Parliament emphasised that strengthening social cohesion and the elimination of poverty and social exclusion must become political priorities for the European Union. The Commission's initiative to make 2010 the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion fits perfectly into this context and could make a significant contribution to directing political attention and encouraging widespread activities to further strengthen social protection and social integration.

The budget that has been allocated for this initiative – 17 million euro – is a record amount, but it is the implementation of projects on the national level that is a key element to making this initiative a success. For this reason we need to call on Member States to participate in this initiative and to allocate appropriate human and financial resources for this purpose.

24. Amendment of the agenda : see Minutes

25. European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion (continuation of debate)

President. – Continuing the debate on the Report on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, we now move on to speakers on behalf of the Groups.

Thomas Mann, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group. – (DE) Mr President, with all this focus on export growth and globalisation gains, one group seems to have been overlooked. I refer to people living in poverty, of whom there are 78 million in the EU, including 19 million children. Is it a matter of learning to live with this state of affairs? Certainly not!

Young people who cannot cope with school and drop out are part of this group, as are older people who, despite having worked for decades, receive small pensions that cover only the bare necessities. They feel marginalised, and in actual fact they are often left to struggle on their own. The result is that daily life imposes severe mental and physical strains in the form of housing without security of tenure, problem estates, the risk of indebtedness, alcohol and drugs – a life without dignity or self-esteem. The annual poverty reports in our Member States should set alarm bells ringing.

Last year I listened to a debate from the visitors' gallery of the German Bundestag. The subject of the debate was the lower classes. It gave rise to weeks of heated public debate. That is what the victims of poverty need: they need people to be aware of them, to take them seriously, to show them how to break out of the poverty trap. Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou has drafted a very good report – I can say that on behalf of the PPE-DE Group and on a very personal level too, Marie – which gives us the green light for the designation of 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

If the European Year does not merely yield analyses of the situation but enables the endangered target groups to become actively involved and to obtain a forum through which their voices can be heard, if institutions present tangible successes instead of only announcing good intentions, if educational experts outline motivating teaching methods that have resulted in more pupils successfully completing their schooling, and if welfare benefits are identified which have demonstrably and sustainably reduced the risk of poverty, many people who still feel marginalised today will finally become aware of their rights as stakeholders in our society.

Richard Falbr, on behalf of the PSE Group. – (CS) I first of all wish to thank my fellow Member, Mrs Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, for her good report and pleasant cooperation. I want to mention two aspects.

Many of our documents use the expressions 'decent work' and 'decent jobs'. The fact remains, however, that more and more jobs fit the description of menial jobs, in other words unskilled, badly-paid work. The number of people living in poverty or suffering from in-work poverty is not falling, which is proof that more and more employers are employing people illegally. The recently adopted draft Working Time Directive, which introduces the possibility of working like people do in some Chinese industrial zones, is a further blow that will surely result in an increase in the number of poor people.

The other issue I want to mention relates to the need to take into account, at last, the fact that the trend towards the privatisation of public and social services in some countries of the Union is going unnoticed. The privatisation of public and social services also leads to an increase in the number of people living in poverty. I should say that my amendments, which highlight this fact, are regularly rejected. I would like us to actually start doing something, instead of just churning out more pages and setting deadlines.

Sepp Kusstatscher, on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group. – (DE) Mr President, let me begin by emphasising that I very much approve of the idea that political efforts to combat poverty and social exclusion should be brought into particularly sharp focus throughout Europe in 2010.

Allow me, nevertheless, to make a few critical comments. The way in which proposals for improvements have been brushed aside, mostly under pressure from the Council, for the sake of reaching agreement at first reading has greatly annoyed me. I have called for more funds to be allocated to this important initiative in the 2010 budget, since combating poverty and social exclusion is an unequivocal goal of the Lisbon Agenda, a goal which, sadly, has not been achieved at all.

I also wanted to ensure that the ample financial resources disbursed by the European Commission were subjected to closer scrutiny, particularly in the context of the European Year in 2010, in order to establish whether they served as an instrument of fairer distribution or whether they might actually be helping to make the rich richer and scarcely ever reaching those below the poverty line.

I am another of those who would have welcomed a discussion within the EU institutions on the introduction of an unconditional basic income, especially on the question whether that would be an appropriate weapon with which to combat poverty and social exclusion. I very much regret that these proposals were immediately shot down. I support the initiative for a European Year, but I find it all too non-committal and too devoid of implications in the field of social policy.

Jan Tadeusz Masiel, *on behalf of the UEN Group.* – (PL) Mr President, the announcement that 2010 is to be the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion is a very good initiative from the Council. We should remind our citizens that the elimination of poverty is one of the principal objectives of the European Union. This will, without doubt, increase people's trust in our European institutions, I am thinking specifically here of the new Member States.

In my own country, Poland, accession to the EU in 2004 is still, unfortunately, associated in many people's minds with an increase in poverty, particularly for people living in the countryside and in small towns. This resulted in the low turnout to the elections for the European Parliament and in the results of these elections. The European Year for Combating Poverty will be an opportunity to review the situation in this regard and to mobilise Member States to undertake concrete steps to combat poverty and social exclusion. From superficial observations of society, it would seem that the quality of life of many individuals and families in both the old and the new EU has recently undergone considerable changes, but unfortunately these changes are for the worse. It has become ever more difficult, for example, to find housing. We need new and current statistical data in this regard.

In a world that is becoming ever more globalised in nature and ever more difficult to control, the responsibility of the state towards the citizen should become greater. The state should make sure that citizens feel safe, at least at the most basic level. I think that the principal benefit from this European Year will be to inform everyone of the existence of the problem, to raise awareness and to increase solidarity, and this includes financial solidarity, with poor and excluded persons.

Gabriele Zimmer, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (DE) Mr President, the Left Group in the European Parliament approves the report presented by our honourable colleague and hence endorses the goal of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. The report very clearly spells out the wide implications of poverty and social exclusion, not only as a social problem but also, and more especially, as a personal problem for those caught in the poverty trap. Several references have already been made to the 78 million people, including 19 million children, who are living in poverty within the European Union.

If serious efforts are to be made to combat poverty and eradicate it as a social problem, however, specific binding political strategies are essential. Political aims and a guaranteed individual right to live in freedom from poverty and social exclusion are on the agenda. These, however, are precisely the things for which the European Union makes no provision. The main political strategies of the European Union have nothing to do with combating poverty. Economic growth and job growth do not reduce poverty. Even the Union's richest Member States are registering growing numbers of people who live below the poverty line or below the at-risk threshold. In Germany in particular, recent years have seen a fall in the level of low incomes but a rise in the number of people who earn them.

Employment in the EU, in other words, does not automatically lead to the prevention of poverty, and I am sorry to say that awareness of this fact within the European Commission and among the Member States has not generated any specific packages of measures involving objectives such as the introduction of a minimum wage above the at-risk threshold or the solution of the problem of basic social security to which Mr Kusstatscher referred.

Kathy Sinnott, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – Mr President, I commend Mrs Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou. I feel that the issue of child poverty needs to be urgently addressed.

Underlining the statistics in relation to the number of children at risk of poverty – 19 million in Europe – a greater emphasis needs to be put on enshrining the paramount importance of the family and, emanating from this, defending family life. The institution of the family merits unconditional respect and protection. It is the natural setting for children. In developed countries we find that poverty is increasingly a family phenomenon rather than a regional one. A child's economic status is closely linked to that of their parents. Parental unemployment is a cause of child poverty.

In Ireland, although families often earn a reasonable income, mortgage, health and car payments can absorb the majority of that income and leave little for raising children. Other issues, such as parental addiction, leave insufficient funds for a secure childhood. Separation and divorce also disrupt family finances to the detriment of children. It is imperative that families be efficiently supported, both economically and socially, in order to alleviate the shameful modern predicament of child poverty in Europe.

José Albino Silva Peneda (PPE-DE). – (PT) Mr President, Commissioner, I note that the report we are discussing today refers expressly to eradicating rather than merely to combating poverty, as was actually proposed. I am therefore pleased that my observation has borne fruit, and I would like to thank the rapporteur, Mrs Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, for that.

The European Union has become accustomed to reacting very rapidly and with great solidarity to help the victims of natural disasters throughout the world, for example, but it still prevaricates a great deal when it comes to helping the victims of economic and social catastrophes within the EU itself.

I say this because I find it rather difficult to understand why a report that addresses the issue of poverty makes no reference to rising food prices. This shocks me, because we all know that the poorer a family is, the higher the percentage of its budget that is spent on food. I therefore think it would be useful to make some reference to the recent Commission communication on the increase in the price of food products, for example.

I also believe, meanwhile, that we should not restrict the eradication of poverty to EU territory alone. This battle has no boundaries – we are talking of values which are essential to human dignity.

Throughout its history Europe has always been defined more by its expansion throughout the world than by its own identity. In the 21st century, of all the tasks the EU could perform for the good of humanity, the eradication of poverty will perhaps be the most noble of all. That is why I hope this issue will be promoted strongly in 2010.

Jan Andersson (PSE). – (SV) Thank you very much, Mr President, Commissioner. Let me begin by thanking Mrs Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou for an excellent piece of work. Let me also say that I think the initiative to make 2010 the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion is an excellent one.

Just as Vladimir Špidla said, such a Year may increase awareness and knowledge of the structures present, but that is not enough. It must be followed up by action, as some Members have previously pointed out. The situation is quite good in the EU generally, but at the same time poverty is not diminishing. Rather it is increasing, and, just as others have said, a great many of those affected are women and children. The approach is the Open Method of Coordination, but measures are needed in a large number of areas, not just a few. Employment is of course important, but so are education, social security systems and a regional policy which devotes attention to neglected areas. There is a need for action targeted at special groups, such as persons with functional disabilities and persons from other parts of the world who are suffering greater poverty than others. I hope that this Year, besides increasing knowledge and awareness, may also be the starting point for concrete measures to reduce poverty in the EU.

Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion will be the high point of the 2005-2010 social agenda. The Committee on Social Affairs has adopted a set of common indicators for the process of social protection and integration, which will ensure comparability of data.

Despite the fact that the European Union is aware of the problem of poverty as well as of the importance of measures to increase social cohesion, disparities in income continue to accompany economic growth in EU countries. As a result, the poor gain little from this growth. In effect, this means there is a decrease in the level of social cohesion. This situation is accompanied by other factors that also have negative consequences: almost one-fifth of children in the European Union are at risk of poverty. At a time of demographic decline

we should take particular care of children, particularly in families with many children that are experiencing the most difficulty. However, it is particularly these families that are subject to discrimination through high VAT rates on children's products.

I would like to congratulate the rapporteur, in particular, for drawing attention to the issue of combating poverty.

Edit Bauer (PPE-DE). – (SK) Mr President, Commissioner, I welcome the report by Mrs Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, as well as the Commission's determination to continue to fight poverty.

The great extent of poverty is probably one of the most notable contradictions in prosperous Europe. It is no coincidence that all the other Members have mentioned the high figures, the millions of people who live at risk of poverty, but the most striking thing is the high number of children who are born into and live with the risk of poverty. Consequently, it does not come as a surprise if these children leave school early, if the percentage of early school leavers is strikingly high. Another striking statistic is the very high number of children, running into the hundreds of thousands, who are homeless or live in institutions.

The problem is that poverty as well as social exclusion are inherited. Consequently, for socially excluded people, the opportunity to get an education and to participate in lifelong learning remains an unattainable goal.

Let us hope that the European Year for Combating Poverty provides sufficient incentive for strengthening the principle of solidarity in national policies. When we consider future changes in the population structure, the implementation of this principle will indeed be even more complicated. Analyses of some public spending and insurance systems show that in some Member States these systems carry financial or even social risks, which can lead to poverty becoming even more widespread.

Without any doubt, the present rapid increase in the prices of oil and food will place a burden on the budgets of the people in the lowest income bracket. This means that there are more than enough reasons to make sure that the European Year for Combating Poverty not only draws attention to poverty but also helps to create specific accountable national bodies that could facilitate the coordination of the various policies used to combat poverty and social exclusion.

Alejandro Cercas (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, I also wanted to congratulate the Commission and, of course, the rapporteur, who have provided the opportunity for this debate and to take the first steps towards making 2010 a significant year in the fight against poverty.

As discussed in Lisbon, this is one of the European Union's objectives and we have often said, and many Councils have said, that there must be a significant reduction in poverty by 2010, but there is unfortunately not much sign of that happening. We must therefore make additional efforts and use this opportunity to reiterate that the increase in the creation of wealth is not benefiting all of us equally.

Some sectors of the population are especially vulnerable and need protection from poverty, because it is very difficult for people to escape poverty once they become poor.

We therefore need a horizontal policy that provides decent jobs and educational opportunities, not only as part of this programme, but as part of all European Union programmes, so that solidarity remains at the heart of the Union and is not only addressed by economic policies.

Ryszard Czarnecki (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, it could be said that the data that we have collected really minimise the scale of the problem. This is because they speak of poverty in the European Union at the time before the accession of Bulgaria and Romania. After the accession of these two relatively very poor countries, the level of poverty in the EU has significantly increased. We should not hide this fact. Furthermore, it is not every seventh person in the EU Member States who is below the poverty line, but the true percentage is considerably above 16%, in fact it is over 20%.

In this regard I would like to make an urgent call that the financing from the European Union for all the projects that we have discussed should be over 50%. This is important particularly from the point of view of the poorer countries. Limiting the amount to 50% is, in reality, a decision to restrict the real fight against poverty.

(Applause)

Joel Hasse Ferreira (PSE). – (PT) Mr President, Commissioner Špidla, ladies and gentlemen, it seems absolutely essential to recognise the inalienable rights of the socially most vulnerable groups, and the practical recognition of such rights will involve the strong commitment of public and private social stakeholders.

The various dimensions of social cohesion must be protected by means of EU and Member State commitment to eradicating poverty and combating social exclusion, promoting concrete action at the most varied levels.

Full and realistic monitoring of poverty and social exclusion is also required, Commissioner, which means that reliable and comparable indicators showing the development of the various social, economic and cultural dimensions of that phenomenon are essential.

Ladies and gentlemen, poor women and single-parent families are particularly vulnerable to poverty and exclusion, and must therefore be given special attention and the corresponding support.

In conclusion, Mr President, after thanking the rapporteur, I would say that 2010 will have to be a particularly effective year for combating poverty and social exclusion, a battle that must also be given a much needed higher profile.

Zbigniew Krzysztof Kuźmiuk (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, I would like to draw attention to three issues in this debate. Firstly, according to the latest European Commission report, in 2004 there were about 100 million EU citizens, that means 20% of the whole population, who were living on less than 60% of the average EU income, meaning they were living on less than 15 euro a day. In the new Member States, such as Poland, Lithuania, Latvia and Slovakia, this is true of almost 80% of the population.

Secondly, solutions that are often put forward by liberal economists, that significant differences in incomes are important for economic growth, should not be adopted in the economic and social practices of EU countries. In 2006 the countries with the lowest disparities in income were Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Slovenia and the Czech Republic, and these countries have for many years enjoyed stable annual GDP growth, which is quite different from those countries that have the highest disparities in income, such as Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal and Greece as well as, unfortunately, my own country, Poland.

Thirdly, I would like to express the hope that 2010, as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion, will make all our decision makers aware that poverty and social exclusion have a destructive effect on economic growth and social development.

(Applause)

Gabriela Crețu (PSE). – (RO) Dear Commissioner, dear colleagues, we are well aware of what the Commission reminds us: there is a huge number of Europeans who live in poverty, including extreme poverty. Those who do not know this should accept the blame for the fact that a rich society, which is based on the principles of justice and solidarity, like ours, operates in such a way that a country of poor Europeans would have more seats in this Parliament than Germany. Poverty is not an abstraction; it is a way of life affecting women and children in particular. Women, including employed ones, come across increased risks given the structural salary gap, their concentration in poorly paid, weakly unionized sectors and in the informal economy, given their prevalence among single-parent families. Poverty is inherited. The economic poverty of parents favours the cultural poverty of children, by reduced access to education, the political poverty, by low participation in or exclusion from decision-making, the social poverty, by low participation in civic activities and isolation. It creates deeper inequalities than those derived from the different purchasing power. Minimum coherence between statements and actions forces us to do more than make citizens aware. Political decisions are necessary in order to remedy the situation. In the Union, we cannot speak of a lack of resources, but sometimes of their unfair distribution, of rules perpetuating exclusion. It is a joint responsibility, including of companies that, for their own interest, should go beyond the stage in which the financing of a foundation for protecting stray dogs in the neighbourhood is the only expression of social responsibilities.

Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, declaring 2010 to be the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion will not solve the problems experienced by the 80 million people in the European Union who live below the poverty line. Appointing committees, increasing bureaucracy, meetings and sittings will, likewise, not give them any food.

In order to combat poverty you have to approach the issue of creating and distributing wealth in a different way. You have to state clearly that globalisation encourages excessive wealth creation for some and rapid impoverishment for others. Unfortunately there are more and more of these others. The problem of poverty in the EU will continue to grow and there are several reasons for this, including unfair distribution of wealth,

problems of food distribution and rising food costs, a general increase in the costs of maintaining a family, the demographic situation in Europe and the world, continuing inequalities, the backwardness of certain regions due to historical reasons and a failure to produce a proper model of how to help the needy.

Finally, as we are not in a position to solve the problem of poverty as a whole, then let us at least provide children and young people with free education and extra meals as required.

Zbigniew Zaleski (PPE-DE). – (ES) Mr President, Commissioner, I want to highlight one particular aspect and I will speak in Polish:

(PL) Mr President, we are trying to help poor countries in Africa and Latin America with little effect, but there can be no justification for failing to help the poor within the European Union. There are regions where people are very poor, especially children. I would like to point out an issue that will have serious consequences in the future, namely the phenomenon of Euro-orphans. These are the children of migrants who travel from one country to another within the EU, often abandoning their children to their fate. I believe that, in future, the psychological consequences of this problem will cost us dear. For this reason we should do everything we can to eliminate this problem now.

Monica Maria Iacob-Ridzi (PPE-DE). – (RO) Honourable President, eradicating poverty and social exclusion is one of the major objectives of the European Union. For this reason, the year 2010 should be decisive in implementing the European strategy in this field. Of the 78 million citizens who live at risk of poverty, 19 million are children. Unfortunately, there are still no European programs and funds designed for improving the situation of children. It is true that the European Union provides funds for fruits and dairy products in schools or money for the education of pupils, but I think we need a coherent strategy and actual programs designed for children coming from poor families. At the same time, we should also focus on the other categories of disadvantaged people, and in particular young people, for whom we have to establish policies and allocate important amounts of money from the structural funds. Moreover, it is important to emphasize the fact that, at present, we cannot create the premises for sustainable social development if we don't have the necessary financial resources. I believe the allocated amount of 17 million Euros is insufficient in relation to the social inclusion and poverty fighting needs Europe presently has. Last, but not least, the fight against poverty and social exclusion should be connected to the existing programs. Both the European Social Fund and the Progress European programmes, should be used for financing the priorities of the European Year for Combating Poverty.

Anna Záborská (PPE-DE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I congratulate you on this excellent proposal. I also thank Mrs Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou for her very good report. I am sure we will vote for the resolution unanimously.

Yet I wonder. Here we have another European year, this time against extreme poverty. It is now 20 years since, on 17 October, the international community celebrated the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty. Looking round at the moment of celebrating 17 October in front of the European Parliament in Brussels, I see myself there with my colleague, Iñigo Méndez de Vigo, who leads this Parliament's delegation with the Fourth World.

As I take the floor here, I would ask you to note this date in your diary. I hope that on 17 October the European institutions will mark their strong solidarity with the slogan for that date: 'Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, human rights are violated. To come together to ensure that those rights be respected is our solemn duty.'

Vladimír Maňka (PSE). – (SK) In all, 78 million people in the European Union live at risk of poverty. Rising prices of commodities, energy and food further multiply the risk for the most vulnerable groups.

Quality employment significantly reduces the poverty risk. However, often even those people who are employed live at risk of poverty.

The amended Lisbon Strategy promotes equal opportunities for all as a vector for social and intergenerational solidarity and the creation of a poverty-free society. Consequently, I welcome the initiative to make the problem of poverty more visible and the effort to establish a single coordinated policy.

The campaign to fight poverty should raise public awareness and produce a long-term effort to fight the phenomenon of poverty. In this sense we have a lot to learn from the Scandinavian countries. They have proved that one of the most effective means of poverty reduction is an active labour market policy combined with the establishment of decent working conditions and strong social protection.

Danutė Budreikaitė (ALDE). – (LT) I welcome the Commission's proposal to designate 2010 the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Poverty is a problem both in the EU and worldwide.

I would like to highlight some acute aspects of poverty and social exclusion on which we should focus much more attention than we used to.

First of all, simply by eliminating child poverty we would be able to escape the vicious circle of generations condemned to a life of poverty and social exclusion.

Secondly, nearly 10% of workers experience poverty because of low wages, part-time employment and low qualifications. It is essential to promote quality employment based on educating employees.

Thirdly, it is vital to promote solidarity within society, making all its members aware of the issues of poverty and social exclusion.

I would like to encourage all EU institutions and Member States to provide the members of society with more detailed information on combating poverty and social exclusion in order to increase the sense of common responsibility and help disperse the prejudice of being a financial burden on society.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, poverty is a very complex problem and it can adopt various forms. It varies depending on the country. In Europe we are not talking of people dying of starvation, but, in the main, low income, poor housing conditions, poor health, often alcoholism, feelings of alienation or lack of any prospects are the greatest problems.

Poverty is a dangerous phenomenon, particularly among children, because, in many cases, it is hereditary. Children brought up in poverty have a more difficult development path and, without outside help, are condemned to failure and to share their parents' fate.

For this reason it is important to take all possible steps to break the cycle of poverty being handed down from one generation to another. Strengthening social integration, reducing poverty and combating social exclusion are some of the challenges faced by the EU, particularly when we take demographic changes into account, by which I mean an ageing population and an influx of migrants.

Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL). – (PT) It is not sufficient to establish a European Year for Combating Poverty when around 20% of the European Union's population is threatened with poverty. What is happening – exacerbated by social inequalities, rising numbers of poorly paid workers with insecure jobs, thereby increasing the number of people in poverty, and rising fuel and food prices – requires other policies to ensure that children, women and families are socially included.

Measures are needed that make work more attractive, increase employment with rights and guarantee high-quality public services, decent housing and public and universal social security.

A European strategy of solidarity and social progress to replace the neoliberal policies of the Lisbon Strategy and the Stability Pact must therefore be approved as a matter of urgency so that we do not have even more poverty in 2010 than we have at the moment.

Juan Andrés Naranjo Escobar (PPE-DE). – (ES) Mr President, first, I would like to congratulate our rapporteur and the Commissioner for this initiative.

Social exclusion and poverty are two sides of the same coin and are features of a society with very needy people, a society that is not socially cohesive. At the end of the day, ladies and gentlemen, progress is a question of ethics.

The year 2010 will be the year for combating poverty. We already know that the eradication of social exclusion and poverty will be a long and complex task, but if we make the most of each euro invested in this programme, if we are capable of reaching the groups of people that need most help, if we are capable of awakening the conscience of public opinion, we will be creating a new European citizenship. This is the big issue.

Last week, the citizens of Ireland rejected the Treaty of Lisbon. Demagogic propaganda drawing on a wide range of opinions have wrought havoc in Irish society, provoking unfounded fears of globalisation and a certain amount of confusion about the construction of our common home.

As well as making 2010 the year for combating poverty, we must also make it the year of European citizenship.

Vladimír Špidla, *Member of the Commission*. – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, thank you for the in-depth debate that touched upon many aspects of poverty. I think that the proposal itself makes it clear that the Commission does not ignore the issue of poverty and that it aims at gradually creating such political environment that will make it possible to fight poverty in a more effective way. I also wish to say that the Commission is dealing with the problem of poverty in all its complexity. Although some of its texts, namely our recent communication on active inclusion that deals with poverty *per se*, emphasise the importance of quality jobs, given that the goal of the Lisbon Strategy is more jobs and better quality jobs, the Commission nevertheless understands that the complex issue of poverty cannot be resolved purely through labour market means. Suffice to mention child poverty, which is also clearly related to the quality of the education systems. There is also the issue of poverty among pensioners, which obviously cannot be resolved directly by labour market means either.

Allow me to mention some other issues I consider to be important. The Commission is proposing financing totalling EUR 17 million and in the course of the debate we heard the opinion that funding of national projects should be increased, especially in some countries. The Commission does not agree with this view for the simple reason that our aim is to make as much financial support available as possible in order to make our actions as effective as possible. The European Year for Combating Poverty is a classic example of a routine democratic political procedure. In order to achieve a breakthrough, in order to change the political atmosphere, we need a detailed and topical debate on this subject, and that is the goal for the European Year.

Allow me now to touch upon certain individual amendments. I agree with the amendments concerning the revision of the headings of objectives in Article 2 and in the list of priorities for the European Year, and I am also in favour of the amendments focusing on the issue of gender equality. Furthermore, since a large number of amendments have been tabled, allow me to present Parliament with an exact list of the amendments instead of resorting to verbatim citations.

Let me mention just two articles – Articles 37 and 52 – which I want to single out in my speech. With your permission, I am going to read the text concerning these two articles.

The Commission attaches the greatest importance to facilitating and supporting wide participation at all levels in activities connected with the 2010 European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion as a practical means of ensuring that its impact is positive and lasting.

In accordance with the Decision on the European Year, the Commission will draw up common guidelines in the Strategic Framework Document (SFD) which will set the key priorities for the implementation of activities relating to the European Year, including minimum standards in terms of participation in national bodies and actions.

The SFD is addressed to the National Implementing Bodies (NIBs) responsible for defining the national programmes for the European Year and for selecting individual actions to be proposed for Community funding, and to other actors concerned.

In this context, the Commission will underline the importance of facilitating access by all NGOs, including small and medium-sized organisations. With a view to ensuring the widest possible access, the NIBs can decide not to request any cofinancing and instead to fully fund certain actions.

That was the text itself. Ladies and gentlemen, let me mention another speech, that of Mr Falbr, who brought up the issue of the Working Time Directive and did so in a way far removed from reality. To be absolutely clear, the simple way of summing up the result of the compromise reached by the Council is as follows: 'The 48-hour working week remains and the possibility to use the opt-out was reduced from 78 hours per week to 60 or 65 hours'. This is one of the substantial features of the compromise, and since it was mentioned in the course of the present debate I thought it would be good to respond to it.

Ladies and gentlemen, to conclude let me once again thank you for the debate, which touched upon many aspects of poverty and was, in my opinion, very insightful. Unfortunately, I do not think that it is possible to respond at the moment to each of your speeches, leaving aside the fact that the overwhelming majority of your views are incorporated in the rapporteur's report. I would like to thank her again for the report.

Commission's position on Parliament's amendments

Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou report (A6-0173/2008)

The Commission can accept in full Amendments 6, 7, 12, 13, 16, 17, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 27, 28, 29, 31, 33, 34, 35, 36, 38, 39, 41, 42, 46, 47, 48, 49, 53, 54, 55, 56, 57, 58, 59, 60, 61, 62 and 63.

The Commission can only accept in substance, in part, and subject to rewording, the following amendments: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 11, 14, 15, 18, 24, 25, 26, 30, 32, 37, 43, 44, 45, 50, 51, 52, 64 and 66.

Finally, the Commission rejects Amendments 40 and 65. More specifically, regarding Amendments 37 and 52, concerning the participation of small and medium-sized organisations and the possibility of cofinancing up to the total amount of the costs of certain projects, the Commission proposes – as a compromise solution – making a statement in that regard, which I shall read out to you, in which it undertakes to incorporate the spirit of the content of those two amendments in the framework strategy document that the Commission will be drawing up to define the main priorities of the European Year activities.

Marie Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou, *rapporteur*. – (EL) Mr President, I thank the Commissioner for his opinion. I hope the common guidelines in the strategic framework document will indeed guide the national committees in planning effective action. As the Commissioner himself has emphasised, the key aim must be to include all those affected by poverty both now and in the future.

Personally, I believe that poverty cannot be eradicated once and for all because it may return after a natural disaster. We have talked about the disasters in Greece and other countries owing to flooding or fires: poverty might reappear or it might be brought back by the international situation. We must therefore always be ready. For this reason, we place special emphasis on prevention; this explains our Day for the Eradication of Poverty on 17 October, as Mrs Záborská has pointed out. We have included this date in our report.

These, then, are not measures with little or no binding force; we want to see them matched to every national need and we believe that dealing with poverty means combating the first great enemy to the peace and prosperity of every community. The Commissioner is in any case a historian and knows that the Emperor of Byzantium, an empire that lasted for 1 000 years in Europe, supported the fight against poverty in every speech he made. He considered it the most important enemy of the state after the various foes he did battle with on his borders.

We too in the EU must fight poverty both internally and externally. We must achieve those famous Millennium Goals, so that we can also address the problem of economic migrants and illegal immigrants who come here because they compare their own situation with ours.

I am sure, then, that with good planning we shall have good results and I thank you all for your excellent words.

(*applause*)

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow at 12 noon.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Adam Bielan (UEN), *in writing*. — (PL) Mr President, I would like to thank Mrs Panayotopoulos-Cassiotou for an excellent report and particularly for drawing attention to the issue of poverty prevention. I am in favour of designating 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. In discussing the above-named report I would like to draw attention to the importance of finding a route out of poverty through concrete measures and not just by talking about it. In Europe 78 million people live in poverty and 19 million of these are children. We have to remember the importance of the family, which should be protected and given social and economic support in order to eliminate the enormous poverty among children in Europe.

At this point it would be worth mentioning the cause of poverty. Poverty is caused by a significant increase in the prices of food and energy, which primarily affects families with many children as well as the elderly. According to the European Commission, about 14% of Poles, Greeks and Portuguese in permanent employment live in poverty.

Corina Crețu (PSE), *in writing*. – (RO) I thank the Rapporteur for the spirit of cooperation in drafting this report. In Europe, one out of six people lives below the poverty threshold, a figure that does not include the statistics in Romania and Bulgaria.

Although in most Member States, the difference between women and men, as regards poverty, is increasingly shrinking and the average difference is 2% as regards poverty and persistent poverty, I would like to draw your attention to the reality in the new Member States. In Romania and Bulgaria, the number of women at risk of becoming victims of poverty is more than ten percent higher than the number of men. Women are also much more exposed to social exclusion.

We should not ignore the fact that the ideas of solidarity, social justice, and eradication of poverty are challenges regarding not only the countries in the European Union, but also its involvement on the world economic and political scene.

Therefore, I would like to welcome the inclusion into the final text of the matter regarding the difference between men and women, in a more general article. I also consider important the correlation of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion with the Millennium Development Goals and, in particular, the International Day for the Eradication Poverty.

Zita Gurmai (PSE), in writing. – (HU) Poverty is a complex, relative and multi-faceted problem: it raises economic, social and cultural questions. Nevertheless, we must take action to combat poverty because in 2006 no less than 16% (78 million) of the total population of the twenty-five Member States of the European Union were living below the poverty threshold. When the Lisbon Strategy was launched in March 2000, the Council of the European Union called upon the Member States and the Commission to take steps ‘to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty’ by 2010. It is an important step that we now have a measure for poverty, since in order to tackle the problem it is important to identify its exact nature. I welcome the fact that we have designated 2010 as the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. I am sure that the Year will help to promote the exchange of best practice and see the launch of new initiatives in every field, especially in connection with poverty prevention, monitoring, financial mechanisms and combating child poverty.

It should be noted particularly that, according to the empirical evidence, women are much more vulnerable to the threat of poverty than men, and this is especially true in the case of women who are multiply disadvantaged. It is vital that the principle of equal treatment is also applied in the fight against poverty, and therefore also in the European Year of Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion. Genuine equality for men and women is a fundamental precondition for reducing the risk of poverty, since women are less likely to fall victim to poverty if they have appropriate and adequately remunerated work that they can combine with their family commitments.

Rovana Plumb (PSE), in writing. – (RO) The Constitution of the International Labour Organization stipulates: “Poverty anywhere constitutes a danger to prosperity everywhere”. For this reason, I emphasize the importance of the amendment regarding the prevention and fight against poverty by carrying on multidimensional policies at a national, regional and local level, which would ensure active participation of citizens in the society and on the labour market.

The reforms in the field of social protection and the active inclusion policies have decisively contributed to accelerating economic growth and creating more jobs in Europe. In the first quarter of the year 2008, Romania had one of the greatest economic growths in the EU, increasing by 8.2% (while the European average is 2.5%, according to Eurostat), but, nevertheless, people with low education levels, without any qualification, especially in the rural environment, children, young people, people with disabilities and the Roma have a significant risk of poverty.

I congratulate the Rapporteur for her activity and I consider it necessary that the policies drafted by the Member States, following European recommendations, aim at the beneficial reconciliation between the citizen's economic competitiveness and social welfare.

26. The impact of cohesion policy on the integration of vulnerable communities and groups (debate)

President. – The next item is the debate on the report (A6-0212/2008) by Gábor Harangozó, on behalf of the Committee on Regional Development, on the impact of cohesion policy on the integration of vulnerable communities and groups (2007/2191(INI)).

Gábor Harangozó, rapporteur. – (HU) Thank you very much, Mr President. Commissioner Hübner, ladies and gentlemen, there are regions, and people living in those regions, that are unable to avail themselves of

the opportunities we seek to provide for them out of Community resources in order to enable them to catch up with the European Union average as quickly as possible and put an end to the poverty in which they are living.

I initiated this report in order to investigate the reasons why we have been unable to bring about development in these regions, and to make recommendations with a view to changing this situation and putting an end to it. As the European Commission's Fourth Progress Report on Cohesion states, cohesion policy functions very well at national level in some countries. In practical terms, more vigorous development and positive progress towards cohesion have begun to take place in countries that have already acceded to EU membership and are receiving cohesion funds. If we look at slightly lower territorial levels, however, we can see that inter-regional disparities are not diminishing to the same extent. I would like to cite Hungary as an example: in Hungary, per capita GDP in the central region has reached 110% of the European Union average; in four out of Hungary's seven regions, however, per capita GDP is less than 45% of the EU average. In these cases the disparity is at least no longer increasing. In many instances, however, as the Fourth Report on Cohesion also states, territorial disparities within regions are continuing to increase.

What could be the reason why some regions are able to use the available opportunities to their advantage, while others are not? If we look a little more closely, we find that there are some very serious underlying structural reasons, structural reasons at the territorial level. In territories where little development is taking place, the human capacity for generating appropriate projects is clearly lacking, the basic infrastructure for getting investment into these territories is lacking, and appropriate education and proper healthcare are lacking. There are several micro-regions, for example in Hungary, where the life expectancy of the male population is more than 15 years lower than the national average.

What should we do about it? Since the problem we are dealing with is a highly complex one, and is clearly concentrated in certain micro-territories and micro-regions, I believe we must assess whether it is right to examine cohesion policy at inter-regional level only, at the level of the regions. Would it not be better instead to examine whether we need more focused, more precisely targeted measures at the level of the micro-regions where the worst of the problems are? From now on our first point of departure must be to examine the nature of the statistics we are using as a basis for our decision making. I was aware of this problem while preparing this report, but I cannot give you any concrete basis for statistical comparison, as there is a lack of comparable micro-regional statistical data throughout the EU. From now on we must examine whether it is appropriate, although these are primarily rural areas, to tie rural cohesion into agricultural policy. Would it not be much more appropriate to deal with the problems of rural areas in the context of cohesion policy and using cohesion policy instruments, allowing agricultural policy measures to play a purely complementary role?

At this juncture I would like to thank the shadow rapporteurs for their exceptionally constructive work in helping to produce the report. At the same time, I would also like to point out that, following the several weeks of negotiations, and after I had accepted the report of the PPE-DE Group containing a very major amendment on a vital point of the report, the PPE-DE Group then proceeded to vote against its own point. For me this raises the question: what is it that we want? Do we simply want to state that a problem exists, and do nothing more, or are we prepared to face up to the problem and to make recommendations regarding how to change our policy, and to focus more closely on identifying areas where we can actually do something to solve the problem? Thank you very much for your attention.

Danuta Hübner, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I would like to thank Mr Harangozó for his report and also for his efforts to achieve a consensual position in his committee on the difficult topic of vulnerable communities and groups. To avoid economic growth being accompanied by social polarisation in our society, cohesion policy targets social exclusion, in particular the integration of vulnerable communities and groups, and it will remain a cohesion policy goal in the future.

It is also true that problems identified in the report are at the frontier between territorial cohesion, on the one hand, and social cohesion challenges on the other, and social polarisation and social segregation problems, when concentrated on some territories, become territorial cohesion issues.

We face social exclusion in the poorest territories of the European Union, but we also have pockets of social deprivation in the richest cities of the European Union. The report calls on the Commission to present a comprehensive definition of territorial cohesion in the framework of the forthcoming Green Paper on territorial cohesion, and I can confirm that the Green Paper to be published at the end of September this year will contribute to the progress towards a common understanding across the Union of the concept of territorial cohesion.

The report also recognises that the notion of vulnerable groups and communities as such is certainly not an easy one and it should not be limited to the Roma communities only. However, it is generally recognised that the situation of Roma communities deserves special focus in Europe. To address the multi-faceted problems of Roma exclusion, we need an integrated approach, and Parliament discussed it in depth in January when adopting a resolution on a European strategy on the Roma. In the package on the renewed social agenda, the Commission will present at the beginning of July its working document on Community instruments and policies for Roma inclusion.

I share the report's opinion on the need to make greater use of the synergies and complementarities among European policies and also among various financial instruments available. The Commission paid much attention to this when negotiating operational programmes of the cohesion policy with the national and regional authorities.

As to the issue of making available comparable intra-regional data for all regions in the European Union, with special regard to social indicators, while essential, I share the report's view here: it is a more complex one. As Members will be aware, Eurostat does not produce data, but manages data provided by the national statistical systems.

We have just completed the second edition of the Urban audit, covering the period up to 2004 and we clearly see how limited the availability of territorial data is below the NUTS 2 classical regional level. To address this challenge and also using the context of preparations of the Green Paper on territorial cohesion, the Directorate General for Regional Policy worked on improving the quality of research on regional policy, including its statistical bases. As a result, the expenditure 2000-2006 is today broken down to the NUTS 3 level, to 20 categories of expenditure at this level, and is available for Objective I regions, Objective II, Urban, Interreg and Cohesion Fund.

Rural audit is still a challenge ahead of us. Unfortunately, I must admit today that reliable data does not yet exist on where particular excluded groups are concentrated, hence it is impossible to cross-match our newly available information on what and where cohesion policy resources are spent on with the location of such groups. I consider that the margin of progress in this area, as it seems today, is rather in specific research, using qualitative analysis.

Once again, I thank Parliament for bringing to our attention all those important issues, and I am looking forward to the debate today.

Ilda Figueiredo, *draftsman of the opinion for the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development*. – (PT) As draftsman of the opinion for the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development, I reiterate the need to support rural areas, including mountain regions, where women play a central role. Their work must be valued and they must also be guaranteed decent incomes.

Well-paid productive activities and high-quality public services must be provided in order to retain young people and prevent rural depopulation. Particular attention must be paid to family farming and to small and medium-scale farmers by reforming the Common Agricultural Policy, which is currently being done, to make it fairer, to combat the rural exodus and to support agricultural products.

I also stress the need to support all less-favoured regions, areas with permanent structural disadvantages, the outermost regions and areas subject to industrial restructuring, relocalisation and company closures in order to reinforce economic and social cohesion and the social inclusion of vulnerable communities and groups.

Maria Petre, *on behalf of the PPE-DE group*. – (RO) Honourable President, Madam Commissioner, dear colleagues, first of all, I would like to thank the Rapporteur for the work and efforts made to conciliate different points of view. We all agree that vulnerable groups and communities deal with many difficulties in their development and require special attention within the cohesion policy, as well as the other available financial assistance instruments.

I have supported, during all the work stages, the need to structure the report into two distinct parts: one referring to vulnerable communities, from the point of view of ethnic membership, and the second one referring to vulnerable communities determined by certain geographical handicaps. Unfortunately, our request is not reflected into the current form of the report. Our group has three amendments, of whose approval our vote depends, namely the elimination of recital Ee, whose content is identical to that of recital

I, explaining the concept of a vulnerable area or zone by listing them, as well as eliminating paragraph 17. We hope we will have the Rapporteur's approval in this respect.

Finally, I would emphasize two more ideas: the problems of vulnerable communities from any point of view, either ethnic and/or geographical, could be treated more efficiently if there were cooperation in this field between the local, regional, national and European authorities. At the same time, the role of the educational system and the public, social and transport infrastructures is indispensable for integrating vulnerable groups and communities.

I end by specifying that our final position is conditioned, as I have already mentioned, by the acceptance of the three amendments and, especially, the elimination of paragraph 17, which was voted in the Commission. If these amendments are accepted, we will obviously support the report.

Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg, *on behalf of the PSE Group.* – (PL) Mr President, I would like to start by thanking the rapporteur for his work in producing the report that has been presented to us today. I would agree that there is a need for a micro-regional based approach focusing on intra-regional disparities and on the most sensitive areas.

In some cases, intra-regional disparities play an even greater role than differences between regions. We should remember that the objective of, and the assumption behind, European regional policy is the reduction of development differences between individual areas within the European Union, and the phenomenon of territorial exclusion has not yet been taken into consideration in policy instruments. In the new Member States, social segregation and failures as regards the provision of equal opportunities occur most frequently in rural areas, while economic and social initiatives in the regions are concentrated on dynamic centres, principally on urban centres.

Resources to combat poverty and social exclusion vary depending on the country, but, in order to create an EU that is territorially and socially cohesive, we have to implement additional measures aimed at unleashing the potential that is latent in economically backward areas.

Ramona Nicole Mănescu, *on behalf of the ALDE group.* – (RO) Honourable President, first of all, I would like to congratulate the Rapporteur for his work.

The cohesion policy is vital for the communities in the underdeveloped regions and sub-regions. The social-economic aspects, such as poverty, lack of infrastructure, administrative capacities, deindustrialization, low education and training level, high employment rate, poor living conditions, as well as reduced access to services of general interest transforms these communities into vulnerable groups, which represent an ever greater challenge for the cohesion of the European Union territories. Thus, a relation of interdependence results, between the need to reduce social-economic disparities between regions and the need for social integration of vulnerable groups, a relation that should naturally lead to a constructive process involving a territorial approach both at a national and a European level.

Honourable President, I believe that the absence of statistics regarding the spreading of these groups and their degree of social exclusion, as well as the incapacity of the indicators for measuring inter-regional disparities to supply viable data, prove, one more time, the need for the Member States and the Commission to cooperate more closely in order to obtain a real image of the situation of vulnerable regions and groups, as well as to set up concrete programmes and strategies for territorial development and overcoming social exclusion.

I also believe that Member States should take a first step by identifying these vulnerable groups and setting their priority in the strategic national plans and, afterwards, by developing mechanisms for evaluation and monitoring. We should not forget that, most of the time, migration is a consequence of poverty and the migration phenomenon itself generates instability and conflicts. For this reason, honourable President, we believe that vulnerable groups should benefit, from all Member States, from social assistance, equality of opportunities and, more than that, from specific programmes allowing the development of the regions where they come from.

Mieczysław Edmund Janowski, *on behalf of the UEN Group.* – (PL) Mr President, I would like to thank Mr Harangozó for working on this difficult issue, even though this report does not look at all the issues relating to situations, persons or environments that are excluded or at risk.

Despite the fact that a considerable part of the European Union budget is allocated to the implementation of its cohesion policy, serious disparities still remain. If, for example, we consider per capita GDP: in the

wealthiest regions this is nearly 10 times higher than in the poorest regions. We have to bear in mind that significant differences also exist within regions. Poor districts are also to be found within large conurbations. In addition, this is also a significant issue in many rural areas. This poverty can pass down from one generation to the next.

Let us therefore protect children and families from this phenomenon. What is needed here, above all, is the creation of equal opportunities, particularly with regard to education, healthcare and housing. This will be the proof of social and territorial cohesion, which have not yet been properly defined. The prospects of groups living in spatial, cultural and communications isolation are significantly poorer. These are issues involving both technical and social infrastructure, as well as jobs and the creation of a climate of internal activity in these societies.

Let us help our fellow citizens, who are subject to discrimination in one way or another, so that they can regain their belief in escaping from a lowly position in society. In addition, we must break the stereotypes that undervalue these groups. This relates to many people who are disabled or homeless, as well as to gypsy societies that have been discussed here. This type of segregation goes against our common solidarity and is a symptom of a failure to respect human dignity. Let us remember that we often have to deal with families with many children, as well as immigrant families, in these types of environments.

In addition, we need a common policy for creating equality on various levels: on the regional, national and EU levels. We also need volunteers and non-governmental organisations.

Lambert van Nistelrooij (PPE-DE). – (NL) Mr President, Commissioner, I am grateful to Mr Harangozó for his attention to vulnerable groups. Cohesion policy has been making an important contribution to improving conditions for vulnerable groups for a long time now. Take, for example, Ireland, once a country with very vulnerable groups: very high youth unemployment, rundown towns, underdeveloped countryside, with virtually no opportunities. For many other countries, too, social exclusion is to be replaced by employment, education and participation. That is the direction we are going in and it is extremely successful.

My second point: I have seen it said in particular that we know too little, have too little information. I agree that that could be improved, especially by the Member States, the regions and the towns themselves. Mr Harangozó wonders why the life expectancy of Hungarians is 15% lower than average life expectancy in the EU. I do not know either, but I have visited hospitals. Eating and drinking habits are extraordinarily bad, and the European Community can do nothing about that. I think that for people to take responsibility themselves in the regions is one of the most important bases of our policy.

Finally, what is the underlying reason for the EPP being against NUTS 4? We are against it because in 2004 we opted for strengthening of the policy up to 2013, for more substance, more focus. We even decided to include the whole external border, as it were, in the policy on Interreg areas on the external borders. That tends to mean that we will be fragmenting, we will be dissipating our efforts, and that should not be the direction we take in this area in the future. That would be a mistake. I am therefore asking you once again to delete the article concerned. Otherwise I accept the challenge the rapporteur has also set out, to have an intensive debate with each other about territorial cohesion with each other in the next six months.

Iratxe García Pérez (PSE). – (ES) Mr President, I would like to begin by adding my thanks to the rapporteur for having taken the initiative of drafting a report stating that one of the European Union's fundamental objectives is to reduce social, economic and regional inequalities.

The cohesion policy has made an effective contribution to reducing these inequalities, but a lot remains to be done, as discussed in the fourth report on cohesion.

There are vulnerable groups of people at risk of succumbing to social exclusion and absolute poverty in all regions, including the most prosperous. An integrated approach is needed when addressing deficiencies in equal opportunities. Member States and regional administrations need strategies to revitalise vulnerable areas, develop their infrastructure and promote genuine development opportunities in accordance with their specific economic potential, while maintaining services of general interest through local administrations strengthened by the decentralisation of the public sector.

Emmanouil Angelakas (PPE-DE). – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, the targeted, issue-specific nature of the Harangozó report represents an extremely significant move by the European Parliament to reach out to vulnerable communities and groups, and integrate them smoothly, through a European cohesion policy. As an initiative it meets with my full approval, and I acknowledge the effort made by the rapporteur, but I

beg to differ with the way the issue has been elaborated. Certain aspects of the report still have no substance, despite the conscientious effort made by my fellow Member.

Some of these aspects deal with vulnerable communities and groups representing a broad spectrum of society and micro-communities, not just the Roma. The European Parliament has already given its attention to this category in a special report, the scope of which should have been broader in order to cover both the social and geographical aspects. The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats has insisted on the usefulness of this broader approach, but has not been heeded. The report remains one-sided and often takes a short-sighted approach to this issue.

I am bearing in mind the mountain and island regions especially, as no-one can doubt the vulnerability of their communities. They are not mentioned anywhere in the report. I do not approve of constantly avoiding definitions or specific references to things and situations. Let me also point out that vulnerable communities and groups exist not only at inter-regional but also at intra-regional level. They need material and technical support, technological and scientific know-how, education, training and an administrative base. There should be an emphasis on decentralising the public sector and extending transport networks. Here, too, voluntary action might play an important role in these groups and might contribute towards activating and demarginalising them.

Despite the rapporteur's undoubted effort, I cannot say that the overall fabric of the report is satisfactory. It is notable for its ambiguities and lack of clear organisation in its sections. If we wish to contribute towards solving the problems faced by vulnerable groups, the texts we prepare must be clear-cut and explicit and must take a global view of the issue.

Evgeni Kirilov (PSE). – Mr President, I would like to congratulate my colleague Mr Harangozó on his own-initiative report.

Special attention to vulnerable groups under the EU's cohesion policy means we have not forgotten that the main priority of this policy is to contribute to the well-being of our citizens.

The regional dimension of this issue is clear. Nevertheless, in order to be able to identify the specific needs and location of the vulnerable groups, it is necessary to analyse the development strength of the small territorial units. Although we could find that vulnerability is a problem at lower levels – in the poorest regions, for example – it has a bearing on the whole territory and touches upon all social categories living there. That is why the policy, strategy and actions to address the problems of vulnerable groups must be comprehensive, based on a common approach on behalf of our institutions at European, national and local level.

Bernadette Bourzai (PSE). – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, first I want to congratulate Gábor Harangozó on the excellent job he has done and for his thoughts on this complex and delicate subject. I wanted to play an active part in the opinion drafted by the Committee on Agriculture and Rural Development on this report, for the most vulnerable people are often concentrated in the least developed rural areas and in areas with permanent natural disadvantages, which means that agriculture and rural development policy have a major role to play there.

Cohesion policy must, in my view, seek to maintain income-generating agricultural and non-agricultural activities in rural areas, in order to maintain a population that is often tempted by rural exodus, but also to welcome new arrivals. It is important to promote family farming, which creates jobs, and equal access to public services as also the provision of public services in order to respond to the needs of disadvantaged families, communities and groups. In short, we must make the rural environment attractive and fit to live in. We can achieve that aim by ensuring a linkage between the various policies conducted in these areas and targeted at these fragile groups and, therefore, drawing more on the complementary nature of the various available financial instruments.

Miloš Koterec (PSE). – (SK) I would like to thank Mr Harangozó for his excellent report, which deals with issues that have not been very prominent to date yet represent a dormant source of what are clearly rather significant problems. I would like to touch upon two concrete areas covered in the report: revitalising vulnerable communities, consisting mainly of people in rural and peripheral areas, and developing the micro-regions that are lagging behind, have an irregular situation in relations to the individual countries' specific characteristics and are almost absent from the current statistics.

Both of the above-mentioned areas are neglected due to the fact that they are not clearly identified. We must clearly define the highly vulnerable communities (both economically and socially) that exist in the European

Union, we must analyse the types and locations of the underdeveloped micro-regions in the EU, and we must find solutions to these problems. They are both difficult to see against the background of the global successes of the cohesion policies. We do not want the cohesion policies to be compared to Emmental cheese, which looks very compact on the outside.

Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE-DE). – (SK) The report in question correctly highlights the relationship between solving social issues and regional development, and the need for Europe to show solidarity and implement the cohesion policy in this area.

Personally, I devote a lot of my time to the problems involved in supporting regions that are lagging behind, especially in Slovakia. Preserving a strong and attractive European countryside is crucial for economic as well as cultural and ecological reasons. I support the call to the Commission to increase, within the framework of the forthcoming Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion, the funding needed to deal with regional problems. As part of this process, it will be necessary to ensure that the regions play an active role and to cooperate closely with the NGOs.

In this context, I would also like to say that the social activities carried out by churches and religious societies merit special praise. I know from experience that their services on behalf of underprivileged social groups and regions are very effective and often indispensable. Therefore, we have to see these services as an integral part of the European effort to help vulnerable groups and support them adequately at European level.

Stavros Arnautakis (PSE). – (EL) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I too would like to point out that with this report we are expressing our conviction that, 20 years after it was formulated, cohesion policy must continue to bring the solidarity of the Union not only to the most disadvantaged regions and countries, but also to the most disadvantaged communities and groups among our citizens.

We must strengthen cohesion policy not only with financial resources, but also with suitable mechanisms and procedures making it possible to track down and address complex, multi-faceted social and economic disparities at local level.

The challenges faced by our regions today are such that they do not allow us to leave the problems of poverty and social and territorial exclusion unresolved. Coordinated action is needed at all levels, as is an integrated approach, with resources and policies working together to deal with the problems.

Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE). – (PL) Mr President, at present, economic growth is concentrated around capital cities and large urban areas. Other areas, including rural areas, develop much more slowly, and this means that they are much more susceptible to problems. The objective of cohesion policy should be to help these areas and to support territorial cohesion.

For this it is essential to improve infrastructure, to increase the attractiveness of these areas to investors, to maintain public services and to improve housing and quality of life. What is very important for the development of rural areas is to create communications infrastructure; primarily this means roads, and also sewage treatment plants, as these create the necessary conditions for flows of investment and the creation of new jobs, which makes it possible for people to remain in these areas and to live decently.

To date, the Common Agricultural Policy has focused principally on food quality, food safety and competitiveness, but it has been less involved in rural development outside of the area of agriculture. It is vital to have better coordination between cohesion policy, rural development policy and employment policy.

Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN). – (PL) Mr President, point N of the report is right to point out that poverty and exclusion have a strong territorial character. Taking into account the principle of solidarity, which is generally respected in the European Union, together with the content of point N, I would like the allocation of resources from European funds to support the integration of economically disadvantaged areas.

Unfortunately, this year, this principle has been breached in my own country. Funds allocated to infrastructure improvements and other aid funds are being directed mostly to wealthier areas that are already well developed. This is often a consequence of better preparation by the persons who apply for these funds. I hope that the document we have been considering will help to eliminate these irregularities throughout the European Union.

Danuta Hübner, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I think this was a good discussion and I would like to thank all those who contributed to the debate, which showed that the integrated policy approach is

the best way to address effectively the problem of different vulnerable communities and groups. The link between cohesion policy and rural development policy seems particularly important here.

I also share Members' concern that, in cases where there is a territorial concentration of problems related to vulnerable groups, a territorial approach to policy is justified. Social inclusion should not be dissociated from territorial cohesion.

I also appreciate Members' emphasis on intra-regional disparities. As many Members have pointed out, developing good-quality, reliable intra-regional statistics would be of much help in this context. As I said in my introductory remarks, the Commission intends to invest further in developing such a database. We are now building a rural audit in the same way as we did an urban audit in the past. Good cooperation with Member States on this issue will be essential and I count very much on Parliament's support in this context.

Gábor Harangozó, rapporteur. – (HU) Thank you very much, Mr President. Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, I would first of all like to thank Commissioner Hübner, not only for her response to this report and to the debate, but also for the ongoing work aimed at making this policy better and more effective. I appreciate her efforts enormously and thank her also for her frankness concerning my report.

I would like to respond to a number of questions that have been raised. First, I think that if we take the problem seriously, then we should do as we did when we took seriously the need for the Lisbon process and the importance of ensuring implementation of the Lisbon process within cohesion policy, which led to the introduction of a system of earmarking cohesion policy funds in order to support the Lisbon process. In the same way, we can take action to combat the territorial concentration of poverty, if we want to. If we decide to.

I would also like to say to the PPE-DE Group, above all to Mr van Nistelrooij, that if we delete point 17, the report would state that we agree that there are micro-regions that are unable to avail themselves of the opportunities we provide for them. We agree that these are micro-regions, but why would we want to delete from the report the very point in which we urge the Commission to examine whether it might therefore be more effective to provide cohesion assistance to these micro-regions at micro-regional level? I still do not understand why we would need to do this.

I would like to say to Mrs Petre that I consider this to be a regional policy report. A regional policy report is not the place for a discussion on ethnic groups, and I do not understand why we should be discussing ethnic groups in any case. In the case of Romania, if we were to look at the matter from an ethnic perspective, which groups would she want me to include in the report? The Roma, who live in very poor circumstances in certain areas? The Csangos, who also live in dire circumstances in one particular area? Or the Romanians of the highland regions? We cannot decide on this basis; we need complex indicators, a complex approach and integrated implementation. Thank you for your attention.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow at 12 noon.

Written statements (Rule 142)

Bairbre de Brún (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (GA) I would like to welcome this report by Mr. Harangozó on the impact of the cohesion policy on the integration of vulnerable communities and groups. There is a growing voice calling for account to be taken of the difficult prospects facing districts or areas whose population has been on the periphery of decision-making and of mainstream economic development.

From my own constituency I know the difficulties facing not only disadvantaged urban areas, but also peripheral areas in the border counties of Ireland. These rural areas frequently face difficulties in securing investment in business or infrastructure. The ending of the "rural exodus" mentioned in this report should be a priority for politicians.

The role of those farming on small- and medium-sized farms in sustaining rural communities is correctly spelt out by Mr. Harangozó. Rural communities should not be demoted in the cohesion policy and a greater interlink between rural development and regional development in fighting social exclusion must be implemented.

Remoteness from communication and transport networks is a practical problem which must be tackled.

Bogdan Golik (PSE), *in writing*. – (PL) Cohesion policy, on which about 33% of the EU budget is spent, is of vital importance to all EU countries. Poland is pleased to participate in any actions relating to the full economic integration of society in Europe and to minimise disparities at the micro-regional level. I believe that the measures taken under the cohesion policy are fundamental to promoting sustainable development and eliminating unemployment, poverty and social exclusion, which constitute grave social and economic problems in Europe. Cooperation between all European countries and the exchange of experiences are of particular importance in this regard.

The problems that are slowing down the EU's sustainable development, including low incomes, poor infrastructure and low social mobility, relate principally to rural areas. The situation is aggravated by the growing exodus of people from the countryside and the increased social exclusion in these areas. In addition, among the problems faced by European cohesion policy at the beginning of the 21st century, are issues that are external in character, such as, for example, the growing development differences between the European Union and the USA. In the years 1995-2005 productivity growth in Europe was much lower than in the United States or in Japan. This has a significant effect on reducing the competitiveness of the European market.

I would like to thank Mr Harangozó for drawing these issues to our attention.

Livia Járóka (PPE-DE), *in writing*. – (HU) In the interests of stimulating employment, growth and competitiveness, the European Union must use the enterprise and labour potential at its disposal to the fullest possible extent. In view of the fact that most of the nearly 10 million Roma living in Europe are affected by structural and/or absolute unemployment or participate in the grey or black economy, integration of Roma people could have a decisive impact on the outcome of the Lisbon Agenda and cohesion policy. The report notes that cohesion policy has helped the poorest regions to close the gap in their economic and social development. Much more is needed, however, both in quantitative and in qualitative terms. The European Commission and Member States must work towards ensuring the coordination and complementarity of the available financial resources; European Union financial instruments, meanwhile, and primarily the European Social Fund and the European Regional Development Fund, must be deployed to support a large number of individual programmes, from providing micro-credits to businesses to investing in infrastructure development. To ensure that these programmes are successful and that the funds reach their intended target, it will be vital to identify and eradicate obstacles of both a general and a specific nature. Lagging regions that are battling with complex problems are unable to raise the counterpart funds necessary in order to obtain the Community assistance to which they are legally entitled. In the case of Roma people, meanwhile, the disadvantages they face as a result of a low educational level and generations of unemployment are multiplied several times over.

Cătălin-Ioan Nechifor (PSE), *in writing*. – (RO) I thank the Rapporteur for the spirit of cooperation in drafting this report. In Europe, one out of six people lives below the poverty threshold, a figure that does not include the statistics in Romania and Bulgaria.

Although in most Member States the difference between women and men, as regards poverty, is increasingly shrinking and the average difference is 2% as regards poverty and persistent poverty, I would like to draw attention to the reality in the new Member States. In Romania and Bulgaria, the number of women at risk of becoming victims of poverty is more than ten percent higher than the number of men. Women are also much more exposed to social exclusion.

We should not ignore the fact that the ideas of solidarity, social justice, and eradication of poverty are challenges regarding not only the countries in the European Union, but also its involvement on the world economic and political scene.

Therefore, I would like to welcome the inclusion into the final text of the matter regarding the difference between men and women, in a more general article. I also consider important the correlation of the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion with the Millennium Development Goals and, in particular, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty.

27. Policy coherence for development and the effects of the EU's exploitation of certain biological natural resources on development in West Africa (debate)

President. – The next and last item is the debate on the report (A6-0137/2008) by Frithjof Schmidt, on behalf of the Committee on Development, on policy coherence for development and the effects of the EU's exploitation of certain biological natural resources on development in West Africa (INI/2007/2183).

Frithjof Schmidt, rapporteur. – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, let me begin by translating the title of my report. When we speak of 'biological natural resources', we are referring to timber and fish. Timber and fish are the key resources for the social and economic development of the West African region. It follows that we are also speaking of deforestation.

We all know how alarming this development is. Of the forestry that existed in West Africa fifty years ago, only about 13% is still standing today. This means that 87% of the land that was once afforested has already been cleared. We all know what impact this has on climatic trends and the desertification process.

We have equally alarming statistics on overfishing in that area of the Atlantic and the grave problems it is creating. We are all familiar, of course, with the images of overloaded canoes landing on the Canary Islands with cargos of migrants from West Africa. The connection between the trends I have described and the increased migration to the European Union from West Africa is obvious and incontrovertible and is also a subject of political debate, of course, within our societies.

The European Union is the main market for timber and fish. We ourselves say that we buy some 80% of these products. For this reason, it is prudent, and indeed essential, to review the coherence of our development policy, our fisheries policy and our policy on trade in timber in order to establish the extent to which they interact fruitfully or whether their aims may also be mutually obstructive in some respects.

In the case of both products there is a need to prevent illegal plundering and to establish sustainable resource management. In the case of both products there is a need to ensure that the needs of the local economy and local consumers take precedence over international trade. If we do not achieve these aims, any self-sustaining development will be undermined, and the success of any development cooperation will be put at risk. That is why it is so important to conduct this coherence review in order to ensure that the other policies we pursue do not impair and undermine our development policy.

We know the instruments with which we can improve the situation. We need better monitoring of fish stocks and forests and better surveillance of the timber and fishing industries. We also need the establishment of the appropriate infrastructure for research into stock development and for the control and surveillance of economic activities. We have known this for a long time, and indeed that is the political course we have been steering for some time too.

In this context we must focus our efforts chiefly on combating illegal logging, illegal fishing and trade in illegal products. We must do that locally in West Africa. To that end, we must support our partner countries in West Africa, which includes helping them to gain access to the EU market. We must develop our monitoring systems. One of the vital tasks in the realm of development policy is to redirect our efforts towards a sustainable conservationist approach to logging, forestry management and fishing.

Allow me to deal with one more point and refer to a conflict concerning the report. We stated in the report that we must improve the conditions for joint ventures between companies in the European Union and African partners and that we must provide for the protection of investments. I find that right and proper, and these are necessary measures, but we must ensure that they do not create excess capacities which undermine the pursuit of our other measures, such as those designed to combat overfishing.

It is absolutely imperative that we resolve this conflict of aims. For this reason we added this statement to the opinion of the Committee on Fisheries as an additional point. I am anxious that the procedural conflict about who is entitled to make additions to what and where and when such additions can be made should not obscure the substance of the addition. It is of prime importance, in my view, to uphold the principle that no new excess capacities should be created. As you know, there has been a motion to delete this point from the report, but we must not allow that to happen.

Danuta Hübner, Member of the Commission. – Mr President, I would like to start by congratulating the rapporteur, Mr Schmidt, on this report. Policy coherence for development is an important issue, and let me

assure you that reducing the adverse effects and fully exploiting synergies between European policies and development is an integral part of our efforts to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

Other policies apart from development policy can in fact contribute significantly to development, and this naturally has a direct impact on the effectiveness of our aid.

As you rightly state in your report, tropical deforestation is a matter of concern for us all and I consider that a distinction should be made here between two aspects: deforestation and climate change on the one hand and combating illegal exploitation of forests on the other.

In Bali, the international community clearly identified the destruction of forests as one of the main causes of climate change. In keeping with the spirit of the UN Climate Change Conference the Commission intends to contribute EUR 5 million in 2008 to the Forest Carbon Partnership Facility, which is run by the World Bank. An additional EUR 60 million will be earmarked up to 2010 to finance the Global Alliance against Climate Change, an initiative we launched last year to underpin the efforts of the poorest countries to adapt to climate change.

Lastly, several countries including Ghana, Cameroon, Mali, Sierra Leone and Cote d'Ivoire have also included measures on the management of natural resources and governance of this sector in their national programmes for the 10th European Development Fund.

West Africa is also an important partner of the Union when it comes to combating the illegal exploitation of forests, as are Cameroon, Ghana, Liberia and Cote d'Ivoire, which export considerable amounts of timber to Europe.

Two of these countries, Cameroon and Ghana, are at this very moment finalising a voluntary FLEGT partnership agreement with the Union, and Liberia should be embarking on similar negotiations very shortly.

In relation to fisheries policy, as you rightly emphasised, the new fisheries partnership agreements have brought about greater coherence between the common fisheries policy and development policy; these new agreements are no longer confined to offering fishing opportunities to Community vessels, but also make it possible to embark on a dialogue with other partners in order to help them introduce a real sustainable and responsible fisheries policy in their waters.

In addition to the financial compensation granted under the fisheries agreements, which often contribute significantly to our partner countries' revenue and hence to their macroeconomic stability, these agreements form an essential political and legal basis. This enables the Community to facilitate the development of their fisheries policies on the basis of dialogue and in the light of the priorities our partners have established in their fisheries policies.

Where I cannot agree with you, however, is the statement in the report linking immigration and fisheries agreements. Even the countries concerned – take for instance Senegal, in the person of its minister of state, Mr Djibo Ka – have publicly rejected the accusations that the presence of Community vessels is having a significant impact on resources and on the decline in profitability for non-industrial fishermen who are often the people most affected by illegal immigration.

We are indeed working with fishermen, NGOs and private partners in Europe and in these countries precisely to try and reduce as much as possible all negative interaction and unfair competition between our fishermen and the most vulnerable fishermen in these countries.

At the moment there is no European fleet competing with the non-industrial fleets of these countries in West Africa, although the same cannot be said of other foreign industrial fleets.

Carmen Fraga Estévez, *draftsman of the opinion of the Committee on Fisheries*. – (ES) First, I regret the unacceptable conduct of the Committee on Development, which is under the impression it is not subject to the Rules of Procedure of the European Parliament. It has circumvented the strengthened cooperation procedure set out in Rule 47 and corrected the Committee on Fisheries' statements on issues that are strictly within the latter's competence. It has also behaved in a completely untrustworthy way from the start of this report by obstinately trying to usurp the competence of the Committee on Fisheries on the issue of Fisheries Partnership Agreements. While the Committee on Fisheries has issued an opinion that consciously sought to be completely respectful to the sensibilities we know this issue awakens in the Committee on Development, the latter has, as it intended from the beginning, intervened in purely common fishing policy matters.

Mr President, some committee chairmen have a tendency to think they can do no wrong and that the Rules of Procedure do not apply to them, although they should be their most prominent defenders. The result is sterile confrontation between committees that damages the credibility of the whole institution.

I hope that this case serves to stifle these temptations to abuse power and that all those who are interested in learning about the role played by the Fisheries Partnership Agreements in the development of the villages and national fisheries of West Africa can make an analysis based on a comprehensive and uncensored report.

By presenting this amendment on behalf of the PPE-DE Group, this rapporteur wants to show our willingness to get back on course, although we have announced that if the other political groups do not support the amendment, we will ask for the report to be returned to the competent committee for the fund.

Filip Kaczmarek, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.* – (PL) Mr President, I would like to thank Mr Schmidt for a very thorough and detailed report. If our development policy is really to be cohesive, then we need such detailed reports on issues relating to various aspects of development work. Of course, cooperation with other committees needs regulation, but, if we are to speak of policy cohesion, then clarification is needed regarding how individual parliamentary committees should work together.

The analysis of the exploitation of natural resources in West Africa by the European Union provides a real, rather than a half-hearted, assessment of the role of the European Union in this African region. We should be aware that the use of natural resources has very concrete, and, sometimes, very painful and complex social consequences. In this context it is very worrying that fish resources in West Africa are being over-exploited, which could pose a danger for local development since these resources provide food security in this region.

It is true that African nations often do not concern themselves with sustainable use of natural resources and, if they do, then it is to an insufficient degree. For this reason, we should view our activities in this region from both economic and ethical standpoints. I can understand that many politicians prefer to see European fishermen on the west coast of Africa rather than in the streets of Brussels. However, we must be careful not to act hypocritically because we cannot speak of a cohesive development policy without a sustainable fisheries economy in West Africa.

Similarly, we should not try to export our own social problems because, even if we could export them, they could well come back to haunt us in the form of migration problems. I also have the impression that we are using a kind of blackmail on ourselves by saying that, if we take our fleets from West Africa, other fleets may take our place and they will have even worse standards than those used at present. This is a dangerous way to think and I do not believe that we should use such arguments.

Thijs Berman, *on behalf of the PSE Group.* – (NL) Mr President, if we fish out the sea off the coast of Mauritania, that causes the very poorest people to come to Europe as immigrants, because they can no longer see any future at home. It is our poorest areas that have to deal with that, not the well-off areas. Then Europe loses the support of its voters, especially those on very low incomes. For that reason, too, cohesion policy is an absolute necessity. It is sad in very many ways, but also entirely understandable, that Ireland has rejected the Lisbon Treaty.

The Lisbon Treaty is a real step forward for development policy. It is the first text to establish coherence properly. The Union should not take away from the poor countries with one hand what is given with the other. The policy of the Union on agriculture, fisheries, trade should not run counter to development policy. Certainly it relates to several policy areas, but this is not a question of rivalry between committees in this Parliament. That is an unimportant detail.

The Treaty of Nice only required the Union to show itself a coherent force in the world. That turned out not to be enough. The agricultural policy shamelessly allowed our surpluses, such as sugar and grain, to be dumped on the world market with export subsidies. Fortunately those are now more or less a thing of the past.

It is only in the Lisbon Treaty, though, that supporters of the poor countries can find a legal basis enabling them to safeguard solidarity with the poorest people in the world. Ireland nevertheless voted against it. It was mainly the people with the lowest incomes who said no, because the poorest in Europe do not identify enough with this European Union. Too much insecurity, too many risks for them, they have to put up with the consequences of this incoherent and anti-social policy.

As the rapporteur, Mr Schmidt, has made crystal clear, the task is thus to show solidarity with all citizens of Europe and in the developing countries, whilst respecting the environment. That is no small task. There is a

strong temptation to trade one of those solidarities against the other. All the same, they are not opposed. Solidarity with developing countries is necessary for genuine solidarity with people on low incomes in Europe and the rest of the world.

Hélène Goudin, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (SV) When EU countries exploit the natural resources of poorer countries, they leave large footprints behind them. Fisheries in West African waters are close to being exhausted, trade in illegal timber is destroying the environment, and the exploitation of other natural resources has proved to have huge consequences in a poor and politically unstable region. Our activities have effects on the local population.

The report seeks more cohesion between the EU countries and wants the European Parliament to have more of a say. But many special interests are represented in this Parliament, which means that a European aid policy is bound to fail. The international work should be conducted by the United Nations and other organisations. If we really want to change the world as we say, we must resort to other measures. What the EU should do is to review and reform its own policy.

The EU must *cease* to subsidise failed European agriculture, *end* the hidden protectionism which characterises its trade policy and *abandon* its immoral fisheries agreements.

Bogdan Golik (PSE). – (PL) Mr President, according to the resolutions passed by the European Union, most Member States concentrate their aid activities on sub-Saharan Africa, which also includes the states of West Africa. This region has the greatest development needs. Poland, too, supports the European Union's standpoint as regards development policy and supports the realisation of the Millennium Development Goals in this region. There is growing support in Polish public opinion for aid to developing countries. Last year this stood at 77%. At the same time we are aware of the need to increase the efforts made by individual Member States to fulfil their obligations and to increase the cohesiveness and effectiveness of European development policy. At present a very important issue, in view of the existing divisions here, is the preparation of a common standpoint of the European Union and of the Parliament for the conferences in Accra and Doha.

Africa, as a region with the largest number of developing countries, has little experience of protecting its own biological resources. On the other hand, it is very important for Europe to have access to African mineral resources, and this is a policy that it is pursuing together with China and the Russian Federation. It is vital for European partners to improve their commercial attractiveness and to make development aid less dependent on democratic reforms in Africa. In particular, access to EU food markets is important to African nations. We should give them this access, before Brazil, the USA or Australia. What is needed is greater complementarity, cohesion and coordination in the aid programmes of the EU and of individual Member States. As regards the use of natural resources in West Africa, it is necessary to have an effective system for assessing the extent of this use, as well as better controls over it.

I would like to thank Mr Schmidt for drawing attention to all these issues.

Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM). – Mr President, according to the report, timber and fish are two of West Africa's most important resources. As the EU is the main destination of these products, it is up to us to play a significant role in promoting their sustainable development. The EU is now considering granting Morocco advanced status, which allows for greater trade opportunities, a deeper political dialogue and cooperation on foreign policy and security matters.

We are not opposed to this agreement in principle provided that Morocco agrees to end all human rights abuses in the illegally occupied territory of Western Sahara, that Morocco agrees to a free and fair referendum for the people of Western Sahara and that the fisheries partnership agreement is reviewed and the Saharawi population of Western Sahara are allowed to live as equal citizens of their Moroccan counterparts.

There are many reasons why Morocco is not qualified to be given advanced status. In particular, by granting Morocco an advanced status the EU will certainly strengthen Morocco's illegal occupation and make the political process towards a free and fair referendum more difficult. In addition, granting advanced status to Morocco would be going against the United Nations mission to organise a referendum on self-determination in Western Sahara.

Danuta Hübner, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, the discussion at this very late hour has clearly indicated the importance we all attach to this issue, so once again I thank Parliament for the report.

As has rightly been pointed out, timber and fish are two key products for the economic and social development of West Africa. Let me emphasise strongly once again that ensuring that the exploitation of these natural

resources is consistent with development goals must remain a priority for the European Union and for the countries of West Africa.

As I explained in my initial presentation and would like to reiterate now, the Commission is committed to this objective, and the resolution Parliament is going to adopt tomorrow will be an important contribution to our work.

Frithjof Schmidt, rapporteur. – (DE) Mr President, the first thing I wish to do – and this may come as a surprise in the light of her intervention – is to express my thanks to Mrs Fraga Estévez, for we personally cooperated very constructively on the report and resolved numerous problems too. We should keep that separate from the institutional conflict which exists between the Committee on Fisheries and the Committee on Development regarding the interpretation of the Rules of Procedure. The latter has something to do with the fact that, as a result of the ICEI study, we have been allocated the new task of performing coherence checks. The Council decided that measures in 12 policy areas were to be checked for consistency with development policy. These policy areas are always part of the remit of other committees. This naturally keeps causing institutional conflicts. It is a problem, but I would nevertheless like to thank you for our good personal cooperation on the substance of the report.

Commissioner, I believe that the Commission has been on the right lines with the FLEGT process and with the new Fisheries Partnership Agreement since 2002. That is a sound basis for further progress, and I would like to encourage you to proceed resolutely along that path towards the promotion of sustainable development. There is still a lot to be done here. This sound approach must be further developed. In so doing, you can surely rely on the support of this Parliament.

Let me say one final word on the link between migration and overfishing. I need hardly say that it is not the sole cause of migration, for which there are many reasons. There are, however, clear indications that overfishing does play a part. And the European Union, among others, is involved in that overfishing. The International Organization for Migration has just provided very tangible evidence of this link in relation to Senegal. To that extent the President of Senegal would be very ill-advised to close his eyes to the reality within his country and off its shores. We should examine these matters more critically and address and resolve these problems together.

President. – The debate is closed.

The vote will take place tomorrow at 12 noon.

28. Agenda of the next sitting : see Minutes

29. Closure of the sitting

(The sitting was closed at 11.05 p.m.)