

## WEDNESDAY, 14 JANUARY 2009

IN THE CHAIR: MR PÖTTERING

*President*

### 1. Opening of the sitting

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

### 2. Documents received: see Minutes

### 3. Presentation of the Czech Presidency's programme (debate)

**President.** – The next item is a statement by the Council on the presentation of the Czech Presidency's programme.

I should like to welcome most warmly the President of the Council, the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, Mirek Topolánek, to the European Parliament. A very warm welcome to you, Mr Topolánek.

*(Applause)*

I should also like to welcome most warmly the President of the European Commission, José Manuel Durão Barroso.

Ladies and gentlemen, we all know that holding the Presidency is particularly challenging, and I know that Prime Minister Topolánek finds it not only intellectually but also emotionally very touching, with his political experience in the years of communism, to now be delivering his report for the European Union as its representative.

This is the second Presidency, the first being Slovenia, to hail from a country that joined the European Union on 1 May 2004. I am sure that I speak for all of you, ladies and gentlemen, when I say that the Czech Presidency has our full support and that we intend to do our utmost to ensure it is a successful Presidency for the European Union at this difficult time.

On this basis, President-in-Office of the Council, Prime Minister Topolánek, I should like to invite you to address this House. Once again, a very warm welcome to the European Parliament.

*(Applause)*

**Mirek Topolánek, President-in-Office of the Council.** – (CS) Mr President of the European Parliament, Mr President of the European Commission, ladies and gentlemen, I come before you today for the first time as President of the European Council. The Czech Republic has assumed leadership of the EU after France, which I consider to be more than symbolic. France played an important role in the birth of the modern Czech state. The French court is where our greatest king, Charles IV, Holy Roman Emperor, grew up, and, following the model of the Sorbonne in Paris, he founded the university in Prague, one of the outstanding institutions of European learning. We are linked to France, then, both through the fulfilment of our national aspirations and in the promotion of universal European values.

Just as it was not easy to found a university in Bohemia to compare with the Sorbonne, it is not easy to take over the EU presidency from France. I see only one way of fulfilling this task honourably. It is no accident that I have chosen a medieval monarch as an example of our links with France and with European values. Charles IV, in his policies, could not uphold a narrowly Czech stance; on the contrary, he had to integrate and represent a whole diverse empire.

In a sense, the European Union follows on from this medieval universalism – if nothing else, in the fact that it prefers a common moral code and common legal basis over local power interests. There is also talk of a second European Union, bureaucratic, technocratic and soulless, but I believe in that first Europe: the Europe of freedom, justice, ideas and rules.

In that universe of values where the law is promoted above the individual, the size of the country does not matter. What matters is the ability to serve a common idea. The role of the country holding the presidency is neither to promote its interests nor to make decisions. Its role is to moderate and inspire debate. Today I do not stand before you as the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, but as the President of the European Council. The views which I shall be representing here, over the next six months, will not be my personal views or those of the Czech government. They will be the consensus of 27 countries, embodied in the conclusions of the European Council.

I cannot imagine coming before you in any other way. You, of course, as the directly elected Members of the European Parliament, have the right to ask me about anything, and, if you are interested, I shall always be happy to give you my opinion or to explain the Czech position; but I myself do not consider this to be essential. The arena for national interests is the European Council, which was conceived as such within the necessarily complex system of checks and balances of European democracy. However, the Council's primary mission is to seek a meeting-point, a compromise acceptable to all. I shall always rigorously, decisively and correctly uphold that here.

In the EU, they say the Czechs are always dissatisfied with something. That we are among the grumblers that others should be afraid of, that we are a nation of Hussites and hotheaded chauvinists. I fundamentally disagree with this type of criticism. Like our first president, T.G. Masaryk, I am convinced that the 'Czech question' is in fact a European question, and that it has always developed within a pan-European context, in accordance with common European values and in conjunction with developments in other countries.

As Masaryk wrote a hundred years ago in the second edition of his 'Czech Question': 'Our national literary and language revival took place at the same time as revivals and new developments in all European nations. This means that our revival was not as isolated and miraculous as it is usually said to have been, but was fully part of the Europe-wide trend.'

I believe these words are still relevant now, when the European Union as a whole, and its individual states, are seeking out a new face for Europe. A face in which traditional European values will be reflected, and which will also look boldly ahead into the third millennium. A face in keeping with the Union motto, '*In varietate concordia*', an expression of unity and at the same time diversity. Just as in the 19th century, the Czechs are entering this debate as a young and small Member. Just as then, however, we consider ourselves a long-standing part of the great family of proud European nations.

Over the next six months we shall have the opportunity to demonstrate fully our attitude towards European integration. The Czech presidency comes in a year significant for a number of reasons. This year is the fifth anniversary of the historically largest EU expansion, in 2004, which was the symbolic and practical culmination of the successful process of reunifying a previously divided continent; and this year Europe celebrates 20 years since the fall of the Iron Curtain, which enabled the countries of the former Soviet bloc to return to freedom and democracy.

2009 will also be the 30th anniversary of the first direct elections to the European Parliament which you represent. Of the triangle of EU institutions, it is Parliament that we consider to be the source of direct political legitimacy. The European Parliament is the only directly elected body of the EU, and with repeated calls for a reduction of the so-called 'democratic deficit', its authority has increased over the decades.

Finally, this year marks 60 years since the founding of NATO, which is the most important Transatlantic defence alliance. NATO is the manifestation, at security level, of the Euro-Atlantic ties that confirm the validity of our European civilisation's values on both sides of the ocean.

2009 will not only be a year of significant anniversaries, but also a year of important and difficult challenges. We must continue to resolve institutional issues. The international role of the EU will be tested not only by the still-unresolved conflict in Georgia, but also by the new escalation of tensions in the Middle East. Finally, the issue of energy security once again demands our urgent attention. In addition to our scheduled tasks we shall, like the French presidency, have to face new events. Further surprises can never be ruled out.

The country holding the presidency cannot influence the EU's long-term agenda or the emergence of new problems. What it can and must influence is the selection of presidential priorities; and, as is customary, I intend to set out these priorities here.

Our primary effort has been to ensure that these priorities not only represent the Czech point of view, but also reflect the continuity of developments in the EU, and the positions and ideas of individual Member States and political tendencies. This has been a broad and consensual task, not a confrontational and one-sided

one. Even though it is of course impossible for everyone to be 100% satisfied with these priorities, I believe that all of you can find something in our programme that you can identify with.

At the same time, I am certainly not hiding the fact that for the Czech Republic, just like every other Member State, the presidency provides an opportunity to draw attention to areas where our specific know-how enables us to contribute something to Europe. What are those areas?

As a country dependent on oil and gas imports and as a former Eastern Bloc country, we are well aware of the importance of energy security as a requirement not only for economic wellbeing, but also for a free and independent foreign policy.

As a new Member State with experience of totalitarianism, our membership of the Community means a great deal to us, and we consider it our moral duty to strengthen cooperation with those who are left outside. Just as France put its know-how to use in relation to the Mediterranean, we want to convince the EU of the importance of the Eastern Partnership.

The third contribution that I want to mention here is our experience with the crisis in the banking sector which we went through at the end of the 1990s. We can contribute to the current debate with our recommendations and our experts. Due to the stabilisation of financial institutions we are one of the very few countries today that have not had to pump taxpayers' money into rescuing banks affected by the financial crisis.

Our priorities for the presidency reflect Czech know-how, respect the continuity of EU development and are in fact well-matched to the existing problems.

As you probably know, the motto of our presidency is 'Europe without barriers'. I would add to that the subtitle 'a Europe of rules'. This vision gains new importance in today's troubled political and economic situation. We believe that only a Europe that makes full use of its economic, human and cultural potential can hold its own, economically and politically, in global competition. This is doubly true in times of crisis.

The full development of Europe's potential is hindered by a number of internal barriers that we should try to remove. I am thinking, for example, of the last remaining obstacles to the full exercise of the four basic EU freedoms by all Member States – the unnecessary administrative burden for entrepreneurs, or the lack of connections between energy networks, which is an obstacle to increased energy security and the development of the internal energy market.

On the other hand, a Europe without barriers cannot be a Europe without rules and borders. The removal of internal barriers must go hand in hand with protection against illegal activities that threaten the safety and interests of Europeans, especially in the areas of protection of intellectual property, and illegal immigration. Only clearly set boundaries will enable us to play a more active role in breaking down external barriers, for example in international trade, so that we can make better use of the potential, and the comparative advantages, of European countries.

During the six months of its presidency, the Czech Republic will aim for these overarching objectives through the implementation of three main programme areas, the 'Three Czech E's': 1. Economy, 2. Energy, 3. The European Union in the World. With slight exaggeration, it could be said that these 3 E's have been transformed, at the beginning of the year, into 2 G's: Gas and Gaza. In physics, E means energy and G is the symbol of gravitational acceleration. For anyone in need of exercise, 2 Gs is plenty of exertion.

I shall say straight away that I could speak for hours about individual priorities and tasks; but more important than any words are the results of the Czech presidency so far. Today is the 14th of January, which means we have held the presidency for two weeks. Within this time, we have managed to find a political solution to the complicated problem of Russian gas, and to negotiate an agreement between the two sides in the dispute. We have also led a European delegation to the area of the Middle East conflict. The delegation completed a difficult round of talks with all the parties involved, and achieved the first successes in opening a humanitarian corridor to Gaza.

All this has come at a time when we have faced a difficult situation at home, with a government reshuffle, and have been subjected to attacks from the opposition, which has been irresponsibly torpedoing the Czech presidency of the EU and holding the country's foreign commitments to ransom in a domestic political dispute. I think the results we have achieved in spite of this are a more than adequate response to the doubting voices that said that the Czech Republic, for objective and subjective reasons, was not up to the task of leading the EU.

Turning, now, to individual areas in more detail:

#### The first E: Economics

The Czech presidency will press mainly for the full implementation of the conclusions of the G20 Summit Declaration of November 2008 and the European Council conclusions of December 2008. In accordance with these conclusions the key requirement for success is to prevent excessive regulation and to avoid protectionism – or in other words, to abide by primary EU law, to abide by established rules. The EU must not close itself off from the world; on the contrary, it must strive for the greatest possible openness in world trade and draw the maximum benefit from it.

Here, the words of my friend Joseph Daul of the PPE-DE Group are very much to the point: ‘The current economic crisis is not a defeat for capitalism, but rather the result of political mistakes and a lack of rules for the oversight of financial markets.’

The priority tasks will be a review of the directive on capital adequacy of investment companies and lending institutions, the completion of talks on the directive regulating insurance, a regulation on the activities of ratings agencies, and a directive on electronic money institutions. The presidency will also press for a review of the regulation on payments in euros, and, last but not least, for prompt and thorough implementation of the roadmap of the Economic and Financial Affairs Council, which was adopted in response to the crisis on the financial markets. At the same time, it is essential to thoroughly analyse the possibilities offered by the legislation currently in force, and to make full use of these.

Only an economically strong and influential EU can manage to resolve the important questions of global policy, security, trade and the environment. The presidency must therefore devote itself to the realisation of the European Economic Recovery Plan, with emphasis on its incorporation into the Lisbon Strategy framework: after short-term tools for strengthening our economies, the tools for medium- and long-term structural reforms will come into play.

An example of these important structural reforms is the common agricultural policy. The key lies in setting equal terms for all EU Member States in the making of direct payments – both in terms of the amounts paid, and in terms of the payment system (removing historical disparities, making allowance for the diversity of individual Member States’ agriculture). The Czech Republic wants to incorporate this dimension into the debate on the future of the common agricultural policy after 2013.

In the long term, the best protection against the devastating impact of future crises is to strengthen the EU’s competitiveness. As I have said before, this is about the full assertion and exercise of the four basic freedoms on which the EU is founded. To these, I would add a ‘fifth freedom’ – the free movement of knowledge, which is something of a return to the medieval universalism I have mentioned.

An important factor for improving competitiveness is an improvement in the quality of regulation, including a decrease in the regulatory burden, to make doing business easier, especially for small and medium-sized enterprises. The Czech Republic is taking a very high profile in this area.

In the area of foreign trade, the presidency is focusing on a revival of discussions at the WTO. Here, we attach great importance to successful completion of the Doha Development Agenda (DDA). The DDA represents an effort to achieve a transparent liberalisation of trade at multilateral level, which will bring long-term benefits. If the talks on the DDA are suspended, the presidency will attempt to set in motion some thinking on multilateral trade tools and will support a step-up of discussions within the framework of the other WTO agendas.

We must not forget investments in education, research, development and innovation, alongside the need to improve the regulatory environment and reduce the administrative burden. Here I shall quote the Chairman of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, Martin Schulz: ‘Europe cannot successfully compete with other regions of the world on low wages and social standards, but on technological innovations, higher quality of work and the competence and knowledge of its people.’ I fully endorse this view.

#### The second E: Energy

The second priority, like the first, fits into the context of current developments. Even more urgently and compellingly, I would say. The global crisis may weaken Europe in the short term; but the energy shortage that threatens us would immediately, and in the long term, destroy not only the European economy, but

also our freedom and security. The Czech presidency will definitely continue its efforts to provide secure, competitive and sustainable energy for Europe.

In the area of energy security, we would like to focus on three aspects: firstly, completing the Second Strategic Energy Review, including an analysis of medium-term energy demand and supply in the EU and, based on this, the identification of appropriate infrastructure projects. Secondly, completing the directive on the maintenance of minimum stocks of crude oil and petroleum products, where we support an increase in the mandatory minimum stocks from 90 to 120 days. Thirdly, reforming the Trans-European Energy Networks (TENs-E); here, the energy security legislation package approved by the Commission in November 2008 also includes the Green Paper on European energy networks. No less important is the strengthening of infrastructure on the Member States' territory, including the existing trans-border connections, and implementation of new energy network connections. In all related legislative acts, we hope to have the European Parliament's support.

Naturally, we are also interested in diversifying the supply and transport routes. It is clear that the construction of the Nabucco gas pipeline, for example, is an issue of the highest priority, and support for construction of new oil pipelines is equally important. Further, we must make efforts to diversify the energy mix, including the rehabilitation of nuclear energy and investment in new technologies.

As an example of our ability to achieve energy security in practice, we would point to the agreement we have brokered on the creation of a monitoring mechanism for the transit of Russian gas. The goal was to restore basic trust between the Russian Federation and Ukraine, and to introduce elementary transparency to the issue. We have managed to get Russia and Ukraine to sign a single document, so that renewal of supplies to the EU becomes possible.

Now the EU must take decisions and measures to ensure that in future there is no repeat of this crisis with its impact on the Member States. Transparency in the gas business must be increased, and the supply routes and suppliers must be diversified. The EU countries' energy mix must be diversified. We need to think seriously about developing safe nuclear energy. The building of infrastructure in the EU must be implemented rapidly, in order to provide effective connections between Member States as a prerequisite for building an effective gas market.

In the area of the internal market and infrastructure, we must make efforts to achieve effective coordination of transmission system operators, to complete the building of a unified internal market for electricity and gas, and to ensure that the gaps in the transmission and transport system are eliminated.

On the question of legislative priorities in this area, we want to conclude the third package on the internal energy market, which means completing the review of two directives and two regulations on electricity and gas whose goal is to complete the liberalisation of the electricity and gas market. We also aim to bring the regulations properly into operation, and to establish an agency for cooperation between energy regulators.

Another area is the increase in energy efficiency, which the Swedish presidency wants to take on in greater detail; this means that the France – Czech Republic – Sweden trio of presidency countries will have tackled the energy issue truly comprehensively and from all sides.

While this priority is called Energy, it is inseparably linked with climate protection policy. In this area, the presidency will try to achieve a globally acceptable agreement on the setting of reduction commitments after 2012. This especially means getting the USA, India and China on board, and it will prepare the way for achieving a broad international consensus at the end of 2009 in Copenhagen. Such a consensus should also reflect current trends in the world economy. In the context of the coming economic recession and the supply crisis, it will be particularly important to harmonise the requirements of the environment, competitiveness and security.

The beginning of the year reminded us that as part of the priority of 'the EU in the World', we must also allow for unforeseen urgent tasks. The new escalation of tension between Israel and Hamas requires not only an active approach from the EU itself, but also coordination with important global and regional players. Again it is confirmed that peace cannot be achieved until Palestine begins to function as a fully-fledged state which is able to guarantee law and order in its territory and safety for its neighbours.

For this reason, in addition to current diplomatic activities, the European Union must continue its efforts to build the Palestinian infrastructure, with the training of security forces and reinforcement of the authority of the Palestinian administration. In the process of resolving the conflict, the Czech presidency will want to

make use of its good relations with both Palestine and Israel; but it is obvious that without mutual trust, long-term peace in the Middle East is not possible.

I have already mentioned the Eastern Partnership. The Georgian crisis showed how important it is for the EU to have a strategy for that region. The deepening of the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, through a strengthening of cooperation with the countries of the region (above all, with Ukraine), and likewise with the countries of the Transcaucasian and Caspian region, is of great importance, not only morally but also practically. This cooperation will enable us to diversify our foreign trade and supplies of energy raw materials.

As far as Transatlantic relations are concerned, it is obvious that unless they are strengthened and developed, the EU cannot effectively perform its role as a strong global player, just as the United States is now unable to perform this role independently. In the long term, we can only succeed if we work together. The Czech presidency will therefore place emphasis on intensive dialogue with the representatives of the new US administration in the key areas of economy, climate and energy, and cooperation with third countries (Pakistan, Afghanistan, Russia, Middle East).

Also of fundamental importance for the EU's standing in the world is the position taken by the Member States when negotiating a new agreement on partnership with Russia. Events of recent years, and especially recent months, raise a number of questions and underline the necessity of a unified approach from the EU as a whole. Prerequisites for this are an understanding of Russia and a common analysis, and we therefore support the cooperation of experts on Russia across the European Union.

Under the Czech presidency, talks will also continue on enlargement covering the countries of the Western Balkans and Turkey. The Western Balkans must not be forgotten because of our economic problems and current international crises. In the case of Croatia, the presidency will do all it can to ensure that this country joins the EU as soon as possible. The positive example of Croatia is a necessary condition for maintaining the European prospects of other Western Balkan countries. We shall certainly do everything possible to support their progress within the Stabilisation and Association Process.

As part of this project, the Czech presidency is also prepared to continue developing a southern dimension to the European Neighbourhood Policy and improving relations with partner countries. This includes strengthening EU-Israel relations and the Middle East peace process in general – the current dramatic events in that region must not deter us. On the contrary, they underline the necessity of finding a peaceful solution.

Last but not least, the priority of Europe in the World includes the area of internal security. This is because current security threats, by their nature, increasingly intrude into internal security. The building of a space of freedom, security and law is a common interest of the EU that touches the lives of all its citizens. In this context, the presidency will make efforts towards further progress in Schengen cooperation, in police and customs cooperation, and in cooperation between Member States in civil and criminal matters.

We are aware that the end of our presidency will be marked by elections to the European Parliament, a more intense political atmosphere, and the need to complete the legislative process for selected legislative acts, so that they do not fall by the wayside. Also on our agenda is the start of discussions about the new form of the European Commission.

It is also up to the Czech presidency to continue the debate with Ireland on the fate of the Treaty of Lisbon. I am convinced that it is necessary to conduct these talks sensitively and with respect for the sovereignty of Irish citizens. Besides, if a referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon were to take place in the Czech Republic, all the signs are that it would not pass there either. It is necessary to find a solution that a majority of the Irish will be able to accept. This will undoubtedly help us in our internal political debate as well.

I began by saying that the Czech question is also a European question. Probably no other nation has devoted so much space, effort and time to a debate on its own identity as the Czechs have. What the European Union is going through now, a search for its form and the purpose of its existence, is something we know very well from our own history. In our role as the country holding the presidency, we therefore offer the Community our two hundred years of experience in seeking our own historical role, our own place in the family of European nations.

The Czech relationship to Europe was well described more than seventy years ago by the critic and philosopher František Václav Krejčí: 'We do not see the Czech lands as 'the heart of Europe' in a geographical sense so much as in a cultural and intellectual sense. We are in the deepest heartland of the continent, where influences from all its parts converge; we feel surrounded by all European nations, if not directly, then through the

imaginative power of cultural works. We say this because we are at the crossroads of intellectual currents, and it follows that it is our mission to mediate, and especially to mediate between east and west.'

I think these words are an inspiration at the beginning of 2009, when the task facing the Czech Republic over the next six months is to be the moderator of debate in the European Union. Thank you for your attention.

**President.** – President-in-Office of the Council, we wish to thank you for your most constructive, extensive report, and to wish you all the best for your Presidency!

**José Manuel Barroso, President of the Commission.** – (FR) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, ladies and gentlemen, the first few days of 2009 leave no room for doubt. The next six months are going to put the European Union to the test. Europe will have to prove its determination to help its citizens, workers and businesses to face and to overcome the economic crisis. Europe will have to prove its solidarity in emergency situations such as the sudden turn-off of the gas supply that we are experiencing at present. Europe will have to demonstrate its ability to use all its external influence to settle international conflicts as dangerous for world peace as the Gaza conflict is today.

In close cooperation with the Czech Presidency-in-Office of the Council – and I should like to welcome Prime Minister Topolánek and all of his team, I wish them every success at the head of the Council, and, once again, I wish to express my full confidence in the Czech Republic's ability to fulfil this very important role – in close cooperation with the latter and with the European Union, the Commission will strive to demonstrate that the Union is equal to the task. Together, we can show Europeans during these six months why the European Union is so vitally important today. We can show them why it is directly in their interest to voice their opinions by electing MEPs who will sit in the next European Parliament. Let us show our fellow citizens why Europe needs the increase in democracy and effectiveness provided for by the Treaty of Lisbon and why it should benefit from it, and let us also show them why, now more than ever, we need a Treaty of Lisbon that has the backing of all our Member States.

We have a solid foundation from which to start. In 2008, the Union demonstrated that it was capable of taking difficult decisions that commit our societies for many years. The energy and climate-change package clearly illustrates the political will of a visionary and determined Europe. With this package, we are able to take steps towards reaching an ambitious international agreement in December. In 2008, the Union also proved its capacity to adapt to change. It quickly found the means to react to the financial crisis, and it very quickly reached an agreement on a recovery plan to stimulate the European economy without delay. I shall come back to this.

The Union also enters 2009 secure in the strength of its international reputation. It was first in line to help resolve conflicts such as the one between Russia and Georgia; it will not diminish its efforts to help bring together parties in conflict such as in Gaza; and, in fact, it is thanks to the European Union that at least humanitarian corridors have been opened up to help the people of Palestine.

The European Union has also inspired the courses of action that the G20 has taken forward to tackle the economic crisis. It has reaffirmed its full commitment to the opening up of markets, especially to the conclusion of the Doha process for development and trade and also to the Millennium Development Goals, which the rigours of the crisis must not call into question. Europe must also continue to do everything it can to meet today's challenges, and I believe that we have reason to be confident.

In the course of this year the Commission is going to continue to do everything to ensure that we do not lose the momentum that we gained at Washington during the G20. We believe that it is important to continue to pull out all the stops to reform the global financial system, and we have an extraordinary opportunity with the G20 in London. The European Union must speak with one voice in London and must continue to show its leadership in the context of reforming the global financial system.

The Commission will continue to propose important initiatives this year, for example to better regulate the way in which the financial markets operate, to launch a new action programme in the field of justice, freedom and security, and to propose new measures for adapting to climate change. We shall draft our proposals with the budgetary review in mind. Furthermore, we shall pay particular attention to developments in the economic and social situation and shall take all necessary measures. You are still in the process of examining some very important proposals, ladies and gentlemen. We hope that they will be able to be adopted by the end of the parliamentary term, and this, in particular, thanks to the commitment made by the Czech Presidency. I have in mind, more specifically, the proposals linked to the economic and financial crisis, to

the social package, to the internal energy market – which current events have shown to be so very crucial – and also to the telecoms package and to road transport.

I will focus my remarks today on energy and on the economy. It is here where Europe's citizens will feel most pressure this year. And it is here where decisive effective action by the European Union can make a real difference.

An issue which requires urgent and decisive European attention is gas, where, through no fault on the European Union side, we have had to plunge into a dispute between Russia and Ukraine on gas transit. The current situation is, in short, both unacceptable and incredible. Unacceptable, as the European Union consumers in some Member States are still without gas after a week without supplies. Incredible, because we remain in this situation the day after an important agreement was signed at senior level with assurances from Russian and Ukrainian leaders that they will implement the agreement and let the gas flow.

Without judging intentions, there is an objective fact: Russia and Ukraine are showing that they are incapable of delivering on their commitments to some European Union Member States. The fact is that Gazprom and Naftogas are unable to fulfil their obligations towards European consumers.

I would like to convey a very clear message to Moscow and Kiev. If the agreement sponsored by the European Union is not honoured as a matter of urgency, the Commission will advise European companies to take this matter to the courts and call on Member States to engage in concerted action to find alternative ways of energy supply and transit.

*(Applause)*

We will see very soon whether there is a technical hitch or whether there is no political intention to honour the agreement. I shall spell this out. If the agreement is not honoured, it means that Russia and Ukraine can no longer be considered reliable partners for the European Union in matters of energy supply.

*(Applause)*

In any case, the Commission will come forward with further proposals to improve energy security in Europe, following our strategic energy review of last November.

Implementation of the climate and energy package and the mobilisation of the EUR 5 billion of unspent money from the Community budget in favour of energy interconnections will also be crucial, and I would like to thank the Czech presidency for its support for the fulfilment of this commitment which was taken at the highest level at the last European Council. Europe must act now to avoid future repetitions of this type of situation.

Let me now widen the scope and look at the economy. All the signs are that the economic climate is continuing to worsen. Unemployment is rising. Production figures continue to fall. Things are likely to get worse before becoming better. We must not hide the seriousness of the situation, but we must not be negative and fatalistic. We have designed the right strategies to get us through this crisis. We can cushion its impact on the most vulnerable in our societies, and we can take decisions now which will stand us in good stead when we come out of this crisis, and we hope that we will come out of this crisis.

The top priority for the coming weeks must be to work together to turn our intentions into reality. The recovery plan proposed by the Commission and backed by the European Council is the right response. It provides a stimulus large enough to have an impact in every Member State: around 1.5% of European Union GDP represents a significant amount of money, if well spent.

It aims at maximum effectiveness by hitting two targets with one shot: the long-term health and competitiveness of the European economy, and the need for a short-term stimulus to arrest the downturn. It recognised that this is not an abstract economic debate, but a crisis that affects Europeans, their livelihoods and their well-being. The social consequences of the crisis must be addressed directly.

Finally, it uses the European dimension to best effect through appropriate coordination to ensure that action in one Member State has a positive knock-on in the others and sparks a positive interaction.

To put this programme into action we need the active commitment of the presidency, the support of individual Member States and of the Council, and the clear engagement of this Parliament. It means, in particular, swift agreement on the legal proposals in the package, from accelerating the use of the Structural Funds to the revised European Globalisation Adjustment Fund, and agreement on the release of EUR 5 billion of unspent

commitments to strategic projects, with a particular focus on energy and energy interconnections. The Russian-Ukrainian crisis has made it clearer than ever that filling in the gaps in our energy infrastructure is to the strategic benefit of all Europe. It means effective implementation of the plan to release a stimulus of around EUR 200 billion into our economy. And, of course, it means keeping the situation under review because, as you will understand, the situation may evolve.

As we take this short-term action we must not lose sight of the long term. We can work best if we build on some of the successes on which Europe's prosperity has been based, such as the internal market. The motto of the Czech presidency, 'Europe without barriers', is indeed an important and inspiring message, but as Prime Minister Topolánek said, let me also emphasise that a Europe without barriers needs rules – European rules. Rules to ensure a level playing field between Member States and between economic operators. Rules to ensure that the benefits of European integration are shared out amongst citizens. Rules to ensure the long-term sustainability of our way of life.

We will work closely with the presidency and with this Parliament in this direction because the Europe we want and the Europe we need is one that combines freedom, solidarity and security for the benefit of all Europeans.

*(Applause)*

**Joseph Daul**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, Mr President of the European Commission, ladies and gentlemen, having only just taken office, the Czech Presidency finds itself faced with considerable difficulties and entrusted with the onerous task of managing three major crises: the continuation of the economic and social crisis, the gas crisis bringing Russia and Ukraine into conflict and seriously affecting the Union and its neighbourhood, and the outbreak of another war in the Middle East.

In the face of these challenges, the only stance that our countries can take is to join forces, show solidarity and take both coordinated and determined action.

I am pleased to note that the Czech Presidency, in close cooperation with the European Commission, has acted swiftly and as one in the energy crisis bringing Kiev and Moscow into conflict with one another. Although a solution is not yet in place, we cannot accept being held hostage; we need to act forcefully. You are right, Mr Topolánek and Mr Barroso. By including energy among its three major priorities, the Czech Presidency fully grasped what will be one of Europe's major challenges in the years to come, namely our energy independence and the necessary diversification of our energy resources.

The Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats is, like all European citizens, extremely concerned about this conflict and about the threat that it poses to European countries as a whole. We cannot tolerate EU Member States being held hostage in this conflict, and this demonstrates, once again, the urgent need for agreement on a European energy policy. We must therefore give serious thought to ways of reducing our dependence and must take action to implement energy mixes.

Ladies and gentlemen, the situation prevailing in the Middle East also takes us back to the need to accept our responsibilities at international level. Yes, Europe is the world's biggest donor of humanitarian aid – we can be proud of that, and it must continue – but it is not humanitarian aid on its own that is going to resolve the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians.

What Europe needs is a strong, articulate political will, one with enough human, military and financial resources to make it a credible actor on the world stage. Why does the world have its eyes glued to Barack Obama? Because Europe is not yet capable of putting forward his vision, ideals and knowledge. Europe has criticised, and rightly so, the unilateralism of the current US administration, and if, as I hope, things change with the new occupant of the White House, are we ready to guarantee our share of multilateralism? Are we ready to release the military resources, not to go to war, but to guarantee peace? Are we ready to release the budgetary resources needed to give us the means to conduct our policy?

Mr Topolánek, you have rightly made the Union's external relations one of your priorities. Current events provide many examples of the urgency with which this subject should be treated, be it in relations with Russia, the United States or the Middle East, not to mention with the Mediterranean, the Balkans, Africa or the emerging countries. Europeans expect Europe to exert its influence on the international stage; all the opinion polls have shown this for years. Why wait?

Lastly, the Presidency-in-Office will have to cope with the economic and social crisis by overseeing the implementation of the national recovery plans, by leading the European Union at the G20 summit to be held in London in April. We call on the Czech Presidency to work hand in hand with the European Commission to define and implement, together with our international partners, rules to be imposed on economic operators.

The European Union must protect its social model, the social market economy, and must promote the implementation on the world financial markets of a market supervision system similar to that which prevails in our countries. Europe must be united and determined in the management of the financial crisis and of the economic crisis also.

We are counting on you, Mr Topolánek, on your Presidency, to show drive and to guide Europe during this difficult period.

*(Applause)*

**Martin Schulz**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Mr President. Prime Minister Topolánek, you are heading the last Council Presidency of the current term of the European Parliament. This parliamentary term started with the Dutch Presidency, headed by Mr Balkenende, and no one remembers what he said here and what we replied. Therefore, what we discuss and achieve together now, in the next five or six months, will be the fundamental precondition for a high turnout in the European elections. If people see that we – the Presidency, Parliament and the Commission – have come together and successfully met the challenges facing us in a crisis situation, I am sure that this will create a fundamentally positive and constructive mood in the run-up to the European elections.

That is why we, the Socialist Group in the European Parliament, have an interest in the success of your Presidency. I had some doubts in the first few days of the Presidency, when Mr Schwarzenberg said that Israel was exercising its right of self-defence and aligned himself with one party in a period when the European Union was needed as a mediator. He put that right, which is a good thing. Mr Topolánek, you yourself said, ‘we shall not mediate in the gas conflict’. You have now put that right.

There were some initial problems, but they have now been overcome, which is a good thing. If the initial uncertainties – and I should like to emphasise that Mr Barroso was right about this – now in fact lead to your activities producing positive results, you will have the full support of our group. That also goes for the speech you held here this morning, which we all listened to and noted with great goodwill and also with a feeling of confidence for the next few months.

I should like to take up one of the points you raised. You quoted my friend Mr Daul – a clever man, but in this case he was wrong – who said here that the financial crisis did not represent the defeat of capitalism. It is true that it has not defeated capitalism – unfortunately that still exists – but it has defeated the capitalists who told us for years that we had no need of rules, as the market would regulate itself, would regulate things itself. These capitalists have suffered a defeat, and when you – having up to now indulged in policies similar to those of the people who said we had no need of rules – tell the House this morning that we need a Europe of rules, I can only agree: we do indeed need more rules to manage, to overcome the financial crisis. Mr Topolánek, I should like to wish you a warm welcome to the club of regulators in Europe – it seems that you, too, have learned your lesson.

*(Applause)*

Prime Minister, this is a decisive period in international politics. If the European Union wishes to assume the global role described by the Commission President, among others, in the matters of energy security or the Gaza conflict, it cannot allow itself to disintegrate; we need the Union of 27 as a strong economic and political bloc. Only if we do not allow ourselves to be divided will we be strong. After all, the strength of others is that they can always hope for Europeans to speak with different voices. Karel Schwarzenberg says Israel is acting in self-defence, whilst Louis Michel says the country is violating international law. If that is what the European Union is like, there is no need to negotiate with it.

If Russia or Ukraine believes that one half of Europe is on their side and the other half on the other, we are not strong. Yet we are strong if we have a strong treaty basis; which is provided by the Treaty of Lisbon. If this Treaty is ratified under your Presidency by your government – which, of course, has been punished enough given your country’s president – that would send out a strong signal that Europe is strong.

*(Applause)*

Prague Castle is the seat of Václav Klaus, who will be speaking to us in February, when he comes to Brussels. Prague Castle was also the seat of Charles IV, as the Prime Minister mentioned. Charles IV built the Golden Road from Prague to Nuremberg, which, in his day, was a tremendous feat, and was intended to connect peoples and nations. Before he became German emperor, with his seat in Prague, Charles IV was Duke of Luxembourg. Therefore, this period in Prague Castle was truly European. Let us hope that Prague Castle is soon occupied once more by someone as European as this.

(Applause)

**Graham Watson**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, on behalf of my group I welcome the President-in-Office. We wish you success, President-in-Office.

A great Czech once said: 'I am no longer a rookie: goals are expected of me; scoring is my job.' Well, what was true for Milan Baroš is also true for you and your ministers. Your work programme outlines those goals.

On the economy, you have said that barriers to the market – internal and external – must come down, and that Europe's answer to recession must not be Keynesian spending alone, but that we must strive for fairer competition, trade liberalisation, and freer movement of people and goods across national boundaries.

These are hard times for Europe's citizens. Your recipe will be contested, but not by Liberals and Democrats. For the experience of the Czech Republic – and so many others – proves the power of markets in lifting people out of poverty.

On energy, you are right to pursue the aims of the Strategic Energy Review, but the Review and our climate change targets should not be a ceiling to our ambitions, rather a springboard to greater and greener heights, to force the pace on Europe's switch from fossil fuels to renewables and put an end to our umbilical energy dependence.

Currently, our monitors are blocked from Ukrainian dispatch centres. Russia claims it cannot export gas because Ukraine will not transport it, and Ukraine claims it has no gas to export because the Russians have switched the transit route. Meanwhile, industry across eastern and central Europe is suffering, some people are freezing in their homes, and there are moves to reopen nuclear reactors condemned as unsafe by our Union.

That is not a functioning energy market. It is the plot of a Marx Brothers' film: *A Night in the Cold* – or, rather, twelve nights and counting. So stop talking about the internal market in energy and the development of renewables: use your presidency's powers to mobilise the necessary investment.

On the EU in the world, we welcome your presidency's ambitions. Europe should play a leading role in resolving conflicts, supporting development and promoting human rights.

But, if you truly seek to widen the EU's capacity to act, why have you delayed yet again ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon? If you want to prevent weapons proliferation, why are you building a ballistic missile defence system on European soil?

(Applause)

And if you want peace in the Middle East, why allow Europe to be ridiculed by so many different peace missions?

As events unfold in Gaza, it becomes harder for many of us to remain detached. This House will never unite around a common position if we seek to apportion blame precisely, but fault can be found on both sides, violence denounced, and an immediate ceasefire sought.

There is no excuse for Hamas rocket attacks, but nor for the use of dense inert metal explosives to maim civilians.

The tag line for your Presidency is 'Europe without Borders'. Perhaps its author had in mind that old Czech proverb: 'Protect yourself not by fences but by your friends'.

President-in-Office, we, your fellow Europeans, are your friends. Your country's President compared the European Union to the Soviet Union. Well, we do not bug private discussions, as he did to Members of this House.

He who wishes to remain on the margin is free to do so. But this is a Union of friends – friends, equals and partners.

Your presidency's aims are bold. We support them. Stick to them, and we will stick by you.

(Applause)

**Brian Crowley**, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (GA) Mr President, a better political and economic relationship must be promoted between the European Union and America. I hope that the Czech Republic Presidency will address this in the coming months. America will have a new president next week; and we all have major challenges ahead of us. Certainly we must regulate the financial markets soon.

President-in-Office, we welcome you to this House today, in particular we welcome the presidency of the Czech Republic to take over the leadership of the European Union at a very crucial time. On behalf of my group, the Union for Europe of the Nations Group, we also offer our support towards your programme to guarantee that there is a clear and stronger voice for the European Union, as well as the Member States within the European Union.

Many colleagues have spoken already with regard to the current series of crises, and, at the outset, I want to pay tribute to both your presidency and to President Barroso for the decisive action that was taken when the issue with regard to the cutting-off of the gas supply to the European Union was brought about, and not just because we apportioned blame but because we immediately intervened on a social level, an economic level and on a political level to bring both sides to sit down to talk each other where they had failed before.

That is why it is important under the presidency now to expand this idea of partnership with the East, that we look to the East and to the Balkans because they are the fault lines within the European Union at the present time, not only because of political instability but also because of our interdependence on energy and economic activity.

Finally, because time is so short, you spoke about the fifth freedom – the freedom of the movement of knowledge. That knowledge can give us the tools that we now require to move up the chain of the innovation, research and abilities that can be made towards us. Through your own history – individually, as well as a country – of totalitarianism, freedom, and greatness in education and innovation, we now look to you to give us the next step to where the European Union must move.

Let me finish with a short quote from John F. Kennedy who said in his inauguration speech: 'We stand today on the edge of a new frontier. But the new frontier of which I speak is not a set of promises – it is a set of challenges'. I know you have the capacity to meet those challenges.

**Monica Frassoni**, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, at the very moment that we are having this debate, bombs are falling on the people of Gaza. I think that our greatest priority as MEPs, and the greatest priority of the Council and the Commission, should be to stop the bombing of the people of Gaza. I think that is our duty at the moment, above and beyond deciding who is responsible and above and beyond the differences among us on that point. I must say that our group, the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, has rather a clear idea on this, as we will say this afternoon.

Mr President, you began your observations by speaking of medieval times, an age that was violent, remote, dark with a few lights, but certainly violent and dark. In fact, regardless of the efforts of your coalition partners, the programme for these six months seems to us to bear the strong stamp of a slightly passé vision, let us say; the strong mark of a conformist, ultra laissez-faire approach, dominated by business and the market, which is now, Mr President, out of fashion.

I think that it is also a little indifferent with regard to the need for policies, laws and instruments on social issues that meet the real needs of citizens, and a little off-track in its view of environmental policy on the fight against climate change as a cost or an obstacle, instead of a major opportunity for innovation and sustainable growth. It even, if you will permit me, leans a little towards machismo, in saying that there is a need to review the Barcelona objectives on support structures for children, naturally with the aim of sending women back to the home.

This then, is a programme that sees migrants solely as a security issue, that looks to NATO rather than to multilateralism, that is still toying with the missiles issue, and does not really place the emphasis on what for us is truly important in foreign policy, namely cohesion: the cohesion of our Union.

Nor are we pleased with the fact that no mention is made of such an important sector as that of combating discrimination, and on this point I would like to know what priority you place on adopting the directive on discrimination. To sum up, this is a programme that reveals a world with many dangers and few opportunities.

You spoke of your mediation work in the conflict between Russia and Ukraine over gas, but it can be seen very clearly from your programme that it will not be during your Presidency that clear action is taken against those countries, such as Slovakia and Bulgaria, that are taking the opportunity presented by the gas crisis to reopen dangerous, obsolete nuclear plants. Additionally, Mr President, please remember that there is no safe nuclear power; perhaps there will be in 30, 40, 50 or 60 years – I do not know – but right now it does not exist. It is therefore not worth discussing it, because it is a very expensive mirage, and certainly distracts us from our real priorities.

Energy security and solidarity can be achieved through strong action, with no distractions, to promote energy efficiency and energy saving, which is an enormous sphere for innovation, employment and reduction of consumption. This is the roadmap that we should use to respond to the gas war, among other things. We are making a specific request to you, Mr President; we are asking you to persuade your colleagues to place at the heart of the spring European Council the aim of making a binding commitment to the target of 20% energy cuts by 2020, the Cinderella of the energy package last year, and to review your priorities by assessing in a less superficial manner the decisions taken in December regarding renewable energy.

Mr President, one last word on the future of Europe: the Treaty of Lisbon is not perfect, but it is really strange that you have not yet ratified it. Therefore, please, take this opportunity to explain to us why, and to tell us when you will do so.

(Applause)

**Miloslav Ransdorf**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (CS) The President-in-Office of the Council has talked about our complex historical experiences. I take the view that the Czech Presidency is an opportunity for us to help overcome the existing division of Europe into West and East. In his novel *Schweik*, Jaroslav Hašek once made a pun, a German-Hungarian pun, *kelet oszt, nyugat veszti*, which loosely translated means that the East gives and the West takes. Consequently, that is the way history has progressed. I believe that we have an opportunity to bring an end to this. I think that the Czech Presidency is also an opportunity for us to liberate ourselves from our own dogmas and prejudices. I offer, as an example of such dogmas, the recent article by Václav Klaus advising us how to overcome this financial crisis by temporarily softening social, environmental and health standards because, he says, these standards obstruct rational human behaviour. I would say that the opposite is true, that the Czech Presidency should help to ensure that we have a socially and ecologically driven economy, that is, an economy powered by social and environmental factors. I would like to note here that I agree with Prime Minister Topolánek on one thing: the need to rely on the flow of innovation to bring us out of the crisis and the need to develop – in the words of Richard Florida, if you will – a creative class that will help our economies escape the impasse.

I mean to say that we all need the courage to change. Stefan George, the great German writer, says that the future belongs to those who are capable of change. I hope that we will be capable of changing, our enslavement to the past, that we will be capable of closing the divide between Eastern and Western Europe and forming a single unit that is free from complexes about the superiority of the United States or anyone else. I should like to end my contribution by pointing out that, while Prime Minister Topolánek's speech was peppered with noble intentions, resolutions and goals, and while it is quite right and proper for the Czech Presidency to set out ambitious projects – I do have one sceptical comment, in the form of an aphorism by the Polish satirist Jerzy Lec, to the effect that going on a holy pilgrimage will not stop your feet from sweating.

**Vladimír Železný**, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (CS) Mr President-in-Office of the Council, no country has commenced its Presidency under such a barrage of negativity or been subjected to so many dire predictions as the Czech Republic. The French press in particular is falling over itself to depict the storm clouds gathering over the wretched Union because it is no longer presided over by someone as infinitely able as the French President but has instead been taken over by a band of Czechs.

Those Czechs indeed, who have caused such deadly offence by not yet ratifying the Treaty of Lisbon, under which a few large countries will permanently usurp decision-making within the Union. To make matters worse, those Czechs have a popular president with a disagreeably sharp intellect who not only opposes the Treaty of Lisbon, but can competently call attention to the ever-widening democratic deficit in the Union. It was because of such a deficit that, twenty years ago, we overthrew socialism in our country.

Yet the Czech Presidency is pursuing restrained objectives and sensible priorities, and will be very successful. Let us wish it well and give it our support, despite the embarrassing howls from the Czech Socialists who have long since exchanged love of country for proletarian internationalism, and thus today, on the instructions of their socialist masters, venomously seek to destabilise the Czech Presidency. I could not care less!

The plot is for the Czech Presidency to demonstrate that small countries are inept and that it is time permanently to hand over the reins of the Union, via the Treaty of Lisbon, to the large, capable and experienced countries. This is what makes this Presidency so important. It will prove that smaller countries are equally capable of managing the EU. What sets them apart is that they steer clear of megalomania, self-centredness, public relations hysteria, the self-indulgent hyperactivity of certain presidents and constant bragging about non-existent achievements.

I wholeheartedly wish Prime Minister Topolánek, Deputy Prime Minister Vondra and the rest much success. This will be more than just the success of my own country; it will be the success of a small and new country. That is the important message for the EU. You see, we have experience in one other area too. While the largest EU countries have lived as predictable democracies and have learned to deal only with standard situations, we have spent half a century living under a highly non-standard totalitarian regime. This has taught us to find creative solutions to non-standard situations, which is going to come in useful.

**Jana Bobošíková (NI).** – (CS) Mr President-in-Office of the Council of the European Union, ladies and gentlemen, I am proud of the dexterity and capacity for action demonstrated by the Czech Presidency over the issue of gas supplies to EU countries. And I would be delighted if the President-in-Office of the Council, Mirek Topolánek, in the talks on the future of the EU, that is, on the Treaty of Lisbon, could show the same determination as we witnessed in the gas negotiations with Vladimir Putin and Yulia Tymoshenko.

The ambition of the President-in-Office of the Council should be to play the role of a group leader, not just a maintenance man. Mr President-in-Office of the Council, you have a unique chance to demonstrate that all states, regardless of size, are equal partners in the European Union. If you can keep your nerve, Mr Topolánek, you will go down in history.

You have been given the opportunity and the power to declare publicly that the Treaty of Lisbon is dead in the wake of the Irish referendum and that it has led us up a blind alley. You are in a position to propose the creation of a new visionary document which will constitute a true common denominator of the interests of individual EU members and which will win the support of citizens in referendums. There is no need to promote blindly the Treaty of Lisbon, which reinforces the undemocratic power of officials while papering over the failure of the European elite to reach agreement and, in particular, their reluctance to be held accountable to citizens.

Mr Topolánek, you represent here a country which, in the last century, succeeded in breaking free from the Austro-Hungarian Empire, which survived the treachery of Munich, and which withstood the horrors of Nazism. You represent a country where people took a stand against the invasion by Warsaw Pact troops. You represent a country which spent 40 years under the thumb of the Soviet Union, which spiralled down inevitably into planned poverty under the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance, and which shook off a totalitarian regime without shedding blood.

I refuse to believe that as prime minister of a country with such historical experience, you would want decisions on social policy, energy, taxes, justice and security to be taken anywhere other than in the individual Member States. I do not believe that you actually want the exclusive powers of the Union to overrule the powers of Member States. I do not believe that you want the Union to intervene in the protection and improvement of human health, industry, culture, tourism, education or sport. I do not believe that you welcome the fact that, in more than fifty areas, the Treaty of Lisbon abolishes the right of national veto and lowers the voting weight of smaller countries, including the Czech Republic.

Mr President-in-Office of the Council and Prime Minister of the Czech Republic, have the courage to tell the other 26 Heads of State what you say in private at home. Say that the Treaty of Lisbon is no good and that you reject it. Do this in the name of democracy and freedom. This will not earn you the applause of the so-called 'European elite', Commission officials, or even the majority of this Parliament. But what you will earn is the admiration and respect of citizens, who are easily forgotten here, and you will boost your prestige in your own country. You are presiding over 450 million citizens, not just a few politicians and officials.

In the Czech Republic, you often refer to the Treaty of Lisbon as a necessary evil. Yet what makes the evil necessary? Stop persuading yourself that the Treaty of Lisbon is a necessary evil. It is simply evil, and you

can change it. Initiate work on a new document, refer to the Rome Treaties and the Messina Declaration for inspiration, and promote the common interest of the European Union. That is, freedom, prosperity, competitiveness and security, not euro-health, euro-taxes, euro-parks and euro-beer.

Mr Topolánek, necessary evil is a coward's alibi. You are no coward, or at least I hope you are not. You are backed up by the Irish referendum, you are supported by the 55% of Czech citizens who are opposed to the Treaty of Lisbon, and you can rely on the powerful voice of the Czech President, Václav Klaus. I am sure you know that the greatest cowardice is knowing what should be done and not doing it.

**Mirek Topolánek**, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – (CS) Thank you for all your questions and comments on my speech. In the Czech Republic, too, we have a parliament where we are used to a plurality of views, so some of the views came as no surprise to me, although I could not fully agree with them. However, I would like to repeat at the outset – and I say this in reply to a whole range of questions – that I feel my role here to be that of President of the European Council, and during these six months I do not intend to push my personal or party-political views; but I feel I must respond on one issue, because it concerns me personally, and that is the very harsh assessments of the Czech president Václav Klaus, a president who has made a name for himself with European citizens, which I think is a good thing, and I am proud of it. Václav Klaus is the icon of the Czech transformation in the 1990s, and it is, I might add, thanks to him that we are successful today and that we have emerged safely from those first ten years. I am proud of the fact that we came safely through the Velvet Revolution, proud of the fact that we drove the Russian troops out of our country in 1991, that we joined NATO in 1999, joined the European Union in 2004, and that last year we eliminated the barriers between EU countries and can now travel from Lisbon to Vilnius without passports or any restrictions. I am proud to have been part of that, and to be standing here today, and it seems incredible to me that the Czech Republic now holds the presidency of a community which has a population of nearly half a billion and comprises as many as 27 countries. If the European Union loses the capability – leaving aside the question of rules and unification – for free public discussion, and seeks to unify this discussion too, then it will not be my European Union. If we lose the capability, the possibility of freely expressing our views, it is the road to disaster, and I strongly object to the attacks on Václav Klaus. He has a unique ability to insert his views into this unified and, I would say, over-correct discussion, and thereby set the parameters for fresh discussion. Free discussion should be a matter of pride for the European Union in future, and should never be stifled.

As for the Treaty of Lisbon – which deserves a mention – I would say it is essentially a 'middling' treaty. A little worse than the Treaty of Nice and a little better than the one that followed. That happens to be my personal view of it. I negotiated this treaty on behalf of the Czech Republic; we approved this treaty in parliament, I signed this treaty and I shall vote for it in parliament – but once again the idea that we should dictate in advance to individual Member States that they have to ratify a document, that they do not have a national right to follow their own procedure and decide for themselves whether to accept it, seems to me absurd. We need to change the institutions, we need to improve the functioning of the European mechanisms, we need to simplify the rules; whether all this is in the Treaty of Lisbon, I am not entirely sure. Each of us had a slightly different view of how it should look, and for me, Mrs Bobošíková, it is a compromise, perhaps a very complex compromise, and I shall support its ratification.

At least a few words should be said about the situation in the Middle East and Europe's position on that conflict. For a long time the European Union has been seen as 'a very big payer but not a player'. This means it has made a big contribution to investments, including humanitarian and development investments in that region, but has not pulled its weight within the 'quartet', and has not shown the responsibility which participation in the quartet entails. I think the existing situation, with the arrival of the new American administration, gives the European Union an opportunity to invest not only money in that region, but also its problem-solving initiatives and a higher level of activity. I do not wish to be the judge of one side or the other, because the fact is that the Israelis have a right to live safely without rocket attacks, and I have been in Sderot and Ashkelon and other parts of Israel. Likewise, the people of Palestine have the right, at this moment, to create their own state and a functioning administration, and to live a safe and decent life. This 60-year conflict has solved nothing. I have no illusions that we will solve it now; our short-term aim is to achieve a truce and a cessation of hostilities. I would like to assess not only the role of the European negotiators, and the mission led by Karel Schwarzenberg which has departed for the region, but also, of course, the role of the Arab states in the region, which has been positive. This can be said of Egypt's role or, for example, the role of Turkey and other countries. I think that after certain conditions have been met, such as a clampdown on arms smuggling from Sinai to Gaza, we could jointly achieve a situation – within the global security architecture, or through the European Union alone or only a part of that global architecture – where conflict could be ended, although I am not convinced that it would happen quickly.

On the questions of energy, energy security, climate change, and the European Union's role in the process: it should be obvious to everyone that if the European Union's leadership on the issue of climate change – whatever my own views on the subject – does not gain support from economies and major players such as the USA, the Russian Federation, Brazil, India and China, then this initiative by the European Union is isolated, a voice in the wilderness and, on a global scale, worthless. Our role is to persuade the other world powers and the biggest producers of emissions to follow our example, and this is where I see our role in the first half of this year, because in my view the climate and energy package is now signed and sealed, and is simply awaiting implementation, after it has been approved in the European Parliament, of course – as I hope it will be. The whole question of the energy mix is sometimes over-ideologised, over-politicised, and in my view the European Union should take a very practical and pragmatic approach to it, and should be looking at the short-term, mid-term and long-term targets, and the short-term, mid-term and long-term means of achieving those targets. I cannot imagine that countries which are 90% dependent on coal-based manufacture, such as Poland, are capable of radically, in some very ruthless manner, changing that dependence within the space of fifteen or twenty years. We must of course invest in new coal technologies, 'clean coal technologies', and in improvements to plant efficiency, because we cannot unilaterally and very rapidly change this dependence. We must discuss this, and must invest in innovation, and of course gradually adjust the energy mix in the directions we are talking about – in other words, in the direction of greater environmental protection, less dependence on fossil fuels and, of course, secure and relatively cheap supplies of energy so that Europe can remain competitive, able to compete on a global scale. The whole Russian-Ukrainian crisis is not only a crisis of confidence, but one where commercial, economic, political, geopolitical and strategic interests are involved. It is a multi-layered problem, and I certainly do not wish to be the judge of who at this moment is the short-term culprit, because for us, for the European Union and for European countries, both Russia and Ukraine are currently to blame. Russia is not supplying the gas, and Ukraine is blocking the transit of gas; in this matter, we must exert our influence in the region and must seek ways of ending this problem in the short term and – in the medium- to long-term – diversifying the sources and the transit routes, and ensuring the interconnection of electricity and gas systems in the European Union, so that we can achieve what has not yet been achieved: solidarity and the implementation of emergency crisis plans, because, although I do not want to be a prophet of doom, the crisis is not over yet, and the situation in Slovakia, Bulgaria and the Balkans is very grave and critical.

Based on my notes on what has been said by representatives of individual Parliamentary groups, it is not at all my view that our agenda is too liberal or too conservative; our agenda arises from the long-term aims and long-term agenda of the European Union, and the Czech contribution to it, the Czech imprint, showed itself in the very first days of the New Year as being well-conceived, because our emphasis on energy security may lead us, unexpectedly and none too soon, into some very thorough, in-depth discussion on how to ensure the independence and freedom of the European Union, which presupposes independence or less dependence on energy imports and sources outside the European Union.

Questions have been raised here regarding the anti-discrimination directive, the Barcelona Targets, and the low emphasis placed on social questions. I do not see it this way – though of course we have tried to reduce these basic targets to a rather symbolic form – because we certainly do not underestimate either the anti-discrimination question, or the question of protection for women. I assure you that we do indeed have very extensive experience of children having to stay in various institutions, and for us it is crucial that women and families should have a choice: that they should be able to choose whether they will, at a certain time, devote themselves to childcare, and we want to create the most varied mechanisms to make this possible, so that the family is not forced into a position of social need; and it is equally important that there should be an adequate range of options from child institutions, and believe me, a country such as the Czech Republic has a wealth of experience of this from totalitarian times, when this principle was rather forcibly imposed.

I think this is probably all I need to say by way of introduction. If there is anything Czechs do not lack, it is self-confidence, so I would like end by saying that we do not suffer from the slightest feeling of inferiority because the Czech Republic is the smallest of the big countries or the biggest of the small countries; we are the twelfth largest country in the European Union. I would simply like to remind you that when the Swedish presidency took over in 2001, the articles in the press were just the same as they were in November and December in the European media, doubting whether the Euro-sceptic Swedes, who do not have the euro and do not want it, were capable of tackling the issue of the single currency, whether they were capable of leading discussions on ratification of the Treaty of Nice, and indeed, whether they were capable, as a new country, of leading the European Union at all. If we now exchange the Treaty of Nice for the Treaty of Lisbon, and replace Sweden with the Czech Republic, those articles look exactly the same. We have no inferiority complex about that.

**IN THE CHAIR:MRS KRATSA-TSAGAROPOULOU***Vice-President*

**Jan Zahradil (PPE-DE).** – (CS) Mr President-in-Office of the Council, I will continue with the Czech theme that has been set in motion here. What we are seeing is something you spotted and acknowledged yourself and which you stressed in your speech, namely that the elections to the European Parliament are fast approaching and you are very likely to hear a number of contributions both from Czechs and from other MEPs that are influenced more by the mounting pre-election atmosphere than by any attempt to evaluate the Presidency programme you have presented.

I believe that in the first days of the Czech Presidency, the Czech government has been confronted with a test of unprecedented magnitude and that it has passed this test with flying colours. I am very glad that a number of my fellow Members have emphasised this here. It has also become apparent that the 3E, the three priorities of the economy, energy and external relations, have been identified quite correctly as Czech priorities, because the events with which the year began – the conflict in Gaza and the crisis over gas supplies to Europe – can be grouped under at least two of these priorities. A fact we failed to acknowledge openly before has also emerged clearly, namely that energy security is an absolutely key issue for the future of the European Union and is more important than anything else, including I dare say the Treaty of Lisbon, since the Treaty will provide us neither with light nor with heat. Energy security is an issue not just for one Presidency, but for many years; it is a great challenge and a great honour for the Czech Republic to be able to make progress on this issue. At the same time, it shows how all of the 3E are interlinked, because energy security has implications for the economy, which will always feel the initial impact of restrictions, as well as for external relations, since we cannot safeguard Europe's energy security and diversity of supply without an Eastern Partnership, a neighbourhood policy or further enlargement of the European Union to include, for example, Turkey.

I believe that the Czech Republic will address itself to this task, that it will move this debate forward, and that it will leave its indelible mark on the Czech Presidency and the EU leadership. I wish all of us every success in this respect.

**Libor Rouček (PSE).** – (CS) Prime Minister Topolánek, President Barroso, ladies and gentlemen, I do not know anyone in this Parliament, any Member, who does not want the Czech Presidency to be a success. Europeans in the east, west, north and south, in Old Europe and in New Europe, wish for the success of the European Union and the success of the Czech Presidency. It goes without saying that Members of this Parliament, irrespective of whether they come from the social democratic, populist, liberal or green camp, also have the same hope. Regrettably, however, I repeat regrettably, there are certain fears and certain doubts prevailing among the European public and even in this Parliament as to whether the Czech Republic will manage the Presidency successfully. There are several reasons for this.

The first reason is the instability within the ruling coalition in the Czech Republic. My fellow Members, for example, find it incomprehensible that, at the very beginning of the Presidency, ministers have been replaced and the government has been reorganised. How can new ministers, such as the ministers for transport and for regional development, who have no European experience, cope successfully with the European agenda and preside over the European Council? Nor can my fellow Members understand why, for example, the Christian Democrats who are currently in office in the Czech Republic and who are fighting for survival, should have chosen to hold their electoral congress during the Czech Presidency.

The relationship between the government and the Czech President has also provoked a number of questions, as we have already heard. I would like a clear answer as to whether the Czech Presidency, or the Czech government, agrees with the views of President Václav Klaus, who rejects the Treaty of Lisbon, denies global warming and argues that the current financial and economic crisis was caused by over-regulation and the existence of social and environmental policies.

There are also serious grounds for doubt concerning the failure to do your homework and honour the pledge made to Chancellor Merkel and President Sarkozy that the Czech government, as the country holding the Presidency, would ratify the Treaty of Lisbon by the end of last year. Prime Minister, I would like you to make a clear statement as to when the Treaty will be ratified in the Czech Parliament. I would also like a clear statement as to why ratification of the Treaty has been made contingent on the ratification of bilateral agreements with the United States over the radar issue and on a law dealing with the relationship between the two chambers of the Czech Parliament.

The Treaty of Lisbon, as we have heard here, is a necessity. We need it, among other things, in order to fulfil the Czech priorities. These priorities, I think, are correct, but in order to be in a position to continue pursuing them in the future, for example in terms of energy security and a greater role for Europe in external relations, we need closer cooperation and, to that end, we need the Treaty of Lisbon.

In conclusion, I wish the Czech Presidency the best of luck and much success. This is in the interests of both the Czech Republic and the European Union.

**Silvana Koch-Mehrin (ALDE).** – (DE) Madam President, President-in-Office of the Council, the European Union has had six months of drama, dynamism and declarations under President Sarkozy, and now you have taken over, Mr President, with a sense of humour that may take some getting used to. I hope that yours will be a constructive, productive Council Presidency, as the EU faces immense challenges. You yourself mentioned the war between Israel and Hamas and the economic crisis, and of course there are also internal issues such as the Treaty of Lisbon.

Allow me to take up one aspect of your speech: energy security. You stressed its fundamental importance, and I agree with you that energy is the basic raw material of modern society. Our lifestyle, our economy, our further development – all of this depends upon it. We cannot be dependent on energy supplies. Independence requires that we have a good mix of various energy sources.

Therefore, I hope that with your open, direct manner, you will be able to persuade your European partners to engage in a new discussion on nuclear power and, in particular, to encourage the German Government to end its anti-nuclear policy. This is a requirement of security for our continent.

There is a great deal to be done, and this is your opportunity to take Europe forward. I should like to express my thanks and my confidence in successful cooperation to come.

**Konrad Szymański (UEN).** – (PL) Madam President, President-in-Office, there is only one yardstick against which to measure the Czech presidency appointed by your Government, and the dramatic events of recent weeks, and that is the energy policy of the European Union.

Today we are coming to the end of yet another round of energy disputes between Russia and Europe, but we still have no systemic guarantee or political framework to avoid similar problems in future. After the energy crises of 2004, 2006 and 2008 it is high time for the European Union to get on with diversification, not just of energy supplies, but of the very sources of energy we so urgently need. For this reason I expect the Czech presidency to take fresh steps towards securing financial support for the Nabucco gas pipeline and a more vigorous energy policy in Central Asia. I therefore expect the Northern Gas Pipeline to be struck off the list of the European Commission's priority, for failure to take these measures will mean waking up next winter to the same problems as we have now.

**Claude Turmes (Verts/ALE).** – (FR) Madam President, Europe's credibility is at stake with regard to the energy issue. Thank you, Mr Barroso, for your very clear words this morning.

These Gazprom and Naftogaz companies, this performance that we have been seeing for two, three, four, five days now, it is unbelievable! From now on, we have to say: 'Gentlemen, enough is enough!' To do that, we have to act together. Thank you for the good coordination! Can someone here explain to me what these visits to Moscow by the Slovakian and the Bulgarian Prime Ministers are all about? This already shows Gazprom that we are not united. Explain these two visits to me.

Moving on, I believe that the Commission has a major role to play: we need to establish emergency gas plans. The first thing to do is to recast the Gas Security Directive, otherwise the European Commission will not have enough political power to act. European coordination is required. Secondly, we need an emergency 'Central and Eastern Europe gas infrastructure' plan, with the money that is available.

Thirdly, we need to combine Europe's economic recovery with a major energy investment plan. The main priority is the buildings in Eastern Europe. It is scandalous to see such a small proportion of the Structural Funds being invested in something useful! Rather than having stadiums built for European championships, I would prefer money to be invested for our citizens – in buildings, heating networks and renewable energies.

My final remark is that we are more dependent when it comes to nuclear energy than we are with respect to gas. We import 99% of our nuclear fuels! Stop linking nuclear energy to independence! Mrs Koch-Mehrin, you sound ridiculous when you mention that.

**Jiří Maštálka (GUE/NGL).** – (CS) Prime Minister, ladies and gentlemen, I am quite sure there is no one in this hall who envies the Czech Presidency the circumstances in which it has assumed the leadership of the European Community. Prime Minister, one of the main slogans you have proclaimed for your Presidency is a Europe without Barriers. This slogan can be interpreted in different ways, depending on one's political and personal experience. Personally, I believe that it cannot be understood as nothing more than a further relaxation of financial and market mechanisms; rather, I see it as a challenge to refine what Europe can rightly be proud of, namely the European social model. I am not thinking here simply of the chance to remove meaningless constraints, or of the prospects for employment. I view this opportunity as a chance to give the mobile workforce credible guarantees of equal treatment. This may include, for example, positive developments over the unresolved issue of cross-border health care during the Czech Presidency.

If Europe is to be without barriers, it might be good to start by not creating any new ones. Europe is not only the European Community; Europe also encompasses our neighbours, who belong not only geographically but also historically to Europe. I would like to know your opinion on this topic, as well as the strategy the Presidency will apply to our neighbours along the borders of the European Union. I am thinking mainly of Serbia and the sensitive issue of Kosovo, and I am also thinking particularly of Moldova, which has taken many positive steps towards closer relations with the European Community. In my view, not creating barriers also entails a principled but European policy towards Russia and China. It is necessary to seek a balanced relationship with these countries too, especially where European interests are involved.

Europe without Barriers also means paying serious attention to the fact that numerous minorities are to be found within the territory of the EU. This includes one minority we are reluctant to discuss in this Parliament, namely the non-citizens in some states of the European Union. The key to addressing these issues hinges, *inter alia*, on the introduction of a new policy, in other words in eliminating the policy of double standards. You have said that freedom and decision-making are of fundamental importance. Give the citizens of your own country a chance to decide in a referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon and the siting of the US radar installation. This will confirm the sincerity of your words.

**Philippe de Villiers (IND/DEM).** – (FR) Madam President, on behalf of my Independence and Democracy Group, I should like respectfully to welcome the Czech Presidency, and to do so by expressing the high regard in which we hold it, for the Czech people have experienced some great hardships and are better equipped than many of us to understand the value and the meaning of the word freedom. I should also like to welcome it by expressing our hopes. Mr Topolánek, Mr Klaus, you represent two hopes for us: listening to the voice of the people, that is, ensuring that the referendum on the Treaty of Lisbon is respected throughout Europe, and giving the people back their freedom in order to free them from the Brussels bureaucracy that is swamping us. Today more and more of us, the peoples of Europe, are Brussels dissidents.

**Frank Vanhecke (NI).** – (NL) Madam President, with only one minute speaking time, all I can do is plead with the Czech Presidency to help us ensure the European institutions respect democracy. In a democracy, it is the people who decide. As it happens, in the countries where the people were allowed to speak their minds – in France, the Netherlands and Ireland – the Treaty of Lisbon, otherwise known as the European Constitution, was consigned to the wastepaper basket. I hope that the new presidency will actually side even more with the citizens and freedom and not, as we have grown accustomed from most presidencies, with the arrogant European mandarins.

There is also the Turkish issue. The large majority of Europeans are opposed to the accession of a non-European country to our Union. In this dossier too, though, the eurocrats are imposing their own will, and we need the help of the Czech Presidency. Given that the Czech Republic shook off a dictatorship not so long ago, your presidency could prove to be a beacon of democracy and freedom in the next six months, if you dare to go against the wishes of this EU elite, that is.

**Timothy Kirkhope (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, I welcome Prime Minister Topolánek to the European Parliament and I know from past discussions that Europe is in very good hands for the next six months. It is a historic moment for the Czech Republic and one to which you bring your customary political skill.

The Czech presidency programme has set some important priorities: the three 'E's of energy, economic improvement, and Europe's role in the world. In the early days of your presidency you have indeed been faced with substantial challenges. You have been to Moscow and Kiev and you are working hard to get a deal to restore the flow of natural gas to European countries. You have displayed great diplomatic skills so far working with Russia and Ukraine, but it is vital that the Russian Government understands that holding nations to ransom is no way to conduct business in the modern world. You have led the way for the EU so

far, and I congratulate you, and also in your work to resolve the current crisis in the Middle East to bring about a credible ceasefire that will enable peace talks to resume.

The economic crisis remains high on your agenda. You are supporting sensible measures to ensure the economic slowdown is tackled. You have been clear about the importance of Europe and the Member States not imposing new and heavy-handed regulation at European or national level. You have spoken of mobilising those countries which share your liberal economic outlook to oppose protectionism at this time. What we must do is ensure that any regulatory changes are proportionate and sensible.

Finally, in a week's time there will be a new US President in the White House. I know we can rely on you, Prime Minister, to establish a good working relationship with President-elect Obama. I know you share my view that the future of the transatlantic alliance is vital to our security and our prosperity. I wish you every success. To quote Winston Churchill in his last great speech in the House of Commons: 'Never flinch; never weary; never despair'. Good luck.

**Kristian Vigenin (PSE).** - Madam President, we have to admit that the Czech presidency faced a very difficult beginning. The worsening economic crisis, the brutal military operation by Israel and the biggest crisis so far in European gas supplies.

Your activity will become even more difficult with the rising political tensions related to the European election campaign. The end of your presidency will be marked by the election of 532 new MEPs. I underline this figure because it is not the one foreseen in the Treaty of Lisbon. I think that the ratification of the Treaty and its entry into force should be higher on your agenda both nationally and at European level.

It may look as though you are unlucky to be leading the EU in such a situation, but every crisis is also an opportunity. Use these opportunities. Make the EU more active, visible and credible in the Middle East. Try to develop a more responsible EU policy on energy and energy supplies. Do more to put the European economy back on track while preserving people's jobs. Mr Topolánek, I would like to see another presidency by a new Member State succeed. This is your special responsibility. This will prove that the newcomers are able not only to follow, but also to lead.

The main prerequisite for success is to bring together all 27 Member States and to make them unite around policies and actions. This will not be possible if there is no unity within your own country. The contradictory messages coming from different Czech institutions harm your prospects of success, so please do your best to put an embargo on all internal political games. It is not easy in a pre-election situation, but Slovenia is an example that you can follow. The second prerequisite is to unite behind you the main political parties in this Parliament. For six months, you must forget your own political membership and hold a broad dialogue. This is something to be learned from the French presidency.

Finally, I would like to draw attention to the rise of extremism, anti-Semitism and xenophobia in Europe. The Czech Republic is also affected by this trend. I ask you to include this issue high on your agenda, particularly in view of the upcoming European elections. I wish you every success.

**Adina-Ioana Vălean (ALDE).** - Madam President, I would like to thank the President-in-Office of the Council for coming here today to outline the Czech presidency's programme. However, I will draw attention to some issues that I hope your presidency can address.

Firstly, the motto you have chosen is 'Europe without barriers'. I agree with the premise of this motto. It should especially hold true for European citizens who have the right to move and reside freely within the EU. I am the rapporteur on the application of the Free Movement Directive. Unfortunately, it seems that your motto is under threat from national authorities. The Commission has recently released a very disappointing report on the implementation of this directive. Given the directive's improper transposition by Member States, I would hope that you will give this issue much more weight than is indicated by your programme in the area of freedom and security.

Secondly, in addition to some daunting issues that you will have to confront during your presidency – such as the continuing global financial crisis and energy security concerns – you will also have a large legislative burden. Therefore, I trust that you will employ all the necessary means to properly conclude the numerous outstanding reports before the end of the parliamentary mandate. In particular, expectations have been created for European citizens on price reduction for voice, SMS and data roaming. I hope that you will honour your commitment to reach a first reading agreement with my Roaming II report. Thank you, and I wish you the best of luck during your presidency.

**Mario Borghezio (UEN).** – (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, I offer a warm welcome to the Czech Presidency and I hope that it will succeed in moving Europe on from the useless persiflage of Brussels to action on combating the disgraceful human trafficking of illegal migrants taking place in the Mediterranean.

Minister Maroni, at a recent meeting of the ministers of home affairs of Cyprus, Greece, Italy and Malta, finally gave a wake-up call to Europe. It is time for Europe to realise the gravity of the situation in the Mediterranean: trafficking is taking place in illegal immigrants and drugs from Africa and Asia. The Czech Presidency must consider the urgent need for specific measures mandating the ministers of home affairs to conclude readmission agreements with the non-EU countries from which these illegal immigrants come.

We need to strengthen the action taken by Frontex, which ought, however, to be coordinated with the appropriate instruments and resources, and Europe must realise that such action will be effective only if it is accompanied by policies for the readmission of illegal immigrants and funds for countries, such as mine, that have to receive illegal immigrants. President-in-Office, go to Lampedusa and see how serious the problem is. We are becoming the centre for combating drug trafficking in the Mediterranean – a disgrace that we must root out. Go to Lampedusa as a politician and then return as a tourist, to the most beautiful island in the Mediterranean!

(Applause)

**Milan Horáček (Verts/ALE).** – (DE) Madam President, Mr Barroso, Mr Topolánek, I welcome the Czech presidency! As a Prague citizen elected to the European Parliament as a German member of the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance, I am particularly pleased that the Czech Republic is to hold the Council Presidency for the next six months. More than 40 years ago, following the occupation of Czechoslovakia, I went into political exile in Germany, and I still marvel that we are now free to drive forward the development of democracy and the respect for human rights in the Czech Republic and Central Europe.

The current political, economic and environmental developments would represent a great challenge for any Council Presidency – but this one, I believe, will overcome it. I should like to wish us all, not just the Czech Republic, all the best for this Presidency.

(Applause)

**Adamos Adamou (GUE/NGL).** – (EL) Mr President of the Commission, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, the priorities of your Presidency include the following: in order for the European Union to take international action, it needs to tie its security in with strategic cooperation with NATO and to develop its own defence capability to complement NATO.

The citizens are wondering who is threatening the European Union to the extent that it needs to tie its security in with NATO? On the contrary, a visible threat to the European Union is the strategy being applied by Israel, the strategy of war, which the European Union has not roundly condemned and for which it has not imposed sanctions, as it has done in other cases.

You further state that you want an economy without borders and that excessive regulation should be avoided, that an increase in the level of protectionism should be avoided. Are these the lessons that we, as the European Union, have learned from the economic crisis? No protection for the weak and market speculation? It is hardly surprising, therefore, that the citizens are losing patience with the policies of the European Union. The Euro-barometer, which we always ignore, tells us as much.

What is topical today and what the mass demonstrations are highlighting is the need for a policy of peace, not complicit neutrality. The reactions and the grassroots protest are blatant proof of the need for justice and for political control of the market and of the price of commodities which will allow each state to perform the social role which its citizens allocate to it without the dogmatic limitations of the Stability Pact.

**Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM).** – Mrs. President, I should like to welcome the President-in-Office and to wish him well in his presidency and also to wish his people well.

As an Irish Member, I should like to thank the Czech Government and people. When my people voted in a referendum to reject the Treaty of Lisbon, the Czech representation alone said it respected the Irish vote. In an environment of disrespect for the French, Dutch and Irish votes – and of people not allowed to vote – this respect was very welcome.

Respect is a valuable and necessary attitude. In Europe we are faced with many crises. You have spelled out an ambitious programme to deal with these. Such a programme requires respect between Member States. It also requires respect for the peoples of those Member States to have any hope of success.

I am impressed at the respect you have shown your people in acknowledging that they, like the Irish, would, if given a chance, probably reject the Treaty of Lisbon as well. Such respect bodes well for your presidency and for Europe.

**Hartmut Nassauer (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, it could be that you were not expecting such a friendly, benevolent reception in the European Parliament, Mr Topolánek – but the Czech Council Presidency is an event tinged with history. I have seen two landmark events in my political career, the first being German reunification and the second Europe's reunification following two bloody European civil wars in the last century. The fact that the Czech Republic is representing the Presidency in the European Parliament today is a reflection of the incredible historic changes to which we have been witness and for which we can be grateful. I assure you of the support of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats, without reservation and without scepticism.

You rightly set the ball rolling with Charles IV, who was not only one of the first architects of a trans-European transport network but also the founder of one of the oldest and most prestigious universities in Europe, and thus an exponent of a European universality that has possibly left at least as great a mark on us Europeans as the treaties we have concluded. The occasional Eurosceptic remark aside – which we are familiar with from your own country – you meet with our support. We in the PPE-DE Group are very staunch Europeans – there is no doubt about that – but precisely because of this we are able to recognise wrong turns taken by Europe and to help put them right. The Treaty of Lisbon is an excellent instrument for correcting any wrong turns taken by Europe. For this reason, I wish to express here the expectation that you, as President of the Council, will contribute to the entry into force of this Treaty and that your country will ratify the Treaty as soon as possible.

**Enrique Barón Crespo (PSE).** – (ES) Madam President, President-in-Office of the Council, President of the Commission, ladies and gentlemen, I offer the Czech Presidency the same friendly welcome that I gave in 1991 when, as President of the European Parliament, I addressed the Senate of the then Czechoslovakia to invite them to join us. In my opinion, that great generation of Czech and Slovak citizens is embodied in someone who is well-respected in Europe and throughout the world. I am of course talking about President Václav Havel.

I have two comments and questions for the President-in-Office. You have taken a decision – and I am glad that you are talking about a Europe of rules – to subordinate ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon to ratification of the missile defence shield. Many of us believe that this is not the way forward, but you have taken the decision to subordinate your own country to something that must be considered jointly. There is one fact that cannot be ignored, however, which is that the gas dispute is a political dispute. In my view, it will be very difficult for you to have a policy towards the East in this situation. I also cannot understand why, when the Czechs are a people proud of their sovereignty and independence, you can subordinate what the Czechs have to decide to what the Irish do.

Secondly, President-in-Office of the Council, you have not mentioned the euro. Yesterday in this House we celebrated the 10th anniversary of the euro and the entry of your sister republic, Slovakia, into the euro. What are you going to do in order to defend the euro during the Czech Presidency?

**Lena Ek (ALDE).** - (SV) Madam President, Mr Topolánek, Mr Barroso, it is absolutely correct that we are in the midst of two crises: a climate crisis and a financial crisis. To these, we can add an energy crisis. It is therefore important not to lose focus. My question to Prime Minister Topolánek is therefore the following: will the Czech Republic ensure that the emergency economic crisis programmes also work to solve the climate crisis?

After all, we have, here, the opportunity to help our citizens to both a better environment and new jobs and to help our small businesses. History has shown that every financial crisis is followed by a technological shift. With investments in new green technology, such as district heating, biofuels, combined heat and power, energy-efficient houses, solar panels, smart grids and so on we can benefit from the adaptations that are necessary in order to deal with the climate threat and create the economic upswing that Europe and the world needs. A simultaneous investment in climate-smart technology and employment will also stabilise the security policy situation with regard to Russia.

Those who opposed the energy package and a comprehensive common European energy policy will perhaps now understand why we put so much work into enabling the EU to speak with *one* voice on these issues. In any case, Europe's freezing citizens understand what needs to be done. We cannot have a situation like we had in the Middle East crisis, with three or four European delegations running around each other.

I therefore welcome the Czech Presidency and the well-established cooperation with the next country to hold the presidency, Sweden, and I wish you good luck.

**Ģirts Valdis Kristovskis (UEN).** – (LV) Fellow Members, Mr Barroso, Mr Topolánek, I should like to express my appreciation of the Czech government for its resolve to continue the evaluation of the political, moral and legal aspects of the crimes of the Communist regime that was begun under the Slovenian Presidency. The consequences of the Communist regime's crimes are a repulsive scar on the face of Europe. However, under the influence of *realpolitik*, European politicians still pretend not to notice it. That shows that Europe still lacks self-respect in the face of Russia's authoritarian ideology. Unfortunately, for as long as the acts of Nazism are recognised as a crime against humanity but the crimes of the Communist regime of the USSR are excused, we have to face the fact that Europe and its historical truth is split between its eastern and western halves. Ukraine's gas supply is cut off and Russian tanks enter Georgia. For so long, Europe's common values remain nothing but a dream. I call on the Czech Presidency to carry out the resolve expressed in the Prague declaration.

**Jacek Saryusz-Wolski (PPE-DE).** - Madam President, this is the first presidency of a former Soviet bloc country, and we are keeping our fingers crossed for you, Prime Minister, that it will be a first-class presidency.

You have inaugurated your presidency in a hot political temperature and the freezing wind of the energy crisis. I should like to congratulate you, Prime Minister Topolánek, for your quick action and commitment to finding a solution to the gas crisis and the mediation you have undertaken between Russia and Ukraine.

Two of the three main priorities of the Czech presidency – energy and the Eastern Partnership – need gas. This is the crossroads of both your presidency priorities. You have to find an emergency solidarity solution right now. You have to work on unblocking gas deliveries to 18 Member States whose citizens and industries are suffering. Then you have to find a lasting, sustainable and systemic solution for the longer term. We need you to design a comprehensive and decisive strategy.

I also welcome your priority on the Eastern Partnership, which would give us an appropriate framework for better cooperation with our eastern partners, who are so close to our borders. The European Parliament will complement it with its own dimension by building an interparliamentary assembly, which we call EURONEST. This partnership would contribute to preventing another crisis like the present one.

I am confident that the Czech presidency, which is confronted with such challenging times and crisis management, will be able to fulfil our expectations and that in six months we will have fewer barriers and a strong and safer Europe, also a sweeter Europe, as your slogan says:

(CS) Making Europe sweeter! I wish you much success.

**Jo Leinen (PSE).** – (DE) Madam President, President-in-Office of the Council, 'Europe without Barriers' is a good motto, as it goes to the heart of the European idea – bringing people together. I also hope, however, that it proves possible to break down the barriers in the minds of some people, who still have political, if not ideological reservations about the European Union, and therefore close their minds to its further development as envisaged in the Treaty of Lisbon. There is a good deal more work to do on this in your country, too.

The Reform Treaty is essential. How are you going to make energy policy without the basis laid down for this in the Treaty of Lisbon? It cannot be done. Many other policy areas can be looked at in the same way. It is completely unacceptable to link ratification to other domestic problems, as this is a common Treaty and has nothing to do with domestic political disputes – the opposition against the government or vice versa.

Europe is a community of values. Human rights and the rule of law – where your country also shows deficits – take centre stage. I should like to take this opportunity to mention the case of Dr Yekta Uzunoglu, who has spent 14 years fighting for justice and compensation. I appeal to you to ensure that this unfortunate case, for which Václav Havel has already gone on hunger strike, is resolved under your Presidency.

At the end of the French Council Presidency, President Sarkozy said that the previous six months had changed him. I hope that this experience will also change you and several others in the Czech Republic.

**Andrew Duff (ALDE).** - Madam President, I should like to ask the President-in-Office four questions.

Mr President-in-Office, if, as you said, you find the Treaty of Lisbon worse than the Treaty of Nice, why did you sign it?

Secondly, will you please confirm that the Czech Republic will not be tempted to follow the Irish example and seek to pull apart the Lisbon package?

Thirdly, do you not see a contradiction in coming here and praising the legitimacy of the Parliament but declining to support the Treaty which so greatly increases its powers?

Fourthly, can the Czech presidency really have authority unless and until the Czech Republic ratifies the Treaty?

**Bogdan Pęk (UEN).** - (PL) Madam President, President-in-Office, it is paradoxical that this multiple crisis that has afflicted the world, including Europe, can also be a great ally, as those who have got used to telling everyone how to run their business bear the brunt of the responsibility for this crisis. It was they who presided over it and got us into it.

Today we can see a wind of change in your statement and therefore wish the Czech presidency all the best. I would like to remind you of a fact from history that should be useful to you. In 1618, an unpleasant Habsburg diplomatic mission came to Hradčany whose behaviour was unprecedentedly arrogant. The Czechs rightly threw them out of the window in an act known as "defenestration". I look forward to such a political defenestration now. I hope you throw all dishonest advisers out of the window of decency and reason, and that you succeed in pushing European affairs forward. That is what Europe's citizens are expecting, and you will not succeed by listening to these charlatans.

**Stefano Zappalà (PPE-DE).** - (IT) Madam President, ladies and gentlemen, as always in Europe we are living through important historic events, and the six months of the Czech Presidency is certain to number among these.

There are many major problems outstanding, to which this Presidency will have to find solutions: for the Treaty of Lisbon, which requires final adoption, the path has already been outlined, but what is needed is a further impetus to ensure that the process is not drawn out beyond the current year. The serious world economic crisis will continue to produce effects, and there is no doubt that these will be significant over the course of this year. It is to be hoped that the Presidency will continue along the road already embarked upon by the French Presidency so that the next G8 meetings, with Italy presiding, can produce results that meet Europe's needs.

Europe is facing a serious problem in terms of energy supply: this is a crucial fact, and it seems a complex problem to resolve. A solution may, however, be on the point of being found; in any case the future ought to be guaranteed, in view of the dependence of many states, including my own, on such supplies.

The situation in the Gaza Strip can no longer be tolerated. One should not negotiate with terrorists but the attacks on the Israeli people must stop once and for all, and we should no longer tolerate the death of innocent civilians on the front line of an absurd and, unfortunately, permanent war.

Immigration ought to be resolved at a European level and therefore considerable attention should be paid to the situation of certain states, including Italy and Malta, which have significant problems relating to this issue. The Cyprus issue should be tackled swiftly, in order to resolve once and for all relations between Greece and Turkey, and between Europe and Turkey, which, moreover, is still permanently awaiting accession.

Finally, Mr Topolánek, I hope to see you always present in this Chamber; I wish you all the best for your work, and I congratulate you on still being here with us after your first reply. With previous Presidencies, we have not been very used to that. Thank you; it is a good sign.

**Bernard Poignant (PSE).** - (FR) Madam President, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, I have discovered from your Czech historians the reason why you have not ratified the Treaty of Lisbon: they talk in fact of the magic of the figure 8, as in 2008. This figure punctuates your history, they say: in 1918 Czechoslovakia was created and, in 1348, Prague. They cite forty-odd examples and, in particular, three recent painful ones: 1938, when France and the United Kingdom abandoned you; 1948, when you were set aside by a *coup d'état*; and 1968, when the Soviet tanks rolled in. So 2008, I can understand – you put it to one side because you thought ratifying the treaty that year was suspect, all the more so since some people were comparing the

limited sovereignty of Brezhnev with the treaty. In spite of all his faults and his past, comrade Barroso, who is here, is not Brezhnev!

*(Laughter)*

We are part of a project that is characterised by its shared and voluntary sovereignty. The Treaty of Lisbon is just one moment in this history; it is just one stage in this history. I beg you: 2008 is over, ratify in 2009!

*(Applause)*

**Margarita Starkevičiūtė (ALDE).** - *(LT)* The Czech Republic is taking over the European Union Presidency at a time when we are debating how to transform the economy and whether the future model of the European Union will be more socially-oriented or more liberal. Sometimes this is even presented as a row between Old and New Europe, but I think the Czechs will be able to find consensus, as there really is not a great difference between these two conceptions. Their coming together is determined by globalisation and the multicultural economic environment which is still developing. The concept of a 'market economy' is understood very differently by various people and this is a behavioural factor. The countries in the post-Soviet bloc understand perfectly that the existence of market institutions and laws does not necessarily mean that the market will flourish successfully. They must match people's mentality and expectations. Although we sometimes try to underline those differences between the economic models for political gain, in the long-term political perspective delaying the reform of economic policy, if we take into account the changing multilingual and multicultural economic environment, will help radical populist groups come to power and will cause long-term political instability and economic backwardness.

**Elmar Brok (PPE-DE).** - *(DE)* Madam President, President-in-Office of the Council, ladies and gentlemen, I should like to congratulate the Czech Council Presidency on its assumption of office. This is the first Council Presidency from a former Warsaw Pact country and therefore of symbolic importance, as Mr Nassauer rightly said.

The matters of the gas negotiations and the activities of President-in-Office Schwarzenberg in the Middle East and many other examples show that the Czech Council Presidency is well prepared for the work that awaits it. Therefore, I attach particular importance to the fact that great store has been set by what has been called a strategic energy security concept. This example, in particular, makes it clear that there are many areas in which nation-states alone are no longer able to look after the interests of their citizens, and only a common European approach will do.

However, President-in-Office, only the Treaty of Lisbon confers on us this competence in matters of energy and energy security. Our current activities are as coordinators and are non-binding. In the case of many of the challenges we need to take up, we shall not be able to do so without the scope for action offered by the Treaty of Lisbon – the scope for greater democratisation, namely the reinforcement of the rights of the European Parliament and those of the national parliaments. I am assuming, therefore, that there was a mistake in the German interpretation when it interpreted you as saying that the Treaty of Nice may be better than the Treaty of Lisbon. You should still be able to correct the German version. For this reason, we should seek an opportunity to make clear that we can improve the way we overcome our shared challenges in all the major areas only with the help of the Treaty of Lisbon. Thank you very much.

**Edite Estrela (PSE).** - *(PT)* Mr President-in-Office, you spoke of a Europe of rules. You spoke a lot about rules, in fact. Now, one of the rules of democracy is the fulfilment of undertakings. You made an undertaking to ratify the Treaty of Lisbon by the end of 2008. You did not and that was wrong. For that reason I ask: 'When will the Czech Republic ratify the Treaty of Lisbon?'

You also spoke about self-confidence. It sounded like arrogance to me. The Czech Government, including its President, has every right to say and do what it likes, but it cannot forget that it belongs to the European Union and now speaks on behalf of nearly 500 million citizens and 27 Member States.

That is why you cannot ignore the fact that 25 Member States have already ratified the Treaty of Lisbon and that Ireland has already planned a second referendum. Happily, the polls indicate a 'yes' majority. The Irish have realised that, in this particularly difficult international environment, the fact that they belong to the European Union and to the euro area has protected them from greater trouble.

What remains now is for the Czech Republic to state when it is going to ratify the Treaty of Lisbon. As my group chairman, Martin Schulz, has stated, at a moment when Europe is confronting unprecedented

challenges, it is necessary for Europe to speak with a single voice. Now, this will only be possible with the Treaty of Lisbon.

**Marco Cappato (ALDE).** – (IT) Madam President, Mr Topolánek, ladies and gentlemen, you spoke of the eastern partnership, Mr Topolánek. Partnership is a fairly recent invention by the European Union, which did not exist in the Europe which the founding fathers of the Ventotene Manifesto wished to see, or in the Europe of the initial periods after the Second World War. That Europe gave its neighbours, including those in Central and Eastern Europe, the prospect of accession. Europe has been a factor for peace not because it offered the prospect of partnership to its neighbours, but because it offered the prospect of membership, of becoming a part of the EU.

The French Presidency which preceded you, however, was very clear, if we are talking about barriers, in wanting to define the borders of Europe, by slamming the door in the face of Turkey, most of all, and making it clear that the European Union wants to close its borders. The result of that is that surrounding the European Union, where in past decades there was hope for countries such as yours, today, instead, there are wars and tensions in the Middle East, the Balkans, the Caucasus, the Urals and the Maghreb.

The call that we, the non-violent Radical Party, would like to make to you is to take into consideration the urgent need, once again, for the United States of Europe, opening up to membership, to members, and not to confused relations of partnership. That partnership rules out the inclusion of the most important thing: civil and political rights for citizens in Europe and at the borders of Europe.

**Gunnar Hökmark (PPE-DE).** – Madam President, I would like to congratulate the President-in-Office on the ability which his presidency has already demonstrated to deal with a number of issues.

Many Swedes still have the feeling that Prague is to the east of Stockholm, due to the heritage of the political geography of the last century. That is wrong, and your presidency, Mr President-in-Office, will restore the Czech Republic to its proper place in our mental maps – at the heart of Europe in history, as well as in the future.

May I also express the hope that you will pave the way well for the Swedish presidency: as regards climate issues and competitiveness, where it is so important for you to demonstrate that we will tackle the economic problems with openness, without protectionism and with the dynamics of an open economy; and regarding energy issues, where you will play a crucial role, since you are clearly very well-placed. The times we are living in underline the need for reforms and change.

I think it is fair to say that solidarity and security as regards energy means that we need to reform and deepen the European internal energy market. Without that, we will be exposed to different threats and attempts to divide us, to fragment us. One aim should be to ensure that no one can control the supply and production of gas and electricity at the same time as distribution; to ensure that we will have one common market. If that can be achieved during your presidency, it will be a strategic step forward that I hope we can all congratulate you on in six months' time.

**Maria Berger (PSE).** – (DE) Madam President, President-in-Office of the Council, I and some fellow Members present here today belonged to the group of MEPs from the Joint Parliamentary Committee who particularly promoted the cause of Czech membership in the period up to 2004. Therefore, being able to welcome a Czech Presidency for the first time makes today a special day for non-Czech MEPs, too. I might add from the point of view of an Austrian MEP that it was not always very popular to campaign in Austria for the accession of the Czech Republic. Thus, we are certainly among those who offer the Czech Presidency particular support and do not intend to attach too much importance to teething problems – the rather one-sided initial position on the Gaza conflict and the Czech President's view that social and environmental standards are too high have already been mentioned. From an Austrian point of view, we are particularly hurt by the sympathetic reaction to Slovakia's plans to restart Bohunice, which would be a clear infringement of existing EU law.

The excellent philosopher and writer Jiří Gruša has written a 'User manual for the Czech Republic and Prague', which I can only recommend to all my fellow Members as an enjoyable and extremely humorous read. As yet, there is no user manual for Europe in written form but, if one should ever be issued, all new Presidencies would be well advised not to turn down the support offered to them in Parliament or by the governments of neighbouring States.

**Othmar Karas (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Madam President. President-in-Office, you have a particular responsibility. The Czech Council Presidency has got off to a bumpy start – its art installation has been provocative and

given rise to indignation – but its serious efforts to find its feet and assume responsibility for the whole Union have been perceptible even before today. It seems to be well prepared. Its programme contains the right priorities. It will subsequently be judged, however, on the determination, personal commitment and European-mindedness with which these are implemented, and on the success rate.

Commission President Barroso said that the EU is being put to the test in these six months. The Czech Council Presidency and the Czech Government are being put to the European-policy test. These tests can be passed only if we all give of our best. For that reason, I would ask you to stop playing domestic policy off against European policy and burdening your Council Presidency with domestic issues. You should make clear to citizens that you already feel that, in the matters of the gas dispute, Gaza, Slovakia's actions with regard to Bohunice and the financial crisis, the Treaty of Lisbon would strengthen your role and enable you to carry it out in better harmony with the other European institutions.

The European Union is a community of values and a common system of law. Yes, we do have rules, and anyone breaking them, anyone not keeping to their promises, shows a lack of solidarity. We are united despite all our differences by our community of values, our common system of law, our political objectives.

Therefore, I would make the following appeal: do not hide behind Ireland, take a step forward, ratify the Treaty of Lisbon before Europe Day 2009, before the end of your Council Presidency. We shall judge you by your deeds and not by the comments by your President in the Czech Republic.

**Gary Titley (PSE).** - Madam President, I was interested that the Czech President-in-Office said that the opposition is trying to torpedo the Czech presidency because, from where I sit, the Czech President is doing a very good job all on his own of torpedoing the Czech presidency.

I notice the Czech presidency states that it is doing all it can to enlarge the European Union and to admit Croatia. If it is doing all it can, why can it not ratify the Treaty of Lisbon? After all, the Czech presidency agreed to it and, therefore, should fulfil its obligations.

We must be honest: it is not a great start to a presidency. The Czech President describes the climate change package as a silly luxury. The Czech Finance Minister describes the economic recovery plan as being reminiscent of the Communist era. We have a so-called work of art – which has given offence to everybody, but particularly the Bulgarians – and the first statement on the Gaza crisis had to be withdrawn several hours later.

What we need at the moment is leadership, and what I have seen so far has taught me that the sooner we get a full-time president of the Council the better, because it is only coherent European action that will deliver security to Europe, will deliver world influence and deliver economic recovery. So let us have some leadership.

*(The President cut off the speaker.)*

**Josef Zieleniec (PPE-DE).** – (CS) Madam President, the Czech Presidency deserves recognition for its active role in settling the dispute over the renewal of Czech gas supplies. However, it would be a big mistake to turn away before addressing the long-term causes of this problem.

The origin clearly lies in Russia's ambitions to extend its sphere of influence into Ukraine and on into Central Europe. The aim of the EU must therefore be to keep Ukraine on the Union's radar screen. However, this will not be possible if Ukraine continues to sponsor opaque transactions and to cling to 'neighbourly prices' which fail to reflect the true market situation and which keep Ukraine politically dependent on Russia.

The Czech Presidency's priorities include energy security and reinforcement of the Eastern Partnership. A fundamental aspect of this partnership must be to help Ukraine set market energy prices, negotiated in the context of long-term contracts, as quickly as possible.

The Presidency should also exert effective pressure on Kiev to dismantle opaque economic structures which undermine efforts to reform and develop a legal state. Only strong external pressure on Ukraine and active cooperation can help it to abandon short-term and often personal interests in favour of genuine independence from Russia, and a legal state that is free of ubiquitous corruption. Unless a clean-up is achieved in Ukraine, we cannot expect the EU to respond effectively to Russia's increasingly assertive policy towards Central and Eastern Europe.

The right time to establish close cooperation between the EU and Ukraine will be immediately after the gas crisis has been defused. Unless the Czech Presidency, on behalf of the EU, succeeds in placing effective pressure

on Ukrainian leaders, we will soon witness not only further days of freezing weather and no gas, with major consequences for the economies of Member States, but above all a dangerous shift in geopolitical relations in Central and Eastern Europe.

**Proinsias De Rossa (PSE).** - Madam President, like everyone in this Parliament I wish the Czech Presidency-in-Office well. However, I am appalled, President-in-Office, by your disgraceful comment here this morning that Lisbon is worse than Nice. That is not only untrue, it is divisive and it is a breach of trust. Now you have to seriously consider withdrawing your comments here this morning in relation to Lisbon.

We need the more united democratic effective Union offered by Lisbon to face the many problems, any one of which can plunge our world into conflict: energy security, climate change, the economic and financial crisis, and the many wars in many regions. As President-in-Office, your task is to mediate for, and lead, Europe based on our common values of solidarity – internally and externally – a social market economy, multilateralism and equality between men and women – and that includes the right of both men and women to share the task of parenting.

President-in-Office, you must park your conservative and neo-liberal views for six months, otherwise you are going to be in conflict constantly with this Parliament for those six months. Ireland will probably have a referendum on a clarified Treaty of Lisbon in the autumn of this year. I will work hard to ensure a positive outcome for Ireland and Europe. Your comments here today have made that task much harder. If the referendum fails, Sir, you will not be thanked by the vast majority of Europeans.

*(The President cut off the speaker.)*

**Jerzy Buzek (PPE-DE).** - (PL) Madam President, President-in-Office, President of the Commission, I would like in particular to thank the President-in-Office for taking on the presidency and congratulate you on a difficult, but successful first two weeks in the presidency. I perfectly understand your words on national identity, an identity which we, the countries between the east and the west of Europe, have built up successfully.

I would like to draw your attention to a matter that I believe will be crucial in these six months: the third energy package. This package deals firstly with the common energy market, a common European agency for cooperation between national regulators, cross-border connections and joint investments, and therefore with integration – in other words, with energy solidarity and secure energy supplies.

Secondly, the third energy package also means liberalisation, the fair regulation of access to networks, that is, competition on the market, which means lower costs and damage to the environment and cheaper energy for consumers, and hence for the economy, which will help to deal with the crisis.

And thirdly, the third energy package fair rules for the operation of countries outside our markets, with common policies for supplying the EU countries and the possibility of transportation through third countries. In the context of the EU's eastern partnership and eastern dimension, the third package clearly speaks for itself.

The third package can benefit each of the three main priorities of your presidency – energy, the economy, and Europe's eastern dimension. I call upon you to keep this priority and to fully ...

*(The President cut off the speaker)*

**Jan Andersson (PSE).** - (SV) Madam President, I, too, would like to welcome the Czech Presidency. During this Presidency, we will have low growth and unemployment will rise. We have a difficult economic situation. I was reading about President Klaus's solutions last week in the *Financial Times*, and I do not agree with them at all. He says that we must lower our ambitions with regard to environmental policy and climate policy and we must lower our ambitions with regard to social policy. That is *absolutely* the wrong way to go. If Europe is to be able to compete in future, we must invest in modern environmental technology. We must invest in modern infrastructure in order for us to have a society that is sustainable in the long term, and in an active climate policy. This will provide a higher rate of growth and increased employment.

It is a similar situation with social policy. We must invest in a social policy with fair working conditions, equal treatment of workers, a good working environment and so on. This will not mean lower growth, but growth that is more sustainable in the long term.

Finally, I would like to mention family policy. The family policy that I read about in your programme is an old-fashioned family policy. Modern family policy is about the equal responsibility of men and women for children and work. You point down a completely different path in your programme.

**Rumiana Jeleva (PPE-DE).** – (BG) Thank you, Madam President. As an MEP from Bulgaria, I welcome the fact that the Czech presidency is including energy and energy security among its key priorities. During the last few days, a large number of EU Member States have become hostages in the dispute between Ukraine and Russia. In Bulgaria alone more than 1 60 000 households have been left without heating. Unfortunately, the Bulgarian Government was unable to help its citizens during this crisis. Bulgaria is the only country in the EU which does not have alternative sources, suppliers and reserves of gas. We must learn the lesson from this case.

Fellow Members, I think that I am speaking for the whole Parliament when I say that we cannot allow European citizens to pay the price for political games involving countries using their energy resources as political tools. This is why I believe that we need sustainable solutions in the energy sector. We need a common European energy policy. One important element in this is to improve the energy infrastructure. When we talk about European energy solidarity, we mean joint energy projects in the European Union and avoiding the current practice of bilateral agreements.

I would also like to believe that before long, it will be possible in Europe to build pan-European nuclear power facilities as joint projects involving Member States. In this context I also welcome the fact that the Czech presidency is making the expansion of forms of cooperation with countries from the southern Caucasus and the Balkans, and with Ukraine another key priority. It is only by adopting an integrated approach which takes into account the interests and opportunities deriving from these interests of both Member States and the countries from the regions just mentioned that we can guarantee overcoming and averting crises, such as the gas crisis we have just been through. We need to take action immediately and do what is best for the European Union. The need for concrete action aimed at establishing a common European energy policy is now greater than ever.

I wish the Czech presidency every success.

**Katalin Lévai (PSE).** – (HU) Madam President, Prime Minister, the Czech presidency has chosen the tagline “Europe Without Borders” as its motto, setting as its foremost priorities the issues of energy policy and economic stability. In addition, I wish to emphasise the importance of including a further priority, that of the European citizen.

I would urge that more attention be paid to issues that directly affect the daily lives of citizens. More emphasis should be given to the enhancement of state-of-the-art European social programmes, to guarantees of European solidarity and equality of opportunity, and to the implementation of the minorities policy. I agree with those who urge the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon.

Citizens must be involved more closely in European politics because I believe that the lack of social packages and effective communication lead to a growing loss of confidence in European institutions. I believe the role of education is especially important ...

*(The President cut off speaker.)*

**Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE).** – (CS) Mr President-in-Office of the Council, ladies and gentlemen, the beginning of the Czech Presidency has been marked by the conflict in Gaza and the energy crisis. After a wave of dismissive and doubting remarks as to the Czech Republic's ability to lead the Union, Europe and other parts of the globe are watching with surprise how responsibly and effectively the Czech Presidency has acted as it deals with the unexpected crises. I wonder, however, whether they were so unexpected, and I applaud the fact that the Czech government started dealing with them early on, at Christmas, because the French Presidency had failed to nip them in the bud.

I would like you to engage just as fearlessly in negotiations with China, which is wilfully breaking the rules on world trade, promoting unfair competition and threatening the health of Europeans by churning out counterfeit and dangerous products. Today, for example, European parents have great difficulty in finding children's shoes that pose no health risks, yet so far the Council and the Commission have paid little attention to this issue.

I welcome, then, the fact that you have placed 'Europe in the World' among your priorities. I assure you that Europe is very open to world trade, but no President of the Council has yet been able to ensure fair reciprocity and to open up China to European producers. I hope that you and your first-rate team will be more successful.

Mr President-in-Office of the Council, I congratulate you on presenting a truly high-quality, realistic programme for Europe and also on your personal growth. Considering that you are the leader of a political party some of whose current ministers voted in 2003 against our accession to the Union, you are doing extremely well on the European scene. I just hope we will witness a similar mellowing of opinion among your party colleagues in relation to the Treaty of Lisbon too.

The media are reporting that the Irish, under pressure from the financial crisis, now understand better that the Treaty is a decent instrument which was put together for dealing with hard times. I hope that you too will start to view the Treaty in a positive light, even if it means deleting President Klaus from your mobile phone. I wish us all a successful Czech Presidency, notwithstanding the pluralism of our views.

**Katerina Batzeli (PSE).** - (EL) Madam President, Prime Minister, in addition to the question of foreign policy, action to deal with the economic crisis and the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon, one of the basic priorities of the European Union must be young people. I read about this priority in your programme. I believe that your programme should be more integrated and more pro-active on the question of young people.

Young people are no longer convinced by pronouncements and promises. They do not feel secure in the face of a state which is collapsing and which is unable to address the economic crisis. They do not accept education systems which send them to the market of unemployment and social disdain. They do not accept euro-scepticism, the fear of Europe. They have a problem with the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon. They clash on a daily basis. It is the new generation that can understand what is meant by ...

*(The President cut off the speaker.)*

**John Bowis (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, I should like to say to the President-in-Office that his country is symbolised for me by two men: Franz Kafka and Jan Palach. Both symbolise the struggle for freedom and for democracy and both showed the frustration, the pain and the sacrifice that can sometimes come in that struggle.

For that reason I think, Mr President-in-Office, you will have a particular insight into the struggle in Gaza and you will understand the pain and the frustration of the people of Gaza and the people of Israel. I hope you will, therefore, throw everything into stopping the slaughter that is going on there.

You will also be able to reach out to the American President on the issues of climate change and bring him into the equation for Copenhagen.

At home you will have the chance to make your mark in the remaining legislative proposals of this Parliament – and I highlight the new opportunities for citizens that will flow from cross-border health, an item I know is on your agenda.

You mentioned the free movement of knowledge. Nowhere is that more important than in medical science, and that goes, too, for mental health. I have had the privilege of supporting some of the work for reform on mental health in the Czech Republic. I know you will want to further those reforms not just in your country but throughout Europe. I would like you to cast your mind back to June when we set out the mental health pact for the European Union. It is not on your list at the moment, but I hope you will ensure that it is on your agenda as an item to be furthered because, above all, our task – your task – is to benefit those people in our community who are vulnerable and need our support. I know you will do your best in that, and I wish you well in all your endeavours.

*(Applause)*

**Józef Pinior (PSE).** - (PL) I would like to start by recalling the Polish-Czech underground opposition meeting organised 21 years ago by Solidarity in the Giant Mountains on the Polish-Czech border.

The Czech Republic is the first country of Central and Eastern Europe to take the EU presidency. This is a duty, Mr President-in-Office. The Czechs heading the European Union are heirs to the Central and Eastern European tradition of the struggle to bring down the Iron Curtain and for a democratic community of societies on the continent of Europe. I stress the special intellectual and political importance of the Czech presidency.

Of its many priorities, the main one is to conclude the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon and to strengthen European common foreign policy. Another very important outstanding task is to prepare a transatlantic strategy for transatlantic relations following the election of the new American president. And finally I would like to wish President Vaclav Havel a rapid recovery from his recent operation.

**Mihael Brejc (PPE-DE).** – (SL) The Czech Presidency has expressed its readiness to intervene to break the deadlock in the negotiations regarding Croatia's accession to the European Union. Mr President, allow me to remind you in this regard that each candidate country is required to submit credible documents. If the documents are not credible, that fact should be drawn to the attention of the country concerned.

In the specific case of Croatia, Croatia has marked on its maps a border which is in dispute. Instead of mentioning that such and such a section of the border is in dispute, it simply marked the border as it sees it. Naturally, such a document cannot be credible, because it actually concerns a dispute between the two countries which will have to be resolved elsewhere. This is a bilateral dispute between two countries who are otherwise good neighbours on excellent terms, and yet it is a dispute that will have to be resolved elsewhere. Therefore, I would like to point out that Slovenia is not being capricious in mentioning that Croatia's documents are not credible. Slovenia is in fact making the point that Member States are obliged to draw this candidate country's attention to the fact that it is required to submit documents which conform to the European Union's standards.

And what is a possible solution? Many proposals have already been put forward and I believe that the Czech Presidency will likewise try to come up with an appropriate proposal. The solution might be for Croatia to submit a government or parliament decision which clearly states that these borders are orientational, provisional or any other term specifying clearly that the borders are temporary and that they have not yet been determined. That way, I think, we would make a small step forward and make it possible for Croatia to join the European Union as soon as possible, which would also be in Slovenia's interest.

In conclusion, allow me to wish you every success in heading the Council of the European Union.

**Richard Falbr (PSE).** – (CS) Criticism has been heaped on the President-in-Office of the Council; I intentionally refrain from joining in. In Czech fairy tales, we usually find the castle occupied by a wise king who provokes no one, causes no offence, and does not claim to be an expert in all matters. This is not the case at Prague Castle. Well, nothing is perfect. Yet I have faith that the President-in-Office of the Council will cope successfully with this handicap and keep the promises he has made to us today. I have known him for almost 20 years, and I am pleased to see how membership of the European Union has fuelled his political growth. I am crossing my fingers for him because, as the Spanish say, *Con mi patria, con razón o sin ella*, as the English say, 'Good or bad, my country', and as I say, 'My country, through thick and thin'.

**Zita Pleštinšká (PPE-DE).** – (SK) I would like to begin by expressing my pleasure that right at the beginning of its presidency our fraternal neighbour the Czech Republic has dispelled any doubts as to the ability of a new Member State to manage and administer the affairs of the European Union.

The Czech presidency has demonstrated that it is capable of responding to and acting in critical situations, such as the war in Gaza and the disruption of gas supplies from Russia to the EU. As a representative of Slovakia, which receives almost 97% of its gas from Russia and which, together with Bulgaria, is in the most critical situation, I would like to acknowledge personally Prime Minister Mirek Topolánek's involvement in the negotiations with the Russian and Ukrainian parties. Prime Minister, Slovakia still has no gas and therefore still needs your active help. Europe needs a common energy policy and it needs to improve its negotiating position in the field of energy.

France started its presidency with the Russian-Georgian conflict and the Czech presidency has to handle the commercial and political dispute between Russian and Ukraine. I firmly believe that the time has come to learn a lesson from these events. It is important to identify areas where the EU is dependent on Russia, as well as areas where Russia is dependent on the EU. Relations with Russia are important but it is unacceptable that Russia should use gas as a political weapon. It is necessary to deal promptly with the issues of diversifying energy sources and constructing the Nabucco pipeline. Prime Minister, Slovakia is in an extraordinary situation and it sees you as an ally in the matter of a strategic decision on Jaslovské Bohunice. I would also like to request your help Mr Barroso, as President of the European Commission.

Personally, I think that many shortcomings still exist in the implementation of the free movement of persons and I therefore welcome the motto of the Czech presidency – Europe without barriers.

I wish the Czech presidency success in implementing its 3E programme and in bringing the EU closer to achieving the Lisbon goals.

**Miloš Koterec (PSE).** – (SK) Prime Minister, we are former fellow citizens and as such I am delighted to welcome you to the European Parliament and to wish you good luck with implementing the objectives you have presented to us.

Your 3E priorities certainly sum up the current problems facing the European Union, although I trust that in the economy section you will not forget its social aspects which are so important for the majority of EU citizens. When I saw you at the celebrations for the adoption of the euro in Slovakia, I was delighted to discover that the new President-in-Office of the Council was a supporter of closer integration between the countries of the Union. Nevertheless, like most Members of this Parliament, I would be even more delighted if you contribute to the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon in the Czech Republic. Failing this, it will be difficult to achieve the priorities you have set out for yourself. If we want the EU to become, as you have said, not merely a payer but also a player in world affairs, then we must take this step.

Prime Minister, as has been said many times, the European elections will be a significant moment during your presidency. Turnout in the elections will influence EU policy for the next five years and material support from the Council can play a major role here. When Slovakia is eliminated from the ice-hockey world championship and the Czech Republic qualifies for the next round ...

*(The President cut off the speaker.)*

**Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE).** - Madam President, I would like to extend the warmest Estonian support for the Czech presidency. Truly increased competitiveness is the best remedy for the economic crisis, with the completion of four basic freedoms. President-in-Office, I support your idea of developing to the full extent the Eastern Partnership. We understand now how important it is to engage countries like Ukraine and Georgia to the rule of law and democratic accountability.

Last September the European Parliament suggested marking 23 August as a day of joint commemoration of the victims of Communism and Nazism. We trust that you will take the lead in convincing all the 27 governments to officially mark this day, beginning from next August. We also expect you to lead us to a European moral and political assessment of the crimes committed under totalitarian Communism.

*(The President cut off the speaker.)*

**Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE).** – (RO) 'Economy, Energy and European Union in the World' is the motto of the EU's Czech Presidency. Europe's citizens expect European institutions to protect them against crises and improve their quality of life. The European Union's economic recovery plan, increasing energy efficiency and energy supply security are currently the priorities of Europe's citizens.

I urge the Czech Presidency, in spite of the approaching European elections, or especially for this reason, to demonstrate vision, political will and, above all, commitment to Europe's citizens. Together we can reach an agreement at first reading on the directive on energy efficiency in buildings. I assure you that both the European Parliament and European Commission are ready to support you so that the directive on energy efficiency in buildings features among the achievements of the Czech Presidency.

**Marios Matsakis (ALDE).** - Madam President, having had the traumatic experience of Russian Communism in the past, the Czech Republic has now gone to the extreme of attaching itself firmly and with obedience to the USA. This is demonstrated clearly not just by your stance on Gaza and the Treaty of Lisbon, President-in-Office, but also by your Government's decision to station American missiles on Czech soil. Your willingness to serve faithfully the Washington administration at the expense of putting Europe's peace at risk is unacceptable and suspicious.

Your country is today part of the EU, not of the US, and you must make sure your Government acts accordingly. American satellite states have no place in our Union. So, you must make up your mind: EU or US? You cannot have both!

**Mirosław Mariusz Piotrowski (UEN).** - (PL) Madam President, President-in-Office, the Czech presidency has been the first in many years to drop that old chestnut, the European Constitution, also known as the Treaty of Lisbon, from the agenda. This realistic approach inspires optimism, and shows respect for democracy and the principle of unanimity.

The Czech Presidency has decided to focus on the most urgent topical issues, including the Gaza conflict and energy security. Initially there was no plan to intervene in the gas conflict between Russia and Ukraine, but when it started to affect large numbers of Member States, Mr Topolánek stepped in to mediate. It is clear that in six months the presidency will not achieve all the aims it has set out to achieve, but the first two weeks already indicate that it can be an effective presidency, despite the Cassandra prophecies of some politicians sitting in this House. On behalf of the delegation ...

*(The President cut off the speaker.)*

**Dimitar Stoyanov (NI).** – (BG) Thank you, Madam President. I have heard the news that with the Czech presidency's support, something supposed to be a work of art has been put up in Brussels, which depicts my country, Bulgaria, as a toilet. This is deeply offensive and is contrary to the European Union's traditions of partnership and mutual respect. This is why we insist that this image is removed immediately by the Czech presidency and by whoever has actually dared to cause such offence to one of the Member States, which we cannot tolerate. If this image is not removed immediately, my colleagues and I will go and remove it personally with our own hands.

**Mirek Topolánek, President-in-Office of the Council.** – (CS) Thank you for giving me the floor. I would like to start my closing address by thanking you for all your views; it was a very warm welcome and one that I was not expecting. I would also like to note that the Czech Presidency and I myself, in my capacity as President of the European Council, will be in close contact and will work in close cooperation with the European Commission over the entire six months. The first fortnight has shown how continuous, daily and very active contact, not only with José Manuel Barroso, but also with the entire Commission, has secured joint action over the issues that descended upon us at the beginning of the year. I am referring here not only to our cooperation with the European Parliament, but in particular to our communication with the European Commission as we sought to handle these ad hoc issues. I would like to extend my gratitude to President Barroso.

Before I came here, I swore I would tell no jokes. The one joke I did tell, which everyone at home would laugh at, fell flat. Never mind, I will keep on trying and perhaps eventually even the German translation will get it right and we will understand one another.

The Treaty of Lisbon cannot be a mantra. It must be a means, not an end. It is a means to improve the working of the European Union. It must never be a matter of compulsion. Each country has its own tools and rules of the game for achieving ratification. The fact that I signed the Treaty does not mean that I will influence the decisions of the two chambers of the Czech Parliament, which are autonomous and free and will decide for themselves. Likewise, we have no intention of exerting advance pressure on the decision of the Irish people. It is impossible to impose the validity of the Treaty in any way, although I do think that the Treaty is needed at this time and will facilitate the working of the European Union. That is my final observation on the matter and I will not return to it because I have explained my personal position.

I liked the quote delivered by the honourable Member Mr Kirkhope, and I will paraphrase another of Churchill's quotes to demonstrate what I think of the current time: 'No more crises tomorrow, my diary is already full.' I think what we have been through in the first few weeks shows that we chose our priorities correctly and that we were well prepared. Besides, we began to address the gas issue in mid-December, during the French Presidency.

I apologise to all those honourable Members whose specific questions I do not answer; I will try to generalise this discussion a little and I will try to shed light rather on the general approach to handling these specific problems.

The question of smuggling people, drugs and children, child trafficking and the like. Just as this Parliament is holding a debate regarding levels of freedom and security, so is the Czech Republic and we are keen to accelerate the directives and the entire legislative plan within the framework of Council decisions to combat people smuggling. I just want to say that we are ready for this and want to address the individual elements of these problems.

The large-scale discussion on Nabucco. We must concede, in all honesty, that Nabucco will be an alternative to other transit routes only if it also provides an alternative source of supply. As for the debate on Ukraine, my countryman Josef Zieleniec said it quite clearly – this is a political and geopolitical problem, and in my opinion if we do not give Ukraine a chance to resolve its internal problems, if we do not place restrictions on the conduct of the various players, whether they be individuals or firms in the gas market, then we could

lose the pro-European orientation of Ukraine, which is, of course, a geopolitical problem. We can only speculate on the goals of the whole crisis – perhaps only a short-term price increase, maybe much greater pressure to build the Nord Stream, the alternative northern route, or perhaps the aim really is to inhibit Ukraine's European inclinations. Whatever the case, these factors are part of the problem, which is not just short-term and is not just about energy.

If I had to respond to the reference as to whether Europe should be more liberal or more socialist, I would attempt one more joke and say that I propose a compromise of a liberal-conservative Europe, but that really is my last joke.

With regard to the path followed by the Czech Republic and the adoption of the euro, on 1 January I declared that the Czech Republic would announce its date of entry on 1 November this year. My government is the first government that will meet the Maastricht criteria. I do not look on this as a race. I congratulate my Slovak counterparts, and we will wait to see how the financial crisis affects compliance with the rules of the Stability and Growth Pact and what sort of effect it has on the *de facto* fulfilment of all the rules governing the euro area. I am concerned – and this also applies to the handling of the financial crisis – that the loosening of the EU's own rules is a destructive step, and therefore when we talk of a Europe of rules, we will naturally insist on compliance with the directives on state aid and competition, and this will be one of the criteria for assessing all proposals on how to address the financial crisis. Rules apply in good times and in bad, and they apply to everyone. Equality here must be absolute.

I will actually comment on 'A Europe without Barriers'. Yes, it is meant to have at least three senses. There is the economic sense, which involves the removal of barriers to the internal market, the mental or psychological sense, in other words the removal of barriers in the minds of Europeans, which is of course an objective of the recently acceding countries, and finally there is the removal of external barriers, the avoidance of protectionism, a genuine liberalisation of world trade as one of the tools for managing the crisis, boosting demand, and bringing about an effective realisation of the conclusions of the Washington G20.

I would like to say perhaps one thing here which affects me personally and which has already found its way into the media. Václav Havel is gravely ill and has been hospitalised. He is a man who symbolises both our pre-November and our post-November direction, and not just for the Czech Republic – he essentially symbolises the fall of the Iron Curtain. He was the first Czech to address this European Parliament, and on behalf of us all I would like to wish him a speedy recovery.

I have a few very specific responses for one honourable Member of this assembly. I was touched by Mr Rouček's concern for the Czech government, and I could list at least six examples from the last ten to fifteen years where countries holding the Presidency of the European Union had many internal problems yet enjoyed a successful Presidency. There was Belgium at the time the Maastricht Treaty entered into force, where constitutional changes took place without affecting the Presidency, there was the time of the French Presidency, when the European Union was enlarged to include Sweden, Finland and Austria while France was suffering an internal political crisis, there was the time of the Amsterdam Treaty in 1999, during the German Presidency, when Gerhard Schröder was facing major problems and Lafontaine quit his party, there was the time the euro was introduced during the Spanish Presidency headed by José María Aznar, there was the time of the Irish Presidency, and I could mention many more. Do not worry about the internal problems of Czech politics; they will not affect the Czech Presidency.

On the Nuclear Forum: we cannot have a nuclear debate in which the dispute between the greens, liberals, conservatives, and so on ends up in a forced result. The Nuclear Forum, organised in cooperation with the European Commission and taking place in Bratislava and Prague, should launch a new debate on security, on opportunities, on risks and needs, and on all of those things that have actually become a little taboo in recent years. Breaking down this taboo is actually the objective of the Slovak-Czech Nuclear Forum. It is obvious why Prime Minister Fico is in Ukraine and Moscow; the problems of Bulgaria and Slovakia are critical because they are countries wholly dependent on gas supplies from Ukraine. Bulgaria is capable of storing only a third of the capacity it requires, Slovakia has already reduced production at thousands of businesses, its thermal power plant in Nováky has burned out and it is suffering a major crisis. I am in daily contact with Robert Fico and I support his mission, even though I do not think it will be successful at this time. We must be much tougher towards the two players, Ukraine and Russia, Naftohaz and Gazprom. Furthermore, I believe that the next steps must be far more effective and tougher on the part of both the European Commission and the Czech Presidency. We must look for the tools to overcome a number of technical

problems. It is not possible for these supplies not to be resumed for a wholly irrelevant reason (that is, the use of technical gas), and we will be taking further action in this respect.

We talked a lot about the Balkans and related problems, and many questions were raised in this respect. Mr Peterle knows full well that, if the chapters in Croatia's accession process are to be unblocked, a bilateral solution must be found to the Slovenian-Croatian dispute. This is not a European dispute, although it is in fact starting to interfere with the accession talks. In this sense, my contacts with the two prime ministers and the two presidents, together with my personal input into this problem, will perhaps help to resolve the Slovenian-Croatian border problems.

There is much that I would still like to say, but I will try not to keep you much longer. I will attempt to make way for your next proceedings. I would like to end by saying that we greatly appreciate the opportunity to belong to a community of states built on values and on foundations that we, after November 1989, have been able to adopt once more as our own values and our own goals. We also value the opportunity to preside over this entire community. It is something so unique, something my generation, which was 33 years old in 1989, never thought it would live to see. We also appreciate the fact that we can tackle many problems. What we value most of all is the internal liberal debate. This is the freedom which allows us to articulate these problems within a spectrum of views which is relevant to their solution. I can unequivocally declare here that Tomas Garrigue Masaryk has said that 'democracy is discussion'. I am keen to follow in the footsteps of the first Czechoslovak president; I remain absolutely open to this discussion. I thank you for your attention today and look forward to meeting you again.

**José Manuel Barroso**, *President of the Commission*. – Madam President, this has been a very interesting discussion, and I am encouraged by the common understanding of the challenges and generally speaking by the support given to the Czech presidency. Once again I reiterate my wish to work loyally, constructively and in the best spirit, with our Czech friends. Their success is also Europe's success.

As some of you have underlined, this is the last presidency before the European Parliament elections. I think it is very important that during these months we all show how relevant all our institutions are to the wellbeing, prosperity and solidarity of our citizens.

It is very important to communicate, and that cannot be done only by the European institutions or only by Member States. We have to do it together in a true spirit of partnership, so a lot of what will happen during these months will be very important for the future of Europe, and also for the respect accorded to our institutions all over Europe.

I would like to use this time to answer some concrete questions put to me, specifically on energy. Yes, we need an urgent revision of the Gas Security Directive. The Commission said so when it presented its strategic energy review last November, and we are working flat-out to put the legislative proposal before the European Parliament and the Council as soon as possible. Yes, we need more solidarity and more progress in terms of energy security in Europe. That was the substance of our strategic energy review presented very recently.

I would like to use this time once again to ask all Member States and European institutions to work more actively on the mechanisms of European energy solidarity. Yes, we also need to accelerate investment in energy infrastructure, interconnectors and energy efficiency. That is why it is so crucial to get the EUR 5 billion of the Community budget allocated for these purposes.

I appeal to you, both Parliament and the Czech presidency, to translate this into practice as soon as possible. Yes, economic recovery needs to be coupled with smart green growth if we want to come out of this crisis stronger. Our proposals are on the table to accelerate the use of Structural Funds for these purposes. Funds are needed for energy efficiency and for energy interconnections, and by the coordination of national stimulus programmes we will align national efforts in this direction as well, in line with European Council conclusions.

Let me also say that getting through this economic crisis and putting Europe back on the path towards sustainable growth will also require respect for Community rules on equal opportunities. Europe needs to continue facilitating the participation of both men and women in the economy, as well as helping combine family and professional life.

A word also on the Treaty of Lisbon, which many of you mentioned: we need this Treaty more than ever, ratified by all Member States. Yes, we need to respect all national ratification processes, but when a government, on behalf of a state, signs a treaty it takes a solemn commitment to put it into force.

(Applause)

Many of you spoke about the Czech presidency and how important it is. As some of you said – Mr Nassauer, Mr Brok and others – the very fact that we have a Czech presidency is in itself an event of great importance. It is the first time a former Warsaw Pact country has assumed the responsibility of chairing the European Council. When you think about it, what a great achievement it is, 20 years after the fall of the Iron Curtain, to have the Czech Republic at the head of the European Council, and to have Prime Minister Topolánek and Vice-Prime Minister Vondra cooperating in this responsibility. I have full confidence in what you are going to do.

Let me share with you an experience I had last year during the Portuguese presidency. Prime Minister Socrates of Portugal and I were in Zittau, on the border between the Czech Republic, Poland and Germany, and I saw the emotion Prime Minister Topolánek was feeling at that moment. That border, which once separated us in Europe, between the two sides of Europe, is now a free point of circulation among Europeans from all those countries. It was a great moment and a great achievement, of which we should be proud. That is why I really believe that it is important to defend our values to make a success of this presidency.

Some of you said it is important that the Czech Republic be successful, because it is a small country. I am sorry but the Czech Republic is not a small country, even in European terms. In fact, it is sometimes a sign of an inferiority complex to consider some of our Member States as small countries. Let me tell you that – as Paul-Henri Spaak, one of the founders of our European project, said – in the European Union there are no longer small and big countries; if you like, none of them is big: the problem is that some of them have not yet noticed it.

In fact, when we look at the rest of the world – when we see the dimension of America's strength in terms of defence and in technology; when we see the huge geographical dimension of Russia; when we see the huge demographic dimension of China and India – can we say that there are any big countries in Europe?

There are no longer big countries in Europe. All are great in terms of dignity. For the European Commission all the Member States have exactly the same dignity, but if we want to be big in the world we need the European Union to be strong. We need to act together; we need to use the leverage of all our institutions and, if we act together like that, we will make a difference in the world for good. That is why we need the Treaty of Lisbon. That is why we need a common purpose. That is why we need strong institutions. I wish the Czech presidency all the best.

*(Sustained applause)*

**President.** - The debate is closed.

The vote will follow.

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

**Gerard Batten (IND/DEM), in writing.** – Some of us are very much looking forward to being addressed by President Klaus in February. How refreshing it will be to hear someone who has the intelligence and honesty to doubt the ideological orthodoxies of ever-closer European Union and climate change.

President Klaus has been quite right to compare the European Union to the old Soviet Union. My friend, the heroic Russian dissident, Vladimir Bukovsky says of the European Union, 'I have lived in your future and it doesn't work.' Mr Bukovsky is quite right, the EU is a form of soft communism.

We can only hope that the Czech presidency will be a little more sceptical of the great European project than some previous presidencies. One thing that the Czechs can do is to delay ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon until after the second Irish referendum. Then when the Irish vote 'no' again to the failed constitution the Czechs can acknowledge the democratic decision of the only EU nation allowed a referendum and stop the Treaty in its tracks by withholding their ratification. Let's hope that President Klaus is the man to do that.

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing.** – *(IT)* Thank you, Madam President, and I offer my sincere wishes to the Czech Republic for success in its work. The signs do not augur well at the beginning of its Presidency: its fundamental Euro-scepticism, which has underpinned many Czech acts in the recent past (such as the failure, to date, to ratify the Treaty of Lisbon), offers no comfort even to optimists. The statement on Gaza made by the President-in-Office of the Council has also demonstrated a lack of institutional feeling: positions ought to be agreed with the other 26 Member States. Additionally, the failure to meet with the Socialist Group in the European Parliament sends out a very bad signal: it has never before happened that a President-in-Office of the Council has not found the time to hold a dialogue with a large political group in

Parliament. Madam President, we hope that we will be surprised by effective, authoritative action: in that case, at the end of the six months, we will have the intellectual honesty to give credit for it.

**Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT)** The Czech Presidency put forward three priorities: economy, energy and foreign relations. Thus, the presentation of the programme of the Czech Presidency followed lines that were already known, but it had some peculiarities, specifically with regard to the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon. The Czech Prime Minister affirmed the need to respect the sovereignty of the Irish citizens. He even considered that, if there had been a referendum in the Czech Republic, perhaps the result would have been identical to what occurred in Ireland, accepting that the draft Treaty might be rejected.

In relation to the gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine, he considered both countries were to blame, underlining economic, strategic and political reasons for their actions, and he supported a greater intervention of the European Union, but he was not very forthcoming with specific proposals.

With regard to socio-economic issues, he did not put forward anything different, which means maintaining the neo-liberal positions, the proposals rejected by the European Parliament on the Working Time Directive, the Stability and Growth Pact and the neo-liberal Lisbon Strategy, and he ignored the economic crisis and its serious consequences in the social dimension.

Moreover, in relation to the war crimes that Israel continues to commit against the Palestinians, he said virtually nothing, which we deplore.

**Genowefa Grabowska (PSE), in writing. – (PL)** The Czech presidency has come at a difficult time for the entire EU. The financial crisis, the energy crisis and economic recession are more trying than at any time in its fifty-six year history. And to add to this we have the June elections to the European Parliament and the latest military conflict in the Gaza strip. I personally regret that the Czechs do not have the proper tools for the job. I regret that the Treaty of Lisbon reforming the EU is not a reality.

That is the reason for the lack of a common foreign policy: there is no system for making decisions, and the Member States are not bound by a principle of energy solidarity. And President Vaclav Klaus' views on climate change, EU reform and the euro, which are bizarre, if not hostile, have a great deal to answer for in this respect. I therefore appeal to the Czech government and premier Mirek Topolánek, to constrain Klaus' public declarations on EU affairs as much as possible. This is for his own good, as well as in our common interest.

The Czech "three E" priorities – economy, energy and external relations – are Europe's needs in a nutshell. I therefore believe that Mr Schwarzenberg's promise that the Czechs will significantly "push European matters forward", and that they "will not be bottom of the class" will come true. I wholeheartedly wish our southern neighbour a successful presidency!

**Gábor Harangozó (PSE), in writing. –** The Economic Recovery Plan – agreed in December – is a major step in the right direction to cope with the current economic slowdown. It must now see its concrete aspects implemented rapidly and effectively. In this respect, the Union ought to maximise its efforts in facilitating access to available resources. We should, therefore – while restoring confidence in our financial market – particularly improve and simplify measures in order to accelerate implementation of structural and cohesion funds. Cohesion policy is the greatest instrument of solidarity in the Union, and its role in tackling the negative effects of a global crisis of this scale is, of course, essential. Moreover, let me welcome among the priorities of the new Czech presidency the will to initiate discussion on the redefinition of the Less Favoured Areas parallel to the Commission communication. A better delimitation of these areas will indeed help in better targeting their needs and foster their development potentials and thus work in line with the objectives of social, territorial and economic convergence throughout the Union. We need indeed to further our efforts to avoid the negative consequences of the crisis not only on the economy but on our citizens, mainly the most vulnerable ones.

**Mieczysław Edmund Janowski (UEN), in writing. – (PL)** I would like to thank President Mirek Topolánek for setting out the priorities of the Czech Presidency. The three 'E's — the Economy, Energy and Europe in the world, which will constitute the framework of the Community presidency, will suffer from additional, unplanned external events: Gaza and gas.

The problem of the Gaza conflict has political dimensions. However, it has now become so militarised that humanitarian issues have now come to the fore. People are dying there! Not just the Hamas militants who triggered the military conflict, but innocent children, women and men. The EU must in conjunction with

the UN do everything possible to find a solution to this bloody conflict. Jews and Palestinians can live peacefully side by side. Please be unrelenting in your efforts to achieve this aim.

The gas crisis has hit many European states. The dispute between two companies, one Russian and the other Ukrainian, has snowballed into a dispute between the two countries. Now many citizens in many countries are suffering considerably as a result, and their energy supplies have been cut in the middle of a bitter winter. It has also resulted in significant economic losses, as the gas is also needed in manufacturing. It is therefore high time to set up an EU-wide oil and gas system benefiting from a variety of sources. We also have to urgently look for new sources of energy, and use modernised methods of coal gasification. Poland is taking steps of this kind.

I cordially wish our Czech friends success in bringing the aims of the EU to fruition.

**Magda Kósáné Kovács (PSE), in writing. – (HU)** The Czech Presidency finds itself in a difficult situation. It is hard to take the reins of power for the first time after a Presidency which, well established as one of the engines of Europe, has already steered the ship of the Union several times. Their situation is difficult since the financial crisis is only now making its effects felt all over Europe. And it is difficult because they have to contend not only with the extreme Eurosceptics within Parliament but also with high-ranking political representatives of their home country.

Nonetheless, the programme of the Czech Presidency seems to be one that tries to keep the European Union well balanced. With the lofty aim of the motto 'Europe Without Borders', it places at the forefront not only the problem of how to manage the economic crisis but also how to affirm effectively the EU's longer-term principles. The Czech Republic is the first country in the Eastern-Central European region incorporating all of the common characteristics of new EU Member States. Consequently, the programme of the Czech Presidency attempts a proportional representation of the requirements of new Member States.

We are delighted that the Czech Presidency's response to the economic crisis focuses on developing the internal labour force and promoting vertical mobility.

At the same time I would draw the attention of the Presidency particularly to the need for improving the situation of the most underdeveloped regions and of the Roma minority. Indeed, these are social and economic problems at a European level that transcend borders.

Besides making use of immigrant workers, the ageing of the EU population and the resulting social tensions can be managed in the long run by developing the internal labour force represented by those with uncompetitive knowledge and skills.

**Iosif Matula (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO)** I want to congratulate the Czech Republic on taking over the Presidency of the European Union. I would also like to express my appreciation of the fact that it has been possible to draw up an 18-month programme as part of a cooperation process together with France, which previously held the Presidency of the European Union, and Sweden, which will take over the EU Presidency in the second half of this year.

The challenges facing this presidency just as it has started, such as the war in Gaza, the disruption to the supply of Russian gas, not to mention the global economic crisis, have confirmed the fact that the priorities identified by the Czech Republic are totally relevant.

Of the three priorities announced by the Czech Presidency, Energy, Economy and Europe in the World, I would like to refer to the energy aspect. I personally feel that Europe needs a united energy policy so that excessive dependency can be avoided on resources from a single area.

In this respect, I support the need to develop relations with new suppliers, as well as the importance of investing in unconventional technologies for generating energy. We need to improve the transport infrastructure and devote proper attention to building the route for the Nabucco gas pipeline. I also believe that it is essential to shorten the procedures for rolling out projects aimed at finding alternative and unconventional sources of energy.

**Mary Lou McDonald (GUE/NGL), in writing. –** The failure of the European Council to date to address the real issues behind the Irish 'no' to the Treaty of Lisbon make it possible that there will be a second 'no' vote.

Realising that a second 'no' vote is a realistic prospect the Czech presidency is looking to prepare for the eventuality that the Treaty of Lisbon will not enter into force. It is looking to prepare a 'plan B' for the selection

of a new Commission under the rules of the Treaty of Nice. The reported idea of selecting a Commission of 26 Commissioners plus a High Representative for European Foreign and Security Policy from the 27th Member State is just one possible way in which this issue could be dealt with.

People across the EU recognise that the Treaty of Lisbon is not the panacea that many of its most fervent supporters present it as being. On the contrary: it could serve to deepen the economic and social problems facing us.

On the crisis in Gaza, the response of the Czech presidency is very far from what is required. The EU must take concerted action to uphold the rights of beleaguered Palestinians and to try and end the bloodshed.

**Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO)** The Czech Republic, which took over the Presidency of the European Union Council on 1 January 2009, is facing, along with other states which joined the EU in 2004 and later, problems linked to the precarious state, in terms of thermal insulation, of a large number of residential buildings.

We should bear in mind the following: the significant energy savings and reduction in heating costs paid by citizens which could be achieved by renovating the heating systems in these buildings, as well as the limited opportunities to use structural and cohesions funds to invest in this area. I think therefore that the Czech Presidency of the Council should include this issue among its priorities.

Secondly, with regard to the European arrest warrant, the Czech Republic has made a statement, based on Article 32 of the Framework Decision, to the effect that it applies the surrender procedure 'only for acts committed after 1 November 2004'. Similar regulations apply in other European states too. Cases such as this undermine citizens' belief in the effectiveness of European policies in combating crime. The Czech Republic holding the Presidency of the Council provides a good opportunity to re-examine these statements.

**Athanasios Pafilis (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL)** The statements by the Czech Prime Minister and President of the European Commission and the debate in general in the European Parliament on the programme of the Czech Presidency of the EU are the sequel to the single anti-grassroots policy of the EU under previous presidencies. They have sent a message that the attack by capital on the workers, on the grassroots classes, will continue unabated. The imperialist role of the EU will be strengthened, as the Czech Presidency took pains to demonstrate the moment it assumed office by supporting the criminal imperialist attack by Israel on the Gaza Strip and legitimising the barbaric slaughter of the Palestinian people, with the full support of the USA and in keeping with the US/NATO/EE plan for the 'New Middle East'.

The programme of the Czech Presidency signals continued intensification of the anti-grassroots attacks by the EU in order to shift the impact of the crisis in the capitalist system on to the working class and poor grassroots classes, an increase in EU aggression against the people and imperialist intervention and improvements to its capability for military intervention around the world.

The people need to respond to EU aggression by counterattacking. Resistance, disobedience and breaking from the reactionary policy of the EU, from the EU itself, are the way forward for the people.

**Maria Petre (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO)** I would like to begin my speech by raising again the idea which I spoke about on Monday during the opening of the plenary session. You are holding the presidency during a period which has a special significance for us. This year marks 20 years since the fall of the Iron Curtain. I was saying on Monday that for us, but especially for the millions of citizens who have sent us here, these 20 years have marked a period of waiting, to some extent, and acceptance, to another extent. Perhaps it was normal for us not to be able to escape more quickly from the burden of the 50 years which separated us from the rest of Europe.

I wanted to make an intervention to congratulate you on including the third priority, Europe in the World, but especially for dealing with the Eastern Partnership as a priority. The histories of our two countries, Romania and the Czech Republic, have two strong features in common: 1968 and then the Prague Spring, which represented for us Romanians, subjected to the most cruel Communist dictatorship, a ray of light which guided us along the path to freedom.

As a Romanian MEP, I would like to ask you to give proper, specific substance to the Eastern Partnership. There are millions of citizens in this region who need to rekindle this hope by symbolically going through again now, in the forthcoming months, the events of the Prague Spring. Both you and I have the opportunity to understand perfectly the weight of this expectation.

**Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (PL) We now have six months of the Czech presidency of the European Union ahead of us, a presidency which, as is now clear, will not be easy. The two major crises we have had to deal with in recent weeks show us that good leadership of the European Union involves not just carefully prepared programmes, but above all the ability to react quickly and appropriately to difficult problems. That is something every Member State preparing to take on the EU presidency should remember.

The Czech presidency follows on from a very dynamic and ambitious French presidency. It is unlikely that no comparisons will be drawn between the two. However, in my view the Czech authorities are well prepared for the job, and the Czech presidency will be an example of how even a small country that has only recently joined the Community is capable of providing it proper leadership. And not even political divisions in the national arena should stop them.

I would like to appeal to the presidency to devote some of its attention to everyday problems. Large-scale, ambitious plans are important and necessary, but very often far off the radar of ordinary citizens. And it is important that today, on the eve of the Parliamentary elections, the people of the European Union must feel that the Community was created for it, for its citizens, that it is there to improve their daily lives. So grand visions – yes, but through the prism of everyday life.

I wish you success!

**Petya Stavreva (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (BG) The Czech Republic is taking the helm at the EU at a time when Europe is facing the challenges of the global financial crisis, the disrupted Russian gas supplies and the Gaza conflict.

I believe that the Czech presidency's ambitious programme will be achieved through close cooperation between the European Parliament and the European Commission. Europe must continue to take an active stance on all the items on the EU citizens' agenda. At the moment, the issue of energy security is particularly topical and the efforts of all the Member States need to be galvanised. The disruption of Russian gas supplies to European consumers in sub-zero temperatures, which has paralysed Europe, adds a new dimension to the concept of energy independence. This crisis situation imposes the need to reduce Member States' dependency on Russian gas supplies and to look for alternatives.

The citizens of a united Europe are expecting the Czech presidency to take an active stance and get involved in resolving this problem, which has long since gone beyond a trade dispute between Russia and Ukraine.

I wish the presidency every success.

**Theodor Dumitru Stolojan (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) I welcome the fact that the Czech Presidency has specified the energy issue as a priority.

The unacceptable events of the last few weeks concerning the security of the supply of natural gas to certain EU Member States have demonstrated yet again the need for a European energy policy, implemented through clearly defined European projects, supported by European funds. The EU's internal natural gas market can only function normally by rapidly developing storage facilities for natural gas, including liquefied gas, and by speeding up the implementation of the Nabucco project.

**Margie Sudre (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (FR) I should like to send my best wishes to the Czech Government, which is presiding over the Union in delicate conditions, due to the complexity of its national political situation and to a particularly worrying international context.

The Czech Presidency must be determined and dynamic, just as the presidency embodied by Nicolas Sarkozy was over the last six months, in order to work actively in favour of an immediate ceasefire in Gaza and to maintain a strong political momentum, on the basis of the preparatory work programme drafted jointly with France and Sweden, which will succeed it at the head of the Council.

In the face of the economic crisis, the coordinated recovery plan adopted by the 27 should be applied without delay, to protect industry, competitiveness and European jobs. Europe holds a vital part of the solution to the crisis, and the Czech Presidency must help to prove this.

I welcome the Czech Prime Minister's commitment to have the Treaty of Lisbon ratified by his country by the end of this presidency. Of the economic, diplomatic and institutional crises weakening Europe, the last one is the only one whose outcome depends solely on Europeans. The Czech Presidency must enable the Union to achieve this success, in order to guarantee future prospects to our fellow citizens.

**IN THE CHAIR: MR COCILOVO***Vice-President***4. Voting time**

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

I would like to inform the Chamber that during the vote, at the express request of the association of parliamentary journalists, for each set of results we must also expressly indicate the number of votes for and against and the number of abstentions. We had wished to simplify things for you, but it is not possible.

*(For details of the outcome of the vote: see Minutes)*

**4.1. Security features and biometrics in passports and travel documents (A6-0500/2008, Carlos Coelho) (vote)**

*After the vote on the report by Carlos Coelho (A6-0500/2008)*

**Francesco Enrico Speroni (UEN).** - (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to make a point of order. You informed us that, at the request of the journalists, an estimable group, you would announce all the votes, but it seems to me that Parliament's rules ought to be made by parliamentarians, not journalists. I would like to know whether this is the association of blind journalists, because the journalists can very well see the outcome of the vote on the screens. In any case, deaf journalists may have some difficulty if you announce the results.

*(Applause)*

**President.** – Mr Speroni, I have some difficulty in expressing my own personal opinion of the difficulties of journalists' work. Since this request has been made to the Bureau at this time, I think that a reply – and probably I personally share your views – a reply should be given by the Bureau; it has already been decided that the issue of the reply to be made will be on the agenda of the next Bureau meeting.

**Edward McMillan-Scott (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, I agree with the position that Mr Speroni has put forward. I recognise the difficulty you are in, but I would suggest that he is right. The screens do record every vote. To read out every amendment result would be very time-consuming – especially with a vote like we have today. I would suggest that you ask the Bureau to remit it to the relevant committee, and we will consider it for a future voting session – if that is acceptable to the House.

*(Applause)*

**President.** – As I have already said, the issue will be referred to the Bureau, precisely so that it can give a definitive answer.

We will therefore move on to the vote.

**4.2. Public contracts in the fields of defence and security (A6-0415/2008, Alexander Graf Lambsdorff) (vote)****4.3. Dangerous substances and preparations (dichloromethane) (A6-0341/2008, Carl Schlyter) (vote)****4.4. Authorisation to ratify the Work in Fishing Convention, 2007, of the International Labour Organisation (Convention 188) (A6-0423/2008, Ilda Figueiredo) (vote)**

#### **4.5. Situation of fundamental rights in the European Union (2004-2008) (A6-0479/2008, Giusto Catania) (vote)**

**President.** – Before the vote on the first part of paragraph 32

**Mogens Camre (UEN).** – Mr President, it is to complete the text of this amendment. After the text which reads ‘12 December 2006’, we simply wish to add: ‘and on 4 and 17 December 2008’. This is because there were decisions by the Court on these later dates, and it would not be correct to mention the decision in 2006 without mentioning the latest findings of the Court in December 2008.

*(The oral amendment was accepted)*

– Before the vote on Amendment 25

**Syed Kamall (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, according to my voting list it appears that paragraph 36 was withdrawn, so I wonder whether we should have voted on that at all.

**President.** – Amendment 8 has been withdrawn, and as a result you cannot vote on paragraph 36.

– Before the vote on paragraph 161

**Marco Cappato (ALDE).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, on paragraph 166 I would just like to point out that the original English text is the authentic version, because there are too many translations which completely distort the meaning; for example, the Italian translation speaks of ‘*morte decorosa*’ [decent death]. I will not go into the details, but the authentic version is the English version.

**President.** – Thank you for reminding us of this. I will mention it again at the appropriate moment without giving the floor again to Mr Cappato, because now we must vote on paragraph 161; we still have to vote on the original text of the paragraph, having rejected the amendment.

#### **4.6. Maritime Labour Convention (B6-0624/2008) (vote)**

#### **4.7. Development of the UN Human Rights Council, including the role of the EU (A6-0498/2008, Laima Liucija Andrikiienė) (vote)**

#### **4.8. Public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents (A6-0459/2008, Marco Cappato) (vote)**

### **5. Explanations of vote**

#### **Oral explanations of vote**

##### **– Report: Carlos Coelho (A6-0500/2008)**

**Hubert Pirker (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr President, I voted in favour of this report because it calls for a reform in the interests of protecting children, also introducing measures to increase the security of passports. All in all, therefore, it is a package that takes forward the fight against child trafficking and for greater protection of children.

**Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE).** – (CS) I consider it necessary to add biometrics to the security features of travel documents. However, in addition to improving the security of European citizens, which is our primary objective, we must also consider the reverse side of the coin, which is protecting the privacy of our citizens. I will strive to ensure that the implementation of this legislation and application at a national level does not lead to bureaucratic difficulties, or even the misuse of data, and that includes misuse by third countries outside the EU. I would like to point out the need to promote greater involvement from Europol and Frontex in this matter; only a high degree of cooperation between the law enforcement authorities of the Member States will produce the desired effect of making Europe a safe home for us all. I am glad that children from the age of 12 years will have their own passport. This measure will reduce child abuse by organised criminals across borders, which is another reason why I support this apparently controversial topic.

**Frank Vanhecke (NI).** - (NL) Mr President, I was happy to add my emphatic support to the Coelho report on biometrics in EU passports, because, if nothing else, this is a first step in the fight against the very many abuses and forgeries of passports. This is a form of harmonisation which, to say the least, we can endorse, as it is a useful and even necessary measure, certainly in the Schengen countries.

When a system of open internal borders is put in place, the larger external border should be protected as effectively as possible, of course. This report is a step in the right direction, because the external border is insufficiently protected at the moment.

I have one reservation, though. Better passports alone are not enough. Every year, hundreds of thousands of non-European aliens enter our continent, Europe. These are legal immigrants, semi-legal immigrants but also illegal immigrants. My country, Belgium, received more than 70 000 non-European aliens last year, in addition to an unknown number of illegal aliens. This is a tidal wave that we have to stop, and better passports alone will not solve this matter.

**Dimitar Stoyanov (NI).** - (BG) Thank you, Mr President. I voted against the Coelho report for two reasons. Firstly, I feel extremely concerned about citizens' rights and about the fact that collecting biometric data will pose a significant threat to citizens' security, particularly in terms of their freedom, and also the basic human right of freedom of movement will be infringed.

But what concerns me even more is that in my country it will be the second time during the last ten years that new personal identity documents have been introduced. On a personal note, it will actually be the third time in ten years that I have had personal identity documents issued. You might find this amusing, but in Bulgaria people are on such low incomes that the additional burden on their resources which they have to spend on buying new personal identity documents is simply unethical and immoral for these people. When we are talking about pensioners who receive BGN 100, which is equivalent to a pension of EUR 50, it is not right to charge them EUR 20 to have new personal identity documents issued to them. This is why I voted against the Coelho report, because I feel that it is highly inappropriate for my country.

**- Report: Marco Cappato (A6-0459/2008)**

**Gay Mitchell (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, I just want to put on the record that I voted against the Cappato report in the end because I believe there is a better report due before Parliament which will deal with these matters.

I also want to say that Parliament does need to do something in relation to our records when there are Members of Parliament who have been here for over four and a half years, who have drawn a salary for all of that time, and who have spoken for less time than Mr Burke, who has been in the Parliament for six months. I think it is time we drew attention to this.

There are people who do not participate in this Parliament, in its committees or in its plenary. Some of them are members of small groups. They come in here and get speaking time before they rush off to the airport and spend their time in our national Member States, instead of being out here, telling people how awful democracy is in the European Union. Well, democracy is awful in the European Union if Members of this Parliament who do not turn up here can be paid a salary to continue with this sort of flagrant abuse of democracy. I want to put that on the record, Mr President.

I believe that when we are reforming, when we are making documents available, when we are ensuring that there is greater transparency, we should take steps to show which parliamentarians are participating in the work of Parliament and which are not.

**- Report: Alexander Graf Lambsdorff (A6-0415/2008)**

**Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE).** - (CS) The European arms market operates inefficiently because it is fragmented. Today we have created a space for public procurement in this sector while respecting the exemptions for strategic reasons under Article 273 of the Treaty of Establishment. On the Committee, I have worked to end the waste of public funds brought about by opaque military contracts. In the past, the national interest clause was also abused in the case of public contracts for the army which clearly had nothing to do with the quality of security provided. I could name, off the top of my head, works contracts, catering and transport services. This proposal will save money that can subsequently be invested in research and technology to protect us more effectively against present and future threats.

**Jim Allister (NI).** - Mr President, I am opposed to this report because of the threat which I perceive it poses to governments and firms that have invested hugely in defence R&D and which now find themselves robbed of return through the development and production phase.

Under this proposed directive, procurement contracts are now required to be opened up to European competition, leaving a defence company – even a country – with no means of protecting its international property rights and jobs. Given that several military defence companies in the United Kingdom have leading-edge R&D, the threat of this report is a major concern.

My unease is heightened by the recognition that a driving motivation in this report is to bolster EU integration and the European security and defence policy, rather than prioritising tangible economic benefit.

**Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I will try to be briefer than usual; I voted for the Lambsdorff report, which takes a step forward on common security and defence. I wonder, however, and I ask you too: when will we finally have a truly European defence, a truly European army, a real opportunity to save money and be able to defend ourselves as a united Europe? I hope that it will be very soon indeed, Mr President!

**President.** – In this case, it is not for me to give an immediate response, which would be complicated. Let us move on to further explanations of vote, this time on the Schlyter report.

**- Report: Carl Schlyter (A6-0341/2008)**

**Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE).** – (CS) I supported the report on dangerous substances and chemicals, namely dichloromethane, making it possible to restrict this carcinogenic substance in paint strippers, even though provision has been made for exemptions under strict conditions. I am satisfied that the exemptions will not be used in practice since there are safe alternatives that not only consumers, but also professional users, will prefer to choose in the future.

**Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM).** - Mr President, some substances are so dangerous that they must be completely banned or have their use confined to severely restricted uses, surrounded by the strictest health and safety precautions. DCM is one of these substances and must be taken out of circulation.

**- Report: Ilda Figueiredo (A6-0423/2008)**

**Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE).** – (CS) I applaud the international agreement which will establish new employment conditions for workers in the fisheries sector. Fishermen face the highest incidence of serious occupational accidents and deaths. I would just appeal to the Council and the Commission to do their utmost to ratify the Convention much earlier than 2012. Please note in the Minutes that my voting equipment failed and that I did, of course, vote for this report.

**- Report: Giusto Catania (A6-0479/2008)**

**Irena Belohorská (NI).** – (SK) The own-initiative report from Mr Catania has prompted a significant exchange of views between political groups and members of Parliament.

The European Union is now facing very serious problems, such as the financial crisis and the energy crisis caused by the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. This is a period when we should act together and avoid any moves that might undermine our unity. The consequences of the crises will undoubtedly affect every citizen of the European Union, whether Slovak, Pole, Hungarian or German. I consider the attempts to provoke quarrels between Member States, which periodically crop up in our sessions, to be a sign of ignorance of the current serious situation where EU unity is under threat. We should concentrate more on finding solutions and on ratifying the Treaty of Lisbon in order to boost the competitiveness of the European Union.

I have repeatedly expressed the view here in the European Parliament that autonomy has no place within our common space. The key idea of integrating EU countries must not be forgotten, not to mention ignored or rejected. We must keep in mind Schuman's statement that an intelligent European cannot rejoice in his neighbour's misfortune since we are all bound by a common fate, both in good times and in bad times.

**Hubert Pirker (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr President, the Catania report is a real sham. It contains no review whatsoever of the extent to which fundamental rights were respected in the European Union in the period from 2004 to 2008; it is merely a list of demands by the left wing in this House.

Its demands include the recognition of same-sex marriage in all Member States and the legalisation of drugs, euthanasia and illegal immigrants. The Austrian People's Party (ÖVP) delegation and myself reject out of hand the above demands, which were adopted by a majority, and therefore we – myself included – voted against this report.

**Peter Baco (NI).** – (SK) I voted for the report on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union 2004–2008.

I made my support conditional upon the rejection of the original draft wording in Article 49 concerning support for territorial and regional autonomy. I consider this to be a clear rejection of the attempts by provocateurs and conspirators at speculating about the status quo. The European Parliament does not, in other words, accept games with territorial and regional autonomy. This is a very valuable conclusion from today's plenary of the European Parliament and I think we are all to be congratulated on it.

**Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE).** – (CS) Mr President, I also voted against the adoption of this report from a Communist MEP on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union. Nevertheless, I appreciate the fact that rapporteurs from other factions have managed to edit the text a little and that it contains some good paragraphs on the situation of minorities. Some passages, however, are not objective. In addition, the extent to which the report oversteps the bounds for a document mapping a past period is unprecedented. The report assumes an overly one-sided political view of human rights in the Union. The report tramples on subsidiarity by dictating rules on family policy and other ethical issues, which is contrary to the founding treaties.

**Simon Busuttil (PPE-DE).** – (MT) I also voted against Catania's report, because it contains at least three references to abortion as a human right. This is something that I do not agree with and find unacceptable. It is a pity that an important report such as this one that covers such a vast range of subjects had to incorporate elements within it that are doubtlessly beyond the competence of the European Union, and that the European Union cannot and should not try to interfere with; namely due to the subsidiarity principle. This is why I voted against Catania's report.

**Péter Olajos (PPE-DE).** – (HU) Mr President, with regard to the Catania report, I voted affirmatively since it eliminates previous flaws concerning minority rights. This matter is particularly important for Hungary and for the minorities living inside as well as outside its borders. The report emphasises the protection of minority languages and declares that the use of one's mother tongue is one of the most fundamental rights. Unfortunately, this has not been so in several of the new EU Member States in recent times.

The report further stresses the necessity of defining and determining national minority status. I believe this is of vital importance for the 150 minorities in Europe.

Finally, I consider paragraph 49 to be especially important, for it affirms that self-governance is the most effective means of handling the problems of national minority communities. The way to do that is to follow the most exemplary models in the European Union as regards personal, cultural, territorial and regional autonomies.

**Jim Allister (NI).** – Mr President, a society consumed by rights is a 'give-me, give-me' society which has lost its balance. It is this which drives the report's demand for equality between regularly married couples and homosexual relationships. The natural order is man and woman. We pervert it when we demand equality for its very antithesis.

Unfashionable as it may be, I unashamedly declare that the unnatural partnership between same-sex couples is not something to which I, as a legislator, wish to consent. Are my rights to espouse that position any less than those of the people who demand the opposite? In view of the intolerant climate in which part of this debate was held, it would seem so.

I disagree with this aspect of this report. If that subjects me to ridicule then so be it. I would rather stand for what I think is right than to applaud that which is wrong.

**Frank Vanhecke (NI).** – (NL) Mr President, in my career in this Parliament, I have rarely seen such a catalogue of politically correct nonsense and so-called progressive platitudes as in the Catania report. What takes the biscuit, though, is the fact that a report on so-called fundamental rights is *de facto* based on the Treaty of Lisbon, a treaty that was rejected in referendums, no less, and has currently no legal basis whatsoever. What

arrogance! I wonder if fundamental rights might perhaps not apply to the European citizens, but only apply to the eurocracy.

Moreover, there is one fundamental right that is missing from this report, namely the right of people, for example people of one's own nation, to feel at home and safe in their own country, to defend their hard-earned prosperity, to maintain their language, their culture, their traditions and their laws. Now that would be a novelty in this temple of political correctness. Parliament has once again made an utter fool of itself by approving the Catania report by an overwhelming majority.

**Philip Claeys (NI).** - (NL) Mr President, the right to the free expression of opinion and the way in which this right can be exercised is without a doubt a key indicator for assessing our fundamental rights situation. The report is quite right to warn against the non-official censorship and self-censorship that come about when certain topics are excluded from the public debate. Just as justified is the section in the report that warns against individuals and groups who want to silence others by claiming that they are being permanently attacked, undeservedly so.

What is totally mystifying, though, is the call to 'resolutely prosecute any hate speech in racist media programmes and articles spreading intolerant views'. This is exactly the kind of thing that leads to the censorship and self-censorship that are lamented elsewhere in the report. It is the kind of legislation that got the largest Flemish party condemned in Belgium, because this party had criticised adopted immigration policy. People should therefore know what they want. It is impossible to be a little in favour of the free expression of opinion. Either one is in favour of the free expression of opinion, and accepts all the consequences that this entails, or one is not.

**Carlo Fatuzzo (PPE-DE).** - (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, on fundamental rights, although I voted against in the final vote, I voted for paragraph 81, which I am in favour of. In this paragraph, my friend, Mr Catania, who is looking at me at this moment from his seat, states that he calls on the Member States to do all they can to facilitate and improve access by young people, the elderly and the disabled to the labour market.

Giusto Catania – who lives up to his name in being 100% just – must have thought, even if he did not state it in writing, that access should be improved not only to work, but also to benefits, since the elderly are mentioned. Therefore benefits for young people, the disabled and the elderly are relevant. I am sure – I see that he agrees – that young people also receive benefits as young people and then work when they are old. I see that he is applauding. I think that you too are in agreement, but since my observations go on the Internet I would like to make it clear that I have said this to gently point out that the elderly too have a right to benefits.

**Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM).** - Mr President, in the Catania report many in this House have, once again, tried to use human rights as an excuse to promote abortion, despite the fact that abortion denies millions of babies yearly the most important human right – life, the human right on which all other rights depend.

Further, as an Irish MEP and voter, it is interesting to note that this report and the amendments link the Treaty of Lisbon and the Charter of Fundamental Rights with the legislation of abortion in the EU.

**Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, at the outset can I ask the services to note that on paragraph 31 the first part of my vote should have been in favour.

I suggest that this report could have done more for areas of disability that need more work. On that note, however, I am happy that Parliament chose to support my Amendment 42 which urges the Commission to make sure that money goes only to Member States who meet the criteria of the UN Convention when it comes to deinstitutionalisation. This is a key issue for me and for many people in this House. There are many issues in this report – as others have said – that are for subsidiarity, and not for the European Union, which does not legislate on abortion and should not and will not be legislating on abortion. So I could not support the overall report. Instead, I abstained because I believe the disability amendment is important for those of us who care for those who do not speak, have no voice and are not listened to.

**Miroslav Mikolášik (PPE-DE).** – (SK) The Catania report covers many human rights issues. I agree with some of the previous speakers and like them I want to express my fundamental disagreement with this report because of one key problem: the failure to approve key amendments which would have corrected what was originally a bad report.

The report retains references to 'so-called' sexual health and sexual rights, which, according to the definition of, for example, the World Health Organization, explicitly include the right to abortion and this is something that cannot be referred to in EU Community Law or forced upon Member States.

As a medical doctor I defend human life and human dignity from conception onward, and therefore I did not vote for this controversial text, which, moreover, fails to respect the principle of subsidiarity.

**Michl Ebner (PPE-DE).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I agree with what Mr Pirker said, and therefore I do not need to spend any more time on that. I believe that Mr Catania has written about the wrong subject; this report should not even have reached the Chamber, because the official services ought to check whether a report addresses the subject and title assigned, or whether it is something else entirely. This report is something else entirely, and does not, in fact, refer to the title and mandate given to it.

With regard to the specific question, relating to paragraph 49, I would have preferred the Chamber to have adopted the original text, with no amendment. I voted against the report in its entirety, for the precise reasons I have mentioned.

**Koenraad Dillen (NI).** – (NL) Mr President, rarely have I voted against a report with so much conviction as today. If we were to follow the recommendations set out in this report, we would create a dictatorship of political correctness in the European Union tomorrow, whereby, under the guise of so-called anti-racism in pompous declarations of principle, the free expression of opinion involving topics such as asylum and immigration would be curbed even further. This report sets out to open even wider the floodgates to legal and illegal immigration into the European Union, and fails to place the citizen's right to safety at the heart of its policy, but considers instead that it is the rights of criminals that should be recognised as so-called fundamental rights.

This is topsy-turvy land. In a normal society, rights and duties go hand in hand. In this bulky report, though, I cannot find a trace of duty on the part of aliens to integrate in our European society. Quite the reverse: only we Europeans are targeted *ad nauseam*. Well, our citizens are sick to death of the stigmatising finger-wagging from the European mandarins that is only aimed at them.

**Martin Callanan (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, there is much in the Catania report that I take issue with.

Firstly, I do not accept that it is the business of the European Union to bestow any rights whatsoever on us – in fact, history teaches us that the European Union has done precisely the opposite.

I also do not accept that the Charter of Fundamental Rights – which is a basic political document, concocted as part of the failed European Constitution – should be incorporated into European law, and particularly not incorporated into British law.

I am very much opposed to the Charter of Fundamental Rights. I reject the absolutist approach to human rights. I would say that I am not opposed in principle to the recognition of same-sex partnerships but, again, this is not a matter for the European Union: this is a matter for the parliaments of individual Member States to determine on their territory.

Given that fundamental list of objections, I voted against this report.

**Daniel Hannan (NI).** – Mr President, the experience of many ages teaches us that paper rights on their own are no adequate guarantors of civic freedoms. The rights that are spelt out in the European Union's Charter of Fundamental Rights and Freedoms are not so very different from those adumbrated in the constitutions of, say, East Germany or the USSR, but as the citizens of those unhappy polities discovered, paper rights in themselves are worthless in the absence of adequate mechanisms of parliamentary government.

There is no crisis of human rights in the European Union, but there is a crisis of democratic legitimacy. Allow me to suggest that one way to ameliorate that crisis would be to keep faith with our voters and put the Treaty of Lisbon, as we promised, to a series of referendums. *Pactio Olisipiensis censenda est!*

**Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN).** – (PL) Mr President, all children have the right to the love of both their parents. Even if the parents' marriage falls apart, it is the good of the child, and not the 'discretion' of civil servants that should decide on the child's contacts with its parents.

Children have the right to speak with their parents in their mother tongue. If the parents are of different nationalities, they should have the right to speak in both of them. However, the Jugendamt is acting against the interests of children from mixed marriages by promptly restricting access to the non-German parent.

The Committee on Petitions has recorded over 200 complaints in this matter. That is why I supported Amendment 24. Its rejection has led to my final vote against a report that negates the right to life through pro-abortion legislation and breaks the principle of subsidiarity.

**Gerard Batten (IND/DEM).** - Mr President, the UK Independence Party is opposed to racism, female genital mutilation, the criminalisation of homosexuality and prejudice against foreigners, wherever in the world that may occur. However, the British enjoy perfectly good human rights under our own law and we do not need the protection of the European Union. The EU is undemocratic and anti-democratic and it is not therefore a suitable guardian of anybody's human rights.

We would also like to remind Parliament that family law is a Member State competence and is not an area of EU jurisdiction. The issue of whether drug abusers should face criminal charges is a matter for Member State law and the EU should not seek to undermine and replace the judicial systems of Member States. Therefore the UK Independence Party MEPs voted against this report.

**Christopher Heaton-Harris (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, when it comes to reports like these, I often talk to different voluntary and community groups from within my constituency, where you can gain a great deal of knowledge from other people's experiences and contacts.

I also regularly try to gauge the opinion of other MEPs across the political spectrum and from different countries, to try and understand the views and problems experienced by others. I fully concur with the sentiments expressed by my colleagues, Mr Hannan and Mr Callanan.

However, on issues such as the ones contained in this report, I like to speak to Members like Mr Allister, who, whilst not from my political party, is a hard-working and pragmatic Member in this place; his counsel is often wise and he is someone with whom I know I can agree to disagree in a civilised way – as I do on what he just said.

With reports like these – where you can cherry-pick the many different issues to determine how you vote on them – it becomes impossible to find a dividing line as to whether you should vote for or against, and so I copped out – I abstained. I apologise.

**Kinga Gál (PPE-DE).** – (HU) Mr President, the report we have just adopted, entitled 'On the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union', is comprehensive and represents a breakthrough in several aspects. Its presentation of children's rights and basic social rights merits special attention. I deem it exceptionally good that at long last it takes a correct approach to the problems and rights of traditional national minorities, laying down the principles of self-governance and language use, areas in which the Union has been quite late in creating norms.

This is why I supported and fought for the adoption of this report, and this is why the Hungarian delegation of the Group of the European People's Party (Christian Democrats) and European Democrats also voted for it, in spite of several debatable adopted paragraphs which we cannot agree with, as we consider it unacceptable to regulate certain issues at EU level.

**László Tőkés (Verts/ALE).** – (HU) Mr President, I apologise that I did not sign up, I did not know. As a clergyman and member of a Hungarian minority subject to discrimination, willing to compromise if necessary, I voted in good conscience for the Catania report on fundamental rights, as I consider it a significant step forward in many respects, for instance as regards social rights.

I wish to express my special appreciation for the article on minority rights, which could form the basis and starting point for an EU legal framework for the protection of minorities. I agree with what has been said by Mrs Kinga Gál.

Compromise was needed because I must disagree with certain points, for instance with the paragraph on euthanasia or the questions regarding homosexuality. I reject the notion that religious leaders should be restricted in their freedom of conscience and religion concerning homosexuality.

I regret that paragraph 49 has failed to include statements on traditional minority and community rights or on territorial and regional autonomy.

**Georgs Andrejevs (ALDE).** - (LV) Thank you, Mr President. In the final vote, I voted against this report, which was worthy of support in many ways. I voted against, because the report confuses traditional minorities and their rights with the economic migrants and forcibly relocated migrants who flooded into my country,

as a result of the occupation of Latvia after the Second World War. During the course of 50 years of occupation, the indigenous nation was watered down to 50% and even to minority status in Latvia's 13 largest towns and cities, including the capital city, Riga. Thank you.

**John Attard-Montalto (PSE).** - Mr President, today we have just voted on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union. It is with great regret that, together with my two Maltese colleagues in the PSE Group, we have had to abstain from voting on the report.

Although the report refers to numerous issues of fundamental human rights which are laudable, it includes other issues, such as abortion, which should never have been included in this report. As the Maltese social representatives in the European Parliament are against abortion, we have had to vote against these particular parts of the report.

There are, indeed, other issues included in this report, such as living wills and the right to dignity at the end of life, which are sensitive issues, regarding which we have had to abstain. That is why we abstained at the end of this vote. I would like to thank you for this opportunity.

**President.** - We will now move on to the explanations of vote on the Cappato report, having already heard Mr Mitchell.

#### **- Report: Marco Cappato (A6-0459/2008)**

**Zuzana Roithová (PPE-DE).** - (CS) Mr President, I did not support this populist text which, in the original version, contained a number of useful provisions on greater transparency in respect of political activities within the European Union. Unfortunately, it was amended. I have no intention of promoting nonsense such as the disclosure of the professional and personal documents which fellow Members exchange among themselves or which they receive from nongovernmental organisations and lobby organisations. While I do not consider such documents to be confidential, no national parliament in a civilised democracy imposes the duty to disclose professional – let alone all – correspondence.

**President.** - Good. Last but not least, Syed Kamall!

**Syed Kamall (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, thank you for your very kind words. I hope to remember them evermore.

When we talk about transparency and access to EU documents, it is something that we can all agree on across the Chamber. After all, we are only here because of the taxpayers who voted us into office and the taxpayers who fund these institutions and fund our work. But let us be absolutely clear about this. When we talk about transparency of documents and access to documents, let us make sure that the taxpayer has access to those documents that they really want to have access to.

Recently, group leaders from Parliament went to visit the Head of State of a democratic country, the Czech Republic. The group leaders, who were representing Parliament, as far as we understand, insulted the President of that country. All that a number of citizens have been asking for is for those minutes from that meeting to be published. So let us be transparent, let us be clear and let us have respect for those who hold a different view to those who sit in this Parliament.

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

##### **- Report: Carlos Coelho (A6-0500/2008)**

**John Attard-Montalto (PSE), in writing.** - One of the top security measures that have been agreed to is the issue of biometrics in passport and travel documents. Of course this means a substantial expense running into millions of euros but one cannot compromise with security measures.

On the other hand one has to take into consideration the earnings of our people, which vary from state to state. The issuing of an ordinary passport in Malta incurs expenditure. Who is going to pay for the change to biometric passports: the state, the individual or a shared arrangement?

In the European Parliament we have agreed today that those Member States in which the inclusion of children on their parents' documents had been allowed will be obliged to issue individual documents for the children at no additional cost other than material expenses. It would be pertinent for the Government to take note

of this as it has become a policy not to make referrals when irregular tariffs and taxes are collected by Government, as has been the cases relating to the VAT on registration and past payments on satellite dishes.

**Koenraad Dillen (NI)**, *in writing*. – (NL) Common sense has prevailed in the Coelho report, and this is why I have emphatically voted in favour of it. It is to be welcomed that the use of biometric data in passports and travel documents will become subject to stricter rules and harmonisation, especially since the abolition of Europe's internal borders has demonstrated the need for reinforced safety controls at the external borders. A uniform and harmonised system of biometric data, amongst other things, will enable us to fight crime more effectively. This report makes a hesitant step in that direction.

**Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL)**, *in writing*. – (PT) This regulation seeks to amend the standards for security features and biometrics in passports and travel documents issued by Member States. This is a regulation that we have disagreed with since its creation in 2004, as it introduces the harmonisation of security mechanisms and the integration of biometric identifiers, in the context of the security policies promoted at European Union level.

This amendment has the essential objective of introducing exemptions for children under 12 years of age, a derogation that is planned to last four years, so that countries with legislation that establishes a lower age limit can keep it, provided that they observe the minimum limit of six years (in the case of Portugal, France and Estonia), apart from other aspects relating to the protection and security of biometric data.

Even though the proposal establishes exemption rules for children under 12 years of age (a decision based on merely technical issues), we consider that it does not deal with the fundamental issue, that is, the use of biometric data, namely of children, and its harmonisation at EU level (and particularly as the issuing of passports comes within the competence of each Member State) in the context of its security policy.

For these reasons we abstained.

**Jörg Leichtfried (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (DE) I voted in favour of the report by Mr Coelho on security features and biometrics in passports and travel documents.

It does not make sense, however, to accept a flawed regulation unquestioningly if there are some ways in which it could be improved.

For example, it is unacceptable for different Member States to apply different rules on the age for fingerprinting children, and therefore it is important to introduce measures, particularly with regard to child trafficking, that, if not always taken jointly, are at least more comprehensive.

Ultimately, it is important to me to emphasise that biometric data may under no circumstances be used for dishonest purposes. A strict, recurrent review of data security is therefore indispensable.

**Bogusław Liberadzki (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (PL) Mr President, I am voting for the report on the Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council (EC) No 2252/2004 on standards for security features and biometrics in passports and travel documents issued by Member States (A6-0500/2008).

I agree with the rapporteur's proposal to introduce the principle of 'one person – one passport', so that every person has a passport with his or her biometrical data.

The situation in which a single passport can be issued to a holder and his or her children, by including their names and surnames, or containing only the biometrical data of the passport-holding parent, may be conducive to child trafficking.

I also support Mr Coelho's initiative to allow two exemptions from mandatory fingerprinting in respect of children under the age of six and all persons who for various reasons are physically unable to give fingerprints.

**Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of this report because it clarifies important points regarding the standards required for issuing biometric passports. Furthermore, I hope that the introduction of biometric passports (which happened in Romania on 1 January 2009) will result in Romania's inclusion in the US Visa Waiver Programme and accelerate the process for its integration in the Schengen area.

However, we need to focus our attention on the reliability of biometric technologies as they have proved to be ineffective in the case of identifying children under the age of 6. Member States should launch shortly a

new pilot project to analyse the reliability of this identification system, which will certainly help to pinpoint any errors registered in Member States.

**Athanasios Pafilis (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL)** Even children must be put on file because they are considered potentially dangerous to the EU. This is the proposal by the European Commission, the EU Council and the European Parliament. The only difference between the proposal for a directive and the European Parliament is the age at which a child is considered dangerous. The Commission considers that children become dangerous at six years old and must therefore give fingerprints which are incorporated in personal passports from that age, while the European Parliament, demonstrating its 'democratic sensibilities', considers that children must be put on file when they are slightly older, namely at 12 years of age.

This unacceptable directive, which has been approved by the supporters in the European Parliament of the one-way street in Europe, is the inevitable result of the EU's frantic 'anti-terrorism' policy which, in order essentially to safeguard the sovereignty of capital over the labour and grassroots movement, has dangerously christened even children as dangerous. It would appear that the EU is making appropriate use of the experience of the Israeli army, which over-defends the 'security' of the Israel state from Palestinian 'terrorists' by slaughtering countless children in Gaza as we speak. How old are the murdered Palestinian children? Are they six or twelve years old?

**Tobias Pflüger (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (DE)** I abstained from voting on the 'Report on the proposal for a regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council amending Council Regulation (EC) No 2252/2004 on standards for security features and biometrics in passports and travel documents issued by Member States'.

This report envisages a limitation on the biometric monitoring of citizens of EU Member States in that children under the age of 12 years are excepted from the requirement to provide biometric data. Such an exception is to be warmly welcomed.

Nevertheless, I reject biometric authentication systems out of hand. They lead to increased police-state monitoring of citizens. This is not the way to improve security. As the report broadly accepts this monitoring, I could not vote in favour; whereas rejecting it would have meant rejecting the improvement I mentioned. That is why I abstained.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT)** Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted for the Coelho report on security features and biometrics in passports and travel documents.

I agree with the proposal to use passports for children too, in order to combat child abduction and trafficking. I support the minimum threshold of six years of age, but the name of the person or persons with parental responsibility for the child should be included in the document, for the reasons given above.

Finally, I agree with Mr Coelho regarding his proposal to introduce a three-year revision clause, with a view to waiting for the results of an in-depth, large-scale study examining the reliability and usefulness of fingerprints taken from children and older people: such a delicate and significant issue requires constant monitoring, so that it can be correctly handled in terms of Community law.

**Bart Staes (Verts/ALE), in writing. – (NL)** This legislation allows fingerprints to be stored in passports/travel documents so as to allow the authenticity of the document and the holder's identity to be verified.

I voted in favour of the changes proposed by the rapporteur. What is positive is that the fingerprints of children under 12 can only be taken if the Member States already legislate for this. Compared to the Commission's and Council's option to take the fingerprints of children as young as six, this is a step forward.

Taking fingerprints also comes at a price. A visa will soon set you back EUR 60. Compulsory fingerprinting will increase that price significantly, so that a family of four who want to travel abroad will need to spend quite a bit of money before they leave.

At any rate, I take issue with the excessive use of fingerprinting or the use of biometric data. Is this not more trouble than it is worth? Its efficiency has not been proven, its use is not proportionate to the desired outcome and it is also very expensive. This is why I endorsed the amendments that improved the text, but ultimately expressed my dissatisfaction by voting against the legislative resolution.

**- Report: Alexander Graf Lambsdorff (A6-0415/2008)**

**Jan Andersson, Göran Färm, Anna Hedh, Inger Segelström and Åsa Westlund (PSE), in writing. – (SV)** We have voted in favour of Mr Lambsdorff's report on procurement rules in the fields of defence and security.

It is clear in the report that the Member States have sole authority for defence and national security, which we feel it is important to emphasise. We believe that equipment, civil works and services should normally be procured in this field, too. However, we believe that it is a natural consequence of the nature of this market that procurement cannot be carried out entirely in accordance with the rules of the directive. These exceptions, however, should only apply when they can be justified on account of their significance in relation to security policy. We believe that in this way we can cope with the habitual use of exemptions for protectionist reasons, which is particularly damaging to Swedish industry.

**Avril Doyle (PPE-DE), in writing. –** Alexander Graf Lambsdorff has presented a proposal concerning the Commission's 'Defence Package', covering procurement for both military and non-military security purposes as well as covering public contracts concluded between EU operators. This proposal improves upon the 2004 Directive (2004/18/EC) currently in force by increasing flexibility, transparency and, vitally, fair competition. The defence procurement market is a very specific one, and Mr Lambsdorff has provided a means of addressing its complex nature.

There are express exemptions for certain obligations relating to disclosure when contrary to the security concerns of the Member State.

While defence procurement remains essentially a national competence, this proposal helps create a single European market for defence and security materials through a structured legal framework. This is a market worth EUR 90 billion annually. Mr Lambsdorff has proposed a common position that I can support.

**Bruno Gollnisch (NI), in writing. – (FR)** Strengthening the competitiveness of the European defence industry, which is supposedly damaged by European markets that are too narrow and too closed in on themselves, has served as a pretext for this Directive on the opening up to competition of public contracts in this sector.

True, the text that is today being submitted to us does take account of a number of problems raised by the Commission's initial text, such as its scope, the non-application of the WTO agreement on public contracts, the financial thresholds and confidentiality.

However, it is in keeping with the logic of Brussels, whereby no sector, not even strategic or vital ones, can be exempt from its supervision, from liberalisation or from privatisation. It does not guarantee respect for Member States' sovereignty, even though they alone are legally responsible for their national security. It does not encourage the existence of far-reaching markets in Europe, where the States' defence budgets are drastically reduced. It does not introduce any system of Community preference, which alone would enable a true European market to emerge naturally. It strengthens the civilian/military dichotomy, which is so specific to Europe and which has already cost us so dearly. Above all, it puts economic and market considerations above everything else. These serious flaws on key points are the reason for our opposition.

**Małgorzata Handzlik (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PL)** The European defence procurement market is highly fragmented, which has a negative economic impact. The main aim of the adopted directive is to do away with this fragmentation and to create a common defence market on the territory of the European Union, while taking account of the specific aspects of the defence market and protecting the security interests of the Member States.

The Member States have based their decisions on the premise that the current public procurement directive takes inadequate account of the specifics of public defence procurement. This has resulted in various instruments adopted in the directive on awarding contracts, selecting bidders or contractual terms imposed by the contracting entities. The controls built into the directive should also guarantee bidders adequate legal protection, promote transparency and non-discrimination in the award of contracts.

I believe that the regulations adopted will be an important contribution to opening the market, while taking due account of national security. The Directive should also lead to cost optimisation, both in national budgets and on the part of industry, and ensure that the armed forces will be equipped with the best equipment available on the market.

**Malcolm Harbour and Geoffrey Van Orden (PPE-DE), in writing. –** The Conservative Delegation has consistently supported efforts to open markets and encourage cross-border trade between Member States

of the EU. We welcome opportunities for British industry to have access to defence equipment markets that might hitherto have been closed to outside competition. However, we regret that such positive, practical aspects are secondary to the EU's political motive to create an integrated European defence industrial base, and to strengthen the European security and defence policy, to which our opposition has been consistent.

We have particular concerns about the negative consequences of insisting that, in spite of investment by national governments and firms in defence R&D, there should then be open competition for subsequent production contracts. This will remove the ability to recoup R&D investment and offer no means of protecting intellectual property, jobs or export opportunities. We are also concerned that an inward-looking European approach will be detrimental to our very necessary and fruitful defence industrial relationships with other countries – especially the US, but also Japan, Israel and other countries.

For all these reasons the Conservative Delegation abstained on the report.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted for the report by Mr Lambsdorff on public contracts in the fields of defence and security. The establishment of a European security and defence policy makes it necessary to build up the necessary capacities, for which purpose a high-performance European industry is needed. The establishment of a European defence technology and defence industry base and a European market for the procurement of defence material is intended to contribute to this.

These two measures can supply the capabilities required to meet global defence tasks and cope with the new challenges in the area of security. I therefore agree with the rapporteur that the proposal for a directive should aim to establish a uniform European legal framework which enables the Member States to apply Community law without jeopardising their security interests.

Finally, I agree with the introduction into the law of a review procedure. This achieves the purpose of affording tenderers effective legal protection, promotes transparency and non-discrimination in the award of contracts, and thus contributes to genuine market opening.

#### **- Report: Carl Schlyter (A6-0341/2008)**

**Edite Estrela (PSE), in writing.** – (PT) I voted in favour of the Schlyter report on restrictions on the marketing and use of certain dangerous substances and preparations (dichloromethane). I consider that this proposal to amend Directive 76/769/EEC will contribute to an effective reduction in the risk of environmental and human exposure to substances with dangerous properties, such as dichloromethane (DCM), which has a unique profile of adverse effects on human health. The protection of human health must prevail over industrial interests.

**Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – (PT) We voted in favour of the compromise text, given that this measure can have positive impacts on workers in various industries, specifically the automobile and naval industries, as it minimises their exposure to quite noxious toxic agents. It deals with dichloromethane (DCM), which is a colourless chemical compound with a sweet, pleasant and penetrating smell, similar to ether. Its marketing is intended fundamentally for the production of pharmaceutical products, solvents and auxiliary products, paint strippers and adhesives.

DCM has a unique profile of adverse effects on human health, and is included in the list of 33 priority substances established under the terms of the Water Directive. This substance is classified as a Category 3 carcinogenic agent. It has a narcotic effect and, for a high level of exposure, causes depression of the central nervous system, loss of consciousness and cardiotoxic effects, with a direct risk of death as a consequence of inappropriate use.

According to the Scientific Committee on Health and Environmental Risks, one of the main problems related to the toxicity of DCM consists of the risk to especially vulnerable groups.

Various alternatives to DCM-based strippers are already available on the market.

**Duarte Freitas (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (PT) I agree fundamentally with the objective of the proposal: to reduce the risks of the use of dichloromethane (DCM) by the general public and by professionals.

DCM has a unique profile of negative effects on human health: it is a carcinogenic agent, has a narcotic effect and, at a high level of exposure, causes depression of the central nervous system, loss of consciousness and cardiotoxic effects, with a direct risk of death as a consequence of inappropriate use.

According to the Commission, between 1989 and 2007, 18 deaths caused by the use of DCM were recorded in the EU. I consider it imperative to apply European measures to prohibit or replace this substance.

Following the vote in the Committee on the Environment, Public Health and Food Safety, I support banning the use of DCM by the general public, but allowing it to be used by professionals, in safe conditions.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI)**, *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted for the Schlyter report on amending the Council directive as regards restrictions on the marketing and use of certain dangerous substances and preparations.

Dichloromethane, in fact, has many adverse effects on human health: it has a narcotic and depressive effect on the central nervous system, as well as causing cardio-toxicological effects at high exposures. It is therefore necessary for the current legislation on the health and safety of workers to be enforced, since, the enforcement procedures in this field are inadequate, mainly because of the large number, small size and mobile nature of the enterprises supplied. Finally, I agree with Mr Schlyter's statement that we need to take special account of the health of children, who are more susceptible to health risks because of the significant potential for a high level of exposure.

#### **- Report: Ilda Figueiredo (A6-0423/2008)**

**Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL)**, *in writing*. – (PT) The vote that took place today on this report, which I presented on behalf of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, on the ILO Work in Fishing Convention, 2007, is an important contribution to creating minimum international standards at global level that guarantee better working conditions, more safety and fewer fatal accidents, in a sector that is very dangerous but also strategic. It puts defence of the dignity and the hard working life of fishermen at the centre of our concerns, given that it is the area with the highest percentage of fatal accidents. It should be noted that the report had 671 votes in favour and only 16 against.

Convention 188 shall take effect after it has been ratified by 10 of the 180 Member States of the ILO, 8 of which must be coastal countries.

I would point out that the Convention revises the conventions concerning the minimum age of fishermen, medical examinations, fishermen's articles of agreement and accommodation of crews, and also covers issues such as health and safety at work, recruitment, placement and social security.

**Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM)**, *in writing*. – (SV) The European Parliament is calling on Member States to ratify the ILO Work in Fishing Convention (Convention 188). This convention dates from 2007 and deals with important issues such as the fishermen's working environment, hours of rest and social security. It should be up to the Member States to decide, in a democratic process, whether or not they wish to ratify the present ILO Convention. I have therefore voted against the present report, as this is not a matter that the European Parliament should involve itself in.

**Luís Queiró (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – (PT) The Union, through the common fisheries policy, seeks to make fishing activities more effective, so that the sector, including aquaculture, is economically viable and competitive, ensures adequate living standards for the populations who depend on fishing activities and meets the interests of consumers.

ILO Convention 188, adopted in June 2007, is a document that seeks to allow fair competition between the owners of fishing boats and to confer dignified working conditions for professionals in the sector. The convention pursues these objectives by establishing a set of international minimum standards for the fishing sector that, in certain areas, are within the exclusive competence of the Community. It therefore seems necessary to propose to the Member States that they should ratify this convention, in the interests of the Community and the consistency of the common fisheries policy.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI)**, *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I support the report by Mrs Figueiredo on authorisation to ratify the Work in Fishing Convention (2007) of the International Labour Organisation (Convention 188).

One of the objectives of the 2007 document is to achieve and maintain a level playing field in the fishing sector by promoting decent living and working conditions for fishers and fairer conditions of competition in the world, seeking to remedy the low rate of ratification of many conventions in the field of maritime labour. To that end, the adoption of the Convention represents a step forward in establishing dignified working conditions for professionals in this important strategic sector, in that it covers a variety of aspects

of professional activity, namely improved installations and safety conditions at work, pay, medical care at sea and on land, rest periods, work contracts and social security.

Finally, I applaud Mrs Figueiredo's initiative, because it aims to ensure that minimum standards applicable to all are universally applied, without prejudice to the existence of standards in individual Member States that are more favourable to workers.

**- Report: Giusto Catania (A6-0479/2008)**

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (IT) I voted in favour of the report. In tackling the issue of fundamental rights in the EU today we must not, however, omit to refer to the terrible events in Gaza. What is happening in the Middle East requires the EU to pay constant attention to the issue of respect for fundamental human rights, which are unfortunately in jeopardy at these times. In fact, I would argue that, in the difficult negotiations which I hope can make progress, the authority and firmness of the Community institutions partly depend on the quality of democracy that we are able to achieve within the EU.

There is, unfortunately, a real danger that even in Europe the fight against terrorism may result in failure to respect fundamental rights and freedoms. I am hopeful about the statements by the US President-Elect, Barack Obama, regarding the commencement of cooperation on this issue between Europe and the United States. Thinking about all the aspects that make up the framework of the inviolable rights of man, I consider, finally, that special attention should be paid to the most vulnerable individuals, namely children, the elderly, migrants, and young people looking for work.

**Philip Bradbourn (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – Conservatives recall their long-held view that the Charter of Fundamental Rights should not be justiciable. In this context we believe that many of the issues dealt with by this report are properly in the purview of Member States and not matters on which the EU should try to impose a policy. The report also contains a number of issues which are matters of individual conscience, for example, the implicit recommendation on euthanasia and the decriminalisation of hard drugs. For these reasons, we are unable to vote in favour of this report.

**Carlo Casini (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – (IT) My final vote against the report in question is the result not so much of its content, but of its omissions.

It is not possible to discuss human rights without speaking of the first and most fundamental one: the right to life. Every year in the 27 Member States approximately 1 200 000 human beings are destroyed in deliberate abortions. This is a tragic figure, and in addition to this number there are the illegal abortions and the incalculable number of human embryos destroyed through the use of the in vitro fertilisation technique. We have a duty to note the diversity of opinions on this issue, but it is certain that this is an attack on the very basis of the culture of human rights. The resolution, however, not only ignores the problem, but seeks to ensure it is forgotten, focusing its attention only on the 'reproductive and sexual health' of women.

Nobody can be opposed to the health of women, particularly if they are young, pregnant and mothers, but this cannot justify the total omission of the rights of children. On the other hand, it is well known that the language of 'reproductive and sexual health' is used to surreptitiously include abortion, understood as a right and as a social service.

**Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – (RO) I voted against the report presented by Mr Catania because I do not agree with Article 49, a controversial article which encourages the problems of 'traditional national minority communities' to be handled through 'self-governance solutions (personal-cultural, territorial, regional autonomies)'.

I support the rights of persons belonging to minorities, but I categorically reject the idea of territorial autonomy based on ethnic criteria and of minorities' collective rights, an idea which has sparked in practice ethnic separatism and interethnic conflicts. In addition, vague, controversial concepts like 'self-governance' and 'cultural autonomy' also have the potential to cause conflict. These concepts extend beyond current European standards of international law with regard to the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and lead us into an area of controversy.

I believe that EU Member States have the sovereign right to decide alone to what extent they accept or reject such concepts. In fact, the EU must respect and guarantee the sovereignty and integrity of its Member States.

**Sylwester Chruszcz (UEN)**, *in writing*. – (PL) Although the desire to respect human rights is one of the mainstays of all states and organisations at international level, this report on the situation of fundamental

rights in the European Union 2004-2007 is a scandalous breach of those same rights in Europe. For this reason I could not support it in today's vote. Yet again, we have an attempt to impose a particular view of the world, expressed by the author of the report, on the Member States. That is something I cannot agree to.

**Derek Roland Clark, Trevor Colman, Nigel Farage and Michael Henry Nattrass (IND/DEM), in writing.** – UKIP is opposed to female genital mutilation, homophobia, racism and xenophobia. However we are also against EU control of fundamental rights. The UK already has perfectly good laws and safeguards on fundamental rights. The EU is not democratic and is therefore not a suitable guardian of people's rights. Moreover, family law is a Member State competence and not an area of EU jurisdiction. The issue of whether drug abusers should face criminal charges is a matter for Member State law and the EU should not be seeking to pervert the course of justice.

**Carlos Coelho (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (PT) For a number of years the Council has been submitting to the European Parliament an annual report on the situation of fundamental rights in the Union, in relation to which Parliament has responded by drawing up an own-initiative report.

For the first time, this report was drawn up taking into account the results obtained by the Fundamental Rights Agency. It has special importance given the fact that no report on this subject has been adopted since 2003.

I consider that the rapporteur developed certain subjects too much, as they have already been discussed in separate reports, and there are various fairly controversial points, some of which I have voted against as they clearly go against my principles.

However, there are many other points with which I fully agree, and for this reason I abstained, not only because I believe that the text was substantially improved by the excellent work carried out by Mrs Gál, but also because I could not under any circumstances, in all conscience, vote against a report in defence of fundamental rights.

**Dragoş Florin David (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) I voted against this report because it suggests approaches which encourage multiple abortions, same-sex marriages or autonomy on ethnic criteria.

**Proinsias De Rossa (PSE), in writing.** – I support this Report which makes recommendations on a broad range of issues including discrimination, immigration, social rights and gender equality.

It notes that the recommendations of this Parliament in its report on CIA Rendition activities in the EU (Feb 2007) have not yet been implemented by Member States and EU institutions. The fight against terrorism can never be used to diminish the level of protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms. Indeed, to defend human rights is precisely to fight against terrorism in both its causes and effects. In that respect, I welcome the statement by US President-Elect Barack Obama on closing the Guantanamo Bay detention facility and to never again practice Rendition.

The Report also suggests raising public awareness about women's right to fully enjoy their sexual and reproductive rights, including the facilitation of access to contraception to prevent all unwanted pregnancies and illegal high-risk abortions, and, to combat the practice of female genital mutilation.

Moreover, the Report urges Member States to take legislative action to overcome discrimination experienced by same-sex couples by recognising such relationships. Member States with legislation on same-sex partnerships should move to recognise provisions with similar effects adopted by other states.

**Glyn Ford (PSE), in writing.** – I supported the Catania report on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union (2004-2008). In particular, I voted in favour of paragraph 32, which calls for the ruling by the European Court on the People's Mujahedin Organisation of Iran (PMOI) to be respected. This ruling demanded that the PMOI should be taken off the EU terror list.

I hold no particular brief for this organisation. A long time ago, I stopped signing their declarations regarding the situation in Iran, which I had more difficulty finding credible, particularly after participating in a Foreign Affairs Committee Delegation to Teheran when I could see for myself the emerging reformist opposition to the hardline fundamentalist regime in Iran.

Nevertheless, I do not have to support the organisation to deplore the failure to implement the Court's view that the PMOI's action gives no reason to include, or continue to include, them on the terror list thus visiting on them all the repressive consequences that follow.

**Lidia Joanna Geringer de Oedenberg (PSE), in writing. – (PL)** The report on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union 2004-2008 acknowledges that the effective protection and the promotion of fundamental rights forms the basis of democracy in Europe. However, the Parliamentary commission notes that Member States have repeatedly refused EU scrutiny of their human rights policies and placed the protection of human rights on a purely national basis, thereby undermining the Community's credibility in the protection of fundamental rights in the international arena.

The European Commission should therefore concentrate on encouraging Member States to cooperate more closely with it by inviting them to include in future reports on human rights not just analyses of the situation in the world at large, but in individual Member States. Also deserving attention are a series of proposals aimed at effectively combating discriminatory policies in the EU, underlining that equal opportunities are a fundamental right of every citizen, and not a privilege. It is very disturbing that around 20% of children in the European Union live below the poverty threshold, and many of them come from single-parent families or families whose parents come from outside the EU. In this regard it is necessary to adopt appropriate means of accessing rights, concentrating particularly on the needs of children, and for Member States to take effective measures to tackle poverty.

**Bruno Gollnisch (NI), in writing. – (FR)** Mr Catania's report is nothing short of alarming. It is a catalogue of all the rights, privileges and exorbitant rights of ordinary law which, according to him, should necessarily be granted to minorities, especially if they are non-European. It is a set of instructions with which to destroy national and regional identities, to destroy the values, traditions and cultures of our countries, and to discriminate systematically and institutionally against Europeans in their own countries. It is an attack on our inalienable right to self-determination – which is granted to all nations except our own.

It is also the height of hypocrisy for an institution that discriminates daily on account of its political ideas and that applies without proper judgment or thought the label 'presumed guilty' to some of its Members, such as Mr Vanhecke and I, who are victims of a witch-hunt in our respective countries.

We are not here principally to defend these visible and noisy minorities, who are demanding more and more privileges and stigmatising countries and populations who are kind enough or foolish enough to take them in. We are here to defend our own, the citizens of our nations, this large majority – for now – of Europeans who are in your eyes invisible, inaudible and contemptible.

**Mieczysław Edmund Janowski (UEN), in writing. – (PL)** I voted against the report on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union 2004-2008 authored by the Italian MEP Giusto Catania, as the author has not so much presented a description of the situation over the past four years as expressed his own opinions, suggesting and even attempting to impose upon Member States legislation that is exclusively within their competence. I do not believe that the countries of the European Union can be forced to issue legislation that their public finds unacceptable.

The very definition of 'marriage' should be reserved for unions between women and men. Mr Catania's proposal will not so much lead to tolerance of homosexual behaviour (which I support), but to discrimination against fundamental biological, that is, heterosexual, relations. Essentially, we need to ask whether the aim is actually to restrict the rights of the family in its traditional meaning, that is, mother, father and children. This makes the highly personal issues relating to a person's sex life into politicised acts, even if it is through public demonstration of one's homosexuality, for example through so-called 'love parades'.

In my view, this report, by using formulations such as 'reproductive rights', which in the present meaning of international law include abortion on demand, opens the floodgates to practices of this kind.

**Livia Járóka (PPE-DE), in writing. – (HU)** I consider my fellow Member's report of special significance, since human rights constitute one of the pillars of the values set out in the Treaties of the European Union. In addition to democracy and the rule of law, respect for human rights is what we require of candidate countries, and we also emphasise the affirmation of universal, inalienable rights in our international relations. However, the European Union will only be a credible global defender of human rights if in its own territory it uses unfailingly every instrument available to defend the values expressed in the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

The report devotes a separate section to the Roma, who are the largest minority in the European Union, and who are most heavily burdened by social exclusion. It is the joint responsibility of European states to design a comprehensive and unified strategy to tackle the problems of the Roma, who for the most part live in deplorable conditions and destitution. A framework programme with action-oriented and clear objectives and deadlines is needed, one that makes use of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms.

A programme must be designed which, independently of parties and government cycles, simultaneously addresses education, housing, health and discrimination and takes on poor practices in the Member States; such a programme should be capable of serving as the basis for immediate action in regions in crisis. If we can help the millions of Roma to become full-fledged European citizens and members of the European Community in a spiritual sense, this will represent a giant leap towards the social cohesion of the continent.

**Ona Juknevičienė (ALDE), in writing.** – (LT) One of the fundamental freedoms of citizens in the Community is freedom of movement. I believe that all EU citizens have the same right to participate in the political life of the European Union (EU), to freely express their political opinions and attitudes. These freedoms became even more important after EU expansion to the countries of Eastern Europe, as once the Eastern European countries had joined the EU, economic migration from the new Member States to Western Europe intensified greatly. Lithuania for its part leads in terms of the number of people who have emigrated since entry to the Community. When I met Lithuanian emigrants in London I learnt that many of these people plan to remain in the United Kingdom long-term, especially those who have started families there and are enrolling their children in schools. To my knowledge, such a tendency is also reflected in statistics. The situation is also similar in the other EU countries Lithuanians have emigrated to. I believe that it is particularly important to guarantee the right of these citizens to participate in European Parliament elections in the country where they are currently resident.

I would also like to stress that the participation of citizens in EU matters and elections to the European Parliament is not increasing, but quite the opposite, the EU is becoming increasingly distant from its people. Bearing this in mind, I think that once EU citizens are given the right to vote in European Parliament elections in their country of residence, this will only strengthen people's trust in EU institutions. For these reasons I voted for the 45th amendment.

**Filip Kaczmarek (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (PL) I voted against Giusto Catania's report on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union (2004-2008). I voted against the report not because I am against fundamental rights. On the contrary, I believe they are of exceptional importance to the European Union and the whole world. The problem is that Mr Catania's report is harmful to the implementation of fundamental rights. Why is this? It is because the demand for European legislation to fight homophobia or recognise same-sex partnerships are not fundamental rights. If they are to be legislated on, they should be part of a completely separate report. The European Parliament cannot effectively extend the definition of fundamental rights because it does not have the authority to establish international law. In addition, some Member States disagree with such an extended interpretation. It is therefore nothing more than a political gesture and wishful thinking.

The danger is that this is an area in which the Member States do and should take their own decisions. Imposing such views is a slap in the face for cohesion in the European Union. I do not like homophobia, but legislating against it in community law is absurd. If the EU is to tackle homophobia, one could just as easily say that it should tackle anti-Polonism, Russophobia, Germanophobia, Francophobia, Islamophobia, anti-Papism, anti-clericalism, anti-Catholicism and a variety of other attitudes and modes of behaviour. And forcing Member States to accept the legality of same-sex marriages could be even more dangerous.

**Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE), in writing.** – I voted against Amendment 103 in the Catania report, which proposed that long-term non-citizens should participate in elections to the European Parliament as well in local elections in order to promote social and political integration.

In fact, elections to the European Parliament are equivalent to elections to the national parliament. To participate in them is the right of citizens. Otherwise, citizenship will lose its meaning, and also incentives would be lost for non-citizen residents to apply for citizenship. Only in this way can we retain the vital balance between rights and responsibilities that only citizens can have.

**Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (FI) The different policies Member States have when it comes to ethical questions gave rise in the political groups, and especially in our own, to just the kind of wide-ranging debate we might have foreseen. I can only say that we agree to disagree, and that has to be taken as a sign of just how diverse Europe is: we need to be able to find room for diversity of opinion. In many respects I admire my own group's basic positions.

With reference to point 61, however, I would like to say this. I would find it problematic if someone were simultaneously opposed to awareness of the right to reproductive and sexual health (which, generally speaking, is a euphemism for the right to an abortion) and the mention of facilitating access to contraception in order to prevent unwanted pregnancies and abortions. Opposing both at the same time I would see as a

reality gap that could only result in undesirable consequences. This I say with all due respect, and I want to thank all parties once again for this rewarding exchange of views.

**Stavros Lambrinidis (PSE), in writing.** – (EL) The PASOK parliamentary group in the European Parliament voted in favour of the Catania report on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union, but writes to point out that it opposes the wording of paragraph 49 and the related Amendment 35.

**Carl Lang (NI), in writing.** – (FR) Entrusting a report such as this to a communist Member is a provocation for the hundreds of millions of victims of communism. In this report Mr Catania is inspired, it is true, by an ideology less brutal than communism, but just as totalitarian: euro-internationalism. His text in fact denies the most fundamental human rights:

- the right to life, with the promotion of abortion and euthanasia;
- the right of each child to have a father and a mother, by calling on the States to apply the ‘principle of mutual recognition for homosexual couples, whether they are married or living in a registered civil partnership’;
- the right of European nations to self-determination and to remain as they are, flouted by proposals aimed at opening up Europe even more to global immigration – a development to which the nationals of our countries are meant to adapt;
- and democracy, since the report claims to adhere to the Treaty of Lisbon, which was rejected by the Irish electorate.

Now more than ever, safeguarding our freedoms and the identity of our nations requires a new Europe to be built, the Europe of free and sovereign nations.

**Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing.** – (SV) The June List believes that protection of the fundamental freedoms and rights is of utmost importance, both within and outside the EU. It is extremely important that the Member States of the EU observe the fundamental freedoms and rights, and it is clear that we cannot leave it to the Member States to monitor themselves. However, the June List is critical of the establishment of a new European agency in this area and of the desire to conduct an ‘external policy’. We believe that the UN – not the EU – with its global scope, extensive experience and competence, is best placed to monitor and implement the measures that are necessary.

I have therefore chosen to vote against the report as a whole, but I am very positively disposed towards some of the wordings in the proposal, which I have voted in favour of. I welcome the fact that the report deals with the unfair treatment of prisoners in the American detention facility at Guantánamo. There is only one way to go: try them or release them.

I am very concerned about the particular vulnerability of individuals from various minority groups and I believe that action needs to be taken, both at national and international level. I have voted in favour of this in the report, but I am sceptical about whether a judicial framework at European level is a good solution to the problem.

**Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) The report referring to the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union includes amendments that I have submitted, which I consider to be important for Romanian citizens (for example, the amendment on abolishing the labour market restrictions imposed on citizens from the new Member States).

In addition, I agree with many of the points put forward by the report, such as the strategy for Roma inclusion, the protection of minorities, the rights of migrant workers or child protection.

However, the report also includes some references which cast doubt on some of the fundamental principles of Romanian society (such as considering the family to be a basic element in society) or which contravene Romanian legislation (such as consumption of drugs).

For these reasons, I voted against the report in the final vote.

**David Martin (PSE), in writing.** – I welcome this resolution, which maps out and summarises the most important concerns on the state of fundamental rights within the Union, and the recommendations it contains on how to improve human rights within Member States.

**Mary Lou McDonald (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – The Catania report on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union in the years 2004-2008 stresses the need to protect the rights of minorities, to fight all discrimination against all vulnerable categories.

I welcome this report which includes important elements drawn from Written Declaration 111 on ending street homelessness, which was adopted by the European Parliament in April 2008.

I particularly welcome the report's call for the introduction of winter emergency plans for the homeless, for a framework definition of homelessness and for the gathering of reliable statistical data on homelessness across the EU.

Ending street homelessness is a fundamental issue in the European Union. This report is an additional step towards pushing the European Council, Commission and Member States to act on homelessness.

Finally, the Treaty of Lisbon will not advance the situation concerning fundamental rights in the EU. Support for this report does not imply support for that Treaty. In fact, the European Parliament's refusal to respect the Irish No vote runs contrary to the spirit of the Charter.

**Andreas Mölzer (NI), in writing.** – (DE) If the population of individual EU Member States decides to allow homosexual couples to marry, to enter into a civil partnership or to adopt children, other Member States should not be forced to follow suit. If the convictions of religious leaders or politicians mean that they are not exactly ecstatic about homosexuality – as the politically correct mainstream dictates – they should not be condemned or persecuted for these convictions. The same goes for the racism cudgel that is readily swung at anyone drawing attention to aberrations connected with asylum and foreign nationals.

Instead, it is being attempted undemocratically, through the back door, to force homosexual partnerships on Member States – which is probably a foretaste of what awaits us if we implement the Treaty of Lisbon. Anyone daring to criticise homosexuality or point out goings-on in connection with asylum and coexistence with foreign nationals is to be stigmatised as a criminal – in violation of the human right to free expression. Therefore, the Catania report is to be rejected in the strongest terms.

**Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) The report presented by Giusto Catania is full of interpretations and recommendations of a general nature regarding the situation of fundamental rights in European Union Member States. However, the regulatory base that we need exists: the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union and the European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms. The priority for us at the moment is not to add new regulations, but to make existing ones operational and effective.

One of the issues dealt with in the report is the free movement of labour which, unfortunately, not all European citizens can enjoy at the moment on an equal basis. Although the two-year period of labour market restrictions imposed on the new Member States expired at the end of 2008, six of the Member States have extended the restrictions for Romania and Bulgaria for another three years, justifying the decision to extend the restriction period on grounds of the current financial crisis. The report does not explicitly discuss this problem, even though it involves differentiated treatment among EU citizens, which is not justified on this occasion.

**Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) I voted against this report which contains, apart from at least ten points worthy of criticism (which is a kind way for us to describe them), an unacceptable reference to Council of Europe Recommendation 1201. This recommendation should not be invoked without explaining very precisely the interpretation which is being given to it as it could be interpreted as granting collective rights to minorities or territorial autonomy based on ethnic criteria. I welcome the approval of Amendment 35, which is very reasonable, but in my view, a number of aspects of the report cannot be accepted.

**Athanasios Pafilis (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – (EL) The report endeavours to help conceal the so-called 'democratic and social deficit' of the – by its very nature – deeply reactionary EU, so as to make it more attractive and blunt the dissatisfaction caused by its anti-grassroots policy. It accepts and welcomes all the reactionary principles and institutions which have been adopted by the EU, such as the four freedoms in the Maastricht Treaty, by trying to ascribe an effective dimension to their application.

It is based mainly on the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights accompanying the anti-grassroots Treaty of Lisbon, which is below the level of rights safeguarded in many Member States. It largely constitutes a report of ideas and a vague wish list, it addresses fundamental rights, such as labour, education and health rights, simply as 'opportunities' which need to be given 'equally' to everyone, something which is physically impossible in practice and, wherever it is more specific, it proposes addressing only certain extreme cases of poverty,

discrimination and so forth with measures such as the adoption of a minimum wage and so on. Finally, the lack of any reference to anti-democratic decisions and the prosecution of citizens, such as the ban on communist parties and other organisations and the imprisonment of communists and other fighters in Member States of the EU in central Europe and the Baltic, is revealing of the nature of the report.

**Dimitrios Papadimoulis (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (EL)** I voted for the report on the situation of fundamental rights in Europe, because I believe that it touches on one of the most basic problems of our unifying structure by engaging in constructive criticism. Discrimination in the enjoyment of fundamental rights derives mainly from the sex, age, origin or sexual orientation of those discriminated against, as the report accurately points out. The problem is exacerbated when the victims of such violations cannot react, mainly because they are locked up in mental asylums, care homes and so on. Europe cannot remain indifferent in the face of this situation, especially where tightening human rights will help to consolidate the European area of freedom and security. Consequently, and given the fact that the Charter of Fundamental Rights is not binding and the very limited facility for private individuals to take recourse to the Community courts, I cannot but welcome the proposals made by Mr Catania on the establishment of a general obligation on the part of the Community institutions to take account of human rights in the performance of their duties and the setting up of a specialist agency for the purpose.

**Zita Plešinská (PPE-DE), in writing. – (SK)** The problem with the report is that it deals with many sensitive issues. Even though the report gives a number of recommendations in a variety of areas, including minority rights, the rapporteur has again included the issue of reproductive health in the report.

The proposed amendments and supplements relating to reproductive health which the EP has voted for deny the right to life and violate the principle of subsidiarity. Respect for every unborn child and the need to protect human life from conception onward are matters of principle for me. I do not agree that we should adopt decisions at a European level on issues where Member States have differing attitudes stemming from their Christian traditions. I do not agree that the EU should force Slovakia, Poland, Ireland and other Member States to agree to abortions or euthanasia, which are not allowed under their national legislations. At a European level, it is always the case that we talk only about the mother's right to decide on the life or death of her child, and we forget about the unborn child's right to life.

For these reasons I voted against the report on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union 2004–2008.

**Nicolae Vlad Popa (PPE-DE), in writing. – (RO)** It goes without saying that the PPE and PD-L (Romanian Liberal Democrat Party) value and respect fundamental human rights and take a firm stand when they are violated.

I voted against the Catania report on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union 2004–2008 because the report has gone beyond its mandate, making recommendations and comments which go beyond the 2004–2008 period, which it had to report on. Instead of dealing with specific cases of human rights violations, the Catania report makes comments and recommends Member States to apply regulations which contradict national regulations. For example, in Articles 38 and 76 the notion of same-sex marriage is used, something which violates not only our religious views, but also our legal and rational views.

Article 149 mentions legalising the consumption of drugs, something which violates Romanian criminal law.

While the initiative of producing a report on the situation of human rights in the European Union is commendable and some of the points made by this report are even correct, based on what I have just said above, I voted against it.

**Luís Queiró (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT)** To think that fundamental rights are fully guaranteed and protected in the European Union and in the Member States would be an error of analysis and would be detrimental to political action. Fundamental rights, even in free and democratic societies, need to be protected and promoted. Separate issues arise, however, in relation to this report and this debate.

Firstly, there is the supervision of the protection of these rights at national level. In societies such as ours, this function is exercised primarily in the national context but, naturally, without prejudice to the ability to appeal at European level, which we have. Between the duty of the institutions to guarantee the Treaties and national sovereignty, there is a place for each party to exercise its function without prejudice to the institutional nature of the EU.

On the other hand, in this report in particular there is an undesirable confusion between what are fundamental rights and what are ideological options for the organisation of society. A debate on these is interesting. However, the attempt to impose these positions on the Member States, against their democratically expressed desire and against the principle of subsidiarity, proves precisely the risks of bringing national matters into the Community domain. For this reason, and because I disagree with much of the content, I voted against this report.

**José Ribeiro e Castro (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (PT) If I had been in favour of the ‘no’ campaign in the Irish referendum, I would have enthusiastically applauded the Catania report and its supporters. It represents such a gross disrespect for the principle of subsidiarity and tramples underfoot the institutional rules of the European Union and the powers of the Member States to such an extent that it gives credence to all those who feed distrust of the political voracity of Brussels. To attack the safeguard clauses, which are a direct expression of the Treaties and a fundamental guarantee of the democracy of the Member States, as serving ‘to codify ... discriminatory practices’ is pathetic and grossly undermines the fundamental rights of citizenship.

To assert that the signature of international conventions by a majority of Member States places an obligation on the whole EU to abide by them is a complete legal absurdity, a plunge into darkness that goes beyond the most extreme federalism. I also reject the absolutely perverse assertion of the ‘lack of credibility’ of Europe, which is bound to lead to our ‘tactical inferiority’: whatever specific problems it might have, Europe is not Sudan, nor the People’s Republic of China, nor Cuba, Somalia or North Korea. In short, the report strays into areas of political struggle that have nothing to do with fundamental rights, thereby stripping it of credibility, consistency and effectiveness. I voted against it.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted against the report by Mr Catania on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union (2004-2008).

I do not agree that the Member States damage the active role of defence of human rights carried out by the European Union across the world. Furthermore, I do not agree that the war on terrorism can be seen as a pretext for a drop in the level of protection of human rights, in particular the right to privacy.

I am therefore opposed to the points relating to the Roma, who do not need any special protection; otherwise, a major discriminatory situation would be created in relation to the Roma, whom this resolution deems to be an ethnic group different from others. Finally, I disagree with the paragraph on repatriation: the procedures to be used in repatriating an individual cannot be assessed solely on the basis of these parameters.

**Martine Roure (PSE), in writing.** – (FR) There can be no European area of freedom, security and justice without the protection of fundamental rights. Europe has a duty to set an example and to be irreproachable in this matter.

Violations have been identified, revealed, including for example in closed establishments accommodating children and elderly people. There is also the eternal problem posed by the disastrous situation of some prisons, as the report that we have today voted in favour of highlights. We must also fight to ensure that social rights are recognised.

Poverty and job insecurity are attacks on human rights. How can we accept a situation where people have work and yet cannot afford a place to live, in Europe and in the 21st century?

We must proclaim the fundamental rights of each and every one of us. The European Union is endowed with a Charter of Fundamental Rights.

Let us make sure that it is respected!

**Toomas Savi (ALDE), in writing.** – Mr President, I voted in favour of the report and I welcome in particular the inclusion of Paragraph 31 in the report according to which the European Parliament deplores the non-implementation by the EU of the judgments of the Court of First Instance on 12 December 2006 and on 4 and 17 December 2008 and the UK Court of Appeal ruling in favour of the People’s Mojahedin Organisation of Iran on 7 May 2008.

The European Union stands for democracy and the rule of law. The more appalling is the idea of one of its institutions acting against the Union’s principles. I hope that the Council takes the position of the Parliament well into account when compiling the new EU ‘blacklist’. Accusations of terrorist activity should actually be founded as well as the decisions on the inclusion of some organisations in the ‘blacklist’ should be more transparent.

Such issues cannot be addressed in an arbitrary manner, but in accordance with the principles of democracy and the rule of law. The EU cannot allow the global fight against terrorism be turned into a ground of political horse-trading and therefore must respect the aforementioned judgements of courts.

**Olle Schmidt (ALDE)**, *in writing*. – (SV) I interpret paragraph 149 of Mr Catania's report on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union as urging Member States to ensure that the equal treatment of patients within the health care system also includes addicts. I have therefore voted in favour of this paragraph.

**Csaba Sógor (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – (HU) The last two rounds of enlargement of the European Union, in which the Central and Eastern European formerly socialist countries were admitted, opened a new chapter in the Community's approach to human rights issues as well.

Since then, it has become clear that the protection of fundamental rights – and within these, the rights of national minorities – in the new Member States represents the greatest challenge to the European Community.

Giusto Catania's own-initiative report emphasises that in addressing the problems of the traditional national minority communities, the principles of subsidiarity and self-governance must serve as the guideposts that could allow the elaboration of policies aimed at resolving the situation of the communities in question in a reassuring manner.

The report encourages the use of cultural, territorial and regional forms of autonomy.

I also welcome the fact that the report of my fellow Member Mr Catania calls for the elaboration of a definition of belonging to a national minority, and proposes the drafting of a minimum set of Community norms for the protection of the rights of such minorities.

**Bart Staes (Verts/ALE)**, *in writing*. – (NL) The protection and promotion of fundamental rights lie at the very heart of our European democracy, and are key conditions if we want to enhance our European area of freedom, security and justice. It goes without saying, therefore, that, in practice, these rights have been incorporated in the objectives of the EU's various areas of policy.

Moreover, we would ask the Council to analyse the situation in the world and in every EU Member State in annual human rights reports, in the interest of Europe's trustworthiness not to use double standards in its internal or external policy. The amendments tabled by the Group of the Greens/European Free Alliance concerning anti-discrimination, minority rights and social rights have been adopted either wholly or in part.

We were also successful in our attempt to include a reference to the need to take account of fundamental rights in legislation on criminal law procedures. The Catania report maps out the problems involving fundamental rights and gives recommendations for resolving them. It can therefore count on my wholehearted support, because respect for all people and their fundamental rights lies at the heart of the Greens' policy, irrespective of gender, age, nationality or socio-economic background.

**Catherine Stihler (PSE)**, *in writing*. – I was pleased to see the European Parliament support the removal of the PMOI from the list of terrorist organisations. Twenty thousand people in Iran who oppose the regime have been killed. As long as the PMOI remains on the terrorist list, more people will be killed in Iran for simply voicing opposition to the regime. The EU must follow the UK's lead and remove the PMOI from the terrorist list.

**Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (PL) During today's vote I spoke in favour of adopting Mr Catania's report on the situation of fundamental rights in the European Union.

Sadly, fundamental rights are often violated in the European Union, with discrimination against minorities and infringement of privacy being most commonly observed. Equal opportunities, particularly equality for women, is another problem. The rapporteur asked the Member States to reject arguments justifying violence and discrimination against women based on tradition and religion.

In many EU countries citizens, in particular the weakest ones, children are affected by discrimination and poverty. The report rightly condemns all forms of violence against children, such as domestic violence, sexual abuse and corporal punishment in schools.

The Member States fail to control practices in respect of human rights, thereby undermining the credibility of EU foreign policy in the world. In my view, the Community cannot apply 'double standards' in its internal and foreign policy.

**Konrad Szymański (UEN), in writing.** – For me, the main importance of Mr Catania's report is to remind us that we inside the EU have our own issues to confront. We should therefore be very careful about taking a holier-than-thou approach when commenting on human rights outside the EU.

I served on the temporary committee into extraordinary rendition by the CIA. It was principally a platform for the left to attack their favourite bête noire, the United States.

In my view, we should be grateful to the CIA and the United States for helping to protect Europeans from terrorists bent on killing innocent citizens. It is an indictment of our own societies that we had to rely on America to do the job for us.

Absolutism over human rights is playing into the hands of those who would destroy us, and putting the human rights of our own citizens at risk.

I therefore voted against the report.

**Konrad Szymański (UEN), in writing.** – (PL) The report on fundamental rights in the EU in 2004-2008 adopted in the European Parliament today contains demands for mutual recognition of homosexual couples in all EU countries and the implementation of such relationships in the legislation of the Member States. Another part of the report defends so-called 'reproductive rights', which in the language of international law also includes abortion on demand. Incorporating religious leaders among the authors of such comments.

The European left has hijacked the report on fundamental rights in the EU to promote pro-abortion and homosexual demands, which have nothing to do with fundamental rights. There are no documents in international or European law which support the existence of such 'rights'.

Despite the non-binding nature of the report, it is the most harmful document approved during the term of the present Parliament. It is the latest attempt to re-define fundamental rights and introduce changes to their meaning without needing to amend any treaties at UN or EU level.

One other aspect of the report is that the EU implement a special directive punishing 'homophobic' actions. Due to the broad and vague nature of this formulation, it is an attempt to exclude homosexual circles from the democratic right to free criticism. Applying this could have consequences in terms of censorship.

The result of the final vote (401 in favour; 220 against; 67 abstentions) shows how deeply divided MEPs are on this issue. That is a defeat for the rapporteur, as fundamental rights are something that should unite, and not divide, Parliament.

**Charles Tannock (PPE-DE), in writing.** – I would like this report to have looked more closely at the situation of orphans and disabled children in institutional care in Romania and Bulgaria, the newest EU Member States.

There was a great deal of concern before those countries joined the EU about the standards of care for institutionalised orphans and disabled children. Perhaps the next such report could go into more detail on this matter.

More generally, I made my thoughts on this report known in the debate last month. I am worried that our culture of human rights has become infected by absolutism and that, in fact, by pandering to the rights of criminals and terrorists we are undermining the rights of everyone else.

Specifically, I believe that matters concerning abortion and contraception are not matters for the European Union, but should be subject to appropriate legislation at the level of the Member States. Also, I object to the call for the Charter of Fundamental Rights to override the law of the United Kingdom, which has negotiated an exemption from its provisions.

I therefore voted to abstain on this report.

**Thomas Ulmer (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (DE) I voted against the Catania report. I am astounded that the House's services even declared this report admissible in its present form. It persistently infringes the principle of subsidiarity. In terms of its content, virtually everything is worthy of criticism. The nation-states must not let themselves be incapacitated or disempowered when it comes to fundamental rights. This represents an attempt to push through, to the detriment of the majority, minority rights that cannot be implemented at national level. A positive attitude to abortion is inconceivable to me. The actual subject, human rights and their implementation over the last four years, is not mentioned.

**Thomas Wise (NI), in writing.** – I abstained on the roll-call vote on paragraph 62 because I believe that every country – which the EU is not – should ensure that legislation on female genital mutilation is locally originated and applied. An international agreement would be more appropriate and far-sighted. As it is, the EU has no current competence in health matters, nor should it seek them.

I also abstained on the vote on paragraph 72 because I am concerned about the implications on free speech. Although to be deplored, discriminatory comments do not necessarily fuel 'hatred and violence'. That we are asked to agree to this will mean that those who choose can use this as evidence of such.

My decision to abstain on Amendment 54 is based upon opposing the EU's Free Movement of People and the principle of mutual recognition, and not in any way a reflection on my views regarding same-sex partnerships, which I agree should enjoy the same rights as others.

**Anna Záborská (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (FR) The European Parliament has just voted in favour of the Catania report on the situation of fundamental rights. At a time when we have just celebrated the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this report questions what we understand by the meaning of fundamental right.

Admittedly, the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union was the result of a consensus reached after more than a year of negotiations between various pressure groups and lobbies, representatives of civil society and national governments, and so on. This exercise to which we, as representatives of the countries of the East, were not invited to take part in, is interesting in more ways than one. The Charter, as the Catania report emphasises, will be a non-legally binding text until the Treaty of Lisbon is ratified by all the Member States.

However, the Agency for Fundamental Rights, set up in Vienna, Austria, is based entirely on this political text, which it uses to justify the positions it adopts. It is therefore interesting to get a glimpse of how fundamental rights under the Charter are considered, by analysing the subjects dealt with by the Agency for Fundamental Rights. This exercise is all the more interesting when applied to the network of FRALEX experts recruited in summer 2008 and mainly belonging to the Dutch network 'Human European Consultancy'.

#### **Motion for a resolution (B6-0624/2008)**

**Dragoş Florin David (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) I voted in favour of this resolution as the ratification of the Convention will make a significant contribution to the promotion of decent labour standards worldwide. It also supports the agreement concluded by the social partners on certain aspects of the working conditions of workers in the maritime shipping sector as it strikes a fair balance between the need to improve working conditions and to protect the health and safety of seafarers, and also because this professional category exists in Romania.

**Constantin Dumitriu (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) The resolution tabled by Mary Lou McDonald summarises the main points which the proposal for a Council directive on the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 and amending Directive 1999/63/EC (COM(2008)0422) must take into consideration.

Maritime workers belong to a category which carries out its activities in extremely difficult, often even dangerous conditions. This is why we need to have standards for working conditions, which enable us to take into account these workers' health and safety, as well as clear rules on their employment. The first step in establishing these standards must be to highlight the needs and problems which employees and employers in the maritime sector have identified, while also ensuring a degree of flexibility in their enforcement by Member States.

The documents which we are adopting at a European level must be followed by action by Member States and monitoring by the Commission to assure ourselves that the provisions are being applied. Furthermore, with regard to maritime labour standards, the European Union has the opportunity to establish itself as the leader in transposing these standards into principles which can be applied anywhere in the world.

**Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – (IT) We voted in favour of this report on the proposal for a Council directive implementing the agreement concluded by the European Community Shipowners' Associations and the European Transport Workers' Federation on the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006, and amending Directive 1999/63/EC, as it consolidates international minimum labour rights. That is important to ensure better working conditions and greater safety, while respecting the dignity of these professionals.

However, we regret that the proposals that our group presented were not adopted, specifically those that sought to remove any legal uncertainty or prejudice to the work carried out by the social partners to reach agreement. The convention itself accepts that countries should not use flexibility, and that was what the proposal for a directive set out, with the agreement of the social partners. We therefore do not agree with the majority of the European Parliament on having included the issue of flexibility in paragraph 6.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI)**, *in writing*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to confirm my vote for the resolution on the Maritime Labour Convention, 2006 (procedures relating to social dialogue).

I fully support the agreement concluded by employers and employees on certain aspects of the working conditions of workers in the maritime shipping sector, as it strikes a fair balance between the need to improve working conditions and to protect the health and safety of seafarers. Furthermore, I am convinced that it is essential to define and enforce global minimum standards of employment and health and safety conditions for seafarers working at sea or on board seagoing ships. Finally, I am happy with the role played by employers and employees in improving health and safety conditions for workers.

**- Report: Laima Liucija Andrikiienė (A6-0498/2008)**

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (IT) I voted in favour of the report. Now, more than ever, we are realising the importance of the role that can be played by a body such as the Human Rights Council (HRC). The action taken to date should be supported, and we should also appreciate the active role played by the EU within the HRC, despite the undeniable restrictions represented by the absence of the United States; in fact, this absence often places the EU in an isolated position. That, however, should not be an excuse for the EU, which ought to be able to make a political effort to build a united, cohesive leadership, overcoming the opposing geographical blocs that are often to be seen within it.

Thus, a very considerable amount still remains to be done to give the HRC greater credibility and authority and to prevent some governments being able to continue to avoid their duties in the international sphere. I therefore warmly support a new analysis with a view to the review, and I would like to confirm that the strengthening of the HRC is a vital stage along the road of civilisation which the EU has always supported.

**Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of the Andrikiienė report on the future of the UN Human Rights Council as I feel that the EU needs a long-term strategy on the activity of this institution, which must become the main global forum for human rights. I believe that EU Member States must demonstrate greater unity and efficiency in promoting certain EU common positions on human rights.

The EU must become a global leader and initiate strategies for protecting human rights worldwide. We need to focus greater attention on promoting human economic, social and cultural rights as poverty, backwardness and a low level of education and culture among the population have negative multiplier effects.

In order to obtain much wider support for its positions, the EU must create coalition-building mechanisms and start to organise regular meetings on specific issues with all the democratic states on other continents. It is also vital for states to send specialists to international forums, with real expertise in the relevant area, a fact which Mrs Andrikiienė's report recommends insistently and with full justification.

**Philip Claeys (NI), Koenrad Dillen (NI)**, *in writing*. – (NL) I have voted against this report, because this UN Human Rights Council cannot by any stretch of the imagination be considered a legitimate institution. It is unacceptable to me for countries like Cuba, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Pakistan, Jordan and a number of African regimes to be issuing resolutions which denounce the human rights situation in other countries. The situation of political or religious dissidents in those countries makes a complete mockery of this institution.

**Dragoș Florin David (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – (RO) I voted in favour of this motion for a European Parliament resolution because the respect, promotion and guarantee of the universality of human rights are an integral part of the European Union's legal acquis and it is one of the EU's fundamental principles. I also voted for it because the United Nations Organisation and its UNHRC are one of the most suitable organisations for tackling comprehensively issues linked to human rights and the challenges in the humanitarian sector. I believe that human rights and democracy are key elements in the EU's external relations and external policy.

**Neena Gill (PSE)**, *in writing*. – President, I was very pleased to vote for the Andrikiene report on the United Nations Human Rights Council since I welcome the fact that this agency has far greater credibility than its predecessor, the UN Commission on Human Rights. The Commission was widely discredited due to several of its member countries having very dubious human rights records.

The regular scrutiny of the rights records of member states is a key component to the Council's greater standing. This will be particularly important in the next round of scrutiny, which will involve Russia, Cuba, Saudi Arabia and China.

Welcome, too, are the provisions in the report which aim to assess coordination on these issues between EU member states. It is vital that the EU, as an organisation that puts human rights at the heart of its mission, works with multinational co-partners such as the UN with similar ideals to realise greater cooperation. Cooperation is vital to ensure that human rights are no longer sidelined as a foreign policy objective for commercial or strategic reasons.

**Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing. – (PT)** This report reveals a certain dissatisfaction of the European Parliament with the UN Human Rights Council (UNHRC), since the Member States of the EU represent a 'numerical minority', which, in its understanding, 'seriously obstructs the EU's ability to influence the agenda of the UNHRC' and to ensure its desired role as a 'leading force'.

This lofty vision is based on the unacceptable attempt to impose the EU as the model in terms of human rights, particularly when the facts demonstrate its hypocritical human rights policy, as is demonstrated by the complicity of the EU in relation to Israel – see its abstention on the UNHRC resolution on Palestine.

The report is replete with contradictions, namely when it 'regrets the division of the UNHRC into regional blocs' while, at the same time, it states that it supports the existence of 'a coordinated common position within the UNHRC' by the EU. Is this too not a policy of blocs, or is a policy of blocs only bad when it does not work in the EU's favour?

Contrary to the EP, we do not consider it 'regrettable' that the United States is not represented in the UNHRC, firstly because of its constant breaches of human rights and international law and also because they did not present their candidature to avoid the shame of not being elected. It is understandable why ...

**Nils Lundgren (IND/DEM), in writing. – (SV)** This report contains a surprising number of intelligent views considering the fact that it has come from the Committee on Foreign Affairs. For example, the view is put forward that it is a positive thing that the Member States of the EU are increasingly choosing to speak out and not allow the EU Presidency to speak for all countries. Statements of this kind are very rare, and I welcome them.

Unfortunately, the positive elements are too few and far between. One of the most objectionable wordings is found in recital H, where it complains about 'a persistent desire on the part of Member States to act independently at the UN'. 'One state, one vote' is, after all, one of the foundation stones of the United Nations. The Committee on Foreign Affairs also regrets the growing division of the UNHRC into regional blocs. Paradoxically enough, certain regional blocs – the EU, for example – seem to be desirable.

The European Parliament neither is, can, nor should be a guarantee that human rights are not violated in the world. This is shown, in particular, by the statements made by Members of this House on homosexuals, for example. Even though the essence of the report is probably good, I have voted against it in today's vote.

**Andreas Mölzer (NI), in writing. – (DE)** The EU claims to put human rights and democracy at the heart of its external relations. This House calls on the EU to pay attention to credibility on human rights issues when ratifying agreements. Yet the EU's own credibility has already gone west: CIA overflights, its failure to take action on United States torture prisons and its zigzagging on international law – with regard to the Kosovo crisis, for example – have seen to that.

How can a community purporting to set so much store by democracy deny referendum results, repeat votes until they produce the desired result and punish Member States for election results? If the EU was really so concerned about respect for its oft-cited community of values, it would have had to break off accession negotiations with Turkey long ago, but at the very latest since its display of warmongering. Instead of really working to promote human and people's rights and common values, the EU is at present apparently throwing away approximately EUR 15 million each year on a superfluous European Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA).

**Nicolae Vlad Popa (PPE-DE), in writing. –** I voted in favour of the report on the development of the UN Human Rights Council because, while recognising both the unquestionable achievements and efforts which have been made to boost the credibility and level of protection of human rights, I firmly believe that the operation of this body can also be improved in the future.

At the same time, I feel that the European Union must continue to have an active, high-profile role in setting up and operating the UN Council.

I also appreciate the fact that the report is calling on the European Union to reaffirm and defend vigorously the principles of the universality, indivisibility and independence of human rights.

**Luís Queiró (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PT)** If the United Nations and the various agencies and organisations that are associated with it are supposed to be, by their nature, a mirror of the world, it is natural that the image thus reflected is not one that we would desire or would like to construct. These considerations are necessary in relation to the debate on the United Nations Human Rights Council.

To debate and decide, by voting, on human rights in a world with countries that do not pay any attention to them can be expected to have a bizarre result. This is not only a question of legitimacy. It is, above all, a question of language. What evaluative standard on human rights can one suppose the Governments of Libya or Zimbabwe share with democratic states that are answerable to their populations? None, of course. However, it is precisely to facilitate dialogue between those who speak different languages that diplomacy exists. Among equals mediation is not necessary.

Thus, the existence of places of dialogue must be a policy to be stimulated and promoted. Otherwise, I cannot believe that we can or should have as a standard for our values and our actions something that is decided in such a context.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing. – (IT)** Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted for the Andriksen report on the development of the UN Human Rights Council, including the role of the EU. The European position within that Council is crucial.

In fact, the EU, which places human rights and democracy at the heart of its own external relations, above all in the action it takes within international human rights organisations, has been committed from the outset to maintaining an active and visible role in the creation and operation of the Human Rights Council, with the aim of upholding the highest standards in terms of human rights, by sponsoring or co-sponsoring texts defining standards.

I therefore welcome the proposal by Mrs Andriksen, which will examine the measures the EU can adopt to improve its influence in the Human Rights Council and give a new impetus to the Council, so that it becomes a more effective operational body.

**Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE), in writing. – (PL)** On 15 March 2006 the UN General Assembly adopted a resolution replacing the UN Commission on Human Rights by the Human Rights Council, an international support body to promote and protect human rights.

The change of name was accompanied by the introduction of new mechanisms and procedures increasing the potential of the Human Rights Council.

The aim of the report is to assess the achievements of the Council, and compare the expectations with the results. It is above all to set out potential improvements in its operations.

Let us not forget that democracy and human rights are the mainstay on which the European Union operates in the international arena. The European Union has given itself a very prominent role and is active in international human rights organisations, and was also active in appointing the Human Rights Council. It has co-authored texts such as conventions or resolutions setting out the norms for the protection of human rights.

Unfortunately, the European Union often lacks the capacity to anticipate issues (due above all to the time-consuming procedures that are sometimes required to draft common positions), and to show leadership in human rights initiatives.

**Charles Tannock (PPE-DE), in writing. –** I and my British Conservative colleagues support the work of the UN and the UN Human Rights Council. We accept that further reform of the Council is required to ensure that human rights around the world are improved.

We agree that EU Member States work towards agreeing positions in the Council but underline the importance of each of them safeguarding their own national interests and positions.

Our support for this report does not imply support for the paragraph in the report (Paragraph 56) which calls for the UN resolution on a death penalty moratorium to be implemented. The death penalty is a matter of conscience for each Conservative MEP.

**- Report: Marco Cappato (A6-0459/2008)**

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE), in writing.** – (IT) I am voting in favour. The approach of the next appointment with the electorate requires us to supply the voting citizens with all the tools they need to access the European Parliament's documents. At a time when the electorate is being asked to place its trust in these institutions, we need at the same time to work to remove all the obstacles that still exist in terms of transparency and accessibility.

To that end, I believe that voting citizens should also be given the possibility of checking on the activity, participation and attendance by MEPs in Parliament's work, in absolute, relative and percentage terms, and that steps also should be taken to facilitate access to data on Members' allowances and spending. Finally, I hope that all this can be achieved by the end of this parliamentary term.

**Nicodim Bulzesc (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) The right to have access to the documents held by Parliament, the Council and Commission is a fundamental right which all citizens and residents of the European Union have (in accordance with EU Treaty Articles 254 and 255).

However, I would like to highlight one aspect. I believe that publishing the European institutions' working documents is only a first step because the majority of Europe's citizens do not understand the procedures we use and will not know how to find the information they need. I agree in this respect with my fellow Member, who is proposing the creation of a single European access portal for all documents, with a structure which makes it easy for anyone to understand. This portal should present information in an accessible, simplified manner so that European citizens can use it without any problem. Such technical solutions definitely exist and I hope that the financial resources will be found for implementing this portal.

However, I voted against the report because, while the general framework is right, some of the features proposed by my fellow Member are unacceptable.

**Philip Claeys (NI), in writing.** – (NL) As I am in favour of maximum openness in all EU institutions, I have emphatically voted in favour of this report. It is a good thing that various European institutions are being given a serious ticking off. The European Council takes major political decisions and discusses very important and controversial issues. Also, it is disappointing and unacceptable that the Council should not allow the precise positions of the different national delegations to be known at the time of decision-making. Parliament should also put its own house in order, though, and should guarantee maximum openness in all its facets.

**Esther De Lange (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (NL) Explanation of vote on behalf of the CDA delegation in the European Parliament concerning the Cappato report on access to documents.

Today, the CDA delegation in the European Parliament abstained from the vote on the report on access to documents. This was not because we have a problem with transparency. We are in favour of transparency and democratic control. Not for nothing did former MEP Mrs Maij-Weggen stand at the cradle of Community legislation in this area.

We have abstained because the Cappato report contains too many inaccuracies, incorrect ways of putting things and over-simplified statements. For example, in our view, the openness of Council documents should be guaranteed, but there is a clear distinction between documents for legislative and other procedures. The rapporteur, however, draws no distinction between these procedures. We are also concerned about the major administrative burden which the recommendations in the Cappato report would entail.

We were unable to endorse the report on account of the inaccuracies and woolly statements. Since we did want to support the principle of transparency and democratic control, in the end we abstained from the vote.

**Koenraad Dillen (NI), in writing.** – (NL) I emphatically voted in favour of this report. It will not hurt for once. Whilst we have to applaud the fact that some of the European institutions are coming under heavy criticism, I should like to make an observation. In the light of the fact that the European Council is at the helm and ultimately takes decisions on very important and controversial issues, it is unacceptable that the Council should not allow the positions of the different national delegations to be made public at the time of

decision-making. It is also true that Parliament should put its own house in order, and should guarantee maximum openness in all its facets, before it hauls others over the coals.

**Avril Doyle (PPE-DE), in writing.** – The present own-initiative proposal by Marco Cappato requests that Parliament endorse the report on the implementation of Regulation 1049/2001, which deals with public access to documents held by Parliament, the Commission and the Council when used in their legislative capacity.

While the aim to increase transparency in the European institutions has my full support, there are three main points in this Regulation which I feel warrant further examination.

(1) The vital protection of client-lawyer confidentiality is not sufficiently protected as it stands in the Turco judgment referred to in the initial paragraphs, and the call to apply it cannot be supported.

(2) The individual processes whereby national governments reach decisions may also be undermined by removing consent required to release documents transmitted to EU institutions, and

(3) These EU-wide recommendations do not take into account the different approaches relating to freedom of information in Member States.

A certain degree of confidentiality is required to ensure full and frank political discussions among political groups, and the broadcasting of these opinions has the potential to do more harm than good. The prospect of restrained exchanges replacing vigorous debate does not bode well for our democratic institutions.

*(Explanation of vote abbreviated under Rule 163(1))*

**Carl Lang and Fernand Le Rachinel (NI), in writing.** – (FR) There is no question for anyone acquainted with the arcane mysteries of the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Council that seeking access to information on the European Union's institutions remains a journey full of pitfalls for the average citizen. There are many reasons for this.

Indeed, it is just as much a question of the huge number of documents issued and the countless forms in which they are published (reports, opinions, resolutions, directives, regulations, and so on), as it is of the lack of simplification and clarity of the institutional registers and of the web pages and the lack of transparency and communication.

This report rightly proposes resolving these kinds of problems by ensuring that the European institutions are more transparent.

Indeed, this forms part of the wider issue of increasing the part played by citizens of the Union in the way in which the latter operates and understands matters. The peoples of Europe do not want systematically to be excluded from decisions that have a direct bearing on their everyday lives and in relation to which they have no right to inspect or to object. On the rare occasions when they have had their voices heard by referendum, they have disowned their leaders and Brussels bureaucracy, which is blind, deaf and unresponsive to their needs and wants.

Making the European institutions more transparent is a first step towards a new Europe, a Europe of the peoples and a Europe of the sovereign nations.

**Jörg Leichtfried (PSE), in writing.** – (DE) I voted in favour of the Annual Reports on simplified access to documents of the EU institutions.

There is no question that it should be made easier to access the various European Parliament, Council and Commission documents. The citizens of the European Union must not be given the feeling that they are excluded from the operations and votes of the EU institutions. In addition, they have a right to be informed about everything possible.

However, we should look into whether publication should perhaps be limited so as ultimately to prevent people losing the overview. Firstly, no one wants a data overload and, secondly, staff privacy must continue to be respected, as it is usually the case that, by virtue of data protection, there is no small number of details that are not universally accessible even to other institutions, including national ones.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI), in writing.** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I voted for the proposal submitted by Mr Cappato on public access to European Parliament, Council and Commission documents.

It is of fundamental importance for the European Union that citizens feel the Community institutions to be close to them. This can only be achieved through public access to the documents of the three institutions. I am therefore fully in agreement with the rapporteur when he states that we must call on the EU institutions and the Member States to promote a common administrative culture of transparency, founded on the principles outlined in Article 41 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the case-law of the Court of Justice of the European Communities, the recommendations of the European Ombudsman and the best practices of the Member States.

Finally, I welcome the initiative from Mr Cappato, because I believe that, to improve and speed up integration processes, the provision of information to the public ought to be a very high priority, in view of the problems regarding the absenteeism of Italian MEPs from the Chamber.

**Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE), in writing.** – (PL) The Treaty on European Union lays down that priority must be given to transparency and ever-closer links between the peoples of Europe and that decisions must be taken as openly as possible, and as closely to citizens as possible. Transparency allows citizens to participate more closely in the decision-making process and guarantees that the administration will enjoy greater credibility, be more effective and responsible towards its citizens in a democratic system.

The ECJ judgment in the Turco case will have resounding consequences for transparency and access to the documents of European institutions concerned with legislative issues.

The judgment confirms that the priority should be given to the principle in question, and that it should apply to all community institutions, and (which is very important) the possibility to derogate from this should be given a narrow interpretation and assessed on a case-by-case basis from the perspective of the overriding public interest, which is openness. Openness increases confidence in institutions by allowing open debate.

The ECJ stated that the refusal to grant access to documents in this case cannot be the basis for a general requirement subjecting legal opinions on legislative issues to confidentiality.

**Thomas Ulmer (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (DE) I rejected this report. The demands it makes go way beyond what I understand by transparency. I consider even the publication of MEPs' attendance registers and voting lists dangerous without extensive additional channels of explanation. I have a high attendance record and am therefore above suspicion. It is important to preserve legal protection of personality for MEPs, too. Europe could increase transparency by publishing public meetings of the Council and the Commission to begin with, before forcing MEPs to lay themselves bare. In addition, there must be confidentiality among the institutions during difficult negotiation phases.

**Anna Záborská (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (SK) Based on experience in the Member States, the EU has started to recognise a real 'right of access to documents' and 'right to information' arising from the principles of democracy, transparency, public interest and openness.

The European Parliament is convinced that the ordinary citizen's access to information on EU institutions raises problems due to the lack of efficient inter-institutional policies on transparency and citizen-oriented communication.

In the interests of greater transparency, EU institutions should respect the principle of multilingualism. In 2008 I presented a Written Declaration of the European Parliament on this issue. The EU operates in all of the national languages and not just in one single language or collection of languages which it may have chosen and which may not be understood by a significant section of its citizens.

The translation of legislative, political and administrative documents allows the EU to fulfil its legal obligations and at the same time the system of multilingualism helps enhance the transparency, legitimacy and effectiveness of the Union. This assists proper preparation for the elections to the European Parliament that will be held in June 2009.

I hereby call on the institutions of the EU to ensure that provision is made in the 2009 EU budget for the resources required to cover the shortfall in posts for official translators within EU institutions; the EP calls on EU institutions to translate all legislative, political and administrative documents for this parliamentary term without delay into all the official languages of the EU in order to allow citizens to follow the political work carried out by all of the institutions.

In doing this we can really contribute towards greater transparency for our citizens.

## 6. Corrections to votes and voting intentions: see Minutes

*(The sitting was suspended at 1.55 p.m. and resumed at 3 p.m.)*

### IN THE CHAIR: MR PÖTTERING

*President*

## 7. Approval of the minutes of the previous sitting : see Minutes

## 8. Situation in the Middle East/Gaza Strip (debate)

**President.** – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on the situation in the Middle East/Gaza Strip.

It is a particular pleasure to welcome the President-in-Office of the Council, Czech Minister for Foreign Affairs Mr Karel Schwarzenberg, who has to travel on to South Africa today. Previous Presidencies have arranged for a representative to take the place of their Minister for Foreign Affairs, and so we particularly appreciate your presence here today, Mr Schwarzenberg. I wish you a very warm welcome!

We are of course also pleased that the competent Commissioner, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, is present – as she almost always is. As you know, the Commissioner is also very knowledgeable about the problems of the Middle East conflict and, like Mr Schwarzenberg, she has travelled to the region. I wish you a very warm welcome too, Commissioner.

**Karel Schwarzenberg, President-in-Office of the Council.** – Mr President, thank you very much for giving me the floor in this timely debate on the dramatic situation in the Middle East.

Since the start of Israel's military campaign in the Gaza Strip on 27 December, we have witnessed a steep deterioration of the situation on all levels. The humanitarian consequences of this operation are dramatic for the population in Gaza. Since the start of the operation, over 900 Palestinians have died, of whom roughly 30% were women and children. We are profoundly disturbed by the loss of civilian life, and the matter has been repeatedly declared in our presidential statements. The European Union deplores the ongoing hostilities which have led to such high numbers of civilian casualties, and we want to express our sincere condolences to the families of the victims.

We are particularly concerned by such incidents as the attack on the United Nations school in Jebaliya and the firing on humanitarian convoys leading to the death of humanitarian staff. Over 4 200 Palestinians have been injured, according to the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs. According to the United Nations agency, an estimated 28 000 people have been displaced since the beginning of the hostilities. A large number of them are seeking refuge in the shelters; the rest of the internally displaced people are staying with relatives.

The greatest humanitarian needs are related to the large number of wounded and the overwhelmed health services, whereas displaced people and host families need specific assistance such as food, shelter, water and non-food items. Since the water system was badly damaged and needs urgent repair, the Gaza population has hardly any access to safe water. Therefore, providing drinking water is of the utmost necessity.

There are also extensive food shortages at all levels of the population. Since 4 November last year, foreign NGOs' personnel have not been allowed access to Gaza to deliver and monitor humanitarian aid properly. Also, the number of trucks entering Gaza has increased since military operations started. The current daily average of 55 trucks remains pitifully insufficient compared to a need for at least 300 trucks daily to cover the needs of the 80% of the population which has become aid-dependent.

The European Union has been closely following the tragic events from the outset. Three days after the operation started, foreign ministers met in an extraordinary session in Paris to discuss the situation. They agreed on the need for an immediate and permanent ceasefire and immediate humanitarian action in stepping up the peace process. The summit aimed mainly to assist in ending violence and alleviating the humanitarian crisis. The presidency led a diplomatic mission in the Middle East. The EU ministerial troika visited the region on 4-6 January for meetings in Egypt, in Israel, with the Palestinian authority, and in Jordan. The High Representative also visited Syria, Lebanon and Turkey.

The outlines of a solution to the crisis have started to emerge. First and foremost, there must be an unconditional halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and an end to Israeli military action, to enable the sustained delivery of humanitarian aid and the restoration of public services and badly-needed medical treatment. The six-month ceasefire, which expired on 19 December, was far from perfect. Israel suffered through periodic rocket fire and the knowledge that its foe was amassing greater firepower. Gaza endured a really punishing economic blockade, totally undermining its economic development.

In order to achieve a sustainable ceasefire, we have to look for a sensible compromise entailing an end to rocket launches and reopening of the crossings. A viable solution must address the tunnels across the borders, especially along the Philadelphia route, to prevent the smuggling of weapons. It must also lead to the systematic and controlled opening of all border crossings to enable the Gaza economy to develop.

We believe that the deployment of international missions to monitor implementation of the ceasefire and to act as a liaison between the two sides could be helpful. In this regard, the European Union is ready to return its observers to the Rafah crossing and to extend the mandate of the European border mission in scope and content. We acknowledge that Israel has agreed to a daily lull to allow desperately-needed food, fuel and medicine into Gaza. However, only a full and immediate ceasefire would allow the delivery and distribution of the large quantities of humanitarian aid that Gaza so desperately needs and for the resumption of basic services. Israel must ensure the unhindered and safe access for humanitarian aid and other essential supplies, including food, medicines and fuel, to the Palestinian civilian population of the Gaza Strip, as well as the safe passage of civilian persons and humanitarian personnel into and from the Gaza Strip.

But even a durable and comprehensive solution in Gaza will not be sufficient to install peace in the region. We need to address broader and more complicated challenges. We need a new and inclusive strategy that addresses the internal Palestinian political situation, as well as a resumption of the peace talks which have been suspended due to the Gaza crisis. Palestinian reconciliation, and a government representative of the aspirations of the Palestinian people, is more necessary than ever. We therefore support the mediation effort undertaken by Egypt in accordance with the Arab League's resolutions of 26 November 2008.

As pointed out in the conclusions of the GAERC in December 2008, the European Union is prepared to support any stable Palestinian government that pursues policies and measures reflecting the Quartet's principles. The European Union stresses the need to achieve a just, lasting and comprehensive peace in the Middle East and calls for the resumption of Palestinian-Israeli negotiations and the resolving of all outstanding issues in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, including all core issues.

A durable and comprehensive solution will ultimately depend on real progress in the Middle East peace process. Urgent and great efforts by the parties will be needed to achieve a comprehensive peace, based on the vision of a region where two democratic states, Israel and Palestine, live side by side in peace, in secure and recognised borders.

The latest outbreak of violence in the Middle East might not only set back prospects of a peaceful settlement in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. The political damage the fighting is causing, both in terms of regional polarisation and radicalisation, and in the further discrediting of moderate forces, must not be neglected either. Only a viable Palestinian state will bring security to a region that has suffered for too long. This is especially in the interests of Israel and its neighbours. Therefore, urgent measures must immediately be taken to reverse the damage done by the military action in order to restore the possibility of an equitable negotiated outcome.

*(Applause)*

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I think we all would have hoped for a better start to 2009. Unfortunately, we face a terrible and appalling conflict in Gaza, which is now in its third week.

It gives cause for immense concern. We discussed it yesterday at a meeting with the Committee on Foreign Affairs, the Committee on Development and those Members of the European Parliament who had been in Gaza at the weekend.

The President-in-Office of the Council has already mentioned the terrible statistics of the dead and injured, which get worse every day. There is increasing evidence of victims suffering from extreme burns, and aid agencies report that the population is suffering from acute shortages of food, fuel and medicine, not to mention the destruction of houses and infrastructure.

However, Israel has also suffered losses and has faced hundreds of rockets being fired into its territory by Hamas, targeting Israeli civilians. War, unfortunately, always produces immense human suffering, and this war is no exception. Therefore, beyond its immediate devastating impact, it pushes the prospect of peace much further away, undermines the Arab Peace Initiative and could potentially have a very negative impact on the stability of the whole region.

I should like to outline quickly the diplomatic activity that we have taken together to bring this conflict to an end, and then to look at the mid- and long-term challenges. We have been active from day one, which I think was important. We know that we are not the main player in the Middle East, but we were, and are, an important player. Therefore, in response to the outbreak of the crisis, the emergency meeting of the EU foreign ministers in Paris on 30 December 2008 was very important in developing proposals from the outset – the Paris Declaration – for bringing this conflict to an end, which we then used in our delegation and visit to the Middle East.

Here there are three elements. First and foremost, the Paris Declaration called for an immediate humanitarian ceasefire, including both an unconditional halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel, but also an end to the Israeli military action. We called for a ceasefire to be accompanied by a permanent and normal opening of all border crossings, as provided by the agreement on movement and access in 2005. We expressed willingness to re-dispatch the EU Border Assistance Mission (BAM) to Rafah to enable its reopening, and we also indicated that we were willing to examine the possibility of extending assistance to other crossing points, provided that our security concerns were met.

Second, we stressed the urgent humanitarian needs, which we said had to be met. Here we urged the immediate opening of the crossing points to enable pressing medical assistance, fuel and food to be delivered to the Gaza Strip, to enable humanitarian workers to gain access and for the injured to be evacuated.

Third, we reiterated our position that there is no military solution to this Israeli-Palestinian conflict, that the peace process is the only way forward and that efforts have to be stepped up as soon as we find a durable ceasefire.

As you have heard, our mission was carried out in tandem with a visit by President Sarkozy, who had planned to make a trip to Syria and Lebanon and who then decided to visit Egypt and Israel to reinforce these efforts, still on the basis of our declaration of 30 December 2008. France is currently chairing the Security Council, so it was an important initiative.

We coordinated closely, including a joint meeting in Ramallah, where President Sarkozy outlined his ceasefire plan, for which we – the troika – had to some extent paved the way through our discussions with key stakeholders, particularly Egypt and Jerusalem.

These efforts reinforced each other, sending a strong, united message from the European Union, and the troika not only conveyed this EU institutional position but also manifested our presence. I think it was important that President Sarkozy also went to Syria and then Mr Solana accompanied him to Syria and Lebanon and also consulted with Turkey. I think all of this was needed.

I particularly stressed the humanitarian situation, as has already been said, and I called particularly for the opening of the crossings and also for the possibility of at least some hours of ceasefire to allow the work of the international organisations to be carried out. Israel accepted some of these points, and, in the negotiations with the Israeli Government, I also secured the co-location of an ECHO official in the Israeli Defence Force premises to coordinate the channelling of humanitarian aid with the Israeli armed forces, as had been done in the war in Lebanon, and that was a powerful tool for better coordination.

I would like to take this opportunity to express my thanks to all the courageous colleagues still working in Gaza, to those from UNWRA and ICRC, with whom we are working and who receive a lot of our funding, but also to many others.

*(Applause)*

I would also like to offer my sincere condolences to the families of those workers who have already been victims of this tragic episode.

The Commission has been spending quite a lot also on immediate humanitarian funds and we are ready to do more in the future.

What have these negotiations achieved? As the President-in-Office has said, they contained the major elements for the latest Security Council resolution, which then, a few days after the negotiations, was adopted with the abstention of the Americans. An immediate ceasefire, Egyptian guarantees to stop smuggling through the tunnels, opening of the crossings for humanitarian aid, including deployment of a force – possibly with international participation and/or the Palestinian Authority's security forces – policing the 15-km-long Philadelphia corridor between Gaza and Egypt.

We understand that the Palestinian Authority has accepted this proposal and now Israel and Hamas are studying it. We think it is very important that very soon something works. My latest information is that everybody is working very closely on it and maybe in a few days we will really have such a ceasefire. I hope that this will be the case.

On mid-term perspectives, sadly both Israel and Hamas have initially rejected this UN Security Council resolution, but from these daily contacts I hope that an agreement can be achieved quite soon. It is important to say and recognise that Egypt has been playing a leading role in direct contacts with Hamas, and also that in this regard President Sarkozy's visit to Syria, as well as the Turkish efforts, have been very important.

I also understand that the summit of the Arab countries could take place in Qatar at the end of this week. We aim, as this intense diplomatic activity shows, to support all relevant actors who have the leverage with Hamas to help deliver a sustainable solution as set out in UN Security Council Resolution 1860.

As soon as this ceasefire is agreed, we will have to think, probably in the form of a conference, how to formulate more concrete measures to alleviate the humanitarian needs of the Palestinian population in Gaza. However, we have to be clear in saying that whatever we do, it must not contribute to an endless cycle of destruction and reconstruction with no peace.

Under the right conditions I might come back to you and seek your help to contribute in a meaningful way to constructive efforts, as I have done in the past. You know that Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon is touring the region and hopefully he too can contribute to this final success that is absolutely necessary to getting this lasting ceasefire.

As a long-term perspective, we have to say that the current offensive clearly contributes to a weakening of trust between Palestinians and Israelis. Military operations can never bring a lasting peace; only a negotiated political agreement can do this. Dialogue should therefore resume both between Israelis and Palestinians and among Palestinians.

Once hostilities have stopped, I think it will be important to resume talks aimed at a comprehensive peace as soon as possible. Here we have to work with the new US administration to ensure it is able to support bilateral negotiations from the beginning. In this regard I welcome Secretary of State-designate Hillary Clinton's commitments at her Senate hearing yesterday. We will insist that parties negotiate on substance, and not just on process, and that the Anapolis process comes to a successful conclusion. This crisis shows that a successful conclusion is more urgent than ever.

The question of Palestinian reconciliation will also be central. It is unlikely that Hamas will be eradicated by this operation. Possibly it will come out debilitated militarily, but strengthened politically. Hamas's position that President Abbas's term will end on 9 January is another issue which is closely linked to the reform of the PLO and of Fatah. To achieve lasting peace it is clear that a strong Palestinian Authority needs to speak for all Palestinians and that it needs to be committed to a two-state solution through peaceful means.

The conflict in Gaza also, unfortunately, has potential negative repercussions in terms of regional support for the peace process. Israel's image with several pro-peace Arab regimes has been dented by the excessive suffering of the Gaza civilian population. Israel's leaders and the Israeli population should understand how negative this is for their aspirations as a people to live in peace. We are their friends and must tell them that we are doing this. Israel therefore cannot afford to waste any time in reaching peace.

This is my first short, or not so short, analysis, and we will have to try to work in order to get this durable ceasefire in order then to be able to go on and get peace negotiations under way with a new American administration.

**José Ignacio Salafranca Sánchez-Neyra**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.* – (ES) Mr President, 17 days of fighting in Gaza have quite simply left a heartbreaking situation. The worst part, because it is irreparable, is the loss of human life, including innocent civilians and children. However, we can also see destruction, chaos,

hatred and revenge; the Palestinian cause divided; the radicals being strengthened to the detriment of the moderates; and a peace process that has been completely derailed.

As pointed out by the President-in-Office, this is because all the battles in a war may be won, but the most important battle can still be lost, which is the battle for peace.

Mr President, rather than trying to apportion responsibility or blame to either or both sides, the most important issue – as the Commissioner has just said – is to bring about an immediate ceasefire, as called for by UN Resolution 1860. As the UN Secretary-General has just reminded us, both sides must comply with this resolution.

It is also vital to alleviate the terrible humanitarian and economic situation that exists in the Gaza Strip, which is governed – in inverted commas – by Hamas, an organisation that is on the EU's list of terrorist organisations. However, we must remember that not only is Hamas one of the causes of the conflict, it is also a consequence of terrible circumstances.

Mr President, my political group supports and wants to recognise the efforts made by all the political groups in this House to support the motion for a resolution that we will adopt tomorrow. We also want to pay homage to those Members who have attended the negotiations, particularly the representative of my group, Mr Brok, who had a very difficult task.

Mr President, my group supports the efforts of the Commission and the Council to bring about a ceasefire as soon as possible, in collaboration with the Arab countries – Egypt in particular – and the other members of the Quartet.

We are very hopeful about the statement made yesterday to the US Senate Committee on Foreign Relations by the Secretary of State-designate, Hillary Clinton, as regards offering pragmatic, dialogue-based and effective diplomacy.

Finally, Mr President, I come to the most important element: the European Union is a union of values with, in prime place, the value of peace. I believe that the European Union must make every effort and use all its political weight in the interests of this cause, without allowing our thoughts to become muddled or our hearts to become hardened to such a conflict.

*(Applause)*

**Martin Schulz**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, debates of the kind we are holding today are very difficult for us all. The reason they are difficult is that Israel is a friend, that many of us – and this is particularly true of me – feel bound to the country by ties of deep friendship. With friends it is all the more important to discuss controversial subjects openly.

So far, this conflict has claimed 1 000 lives in 17 days. It is a bloody conflict, and women and children are suffering particularly as a result of it. There is a UN resolution that forms a basis for declaring an immediate ceasefire and opening negotiations. It is crystal clear that the conflict can be resolved only on the basis of international law, and the fact that international law and international humanitarian law must be respected should be obvious to a democratic country based on the rule of law. It is actually a shame that we are having to discuss this. Therefore, all we can do to overcome the humanitarian crisis is to appeal for an immediate ceasefire. What we say in our resolution is not just anything, but something that is vital in order to put a direct and immediate end to the loss of life, the starvation and the misery.

It is quite clear that the State of Israel has a right to defend itself. It is entitled to defend itself against people whose aim it is to destroy the State. Yet a democratic country based on the rule of law must always ask itself whether the means it uses to do so are proportionate. In my estimation – and, I believe, that of most of my fellow Members in this House – the means are not proportionate.

*(Applause from the left)*

We must tell our friends in Israel, regardless of their political orientation, that we are aware that Hamas is no peace movement. We know that it is led by people who do not share our fundamental values, and of course each rocket that is fired at Israel is an attack against which the State is entitled to defend itself – but, in spite of everything, it is a mistake to refuse to engage in dialogue. If dialogue is the fundamental precondition for peaceful development, to refuse to engage in such dialogue is to perpetuate the armed conflict. A fundamental adjustment is needed, therefore.

There will have to be dialogue with Hamas. If Israel cannot engage in this directly – I can understand the point of view of Israeli politicians who say we cannot talk to Hamas, even though many of the country's citizens believe they should – if parliamentarians and members of the government say they do not want to, there are enough opportunities for international mediation. For example, there is the Quartet, and one of the possible tasks of the European Union within the Quartet is to enable such mediation on dialogue.

It is a fundamental error to believe that there can ultimately be a military solution to this Middle East conflict. I consider this a fundamental error regardless of which side believes it. There can be no solution via terrorist acts, and there can be no solution via conventional military action. The only solution there can be is dialogue between the parties to the conflict, with the help of international mediation.

What is needed is an immediate ceasefire. This must be guaranteed by means of the mechanism provided by the international community, if necessary with the help of a multinational force with participation from Arab and, in particular, Muslim States. This would be a way to now bring about a ceasefire and an improvement.

When I was a young lad and entering politics, I was told that one does not talk to terrorists. At that time, the main terrorist was Yasser Arafat. A couple of years later I saw pictures on television of this terrorist leader receiving the Nobel Peace Prize together with Israeli politicians. What was possible then can be possible also in future. Therefore, one question is whether progress is made to the extent that the available mechanisms produce the necessary dialogue. On behalf of my group, I should like to thank all those, including from other groups, who worked on our resolution. If this resolution, which is supported by all the groups in the House – I consider this a good sign – can help improve the atmosphere, we shall have made a contribution, however small, to ending loss of life that is intolerable to all.

*(Applause from the left)*

**Annemie Neyts-Uyttebroeck**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, the day will indeed come when we have to separate the good from the evil, but I think that, today, it is more urgent that we make our demands, which are: an immediate truce, with an end to rockets being launched into Israel and to Israeli operations in Gaza; the delivery of humanitarian aid; a lasting ceasefire, with an end to trafficking in weapons and munitions, with effective surveillance of the border between Egypt and Gaza, with the withdrawal of Israeli troops and with the reopening of the crossing points; and, lastly, the lifting of the embargo – and all of this, at the same time.

This will be a highly complex phase, one that will no doubt or most probably require the presence of an international force, and I believe that the Union should prepare itself to take part in this. I should like to make two additional points.

In order to succeed, the European Union will have to speak and act clearly and not in a disorganised manner. It is very useful to have good intentions, but it is more important to be effective. The United States will also have to make a commitment, as will the Arab League and its member countries.

Lastly I would add that, in order to offer a real alternative to the situation in Gaza, Israel will have to significantly improve the situation in the West Bank: 634 checkpoints, the splitting in two of the road network, 8-metre-high walls, as well as the countless acts of humiliation inflicted on the Palestinians, do not offer an appealing enough alternative to the inhabitants of Gaza to make them turn their backs on Hamas.

To conclude, I would say that the day will inevitably come when everyone will have to speak to everyone else.

*(Applause)*

**Cristiana Muscardini**, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, like everyone, we are all, obviously, involved in and upset by this situation, but I believe that it is a duty, at least for me, to reject any kind of hypocrisy.

The problem has very remote roots: the legitimate and sacrosanct right of the Palestinians to have a free state is coupled with the equally sacrosanct right of Israel to be recognised, and we know that Israel has been removed from the map in many countries. We know that France, Italy, Spain and Germany would certainly not have stood for being removed from the map; they would not have agreed to be considered non-existent. We know that it was not Israel that started this umpteenth war and that terrorism is still one of the main problems.

I therefore believe, Mr President, that, setting aside hypocrisy, we now have a duty to start thinking in different ways. We cannot believe that dialogue with terrorists is justified by the fact that so many civilians have died, because this would create an excuse for any terrorist in the future to use violence, force and death in order to obtain political legitimacy.

I believe that we, as the European Union, should finally start behaving more consistently and find the ability to tackle the problem of economic relations with countries that do not recognise Israel, and to provide humanitarian corridors that enable civilians, both Palestinian and Israeli, to reach a place of safety. In this case it is the Palestinians that are suffering more, having said that, Mr President, I believe that it would also be right to review the position on aid that has been given and which is being given now, but over the use of which we have no control.

**Daniel Cohn-Bendit**, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (FR) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, the situation is certainly enough to make one weep. The hope for peace and security for those concerned vanished in the smoke of Gaza and under the bodies of the dead, and of the children, and of the women, and of the men, and of the wounded. We are further now from a hope of security than we ever have been. All those who think that this war is, according to the logic of the Israeli argument, a war justified by the fact that there was a rocket attack on Israel, and that the Palestinians should be taught a lesson, have not understood a thing. They have not understood a thing, for teaching someone a lesson is a dismal way of educating them and one that has never worked. Since the time of Clausewitz we have known that he who starts a war must know how to finish it, must know what the aim is. Well, the aim of this war is more security for Israel. We can say today that the aim of this war will never be achieved by this war and the way in which it is being waged. The more civilian deaths, the more Palestinian deaths, the less security in the region! That there is the drama, the tragedy that is currently taking place in that region. And that is why we have to be very clear here. Mr Schulz is right: Israel needs to be protected from itself! Israel needs to be saved from the temptation of a solution that involves war and armed force. The Palestinians need to be protected from Hamas. Palestinian civilians need to be protected from Hamas. That is our task. It is not easy, but we must be clear. I call on the Council to stop thinking in terms of upgrading, increasing, improving relations with Israel while the situation remains as it is. This is a poor solution; this is not the right solution!

(Applause)

I call on all those who rightly advocate a dialogue, a debate with Hamas, not to be naïve, to bear in mind the fact that a debate must be held with Hamas in order to improve the situation in Gaza, since they hold the power, but, at the same time, to realise that Hamas's strategy requires there to be casualties. Israel has fallen into Hamas's trap: the more deaths there are in Gaza, the better it is for Hamas. That is one of the truths that Hamas must also be told. We refuse to accept this suicidal strategy of Hamas's that seeks to create victims and martyrs in order to launch acts of aggression against Israel. Hamas must be told this, too.

To conclude, I am going to tell you something: the only ones who can resolve the Hamas problem are the Palestinians. As long as Israel continues to occupy the West Bank, as long as Israel fails to offer a positive solution to the Palestinians of the West Bank, more and more Palestinians will turn to Hamas. If we give the Palestinians in the West Bank a hope of life, they will rise up against Hamas and they will rid us of Hamas. Free the Palestinians from the Israeli occupation of the West Bank and the Palestinians will free themselves from Hamas.

(Applause)

**Luisa Morgantini**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Rahed is 50 years old; he has lost his home, his three children, his wife and two sisters-in-law. Rahed is in despair, and is in the centre that we visited. He said, in deep distress, 'Hamas will say that it has won when this attack is finished, and Israel will say that it has won, but in reality it is we civilians who are dead.' I would like to say another thing: in reality, with the dead bodies of women and children that we saw, and with over 4 000 wounded in the hospital without any treatment, what is dying there is justice; what is dying is the dream of a Europe that wants human rights to be universal, and that is a tragedy!

We are ineffectual. Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, you know that I have great respect for you, and I know that you are taking action and working together with others to achieve much. I believe that we must understand, clearly and unambiguously, that this military war, this militarism on the part of Israel, is leading not to Israel's salvation, but to its end, including its moral end. This is what David Grossmann says, moreover, when he commemorates Mr Rabin, killed by a fundamentalist Jew, not a fundamentalist Islamist, because he wanted to achieve peace. Bring in a cease-fire! Bring in a cease-fire! That is what a Norwegian doctor said to me, who

is operating every day and working round the clock (we are sending doctors to Gaza). A cease-fire is what we want!

The Security Council must start to turn its words into concrete actions. We agree with diplomacy, but we must use not only diplomacy, we must also use the instruments that we have. One instrument that we have in relation to Israel is in fact the upgrade, and I am pleased to hear that today, for example, the European Commission's representative in Tel Aviv has said that now is not the time to think about upgrading. We should take a break from that, because what we must do is to bring about a cease-fire. This is extremely important. I think it is important, and that it is a strong message.

You were speaking about protection and international protection. I believe that it is a mistake to think only about Gaza and Rafah. Protection for the civilian population comes from the north, it comes from the Israeli attacks that come from Herez. Border control is control of the main borders, Rafah and Herez, because for a long time, since 1992, since the Oslo agreement, as you very well know, Palestinians have not been able to exit through Herez, and not even sick people get out through there.

We must therefore think not only in terms of the tunnels, and the weapons with which Hamas can arm itself, but in terms of absolutely all the prohibitions that exist for the Palestinians. We need a cease-fire and an opening-up not only of humanitarian corridors, but an opening up of all the crossing points, because if the people do not have food to eat, if the people do not have trade, what can be done? Then that will be truly serious pressure for Hamas to stop existing and stop carrying out actions that harm the Israeli population. Israel, however, should know that it is the West Bank which is militarily occupied and it should truly make peace, and not build settlements.

(Applause)

**President.** – Many thanks, Mrs Morgantini. I should like to express my respect to you and the other MEPs who took the initiative to travel to the Gaza Strip in recent days.

**Bastiaan Belder**, on behalf of the IND/DEM Group. – (NL) Mr President, Palestine is Islamic territory, inalienably so. Since its creation in 1987, the Islamic movement Hamas has stuck firmly to this basic principle. In this, it receives full backing from the Islamic Republic of Iran. This ideological point of view leaves absolutely no room for the Jewish state of Israel in the Middle East, and the baneful effects of this Muslim totalitarianism are making themselves cruelly felt in the Gaza Strip.

Typical of Hamas's philosophy is the military use of mosques in Gaza, with all the tragic effects that this entails. I would in this respect refer you to the lucid report in last Monday's *Frankfurter Allgemeine*. If Europe really values the continued existence of the Jewish state of Israel, a confrontation between Hamas and its ally Hezbollah in Iran is on the cards. Are we prepared to brace ourselves for this grim, albeit realistic, prospect? After all, a cease-fire or temporary armistice is to Hamas and company a mere pause for breath in the Jihad against Israel.

**Luca Romagnoli (NI).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I must say that I believe that the vast majority of this House shares the wishes for peace and the concerns that have so far been expressed by many of us here. I also believe that what was said by the Council can be endorsed, and I would argue that the Commission has so far pursued a course that may be beneficial to dialogue: the opening up of the humanitarian corridors and the bilateral cease-fire might herald a subsequent commitment to organise an international safety zone.

Here perhaps Mrs Morgantini is right, in asking that this zone should relate not just to Gaza, but should extend to all Palestinian territories. Basically, I have the impression that the wishes and the diplomatic activity of Mrs Ferrero-Waldner, to some extent at least, can be seen as adopting the same approach as that which the Pope sought to adopt on this issue. I humbly wish to share the same kind of approach: after all these years, we must still seek a solution for two peoples and two states – that is a point which we must not forget – and we must seek, finally, to affirm international law. There is not and never will be a military solution – Mr Schultz said that too, and every now and then I must refer even to him – and I must say that undoubtedly there will never be a military solution that resolves the problem in the Holy Land. On this point, I believe that the European Union has the tools to support whatever diplomatic effort may be of use here.

**President.** – I am sure Mr Schulz will be pleased to hear you mention his name in connection with the Holy Father!

**Elmar Brok (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr President, Commissioner, President-in-Office of the Council, I should like to describe my starting point. Hamas opposes a two-state solution, rejects the right of existence of the State

of Israel, has taken power by means of a brutal coup against its own people, fires rockets at civilians, and uses civilians, schools and mosques as human shields. How, when trying to protect one's own civilians, is it possible to react proportionately if the other side is using its own civilians as human shields? Therefore, the concepts of numerical comparison and proportionality are not applicable in a situation such as this. In a war situation there is no proportionality – each war and each casualty is one too many, and it is not possible to balance figures for each side against the other. This seems to me to be the sensible starting point. Therefore, we should not be engaging in the kind of one-sided finger-pointing we have seen, but instead attempting to bring about a ceasefire and to provide help in this regard.

I believe that President-in-Office Schwarzenberg and his delegation, and also Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner, with the help of other national delegations, have done more in this regard than any other party, for which I wish to thank them sincerely – I have seen no sign of the United States, hardly any sign of the UN and no sign of the other members of the Quartet. We must ensure that this ceasefire has two components: there must be an end to the Israeli attack, and Hamas must be prevented from getting its hands on new rockets from Korea and Iran that would put Tel Aviv within range. For this reason, it must be ensured not only that the firing stops but also, by means of international agreements including the Quartet and the Arab League, with Egypt in the key role, that the 15 km border is patrolled to the extent that no more shots can cross into Gaza. At the same time, the Israeli attack must be stopped.

There is one final comment I should like to make. This is just a small first step. If Israel wishes to have moderate Palestinians to deal with in future – which would mean a two-state solution – then, once this is all over, care must be taken at long last that the moderate Palestinians supporting President Abbas have accomplishments to show to their own population, which means an end to the resettlement policy and to several other things. After all, if the moderates have no successful achievements to show to their people, the radicals will triumph. This must be the starting point of a new Israeli policy.

**Pasqualina Napoletano (PSE).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, in the face of this vast tragedy our words are liable to be inadequate. An army that kills hundreds of civilians, women and children, places itself at the same level as the terrorism that it is claiming to combat. On the other hand, anyone who knows Gaza, even if only through having seen it on the map, knows that no military operation could be conceived without admitting the likelihood of a massacre of civilians.

Can Israel today say that it is safer, after having given rise to so much hatred and despair? If not with Hamas, directly or indirectly, then with whom must a way out of the blind violence be sought? Our resolution reinforces the call for a cease-fire already expressed by the United Nations Security Council. We urge the parties to abide by it and we call upon Europe to take action to render it possible.

The risk is that this massacre, far from vanquishing Hamas, Mr Brok, will weaken the Palestinian Authority itself even further, as well as those in the Palestinian world who have staked everything on negotiations with Israel. We should ask ourselves, honestly, what have they actually gained so far? Nothing. That is the answer that we must give if we truly wish to start rooting out the hatred and the violence.

**Marielle De Sarnez (ALDE).** – (FR) Mr President, we are all partly responsible for what is happening today in the Middle East. We, in Europe, and we, in the international community, have allowed the situation to get worse; we did nothing when Israel's security was under threat, and we did nothing when the blockade was making life in Gaza absolutely impossible.

Today is the 19th day of war; 995 people have been killed, including 292 children, and there are thousands of wounded, some of whom are still waiting to be evacuated. There are tens of thousands of refugees who no longer have a home and do not know where to go. The humanitarian situation is becoming worse and worse: 700 000 inhabitants of Gaza no longer have electricity, one-third of them no longer have water or gas, and it will soon be three weeks since this situation first began, three weeks in which these people have lived or, rather, have done their best to survive. There is too much suffering, too much hardship, and this must end, this must stop now!

Our responsibility to ourselves, as Europeans, is not to be obliging towards anyone. Our responsibility to ourselves, as Europeans, is to put pressure on the two parties so that they finally agree to negotiate. It is a matter of days, perhaps even hours, before the point of no return is reached with a land offensive, particularly in Gaza town. Israel must be guaranteed its security, and the people of Gaza must have a guarantee that they will be able to live in peace in the future. The borders must be controlled, and the blockade must be lifted. All of us here know that, in order to obtain this agreement, it will perhaps be necessary for Europe, the United

States and the Arab states – which are meeting the day after tomorrow – to all speak with one and the same voice.

I should like to express my firm conviction before I conclude. It is not the war that must be won today, but peace.

(Applause)

**Roberta Angelilli (UEN).** – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I truly welcome the comments by the Commissioner and Mr Pöttering, in denouncing in no uncertain terms the grave responsibility that Hamas bears for having put an end to the truce, but equally clearly judging the Israeli reaction to be totally disproportionate. Beyond the words, however, the crisis remains, and there are still thousands of people – the civilian population and children – who are in desperate need of humanitarian aid.

In all conscience, and without hypocrisy, perhaps we should ask ourselves some questions. While our children were celebrating Christmas, how many children died in Gaza? Two or three hundred; and how many Israeli civilians? Could the international community have done more? In my opinion, the answer is yes. It ought to have done more. We should feel the full weight of our responsibilities. It is not enough to broadcast views on Hamas, on Israel, on the initial responsibility, or on who is more to blame. Unfortunately, above and beyond the emergency, Europe remains inadequate. In my view this is a serious inadequacy: an incapacity to build a real, strategic and lasting peace policy.

Today, clearly, we must issue a strong demand for a cease-fire, but this is not enough. We must set out strict conditions to accompany the peace and development process in the Middle East. To finish, I would also like to refer to the words of the Pope, who said that we need to give specific answers to the general aspirations of many in those lands to live in peace, security and dignity, as Mrs Morgantini also pointed out.

Mr President, I really am finishing. Violence, hatred and distrust are forms of poverty – perhaps the most terrible to combat.

**Hélène Flautre (Verts/ALE).** – (FR) Mr President, in Gaza, we have seen war and we have seen death, but we have also seen people, living people, people who have the right to live and whom we have a duty to protect. Protecting the civilian population – this is the real emergency. Nothing can excuse the fact that not everything has been done to protect this population, and I would ask you, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, do you feel, today, that you have done everything you can to ensure that the Israeli authorities call an immediate halt to this indiscriminate and disproportionate military operation? The answer is most certainly 'No'.

When rumours of the operation were circulating in the embassies the Council, against Parliament's wishes, reaffirmed its determination to step up its relations. This was a tragic mistake! When NGOs call on the Security Council to have the International Criminal Court investigate alleged war crimes, the Council is unable to invoke the 'human rights' clause of its agreement with Israel. I am sick of hearing that we cannot do better, that we have done all we can. It is in fact the deadlock of your essentially humanitarian policy to alleviate the damage caused by the military occupation and the war that is the biggest failure. How far will we have to go in terms of violations of international law before we have the 'human rights' clause applied? If we are not capable, today, of asking ourselves questions about the scope of effective mechanisms for applying pressure and for implementing, then I do not really know what kind of situation will justify our finally taking action. I tell you straight: if the business-as-usual approach continues and remains an ongoing part of our relations with Israel, with the 1 000 deaths in Gaza, you will bury Article 11 of the Treaty, you will bury the Union's 'human rights' policy and you will bury the European project!

(Applause)

**Kyriacos Triantaphyllides (GUE/NGL).** - Mr President, returning from the Gaza Strip after seeing the massacre – predominantly of civilians – I feel the urge to express my wholehearted solidarity with the Palestinian people. For 17 days, they have been facing the enormous Israeli war machine that is flagrantly violating international law. I also express support for the peace forces in Israel calling for an end to this war.

After a long closure and siege that converted Gaza into the largest open prison in the world, the building of the shameful wall around the West Bank, the continuous expansion of the settlements, and the effective division of the Palestinian land, the occupying forces have moved to the fiercest military operation. In this, the rocket attacks against southern Israel – and I stress that I am against any attack from whichever side on

civilians – served as the pretext. The ending of the ceasefire against the background of the power games in view of the Israeli elections is an insult to a whole nation.

The UN Security Council has adopted a resolution. Israel is a state, not an organisation; it is a member of the United Nations. It has a responsibility towards the international community, and has to comply with this and all other resolutions adopted by the United Nations. There should be respect for international law. No impunity should be permitted any longer. There should be a full international investigation.

The international community demands an immediate ceasefire, the immediate withdrawal of the military forces, access to humanitarian aid, and freedom of movement for the population. Let UNWRA carry out its mission.

The EU has taken steps, but only at a humanitarian level. It has to show decisiveness at the political level. Use the clauses in the association agreements. Stop the upgrading of relations with Israel. Stop arms exports to Israel.

There can only be a political solution to this conflict. There should be a full return to international law, which means ending the 42-year-long occupation of Palestine, and establishing a sovereign and viable Palestinian state, thus building a peaceful future for both Palestinian and Israeli children. To save future generations, we need to stop the war now.

**Patrick Louis (IND/DEM).** – (FR) Mr President, several thousand years ago, David confronted Goliath in order to find out whether the land was destined for the Moabites, the Philistines or the Hebrews.

Currently the same drama is continuing on this land, the source of one of the three pillars of our civilisation. Today it is urgent, right, legitimate and necessary to ensure the security and recognition of the State of Israel. To do so, a single solution is required, and that is to guarantee the birth of a truly sovereign Palestinian State. Here, as elsewhere, multiculturalism has its limits. Where there are two peoples, there must be two States.

If the European Union's aid is indeed effective, then it must be focused on one objective: that of ensuring the growth of this Palestinian constitutional state where the rule of law protects the weak and helps the strong. There is a sense of urgency, since, on this land, the extremists on all sides are powerful and in the wrong, while the children are moderate and victims.

The solution for transcending the demands of 'an eye for an eye' is neither moral, nor military, but political. So, it is time to get down to work!

**Jim Allister (NI).** - Mr President, I abhor terrorism. I repudiate the propaganda of terrorism. Maybe coming from Northern Ireland heightens my awareness, so when I hear Hamas bleat because of necessary retaliatory action against its years of indiscriminate raining of rockets upon innocent citizens in Israel, then I am unimpressed because I know that Hamas, like the IRA in my country, are masters of the twin arts of terrorism and propaganda.

The situation is demonstrably clear. Israel accepts a two-state solution. Hamas cannot even abide the right of Israel to exist and thus unleashes endless relentless terrorist attacks upon its territory. And when, after much forbearance, Israel hits back, they cry victim. Sorry: they are the perpetrators and if they want peace the answer lies in their own hands. Stop shelling Israel.

**Rodi Kratsa-Tsagaropoulou (PPE-DE).** - (EL) Mr President, we all realise that the situation in Gaza is tragic. It is bordering on a humanitarian disaster and it requires immediate action. I would like to congratulate the European Commission on having stepped up its efforts, the Presidency on its initiatives and on coordinating national action being taken in this sector, and Egypt on the important and sensitive role which it is playing.

There is now an urgent need for a ceasefire and for a cessation of hostilities on both sides, for corridors from Israeli territory and Egypt to address humanitarian needs and for border controls to stop the illegal movement of weapons and people. As the Commissioner said, the signs for a truce plan are encouraging and I hope that it will be accepted immediately and will be respected in practice.

So what are our next moves? Both the Commissioner and the President-in-Office of the Council have already said that we need to support our objectives for viable peace and the creation of a Palestinian state which will live in peace and respect next to Israel. They are not new. We have announced them and we have supported them without result. The vicious circle of violence continues with negative consequences not only for the

people of Israel and the Palestinians, but for all peoples in the area and for the security of the international community.

Now we need to take stock of our actions, our political choices and our practices and take more courageous and different steps. There is an urgent need for us to engage at bilateral level with Israel in an honest, in-depth dialogue and self-criticism within the framework of our friendly relations and partnership and for us to identify the mistakes made in promoting mutual trust between these two peoples. We also need to strengthen this sort of dialogue with all Palestinians, to make them understand the importance of peace, cohesion, human life and unity between them.

**Hannes Swoboda (PSE).** – (DE) Mr President, after Prime Minister Topolánek made some joking remarks today, I can say that, as an Austrian MEP, I am pleased that both the Commission and the Czech Council Presidency are represented by Austrians. I wish you a very warm welcome! President-in-Office, I realise of course that your loyalties lie with the Czech Republic.

Ladies and gentlemen, when, shortly before Israel's unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip, I travelled to the country as part of a delegation with Mr Schulz, as Chairman of the delegation, the Deputy Prime Minister at the time said, 'do not interfere, this will work well'. Others – such as former Minister for Foreign Affairs Josip Elin – said, 'this will lead to chaos' – and he was and remains right. Unilateral disengagement without negotiations, without having a negotiating partner, does not make sense.

However, neither was it very well-advised of us to decide against entering into dialogue with even moderate representatives of Hamas – who may not even have belonged to Hamas, but rather have been nominated by it in the joint government. By taking this position, we helped to destroy this joint government. I know that there were some who wanted to hold talks but were not allowed to – that, too, was a mistake. We need dialogue!

I do not like Hamas, firstly because it is a terrorist organisation and secondly because of its fundamentalist views, but this is not a matter of liking or disliking; it is a matter of solutions. Therefore, we must return to dialogue and talks, as many of our fellow Members have already said today. Also, the people in Gaza must be given the chance to live half-decent lives. Why are they voting for Hamas? The answer is that they see them as the only chance, the last chance, of even surviving – and this must be changed. We must give these people an economic basis for survival, too; we must lift the boycott and end their isolation. That is the only real requirement.

Mr Brok, whom I hold in very high regard, said that the principle of proportionality was not applicable – but that is not true. The principle of proportionality applies to private as well as international law. Anyone violating it also violates international law – and that is something this House really cannot accept.

(Applause)

**Chris Davies (ALDE).** – Mr President, a friend who knows I was in Gaza just three days ago challenges me. 'Have you never seen pictures of five-year-old Jewish children facing Nazi rifles with their arms above their heads?' she writes. 'They break your heart.' And her words highlight why we make allowances for Israel that we would not make for any other country.

They do not, however, explain why a people that suffered so much in the 20th century should now inflict so much suffering on another people in this one. Israel has turned Gaza into hell: the ground is shaking with explosions, even during a ceasefire; there are donkey carts on the street and F-16s in the sky, 21st-century killing machines just dropping bombs; 300 children are dead already, hundreds more torn apart limb by limb.

This is not a proportionate response of a civilised power. It is evil. It is evil. Yes, the Hamas rockets must stop. I have said so to Hamas representatives in Gaza myself before now, but let us have no more sanctimonious talk from Israeli officials about the need to fight terrorism, because Palestinians being bombed could name terrorists and they would name Olmert, Livni and Barak.

We have some responsibility for Israel's actions. On no occasion in the past, on no occasion I can think of, has the European Union ever backed up its criticism of the treatment of Palestinians by the Israelis with any kind of action. We give a green light to Israel to proceed as it would wish and we have compounded that failure by ignoring the lessons of history. You cannot make peace without talking to your enemies, yet we refuse to talk to the elected representatives of the Palestinian people.

Now we are completing negotiations with Israel on an enhanced cooperation agreement. We do not plan to condemn Israel: we intend to reward it. Those who want peace in the Middle East, those who want to see justice for both sides, must recognise that it is time to think again.

**Seán Ó Neachtain (UEN).** – (GA) Mr President, the war in Gaza is frightening and scandalous. Everyone knows that a military solution will not work in the Middle East. A political resolution is the only way to re-establish peace and reconciliation in the area. In order to do this, the violence must be ended immediately.

I support the creation of an independent, sustainable Palestinian state, but a reasonably good economy and a proper political plan must be put in place. It should be our aim to ensure that those two states exist in the region and have respect for one another.

Israel is entitled to protect itself, but it has gone too far with these attacks. The attacks are immoral, and the international community cannot accept them.

The peace process in the Middle East must be put in place immediately. I hope that America's newly elected president, Barack Obama, will be working on this. We wish him every success with this important duty and with the challenge ahead of him.

**David Hammerstein (Verts/ALE).** – (ES) Mr President, I too was in Gaza a few days ago, and it was a very intense experience. We also went to Egypt. I believe that we are at the end of an era: the Bush era, and that the last throes of President Bush are proving particularly bloody and painful.

We are at a turning point when we can adopt a different policy towards the Middle East, in which I want the European Union to take the lead. Mr Obama is also taking this line as he says that he will talk to Iran. Yes, Mr Obama is going to talk to Iran and we must talk to everyone, including Hamas, in the Middle East.

This new policy in the Middle East must be a policy of cooperation and, at the very least, it must abide by our values and by international law. The hundreds of children whom we saw in Gaza, who clung onto our arms and who looked at us with eyes full of hope deserve an answer, just like the children of Israel.

This requires concrete action; it requires action on the ground, to give hope to the moderates. The most regrettable aspect is that Prime Minister Fayad, President Abbas, President Mubarak and King Abdullah are currently being accused of treachery in the streets of the Arab world. When I stopped my taxi in the Sinai desert to have a coffee, we only saw Khaled Meshal on the huge screens.

That is the result, the collateral damage of this attack on Gaza. It will not bring peace to Israel or the security that we want, and even less so will it bring anything good for us. If we do not stop this conflict, it will bring hatred to Europe's own streets.

**Miguel Portas (GUE/NGL).** – (PT) One thousand is the number of the day, one thousand deaths to teach a black lesson. Excuse my frankness: how many more lives will it cost to elect Tzipi Livni and Ehud Barak in the February election?

We are here today to demand a cease-fire and an end to the slaughter of civilians. However, the resolution also raises issues about our own liability. It reminds us that the Council decided to *upgrade* diplomatic relations with Israel, against the opinion of this Parliament. This was complicity by anticipation. Today I hear: 'It is necessary to talk to Hamas'. We would have saved years if we had respected the elections in Palestine.

The role of Europe is not to support the politics and the destruction imposed by the stronger side. It is to listen to the clamour that is filling the streets and squares of our cities.

We demand a cease-fire now, but we must realise that peace depends on an end to the occupation. This word has fallen into disuse, but it has to come off the list of banned words where it was put by power politics.

**Kathy Sinnott (IND/DEM).** – Mr President, what is happening in Gaza is heartbreaking. That the devastation is perpetuated by a supposedly western nation is unfathomable. I agree 100% that Israelis have a right to live without the threat of rocket attacks. But what is being done in Gaza is not justice: it is slaughter. There is no excuse; there is no possible justification.

The most shameful thing for us in the EU is that it is being carried out by one of our preferred trading partners. In 2007 the value of EU-Israel trade was EUR 25.7 billion. Given the amount of money we contribute to Israel's economy, we carry a grave responsibility when that money contributes to the death of civilians and children. If we do not act, the blood of those in Gaza will equally stain our hands.

I call on this Parliament and all EU bodies to impose trade sanctions on Israel immediately and to keep them in place until a meaningful ceasefire is agreed. If we do any less than our utmost to stop this killing, we become accessories to the slaughter.

**Tokia Saïfi (PPE-DE).** – (FR) Mr President, once again, weapons are doing the talking in the Middle East. Once again, the main victims are women and children, of whom thousands have been wounded and hundreds killed. Once again, history is repeating itself, in all its horror, on Europe's doorstep. However, we note that, in spite of its initiatives, Europe is not making an effective contribution in this major conflict, even though it is taking place in its immediate area of influence. An overwhelming majority of the public are finding this difficult to understand, and they are increasingly refusing to accept such powerlessness.

Commissioner, we must vigorously and authoritatively take up the leadership in order to bring about peace. The Union for the Mediterranean must play a major role, as must the Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly. In line with this, the European Parliament must support the Franco-Egyptian peace plan in favour of an immediate ceasefire, the securing of the borders between Israel and the Gaza Strip, the re-opening of the crossing points and, above all, the lifting of the blockade of Gaza.

We must also call for the immediate application of the UN resolution. Once this first stage is over, we must go further by proposing the implementation of a military force, not a multinational one but a Euro-Mediterranean one. This gesture would be the founding act of a confirmed political will to achieve a 'European peace', something for which all the peoples of the Mediterranean have been waiting for so long.

I should also like today to draw your attention to a new situation. With the Middle East conflict, we are little by little entering very dangerous territory, that of the clash of civilisations. Indeed, ever since the start of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, there has always been a groundswell of Arab public opinion. Today, it is Muslim public opinion, which extends far beyond the geography of the Arab states. This suggests a radical change in the nature of the conflict. Europe has an historic responsibility, that of urgently strengthening the dialogue between civilisations.

**Véronique De Keyser (PSE).** – (FR) Mr President, I have taken the floor so many times in this House to say that we should seize any opportunity of peace, however slight, and that, in spite of everything, we should talk to Hamas, because it won the elections, that I no longer wish to return to these subjects.

I am overcome with sadness and anger, and while I do not wish today to let myself become overwhelmed with emotion in the face of this massacre, in the face of the war propaganda that I hear around me, in the face of the confusion, in the face also of the wave of hatred and anti-Semitism that is beginning to sweep through our streets, I have but a few words to say: Europe must go back to basics, and for me, these are obvious facts, but sometimes it is good to point them out.

Firstly, a Palestinian's life is equal to an Israeli's life, but not only his life, his future and his freedom, also. Secondly, international law must be respected, and international law of course means an immediate ceasefire. There are all the UN resolutions and the Geneva conventions as well, however. The fact is, this region, today, has become a lawless region where everything is seemingly permitted and where a population is being held hostage. Thirdly, justice will have to be served for all these crimes, no matter what they are or where they are committed. There will never be security without peace, or peace without justice. Transitional justice does exist, it is made for that, and, if it is not applied, the hate will continue to spread. Over the last few days we have built up a capacity for hate that will prove more dangerous than the bombs. Europe must enforce the application of the conditions of its partnership agreements, including paragraph 2 of its association agreements on respect for human rights. This is an obligation of these treaties from which it cannot be exempt. Lastly, Israel is not a special case. It has responsibilities as a State and it cannot be put on an equal footing with Hamas. When it comes to international law, there is no such thing as a 'get-out-of-jail-free' card.

On Sunday we left behind us in Gaza a population that was caught in a trap, imprisoned in a ghetto below the bombs, and hundreds of thousands of children whose futures are today in our hands, and we came out of Gaza simply because we are Europeans. The only Palestinians leaving Rafah are those who go first in ambulances, because they are dead or because they are wounded.

Europe will no longer be Europe, and no citizen will recognise himself as European if we forget these basics.

(Applause)

**Frédérique Ries (ALDE).** – (FR) Mr President, Commissioner, I should like to start by echoing the words of Mr Cohn-Bendit. It is despair that grips us today; this war is a tragedy. The images of suffering and of death

that have flashed across our screens non-stop for three weeks now are unbearable, as are, I hasten to add, all the images of war, all the conflicts, including those that are spoken of much less, if at all, such as Congo, Darfur, Zimbabwe and, before that, Chechnya, the horrors of which took place amid a deafening media and, I would stress, political, silence.

I have already stressed on several occasions in this House the fact that the indignation of some of my fellow Members varies according to circumstances. However, as Mrs Morgantini has also often pointed out, there are no accounts to be kept when it comes to people dying; there is no hierarchy in suffering; every casualty, be it a man, woman or child, from whichever side, is one victim too many.

So, what should we do now to ensure that our debate today is not what it often is – a somewhat pointless, futile confrontation? Continuing to hurl abuse at each other about the historic responsibilities of the different parties seems to me to be a perfect example of such futility.

I have taken the floor late in this debate, so the arguments have been heard. Questions can certainly be asked about the scale of the Israeli crisis and of the Israeli counterattack, but not, under any circumstances, about Israel's right to security. Which of our western governments would agree to watch thousands of missiles fall on its citizens without reacting? The question answers itself.

Above and beyond the call for an essential negotiated ceasefire, for a guarantee, of course, of the delivery of humanitarian aid, and for an end to the supply of weapons via the tunnels, the real issue, today, is necessarily aimed at the future. The fundamentals of peace are well-known: they have already been identified at Taba, Camp David and Annapolis. Mrs Ferrero-Waldner has made this point. Most, though not all, of course, of the elements are on the table, and this involves sacrifices being made on both sides. And, when I talk of sacrifice, I agree with Mr Schulz, who is not in the Chamber at present. It is not a question of knowing whether a dialogue will be held with Hamas, but of knowing how it will be held, and under what conditions.

Most of my fellow Members have exceeded their speaking time by 50 seconds, so allow me to finish, Mr President.

The answer is that given by Yasser Arafat, in May 1989, when he declared his freedom-destroying and deadly charter null and void. Those words, moreover, have become part of the Palestinian vocabulary. Inter-Palestinian reconciliation, above all, comes at this price, and our role as the European Union is to get the protagonists in Palestine and Israel, but also their Arab neighbours, Egypt and Jordan, to become partners of a lasting peace agreement.

*(Applause)*

**Feleknas Uca (GUE/NGL).** – (DE) Mr President, on Sunday, 11 January, we visited the border city of Rafah in the Gaza Strip, which is completely sealed off. This means that the civilian population has no chance of escaping the daily bombardments by the Israeli army. If you have not seen it with your own eyes you cannot imagine how much the people of Gaza are suffering and how urgent it is to reach a peaceful, definitive solution to the conflict. We were all deeply affected on a personal level by the immensity of the suffering of the Palestinian people, and also of the devastation.

Therefore, I wish to reiterate, in the strongest terms, that the Israeli bombings must be brought to an immediate halt, as must Hamas' rocket fire into Israel, and the smuggling of arms into the Gaza Strip from Egypt must also be stopped. In addition, the borders must be opened immediately to allow into the area the aid deliveries that are ready and waiting to supply the civilian population. We also saw doctors at the border ready to travel into the area to provide help, but being unable to as the border was closed. Therefore, I would appeal once again for the borders to be opened to allow the assistance to be provided.

**Vladimír Železný (IND/DEM).** – (CS) Mr President, who would not experience anguish on seeing children killed by a missile? This is a terrible feeling, but it should not warrant hypocrisy. Which European countries would show as much restraint as Israel and, for years, put up with an attack of more than 7 000 missiles, at each moment threatening the lives of more than one million civilians?

However, the inhabitants of Gaza are not just innocent victims. They enthusiastically, knowingly, freely and democratically elected Hamas and its charter. When they spoke of liberation, they did not mean the liberation of Gaza, which is already free, but the liberation of Tel Aviv and Haifa from the Jews and the destruction of the State of Israel. Anyone who elects criminals must logically share their fate. Especially when these criminals hide behind the skirts of women and children as they would hide behind hostages, when they fire missiles from schools and transform mosques into huge weapons depots. I remember the bombing of Dresden in

1944, when British aircraft razed the city to the ground and killed 92 000 civilians, mostly women and children. There was no hypocritical umbrage. The Germans freely elected Hitler and shared in his fate. The Gazans also knew who they were electing and why.

By the same token, a significant portion of the funds flowing from the EU into Gaza ended up in the hands of Hamas. Perhaps this was so that Gazans, with full bellies and well provided for by the EU, could devote all of their attention to excavating tunnels for smuggling in increasingly lethal weapons to be used against Israeli civilians. Proportional indeed!

**Gunnar Hökmark (PPE-DE).** - (SV) Mr President, there are two important things that characterise the debate here today. The first is that an overwhelming majority of this Parliament wants to bring about a quick ceasefire. The second is that there is overwhelming support for the requirement for all parties involved to accept the state of Israel's right to exist within peaceful borders. This is the starting point that is important for the European Union. It is important, because it is a tragedy that we are witnessing in Gaza. Every life that is lost is a tragedy, whichever side of the border they are on. Let us not think that this tragedy would be any less if those who deliberately kill civilians succeed in reaching even further in amongst civilians by means of rocket fire.

It is also a tragedy because it creates obstacles to the realisation of a Palestinian state and thus a peaceful solution. It is a tragedy that is also befalling the international community, because what is happening now has not happened overnight, but has been built up through rearmament, through the smuggling of weapons and through rocket fire over a long period.

What is important for us to see is that this is not a tragedy that is built on conflict between Jews and Palestinians. I strongly object to anyone trying to demonise a nation. When I heard Mr Davies trying to lay the blame on a nation, I heard a tone that I do not think should be heard in this Parliament. It is not a conflict between Palestinians and Jews, it is not a conflict between Israel and the Palestinian authority, it is a conflict between extremists and moderate forces in the region. Let us support the moderate forces by making it clear to everyone who is pursuing hatred and wants to eliminate the state of Israel that they will not succeed. If Europe sends out this message, we will also strengthen the moderate forces and lay a better foundation for peace.

**Marek Siwiec (PSE).** - (PL) Mr President, I would like to address those who have detonated their charges of deception and demagoguery in this House. This is one in a series of wars, each of which has its similarities, but also its differences. The conflict we are discussing today is an asymmetrical conflict.

For three years, Israel was bombarded with home-made missiles, and not a single word of censure was uttered in this House against those who fired them. Today we are condemning Israel. It is easy to condemn Israel, because it is a member of the UN. It has something to condemn, it has authorities. There is a government that can be condemned and censured. On the other side is a terrorist organisation whose real identity is not known. An organisation which plays with the lives of innocent people by acting behind their backs. Another asymmetrical element is that we count the Palestinians who have been dramatically killed while being used as human shields, without countering this with the Israelis who have been killed and the thousands who live under threat, because bloodshed cannot be compensated by more bloodshed. But the worst thing in this House is the asymmetry between words and actions. It is easy for us to talk, but very hard to take effective action. Without an international presence, this conflict will never be resolved.

Finally I would like to address those protesting against Israel's disproportionate action. Ladies and gentlemen, would you want a terrorist organisation to fire 7 000 missiles from Israel into Gaza? Would that be proportionality? Because this is a disproportionate conflict in which the law is ineffective, we will have to simply get used to it, otherwise we will just be going round in circles and using words which are not backed up by reality. Opinions uttered in front of the television by a warm fire are not adequate to the truth about this conflict.

**President.** - Ladies and gentlemen, I really must insist now that you keep to your speaking time. I have never interrupted speakers, even when their speaking time had elapsed, but Mr Schwarzenberg is already giving us more of his time than we were expecting. He has until 5.20 p.m. at the latest, I have been told. I would entreat you to bear in mind the time for which you applied. Being a general, Mr Morillon will set a good example.

**Philippe Morillon (ALDE).** - (FR) Mr President, achieving a lasting calm in Gaza will be possible only if a multinational intervention force is deployed under UN control. For the first time, Israel seems resigned to

this solution, which has been demanded time and time again by the Palestinians. I do not know when this force will be able to intervene; intervention will not be possible before an agreement has been reached between the parties to the conflict, but we all hope that this will be as soon as possible. I do know, however, that this mission will require those conducting it to be completely impartial. I believe that the European Union will therefore be in the best position to take action and – why not, Mr Pöttering? – to do so within the framework of the Union for the Mediterranean.

It will be in the best position to take action since, rightly or wrongly, the Americans are considered to have sided with the Israelis, and the Arabs, with the Palestinians. Do you not think, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, that we ought to prepare ourselves for this?

**Zbigniew Zaleski (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, long-lasting conflict and occupation give rise to anger, rage and disappointment at the efficacy of legal authorities, producing something we call the ' Hamas effect ', as a serious factor. The denial of Israel by Arabs, Islamics and Hamas is unacceptable, as is using children as human shields. Neither should the constant threat under which Israeli children live be allowed.

The question is whether, in this vicious circle of aggression, the present Israeli authorities are able to take the lesson from the six-year-long history in the area, and apply the scalpel-like strategy for two states. I know that they fear the threat from an aggressive and unpredictable neighbour shelling them with rockets, but in this matter the international community, including the EU, could come with help.

Is this risky solution acceptable, today, to Israel? But is there any other solution? If there is, tell me. To expect Hamas to die out naturally, or by bombing them out, looks like a naïve expectation, so more courage is needed by Israel. The Western powers did not create two states in 1948, but they should do so now. The core responsibility does not fade away. Let us be more courageous in this strategy.

**Jelko Kacin (ALDE).** - (SL) The Israeli state has ordered the Israeli army to destroy Hamas in Gaza. However, the Israeli army is eradicating Hamas by killing Palestinians in Gaza. One third of all the dead are children and half of all the dead are women and children – but they are not members of Hamas.

The extent of the military violence is huge and disproportionate. And how can a ceasefire be achieved when neither party recognises the other's legitimacy? The enemy needs to be perceived, not as the object of attack and destruction, but as a subject, a partner with whom a ceasefire is possible and who will be responsible for preserving peace in the future. Israel has to recognise Hamas and initiate dialogue with them, and vice versa – Hamas has to recognise Israel. There is no other way. Any kind of peace is better than bloody conflict.

Military violence must immediately give way and priority to a political solution. However, Mr Ehud Olmert, the Israeli Prime Minister, is still trying to boost his bedraggled reputation by not allowing a ceasefire.

**Jana Hybášková (PPE-DE).** – (CS) Mr President, Commissioner, let me congratulate you on the results of your joint negotiations, the troika negotiations in Israel. Unlike the press, we know that it was your mission which led the Israeli side to debate the opening-up of humanitarian corridors and a daily ceasefire. I think this is the first time the Israelis have accepted Europe as a major partner and the Czech Presidency as an important representative.

Despite enormous pressure from the left, the European Parliament yesterday agreed on a quite exceptional resolution. Even in such extreme circumstances, this is a balanced resolution, a resolution that can be supported by the right, a resolution which is not just a pamphlet or a political victory for the left. We have avoided inserting an equals sign, however notional, between an existing State and a terrorist movement. Recognising the existence of the State of Israel, renouncing violence and the entry of Hamas into PLO agreements remain the key objectives, as does the requirement of achieving a permanent ceasefire as soon as possible.

Yet we have provided no added value. The three leading Israeli representatives, Barak, Livni and Olmert, are currently at odds over the conditions and guarantees under which they are willing to implement a ceasefire. The key is clearly Egypt and it consists in a guarantee of tunnel checks and smuggling checks which would be acceptable to the Egyptian side. What is the Council doing at this time? How is it proceeding in negotiations with the Egyptian side on the technical mission, international monitoring, technical surveillance, and the opening of the EU BAM Rafah? What can the MEPs meeting tonight with the Egyptian ambassador demand of the Egyptian side, or vice versa, how can we contribute to the negotiations with Egypt?

**Libor Rouček (PSE).** – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, I would like to call on the Council and the Commission to step up pressure on both sides of the conflict in order to stop the ongoing violence. We have here Security

Council Resolution 1860 and we must comply with its provisions. It is necessary to adopt safeguards ensuring the long-term ceasefire and to allow a humanitarian corridor to be opened. It has been stated repeatedly here that there is no military solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The road to lasting peace leads only through political negotiations. Here it is necessary for the European Union, in cooperation with the new United States government and the League of Arab States, to play a much more prominent political role than has been the case thus far. The long-running conflict must be ended through a political agreement based on a two-state solution, enabling Israelis and Palestinians to live together in peace within secure, internationally recognised borders, and striving to build a peaceful system of regional security throughout the Middle East.

**Ioannis Kasoulides (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, we are debating yet another humanitarian tragedy in our neighbourhood – next door to my country – by two of our partners in the Mediterranean. Alas, the Palestinians have not yet accepted that suicide bombs or Kassam rockets will never deliver liberation from the occupation of their land. Israel does not realise that such an extensive military response nourishes new potential suicide bombers and invites new Kassams at the first possible opportunity.

What about the innocent civilians, the non-combatants, women and children? Nobody cares about them. Nobody cares about children killed, mutilated, burned and traumatised by the hundreds – children of Israel and of Palestine. We, from the comfort of our television sets, feel nauseated watching them. How about those on the ground?

What can we do? Just entering into the classic blame game does not help the civilians. Making calls and resolutions does not help the civilians. How can we pass from words to deeds? The time is right to negotiate with the interested parties the formation of an international force – as was suggested by other colleagues – to go into Gaza with a large police component composed of Arab countries to train and help a Palestinian authority police force in a large UN mandate to impose law and order, as well as a military European force to ensure there is an end to rocket firing and weapon smuggling, and that there is the full opening of the crossings. We can no longer leave the fate of the civilians in the hands of the opposing sides.

**Giulietto Chiesa (PSE).** - *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, a great Italian anti-fascist, Piero Gobetti, said that when the truth lies all on one side, to adopt a Solomon-like position is to be totally biased. That is the case for Gaza at the moment; I hope that Parliament will be able to say the right words to stop Israel. If it does not do so, it will be seen as shameful by history, the Palestinians, European public opinion and Arab public opinion.

Israel is bombing and decimating a ghetto. The sons of those who were exterminated have become exterminators. There is no excuse for this, nor is the argument that Israel has a right to its own security enough. Anybody, if he wishes to, can see that nobody is today able to threaten Israel's security or its existence. This is clear from the imbalance of forces on the ground; it is clear from the numbers of the dead and wounded; it is clear from the support that the West continues to lavish on Israel. The only purpose of this massacre is to prevent the creation of a Palestinian state. In this way, peace is being killed, and therefore we need to stop Israel.

**Stefano Zappalà (PPE-DE).** - *(IT)* Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I would like to thank the President-in-Office of the Council and the Czech minister for foreign affairs, because they are still with us; we are not very used to a strong presence in this Chamber, such as that demonstrated today by the Czech Presidency.

I believe that Mrs Muscardini is right; I advise those who do not know what things are like in that area and who need to be able to express precise opinions to go and see how things are on the ground, by going either as a tourist or for other purposes. Some of us have been to Palestine under various circumstances, as observers for the Abu Mazen elections or other elections, and I believe that only seeing things in person can give one an accurate idea of how things stand.

I believe that throughout these events, which date back decades and are not just recent, the only losers have been ourselves in the western world, because we have never seriously tackled this problem and never sought to resolve it; we continue to see it as a problem between two opposing parties.

I have been to Palestine several times, and I have been to Israel several times, so I know the situation, not perfectly, but well enough, and I believe that in reality there are not two parties involved there but three. In this specific case the problem is between the terrorists and the state of Israel, and the Palestinian people are the victims caught in the middle. Hamas does not represent the Palestinian people; perhaps it represents a section of it, but it certainly does not represent the entire Palestinian people.

I have a film, which I believe that many Members will have had; the film shows all the Israeli victims, including children and people of all ages, victims of all the rockets that have been fired and are still being fired by Hamas. It is no accident that there is a large difference between the Gaza Strip and the West Bank.

I address this comment to the President-in-Office of the Council, and to our fine Commissioner, representing Europe. I believe that we need to tackle the situation properly. I believe that the most important thing of all is that today the position of Abu Mazen should be reinforced; he is the weakest figure of all in this situation, together with the Palestinians, who count for nothing in this affair. I believe that the real losers are all of us.

**Maria-Eleni Koppa (PSE).** - (EL) Mr President, public opinion throughout Europe is calling for one thing from the Union: to put a stop to the slaughter of the Palestinian people. We must condemn blind violence whatever its origin, but we need to be consistent in recognising that Israel is responding with state terrorism on a massive scale. The asymmetrical retaliation, the blatant disregard for any concept of international and humanitarian law on the part of Israel cannot be tolerated.

It is unacceptable for white phosphorus bombs and experimental weapons to be used against civilians and it is inhumane for innocent women and children to be targeted. If this happened in Africa or some other part of the world, our reaction would be immediate and the UN Security Council resolution would be binding. However, in the case of Israel, we confine ourselves to statements and fruitless discussion.

I believe that we should use every political tool, including the Association Agreement, to persuade Israel to stop the illegal violence against the Palestinian people and to stop prohibiting access to humanitarian aid.

We cannot be bystanders because that makes us complicit in the slaughter. The only solution is an immediate ceasefire and the opening of humanitarian corridors to Gaza and the start of dialogue with all sides.

**Struan Stevenson (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, the horrific events in Gaza during the past two weeks have brought international condemnation against Israel. We have witnessed colleagues during this debate today lining up to see who could express the strongest outrage against the Jewish State.

However, for one country in the Middle East, this was exactly the outcome it had sought: Iran has supplied missiles, munitions and other sophisticated weaponry to Hamas for years. It has provided money and training for Hamas fighters. Its objective was to provoke Israel into a ground war and the bloody result, with gruesome photos of dead children on TV screens and in newspapers around the world, is the best possible recruiting sergeant for fundamentalist Islam and the Iranian mullahs' vision of a global Islamist movement united against the West.

The fascist regime in Tehran is the main sponsor of war and terror in the Middle East, and the tragic outcome is exactly what Tehran wanted. It distracts domestic attention in Iran from the economic crisis caused by the collapse in the price of oil, and it distracts international attention from the mullahs' rush to produce a nuclear weapon. Iran's foreign policy objective is to become the dominant regional power in the Middle East. It wants to unite the Islamic world in submission to its own austere and disturbing vision of a totalitarian Islamic brotherhood, where human rights, women's rights and freedom of speech are ground into the dust, and, shamefully, the West has done nothing to confront or expose Iranian aggression. Faced with mounting evidence of the mullahs' sponsorship of terror, the West has gone out of its way to appease Tehran, even agreeing to its primary demand of disabling the main Iranian opposition movement, the People's Mujahedin of Iran, by placing it on the EU terror list. This must stop.

**Richard Howitt (PSE).** - Mr President, firstly, let us be clear that this Parliament will today support the UN Security Council Resolution 1860. It should be implemented without delay. As one of the MEPs here who has been in Gaza through the blockade, a ceasefire and a withdrawal are not enough. Of course we want the rockets to stop and the terrorists to stop their movements, but we must see a ceasefire and an end to the blockade so that the people of Gaza can begin to live their lives.

This is an issue of respect for international humanitarian law. Human Rights Watch and Islamic Relief have told me that the three-hour daily pause is simply woefully inadequate to get in and to distribute aid. It is an issue of proportionality. Save the Children say that the killing of 139 children since the conflict began, with 1 271 injured, cannot be justified as self-defence.

I welcome the statement today by the EU envoy in Israel, Ramiro Cibrian-Uzal, who said that the EU and Israel have put negotiations on the upgrading of relations 'on hold' at this time for these reasons. So they should.

**Michael Gahler (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr President, first we need an immediate and permanent ceasefire on both sides – there is a broad consensus on this in this House. However, afterwards, we – the EU and the international community – cannot leave the fate of the people in the Gaza Strip in the hands of Hamas and Israel alone.

Hamas does not have the interests of the inhabitants of Gaza at heart, as it knew very well that Israel would respond to constant rocket attacks – and not only during election campaigns. During the last year, surveys in Gaza have shown a fall in political support for Hamas in favour of Fatah. It seems that Hamas is cynically counting on political support for Hamas increasing again with the large number of Palestinian victims, out of victim solidarity.

Israel, on the other hand, has almost exclusively the interests of its own citizens in mind, and so international criticism is directed mainly at the extent of Israel's military operation and at the country's acceptance of the large number of civilian casualties.

Therefore, we Europeans should not stop at negotiating a further ceasefire and financing the repair of the infrastructure. I can already see the Commissioner's letter of amendment: I am sure the draft is already finished and ready for submission to the Committee on Budgets.

Nor is it sufficient to keep an eye on whether Egypt closes the tunnel system at the border with the Gaza Strip to arms smuggling. I call for the whole Quartet, including a strong Arab presence, to make a joint commitment to sending troops with a robust peacekeeping mandate to the Gaza Strip and the surrounding area – in the interests of the people in Gaza, Israel and Egypt. In parallel, the peace process itself must be driven forward rapidly. Otherwise, I fear that we shall see the kind of incidents we have been seeing in Gaza with ever greater frequency, and neither the Palestinians nor the Israelis deserve this.

**Miguel Angel Martínez Martínez (PSE).** – (ES) Mr President, the Spanish members of the Socialist Group in the European Parliament view the situation in Gaza with horror, pain and shame, but also with a commitment to defend peace, protect those who are suffering most and maintain dignity and hope.

Our horror is at the repeated scenes of murdered children and women heartbroken in their endless suffering following the bombing of the ghetto that Gaza has become. Picasso depicted this same horror in his *Guernica* painting of our Guernica razed to the ground by the Junkers of the Condor Legion seven decades ago.

Our pain is at the enormous suffering of so many victims. Our shame is at the inability of everyone – our countries, the European Union and the international community – to firstly prevent and secondly end the criminal aggression which we condemn.

Our shame and also indignation are at so many lies, so much ambiguity and so much hot air. Our shame is because we know exactly what is happening, yet we are not acting with the necessary forcefulness and coherence. History will therefore demand an explanation from many as accessories to the crime, at the very least due to their failures.

As it is always 'better late than never' and as it is vital to keep open a door to hope, the European Union must support the belated Security Council resolution. However, it must ensure that this is strictly observed, just as our association agreement with Israel must also be strictly observed, which provides for its suspension in the event of behaviour such as that which is occurring.

Incidentally, is Hamas also responsible for the media blackout that I have not yet heard anyone condemn?

**Geoffrey Van Orden (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, I wish to begin by expressing my deepest sympathy for all the innocent people, both in Israel and in Gaza, who have suffered in recent weeks and months as conflict rages. But we need to take care that our natural humanity, our very justified concerns, do not distort our view of the true nature of the situation that we are dealing with.

In Gaza, Hamas has created a terrorist fiefdom: it tolerates no opposition to its views, it has murdered those Palestinians who opposed it, it has split the Palestine Authority, it refused to stop terror attacks on Israeli civilians, it refused to recognise the right of Israel to exist, it refused to acknowledge the peace agreements previously negotiated. I recall the words of Hanan Ashrawi three years ago, when I was monitoring the Palestinian elections. She foresaw the imposition of rule by the forces of darkness – how right she was!

We should not be surprised that a Hamas MP should take pride in stating that death was an 'industry' for the Palestinian people. He was referring to the use of suicide bombers and the deliberate use of civilian human

shields to protect potential military targets. It is, of course, a direct contravention of international humanitarian law to use civilians in this way.

Faced with such an intractable, callous and hateful enemy, what do we expect Israel to do while its citizens are constantly subjected to terror attacks? The international community took little notice. When Israel took non-violent action, such as imposing blockades or cutting electricity, it was castigated. Now that it has taken military action in reaction to Hamas provocation, it feels the weight of international disapproval.

The sad reality is that the Palestinian people have been atrociously served over many years by those who have control over Palestine Authority areas, by the international community, which has tolerated extremism and corruption, and by the Arab world, which has done nothing practical over many decades to improve their lives or prospects.

We need a Marshall Plan for the Middle East. It is not just peacekeepers that the Palestinians need but a decent civil administration, free from corruption. The civil administration needs to be put under international control but first of all the terrorist lifeline – weapons, monies and political indulgence – must be cut.

### IN THE CHAIR: MR VIDAL-QUADRAS

*Vice-President*

**Proinsias De Rossa (PSE).** - Mr President, I could agree with what Mr Van Orden says about Hamas, but the fact is that none of what he says justifies the bombing of civilians by Israel. That is the fundamental point: we have to stop the bombing, whether it is coming from Hamas or coming from Israel.

I hope the resolution accompanying this debate will receive a strong vote in this House tomorrow, and I hope it will strengthen the hands of the Commission and the Council in pressuring both Israel and Hamas to stop the killing. Since Israel withdrew from Gaza, it has turned it into the largest prison in the world, and for the last three weeks it has turned it into a slaughterhouse, illegally using terror against terror, killing civilian men, women and children, and killing the possibility of a viable two-state solution in the process.

There can be no upgrading of Europe's relations with Israel so long as it fails to engage in constructive and substantive negotiations with its neighbours and all the Palestinian elected members, including Hamas. It should be made clear by Europe that any escalation of this war on Gaza will be followed by an escalation of our reaction to that war.

**Kinga Gál (PPE-DE).** - (HU) Mr President, Commissioners, members of Council, fellow Members, I find the behaviour of the parties in the Gaza conflict to be cynical. I consider it cynical and unacceptable that Hamas uses the civilian population – even children – as a human shield. I consider cynical and inhumane the Israeli stance which, on the pretext of self-defence, uses disproportionate means, shooting masses of Gaza residents and most severely affecting the civilian population, including children.

I consider cynical and mendacious a foreign diplomacy which, with notable exceptions, strives to maintain appearances and yet even after so many days is unable to secure protection for the civilian population or aid agencies, and unfortunately is unable to protect children either.

I speak up for the children, because no end can justify the means of unnecessarily ending innocent lives. We must consider each child's life to be of equal value, on either side of the border. This is the fundamental axiom which each party to the conflict must hold equally important, if there is ever to be true peace in that region.

Acceptance of the values of respect for human life, protection of civilians and promotion of humanitarian aid can form the foundation for reaching a lasting ceasefire, achieving peace within Palestine and between Palestine and Israel.

**Gay Mitchell (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, Hamas unleashed terror on Israel's citizens and has provoked retaliation. It seems from this distance that some of them relish the new civilian – including child – martyrs and the publicity it gives their cause, no matter how horrible it is for right-thinking people to take that in.

I have never given succour to terrorism, nor am I a critic of Israel, which has a right to peaceful coexistence in the region, but we would have to be turnips not to feel emotional upset and moral shame at what is happening at present in Gaza. The Israeli response is totally disproportionate and the deaths of young children are particularly shameful.

I have not, to date, opposed the new EU-Israel agreement. I believe the advice of the Dalai Lama last month here in Parliament that the best way to influence China on Tibet is to keep good relations with them. I think that also applies to EU-Israel relations, but how can we get their attention to express the level of revulsion felt here at the scale of what is happening?

I may add that yesterday a note on the humanitarian needs of the region was distributed to those of us who attended the joint meeting of the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Development Committee. I urge the Commission and the Council to ensure that a totally comprehensive humanitarian aid package is ready so that we can move in there and help these suffering people at the first opportunity.

**Karel Schwarzenberg**, *President-in-Office of the Council*. – Mr President, one thing that was mentioned at the beginning was whether we should contact Hamas. I do not think it is yet time to do so. In the last months, Hamas still definitely behaved as a terrorist organisation. As long as it behaves as such, it cannot be officially contacted by the representatives of the European Union.

I admit, being an old man, that I have seen many terrorist organisations during my time growing up from their beginnings, becoming more or less acceptable, and being accepted by the international community. I have seen it in Africa. I have seen it in Ireland. I have seen it in many places. That happens. But first of all they have to stop acting as a terrorist organisation. Then I will be ready to speak with Hamas or with anybody else, but not before they have given up acting as a terrorist organisation.

I think it is important to state this, because the European Union cannot give up its principles. There are ways of hearing what their ideas are, there are indirect contacts with politicians in the region who are in contact with them, which is important and good, but it is not yet time for the European Union to have direct contacts with Hamas. I think we should be adamant about that.

In other respects, we should praise Egypt very much for its important role in the last weeks and days for its efforts and hard work on achieving a ceasefire and maybe even an armistice with, at the very end of the process, peace in the region. I know how difficult the question is. We are in contact with the Egyptians the whole time. We know what important work they are doing, and I would like to congratulate them.

There was a question on how we can assist in the region. First of all, those who are on the spot will tell us clearly what they need. It is not for us to decide what we should give them. They have to ask us and the European Union. Many European Union Member States have stated their readiness to help in every possible way – technical ways, sending advisors, preparing whatever means are necessary – but this must, first of all, be with the consent of the relevant states there. That is the first task to be carried out.

I heard one important suggestion, which was to prepare a Marshall Plan for the Middle East. I think it is a very good idea and we should follow it. This region really needs a genuine build-up of the ideas which helped Europe so much after the war.

Ms Ferrero-Waldner and others mentioned what the mission achieved. I think we achieved a lot, and I would like once again to commend Ms Ferrero-Waldner, who did the main work in our delegation in the humanitarian sphere, where what we have achieved still works today. But, let us be clear, even these very difficult negotiations in the Middle East are based on the design already structured during our delegation's visit to the Middle East. This basically deals with how to organise peace and what is necessary. Our plan is based on what we found out then and discussed with our partners.

There was a discussion about upgrading our relations with Israel. As you know, that was a decision taken by the Council of Ministers of the European Union in June 2008. This can be changed only if the ministers of the European Union decide to alter the decision. It cannot be changed, even by the words of a very respectable representative of the European Union in Jerusalem. I admit that in the current situation it would be premature to discuss how to upgrade our relationship with Israel and whether there should be a summit in the foreseeable future. For the moment we really have more urgent and more important questions to solve. Again, I would state that the decision was taken by the Council of Ministers, and that is it.

What can be done to stop Israel? Let us be frank – very little. Israel acts as it acts and, being a lifelong friend of Israel, which I state today and I state quite frankly, I am not so happy with what it is doing at the moment. I think its politics are also harming Israel. That is one thing, but the European Union does have very few possibilities, other than speaking very clearly and very honestly and asking our partners to stop it. The solution has to be found by our partners in the Middle East, by Israel, by Egypt and the others involved. The European Union can help there. The European Union can assist by offering every type of help if a ceasefire is agreed to achieve the stated aims: closing the smuggling passes, closing the tunnels, guarding the sea etc.

It can help in Gaza in many ways, such as reconstruction or assisting with humanitarian aid. The European Union can do all that, but, to be quite honest, we do not have the power and means to say 'stop'. Does Parliament think we can send a huge armed force to the Middle East to stop the fighting parties? No. We do not have the possibilities, and both Israel and Hamas are dependent on powers other than European powers. Israel has mighty allies outside of Europe too. There are limits on our power to achieve something. We can help, we can assist, we can offer our good services and we can be very engaged. In that respect, we have achieved quite a lot. But do not overstate our possibilities.

**Sajjad Karim (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, Israel states it is exercising its right to self-defence. In that case, the rudiments of the just war principles, including proportionality, must be adhered to.

The fact that Israel is ignoring this is patently clear, and for us to ignore this fact is patently wrong. The use of phosphorus on civilians with the claim of civilisation is not compatible.

Clearly, the EU alone cannot resolve this. But there is a white elephant in the room. We need the resolve of the USA. Their disappointing response has been imbalanced and unjust. The timing of these actions by Israel has been strategically calculated, but, Mr Obama, 20 January is fast approaching. The world is waiting and the EU is a willing partner!

Will you restore those values we share with you or will you allow such injustice to prevail – yet again? Will you work with us to provide protection for all concerned? The Palestinians ask you – how can it be right that your country asks for humanitarian aid on the ground, but remains silent when there are only bombs from the skies?

Colleagues wanting to break Hamas with military means alone: go and see Gaza and the West Bank. Reawaken your basic humanity and you will see why Hamas gains strength.

This is not the way to help Israel or Palestinians. An immediate ceasefire is only a necessary start.

**Colm Burke (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, it is very clear that the parties to this conflict are failing to respect international humanitarian law and that the civilian population of Gaza is consequently paying a very heavy price. There must be accountability in international law where such warfare principles as proportionality and non-discrimination are not respected. One of the tenets of a just war provides that conduct should be governed by the principle of proportionality. The force used must be proportional to the wrong endured. Unfortunately we have seen a large degree of carelessness by the Israelis. While acknowledging the fact that Hamas began the rocket attacks against Israel, the Israeli reaction has, in my opinion, been disproportionate. The numbers speak for themselves: over 900 Palestinians have been killed in contrast to a much smaller number of Israelis. Israel must realise its responsibility to measure its use of force right away in compliance with international law.

On the other hand, it cannot be overlooked that Hamas is still listed as a terrorist organisation by the EU and continues to refuse to renounce its arms struggle. Not only that, but Hamas has consistently declined to recognise Israel's right to exist. Hamas and other Palestinian armed groups must recognise that the people of southern Israel have a right to live without bombardment.

**Nickolay Mladenov (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, for all those who observe the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this might be a time in which we are tempted to put our hands in the air and scream in despair. I do not think we should, however, because I think the greatest test of our humanity today is to really understand the issues at hand.

The first issue is that there can be no lasting solution to this conflict without stopping the bombardment of Israel. The second issue is that there cannot be a lasting solution to this conflict without opening Gaza to humanitarian aid. Indeed, President Peres has been absolutely right in saying that Gaza should be open for aid and not enclosed for rockets.

I think this is quintessential, and everyone agrees to this. There cannot be a return to the status quo ante, and I think we could do a number of things here. Firstly Parliament can bring both sides together to talk; secondly we should stand behind the Commission and the Council and support their efforts; and finally we should firmly support the Egyptian track of negotiations, because that is the only track that can lead to a solution and to the ceasefire which we currently all hope for.

**Neena Gill (PSE).** - Mr President, it is not just the Members of this House who have been outraged by developments in Gaza. The European public have also been outraged by the suffering of the people in Gaza

and the Israeli blockade for far too long. Added to this are the constant attacks and the terrifying Israeli military assaults on innocent civilians, especially women and children. The calls by the world community for an immediate ceasefire are falling on deaf ears.

Palestinians need urgent access to food, medical aid and security. Israel must, at the very least, respect the principles of international law. Unless it does so, Israel should lose any remaining support it has from the international community.

It is unfortunate that the UN's resolution has been sidelined. It is also regrettable that the EU still needs to find a role. Perhaps it can do so if it takes stronger measures than it has done so far. It is not enough just to put the upgrading of the relationship on ice. We have leverage. We are a major trading partner. We are a major funder in that region. So we are able to exercise that role.

**Marios Matsakis (ALDE).** - Mr President, is it ethically acceptable and is it excusable in international law that, in its endeavour to neutralise Hamas terrorists, the State of Israel can embark on a major military campaign of terror and gross violation of UN conventions and human rights against 1.5 million trapped, innocent civilians? Is such action consistent with our own EU values of justice and democracy? Is the Israeli lobby so strong that it can cause the US and the EU to – in effect – stand idle and just watch unspeakable atrocities being committed in the name of the fight against terror?

If the answer to these questions is yes, then we should all commend as brave the Israeli Government for their action in Gaza. If the answer is no, then we should strongly and clearly condemn Israel and must take swift and effective steps against it, including trade sanctions, in order to end the carnage in Gaza today and in the future. I disagree strongly with the minister who left, who said that we can in effect do very little. We can do a lot and we must.

**Christopher Beazley (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, I was elected to this House 25 years ago. This is probably the most important debate in which I have taken part. Madam Commissioner, I hope you listened very carefully to the Foreign Affairs Committee last night and to this Parliament today. I hope you may reply in your debate to say, unlike President-in-Office Schwarzenberg, that there is moral power that the European Union may exert on the aggressor on this particular occasion.

The Israeli people are a just and honourable people who have suffered miserably throughout the centuries in this continent. They will understand your recommendation to the Council of Ministers now that the EU should withdraw any contact with the Israeli authorities until they stop the bombing.

**Antonio Masip Hidalgo (PSE).** - (ES) Mr President, we must tell Israel with absolute conviction to stop killing and to allow the wounded to be treated and the victims to be fed. It must be told that its attitude towards international law will have consequences for its relations with Europe.

I want to congratulate the few young European voluntary workers who are suffering together with the people of Gaza, in particular Alberto Arce. They represent the best of the values of solidarity and freedom held by this Europe of ours, which needs to act accordingly in such a terrible conflict.

**Margrete Auken (Verts/ALE).** - (DA) Mr President, I just want to say two things. First of all, I would like to remind everyone that our decision expressly states, and reiterates, that we have put our support for upgrading on hold, and I very much hope that we will not merely carry on as if nothing has happened just because the Presidency says so. My second point is that Israel has at no time delivered what it promised in connection with the negotiations. There was no ceasefire because Israel did not actually lift its blockade during that period, and I feel I must also raise Annapolis, where Israel promised to freeze settlement activity. What actually happened? It simply went and increased the rate of settlement. The rate of settlement building has never been as rapid as it has been since Annapolis, and I believe that as long as no progress is made on the ground we will never get Hamas to act in accordance with the rules we want it to play by and that, for that reason, we must ensure that Israel fulfils its side of the bargain.

**Peter Šťastný (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, yesterday we had a joint meeting of the Delegations for Relations with Israel and with the PLC, and one can imagine the intensity, emotion, accusations – and the suggested solutions – after 18 days of war in Gaza and around 1 000 deaths.

The fact is that Israel, after eight years of waiting and absorbing around 8 000 missiles that terrorised one million citizens along the Gaza borders, finally ran out of patience. They began securing safety for their citizens, as is their full right and obligation. Hamas is a terrorist organisation and is the clear culprit and a

burden for the Palestinian people in Gaza. The solution lies in an invigorated Quartet and particularly in redoubling the joint effort between the new US administration and a stronger and more integrated EU.

I welcome the Czech presidency, its priorities and its immediate and active involvement in the region.

**Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE).** – (RO) This conflict, which has lasted a very long time, is based on problems to do with territory, as well as cultural differences which are sometimes treated in an exaggerated manner. The long-term solution is a protected, secure Israeli state, along with a sustainable Palestinian state. This solution cannot be achieved, however, through terrorist attacks or armed actions.

In order to achieve a normal way of life, the Palestinian people need to create for themselves a state based on democratic institutions and the rule of law, which would ensure economic development. They need to renounce terrorist acts and turn their concerns to creating a normal political climate, facilitating the election of politicians to lead the state, who genuinely wish to resolve this conflict through negotiation.

**Bairbre de Brún (GUE/NGL).** – (GA) Mr President, I would like to lend my support to those condemning the attacks and to show my solidarity with the people of Gaza.

Minister Schwarzenburg says that the European Union cannot do very much. The European Union should abandon the upgrade of relations with Israel and the agreements that are currently in force should be cancelled until Israel fulfils its duties under international law.

Even before the recent immoral attacks, we saw years of collective punishment of the Palestinian people. The scale and type of attacks carried out on Gaza by a modern army against a besieged people, who are already weak as a result of isolation and siege, is absolutely horrific. The blame that was put on those same people was wrong – we must be clear in saying that the biggest victims here are people, the innocent people of Gaza.

**Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE).** – (PL) It is with great pain that we observe what is going on in the Gaza strip. We do not support Hamas' methods of fighting and provocation, but Israel has chosen a disproportionate means of resolving its dispute with the Palestinian people. There has been a definite violation of the principles of international law. Neither party to the conflict is interested in peace for the other party. Both parties see only their own interest – that is national egotism.

International opinion is against the continuation of this war. The European Union and the UN, supported by many countries, should intervene decisively. It is time to end this unfortunate war. Israeli troops should return to their barracks. Hamas has to stop firing rockets at Israel. We must guarantee more urgent humanitarian aid to the civilian population and administer care to the casualties, of whom there are said to be approximately 3 000. We need to build the country up and help it return to normal life. That is the scenario I ask from the current leadership of the European Union and the European Commission.

**Hannes Swoboda (PSE).** – Mr President, I would just like to ask whether we will still be having a debate on gas today or whether it has been deleted from the agenda. We are waiting here. There is not only a Middle East debate but also one on gas on the agenda. Has it been deleted from the agenda?

**President.** – That is the next item on the agenda.

**Aurelio Juri (PSE).** – (SL) I was disappointed by the last announcement by the Foreign Minister of the Czech Republic, which is currently heading the Council. Of course, we can pin all our hopes on our Commissioner. But the death toll is rising. If we continue to talk in this manner, in a week's time 1 500 people will probably be dead.

Speaking to Hamas is difficult. It is on the list of terrorist organisations and it is difficult to take action against it. Israel, on the other hand, is our friend, Israel is our partner and an important member of the international community. Israel has to abide by international decisions, the resolutions of the United Nations and also by the recommendations of its friends and partners. If it fails to do so, its friends and partners must be able to condemn its actions and to threaten sanctions against it, as well.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission.** – Mr President, I will be brief because it was a very long debate. Let me say first of all, as a member of the Middle East Quartet for four years now, the European Union has a role to play, but of course we do not have the strongest role to play. That is sometimes frustrating for all of us, particularly in such a difficult moment when you would like to immediately achieve a durable and sustainable ceasefire as we have proposed, but when it can, unfortunately, not be achieved so quickly.

I would like to give you, at least tentatively, the latest information that I got now, which is in the news, saying that sources in Egypt close to negotiations report that Hamas is reacting favourably to the latest Egyptian proposals. There is movement in any case. I am not yet sure whether this is really confirmed, but there will also be a Hamas press conference in the evening at 20.00. Hopefully things will go forward. At least, this is what we all want.

Second, despite all the frustrations, we have no other possibility than to go on working for peace. This is what we will do. I am committed to that as long as I am a member of this Middle East Quartet. We can only achieve it together and we also have to help and enhance Palestinian reconciliation efforts, because only then will it be possible to totally avoid the anomaly of Gaza.

Third, as soon as there is a ceasefire we will try to do everything to totally restore the basic services to the population that have been so badly disrupted. I think, most importantly, what is necessary now is to put an end to this destruction and to go for reconstruction and try to come to peace.

We have talked at length about this, so I will not extend myself, but this is my spirit and I hope there is a good moment.

**President.** – To conclude the debate I have received one motion for a resolution<sup>(1)</sup> pursuant to Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure. The debate is closed.

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

**Pedro Guerreiro (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – (PT) Given the barbarity that has struck the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip, which the recent resolution of the UN Human Rights Council denounces and condemns, what is required and demanded is the following:

- A firm denunciation of the violations of human rights and of the crimes perpetrated by the Israeli army, the state terrorism of Israel!
- A clear condemnation of the cruel aggression of Israel against the Palestinian people, which nothing can justify!
- An end to the aggression and the inhumane blockade imposed on the population of the Gaza Strip!
- Urgent humanitarian assistance to the Palestinian population!
- The withdrawal of Israeli troops from all the occupied Palestinian territories!
- Respect for international law and the UN resolutions by Israel, the end of the occupation, the settlements, the segregation wall, the assassinations, the detentions, the exploitation and the innumerable humiliations that are inflicted on the Palestinian people!
- A just peace, which is only possible by respecting the inalienable right of the Palestinian people to an independent and sovereign state, with the 1967 borders and its capital in East Jerusalem!

In Palestine there is a coloniser and a colonised, an aggressor and a victim, an oppressor and an oppressed, an exploiter and an exploited. Israel cannot continue with impunity!

**Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE), in writing.** – The reaction to the conflict in Gaza has to be more balanced than it currently is. No excessive violence can be excused, yet we have to look deeper into the origins of the conflict.

Negotiations with Hamas as it is are not possible. A terrorist grouping which is cynically using its own people as a shield against attacks is not interested in negotiating a true peace.

Furthermore, we need to take into account that Hamas has assumed an important role in the chain of terrorist movements which lead to Hezbollah and the Tehran terrorist regime. So Hamas has to be seen as part of wider efforts to destroy the fragile stability in the Middle East and substitute this with fundamentalist extremist regimes that allow in principle no right of existence for Israel.

Indeed, we need to understand that the question of Israel's security is also linked to the EU's security.

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<sup>(1)</sup> See Minutes

The EU must exercise its authority to address first and foremost the roots of the conflict. To avoid further killing of Arabs and Israelis, the Arab partners have to recognise unconditionally Israel's right to existence and contribute to stopping the infiltration of extremist movements and even more deadly weapons to this region.

**Eija-Riitta Korhola (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (FI) Mr President, it is an incontrovertible fact that the civilian population in Gaza and southern Israel have been deprived of the right to an existence worthy of human beings. One news agency told a story of two children who were about to cross the road in Gaza. They did not look right or left to see if anything was coming – they looked up because they were afraid of what might come down from the sky.

There are clearly two guilty parties when it comes to Gaza's massive humanitarian crisis. The irresponsible action of Hamas in the Palestinian territories, the cowardly way in which it hides among the civilian population, and the provocation it engenders with its rocket attacks are all indications of the unsustainability of the Palestinian government. Israel's disproportionate attack on the already frail and desperate Palestinian enclave is another indication of its indifference to international humanitarian obligations.

We must call for an end to this madness in the shape of an immediate and permanent ceasefire. As a first step, Israel should allow humanitarian aid into Gaza, where an improvement to living conditions would also constitute one of the paths to peace in the long term.

The Middle East Quartet needs to make a move in the right direction, with the new US administration showing the way. Egypt has a special responsibility, because of matters to do with borders, and its role as mediator with the Union has given us hope.

World history shows that the quest for peace pays off in the end. We cannot give in, adapt or become accustomed to the notion of an unresolved conflict, because there is no such thing. According to Nobel Peace Prize Winner Martti Ahtisaari, peace is a matter of will. The international community may try to encourage and foster this will, but only the parties concerned can produce it, and lasting peace.

Commissioner, could you take this message from Europe: 'People of the Holy Land, show that you want peace.'

**Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE), in writing.** – There is something disturbing about a world apparently helpless to save innocent children from being blown apart in war.

Despite all the words, there has been no let-up in the bombardment of Gaza, which has, so far, resulted in the deaths of 139 children and injury to 1 271. Sadly, these shocking numbers will increase.

Hamas rocket attacks on Israel have provoked the response it desired – counter-attacks and the loss of civilian life and a further entrenchment of positions.

I deplore that innocent civilians are used as human shields. This has to stop.

I do not apportion blame – there is wrong on both sides, but I do stress the need for an immediate and effective ceasefire.

It is vital to allow unimpeded access for humanitarian assistance and aid to Gaza without delay.

Would that humanity could only see the futility of such wars.

Every image of the dead in Gaza inflames people across the Arab world, and I am worried that the essential tenet of the Middle East peace process is slipping away: the so-called two-state solution, an independent Palestinian state coexisting in peace with Israel. It is incumbent on the international community to redouble its efforts to find a solution.

**Esko Seppänen (GUE/NGL), in writing.** – (FI) We are all now witnessing the wholesale slaughter of civilians by Israeli soldiers in Gaza. We, or more precisely many Members on the right, are closing our eyes to what is happening. It could not happen without the political right-wing elite in the United States of America and the EU closing their eyes. The eye-closers are also the ones arming the killers of civilians.

It is time we raised the matter of severing diplomatic relations with the perpetrators of genocide and the ethnic cleansers.

**Csaba Sógor (PPE-DE), in writing. – (HU)** The situation in the Middle East fills me with anxiety. What will it take to have peace? How many civilian casualties will it take before there can be a true ceasefire? In Bosnia-Herzegovina it took at least 10 000 for peace negotiations to begin, for peacekeepers to arrive on site and for disarmament to begin.

A few days ago we commemorated the destruction of Nagyenyed (Aiud). 160 years ago, several thousand innocent civilians, including women and children, were massacred in this Transylvanian city and its environs. Since that time it has not been possible to remember these victims together with the majority population.

There may come a time when Israelis and Palestinians not only remember each other's victims together, but join forces to build a lasting peace and future.

Until then, the task of the European Union is to serve as a responsible example. There is a lot for us to do in building peace within Europe, too. We need cooperation between majorities and minorities on an equal footing. At the very least, we need to join together to remember the victims. There is still a lot to be done in the EU in the area of respect for individual and minority rights.

**Andrzej Jan Szejna (PSE), in writing. – (PL)** During January's plenary session, the European Parliament adopted a resolution on the conflict in the Gaza Strip. Both sides in the conflict were urged to implement an immediate and lasting ceasefire and to halt military activities (Israeli's military action and Hamas' rockets), which had for some time prevented aid and humanitarian assistance from getting through to the citizens of the territory where the conflict was being played out.

It has already cost thousands of victims, with civilians, including women and children who have been suffering for almost three weeks. There is a shortage of basic necessities such as drinking water and food. UN facilities have been attacked.

The resolution calls for observance of international law, which would resolve the existing conflict. Israel is our friend, and is entitled to defend itself as a state, but it must be firmly stated and underlined that in this case the means it has used are highly disproportionate. Israel needs to talk with Hamas, to negotiate, because the previous methods have not worked.

The European Union also faces a difficult task: it needs to find mechanisms which will lead to dialogue and understanding between the parties which will permanently end the conflict as soon as possible.

## 9. Gas supplies by Russia to Ukraine and the EU (debate)

**President.** – The next item is the Council and Commission statements on gas supplies by Russia to Ukraine and the EU.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – Mr President, the Council would like to thank the European Parliament for placing this item on the agenda of its first part-session this year. You will probably agree with me that the Czech presidency displayed remarkable foresight when it placed security of energy supply as one of the cornerstones or priorities of our presidency this year.

The European Union is undoubtedly facing a major gas supply disruption as a result of the dispute between the Russians and the Ukrainians and between the Gazprom and Naftogaz organisations. The extent of this supply cut now covers about 30% of the Community's total gas imports. So this is a situation that not even the Cold War years have seen us exposed to – the total cut-off that we are facing today.

The Council and the Commission were aware of the potential problem. As you know, we faced a similar situation three years ago, in 2006, and this is more or less a recurring annual problem, as each year Russia increases the prices of the gas it exports to its neighbouring countries towards market levels. Therefore, we were extremely vigilant, in view of the Community's large degree of dependence on Russian gas. Indeed, for some Member States, dependence on the gas supplied by Russia reaches about 100%.

I would like to stress in particular the difficult situation of countries like Bulgaria or Slovakia. It also gives us an explanation as to why, for example, in the central and eastern European countries, this is problem number one – the people are freezing and it is on the front page of the newspapers. I know that in some other countries, which are not facing the problem with that kind of intensity, the situation is probably different, at least in PR terms.

This time, we already received a formal warning from the Russian side on 18 December 2008 through the EU-Russia early warning mechanism that a problem might occur if the ongoing negotiations between Ukraine and Russia did not result in an agreement on prices, transit fees and payment of the debts. So we were not that surprised by what has happened, but we were surprised by the magnitude and the intensity of the cut.

Contacts, therefore, took place at the highest level prior to 1 January 2009 in order to avert the disruption of supply. The Czech presidency had been monitoring the situation well before the beginning of the year. I personally already met Russian officials in Prague two days before Christmas Eve.

The Commission took adequate precautions in order to follow the development throughout the holiday period and shared its information with the Gas Coordination Group in early January. Both prior to and after 1 January 2009, the presidency and the Commission – working very closely with Andris Piebalgs – received assurances from both actors that gas deliveries to the EU would not be affected.

As you know, the Czech presidency, together with the Commission and with the aid of some Member States, has been in contact with both the Ukrainians and the Russian gas companies and travelled several times in order to meet with both sides.

In these contacts we have not sought to blame either side, or take sides, or even act as a mediator, since this is a commercial dispute. Rather, we have emphasised to both parties the gravity of the situation, stressing the fact that the credibility and dependability of Russia as a supplying country and of Ukraine as a transit country are both clearly damaged. As the gravity of the situation has increased, we have also acted as a ‘facilitator’ as far as deliveries of gas to the Community were concerned – a role that was very much appreciated by both parties, because they were not talking to each other at all.

Let me give a brief synopsis of what has happened since the early morning of 1 January 2009 – New Year’s Day. On 1 January 2009, Russia announced it had stopped deliveries of gas to Ukraine, whilst keeping deliveries to the EU at full level. That same day, the Czech presidency and the Commission issued a statement calling on both sides to look for a prompt solution and honour their contractual obligations towards EU consumers.

On 2 January 2009, as it became clear that deliveries to the EU were beginning to be affected, a formal declaration by the Czech presidency on behalf of the EU was issued and early in the morning on the same day in Prague, we received a Ukrainian delegation led by the Minister of Energy, Yuriy Prodan. This was made up of all parts of the Ukrainian political spectrum, such as the adviser to President Yushchenko, representatives of Naftogaz and the representative of the MFA.

On 3 January 2009, we had a lunch in Prague with the Director of Gazexport Alexander Medvedev, and I personally took part in both meetings. Both meetings revealed a flagrant lack of transparency as regards contracts between Gazprom and Naftogaz and especially a lack of confidence which prevents progress in reaching an agreement. The stories given by both sides were totally different on certain issues, so that was the moment when we started to push the monitoring issue.

In an effort to tackle this problem of divergent views, the idea of a joint fact-finding mission by the presidency and the Commission, led by the Czech Minister of Industry and Trade, Martin Říman, and by Matthias Ruete, the Director-General of DG TRAN, emerged, and it obtained the mandate to do this from an extraordinary COREPER I session, which we called on 5 January 2009, the first working day after the holidays.

The mission went to Kiev. They also visited the dispatching centre and then the next day they travelled to Berlin to meet the Gazprom representative on 6 January 2009. Also on 6 January 2009, as the gas supplies were severely reduced to several EU Member States, leading to a major supply disruption, an extremely strong statement by the presidency and the Commission was issued, calling on both sides to immediately and unconditionally resume gas supplies to the EU. The presidency and the Commission then sought to accelerate the conclusion of a prompt political agreement between the Russian Federation and Ukraine so that gas supplies could be restored without further delay. Gas supplies were also the number one topic of the European Commission’s meeting with the Czech Government, traditionally the strategic session, which took place on 7 January 2009 in Prague and also dominated the first informal council which we organised in the Czech Republic – the general affairs informal meeting held in Prague last Thursday. Again, we were planning to discuss energy security in advance, but, of course, we had to react promptly and thus adopted a strong declaration by the presidency on behalf of the EU, which was approved by all.

Following the complete standstill reached by gas supply transiting through Ukraine on 7 January 2009, with severe consequences for those Member States with little possibility to mitigate the cut, we stepped up pressure

and after lengthy and difficult negotiations got both sides to agree on sending a monitoring team composed of independent EU experts, accompanied by observers from both sides. This team was tasked with providing an independent monitoring of gas flow transiting through Ukraine to the EU and is deployed in both countries. Monitoring was defined by Russia as a precondition for the resumption of gas supplies.

Deployment of this mission was not easy to achieve, as you probably observed. First, the resistance of the Ukrainians to include a Russian expert in the monitoring mission had to be overcome, then an annex added unilaterally by Ukraine to the agreement painfully brokered by our presidency was refused by Russia.

After several trips by Prime Minister Topolánek to Kiev and Moscow and difficult negotiations with President Yushchenko and Prime Minister Tymoshenko and also Prime Minister Putin in Moscow, the agreement was eventually signed on 12 January and created a legal basis for the deployment of the monitors, and asked for the resumption of Russian gas supplies to the EU. Russia then announced that the supply would be resumed on 13 January at 08.00 in the morning, but then – I do not know whether it was 13 January – the progress did not take place as expected.

On Monday 12 January we, the Czech presidency, convened a special Council of Energy Ministers in order to press for further transparency on transit-related issues, identify short-term mitigating measures to be taken until supplies are fully restored and identify medium- to long-term measures that are needed to prevent the consequences of such major disruption in future.

The Council also adopted the conclusions reflected in document 5165 which urged both sides to resume gas deliveries to the EU immediately and to develop solutions that prevent recurrence. Furthermore, in these conclusions, Council agreed to urgently develop the strengthened medium- and long-term measures relating inter alia to transparency regarding the physical flow of gas, demand and storage volumes, regional or bilateral solidarity arrangements, to address the issue of missing energy infrastructure interconnections (which is a huge problem), to continue to diversify the transport route and sources, and to address the financing aspects of this, also by speeding up the revision of the Security of Gas Supply Directive.

A further meeting of the Gas Coordination Group on Monday 19 January now looks likely.

The Energy Council, the TTE, will revisit the issue at its scheduled 19 February meeting through the conclusions it will adopt on the Commission's Communication on the Second Strategic Energy Review.

These conclusions and the Commission Communication will be discussed at the March European Council meeting which will no doubt devote adequate attention to the events of the past weeks.

Allow me also to make a couple of final remarks in that introductory statement. First, the key objective of the presidency in the recent dispute has been an immediate resumption of gas supplies in the contracted amounts. The dispute is not over yet, as we all know. Therefore it is essential that the EU does not become entangled in the bilateral quarrels between Gazprom and Naftogaz.

Second, both the presidency and the Commission keep urging both parties to dialogue in order to reach a compromise under which gas supplies to the EU could be restored. The failure to respect the agreement of 12 January by either Russia or the Ukraine would, in the view of the presidency and the Commission, be unacceptable. The conditions for the resumption of supply – as stipulated in the agreement – have been fulfilled and there is no reason therefore not to restore the supply fully.

The presidency is well aware of the number of problems which persist. These need to be addressed, otherwise the insecurity concerning Russian gas via the Ukraine will linger on.

First, there is this issue of the technical gas that the Ukraine needs to keep its transit system running. It is necessary that both sides reach a transparent agreement defining who is responsible for the technical gas supply and who pays for it.

Second, it is crucial that the Russia-Ukraine contracts on gas prices and transit fees set clear and legally binding conditions preventing similar disruption from recurring. The presidency, together with the Commission, have repeatedly called on both sides to sign such a contract. However, neither we nor the Commission intend to intervene in the negotiations on the contractual conditions between the two commercial subjects.

The presidency is also aware of the widely-shared consensus among the Member States that short-, medium- and long-term solutions be adopted without delay that would prevent similar situations from recurring in the future. Energy security is one of the top presidency priorities. The presidency has taken the lead in chairing

the discussion on possible solutions for our energy dependency trap: be it the informal Council, as I mentioned, or the TTE-Energy session. Of the issues mentioned in the Energy Council Conclusions, I would like to mention the following.

Firstly, the Member States agree that the creation of a functional and efficient solidarity mechanism is one of the cornerstones of future EU energy security.

Secondly, solidarity presupposes interconnections of European energy networks, as well as improvements in energy infrastructure.

Thirdly, increased gas storage capacity is crucial for the operability of the solidarity mechanism.

Fourthly, in the light of the current crisis, the presidency also urges agreement on the review of the Directive concerning measures to safeguard the security of natural gas supplies by the end of 2009.

Furthermore the EU needs to diversify its gas resources and supply routes. To this end, the presidency will organise the Southern Corridor Summit in May 2009, expecting tangible results as regards the diversification of resources and supply routes and as regards closer cooperation with the countries of the Southern Caucasus and Central Asia.

EU energy security is not feasible unless internal energy security market is completed and functional. Therefore the presidency is looking forward to close cooperation with the European Parliament to compromise on the Third Energy Package at second reading.

The presidency is also ready to continue discussions of the Second Strategic Review with the aim of reflecting its outcomes in the Spring Council Conclusions.

Finally, in order to boost energy security the EU should strengthen the transparency mechanism and so on.

I think the Community is prepared for the situation both politically and technically. Politically, the presidency, together with the Commission and other Member States, has invested, and will continue to invest, considerable effort in order to solve the situation. Technically, during these recent weeks, we have acted in accordance with the Directive concerning measures to safeguard the security of natural gas supply.

This Directive established the Gas Coordination Group, which now proves its value. It requires Member States to prepare national emergency measures for this type of situation, sets minimum standards for the security of the gas supply to household consumers, and it prescribes that the Gas Coordination Group should ensure the Community coordination.

This mechanism has had a considerable effect in mitigating the effects of the crisis. To give you an idea, gas from storage was used and sold to neighbouring countries and even to members of the Energy Community, alternative fuels were used for electricity production, gas production was increased – including from Algerian, Norwegian and other Russian sources – extra deliveries of gas were made to neighbouring countries.

I stop here. I assure you that everything is being done, both at the political level and at the technical level, to incite the Ukrainian and Russian negotiators to re-install full contractual gas supplies to Europe and to minimise the negative consequences to our citizens and economies until that is the case. As you know, we are on the hotlines all day in Parliament because time is expiring and we need to have results. If we do not have results, it will inevitably have political consequences in our relations with both countries.

**Andris Piebalgs, Member of the Commission.** – Mr President, we are currently living through one of the most severe energy crises in European history, comparable with the oil crises that we had in the 1970s and 1980s. The difference is that those oil crises were global while this is very clearly an EU crisis.

Where are we today? Well, in spite of promises made and the protocol signed on Monday 12 January 2008 between Russian and Ukrainian ministers, myself and the two companies involved, Russian gas is not yet flowing through Ukraine to EU consumers.

The Commission has fulfilled its part of the deal: providing a European team of monitors to be spread over key places in Russia and Ukraine to observe the operations and report on their accuracy. We were able to mobilise a team composed of Commission officials and industry experts in 24 hours and they were already in Russia and Ukraine last Saturday to enable the flow of gas to resume as soon as the protocol was signed.

Yesterday Russia resumed gas deliveries to Ukraine in relatively small quantities that meet less than one third of the normal flow, but decided to use an entry point which, according to the Ukrainian company, is difficult

to use, and this led Ukraine to stop transport. The report of our monitors confirms that it was technically difficult (though not impossible) to ensure the transport under these conditions.

Today, unfortunately, the same situation occurred and the only solution is for the two parties to ensure full coordination of their technical operations, so that volumes and entry points match the requirements of the gas transport system.

If there is no further coordination, there will be no gas supply, and EU monitors and the Commission on the spot are trying to encourage both sides to find this technical agreement.

At the same time, I do not take sides. I do not want to blame one or the other party. But it is very clear that both parties have lost their reputation as reliable energy partners of the European Union.

*(Applause)*

Returning to the history of the last month, I wish to say that the EU reacted promptly, voiced its concerns, and both parties have been constantly urged by the highest-ranking political leaders to restore immediate supplies and to fulfil their obligations.

In normal contacts with both parties earlier in the years, knowing from previous experiences that deals are usually struck in the night from 31 December to 1 January, we always reminded them: 'Please find a solution to your bilateral gas issues because it is affecting our transit'.

Well, unfortunately this was not the case. We know where we are today in spite of all these efforts, and I strongly believe that the solution is in the hands of the two parties. But do they want a solution? The presidency and the Commission have called and are still calling on Russia and Ukraine to resume gas flows immediately. We have done our part. We are genuinely able to provide a full response about where the gas goes: not one cubic metre of gas goes in a different direction without us noticing. I believe that the measures that we have taken are sufficient.

But if both parties say that some other measures are necessary, we are ready to consider that, because I also see the lack of coordination and contacts between the two sides.

This is the immediate crisis. What next? I know that whatever solution we will find now is temporary, so to restore the credibility of this transport route we will need a long-lasting solution; so the contacts between those parties will definitely be continued during the Czech presidency, but will also, unfortunately, have to continue under the Swedish presidency.

But I believe that we have provided answers for security of supply in the Second Strategic Energy Review, in the work Parliament and the Council have done on the energy and climate change package. These are the solutions provided, and we cannot rely on external suppliers which unfortunately do not honour their contractual obligations and do not take into account consumer interests.

But I would like to stress particularly two issues that should be addressed immediately:

One is the lack of interconnection. Yes, there has been solidarity, but in a lot of cases it was hampered by the lack of sufficient infrastructure to deliver gas from the storage facilities that are there to the places where there is an acute need of gas supply. I believe that the debate on the recovery plan, where infrastructure is also mentioned, is really a good instrument to address these places, because there is not always enough commercial interest to really provide for this type of intervention.

Second, we definitely missed an opportunity in 2004 when we discussed the Gas Supply Security Directive. The instrument which was prepared was weak and did not meet the current needs. We have prepared, and we will shortly be submitting, the new draft proposal on the Security of Gas Supply Directive; an impact assessment is being made and in the coming weeks it will be here in Parliament.

I believe we should react immediately and really find coordinated Community mechanisms to respond to this type of crisis.

The presidency has really worked very hard and I would like to congratulate the presidency for always taking the lead, with the full support of the Commission. I believe that in these difficult times the European Union has proved that it is speaking with one voice. The European Union is led by the presidency and supported by the Commission.

But I also very much welcome all the activities that the European Parliament carries out, because Parliament provides the basis for an agreement. If two parties do not speak at government level, if the companies are trying to play games, which could provide for political stability? It is the broad political basis in Ukraine and Russia that speaks together, and I would thank Mr Saryusz-Wolski for his activities in providing this exchange of views, and also President Pöttering who took part in conciliating both parties. The solution is so easy if they would just talk to each other.

So I believe these were very important activities and I very much hope that after today's meeting in Parliament – because it is followed by both sides – there will be additional encouragement to resolve the issue. The party suffering the most is the party that is not responsible for this crisis, the party that has come in to facilitate matters; and this facilitation costs European taxpayers and European consumers money.

So I believe it is high time the gas flowed again towards the European Union in stable conditions.

#### IN THE CHAIR: MR ONESTA

*Vice-President*

**Jacek Saryusz-Wolski**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – Mr President, this major disruption in supply is a dramatic one for European citizens, European industries and European jobs and it comes on top of the economic crisis. We parliamentarians of this House, in our coming European elections, will all have to answer questions about what we have done to protect our industries, our jobs and our citizens.

Contrary to some initial opinions, the problem concerns political and multilateral entities and is not bilateral and commercial in nature. Three years ago, when we witnessed the first gas crisis following Russia's cutting of energy supplies, Europe realised its vulnerability and its limitations. Already then it became obvious that we need a common EU foreign policy on energy.

Our group, the PPE-DE Group, has supported this idea from the very beginning. It was our group which took the lead by asking for an own-initiative report towards a common European foreign policy on energy, which I had the honour to present to this House in September 2007 and which was unanimously supported by all the political groups and adopted almost unanimously.

It called for a comprehensive strategy with a precise road map towards a common EU external policy on energy, recommending a number of actions to be taken: in the short term, solidarity mechanisms, unity in defending our interests, more efficient energy diplomacy; and, in the medium term, diversification including Nabucco, storage, investments and interconnections.

Some of our recommendations have been addressed – albeit belatedly – in the Commission's second strategic energy review. We welcome this and also the efforts of the Czech presidency to solve the current crisis and to mediate between the two sides.

However, this is not enough if we are to avoid similar situations in the future, and this will only be possible if we equip ourselves with a truly common EU energy security policy and solidarity, which would offer lasting, sustainable and systemic solutions. It means the combined weight of Member States, represented by the European Commission, in negotiations, and a single EU voice vis-à-vis our partners, be they producers or transit countries. Meanwhile, we could envisage buying gas directly from Russia at the Russian-Ukrainian border.

I have two questions for the President-in-Office and the Commission. Commissioner Piebalgs and Deputy Prime Minister Vondra, could you elaborate on the scenario of the EU stepping in and taking over responsibility, with the Ukraine, for the transit? Secondly, what pressure instruments does the EU possess? What action could we take in response? Our group would expect the presidency and the Commission to undertake swift and radical actions and measures vis-à-vis our energy partners, Russia and Ukraine, to restore gas supplies. Our group will ask Parliament to be closely and permanently involved, even during the campaign and until the elections. I would inform you that we have established a contact group between the European Parliament, the Russian Parliament and the Ukrainian Parliament.

**Hannes Swoboda**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, my group requests that a temporary committee be set up pursuant to Rule 175 in order to answer many of these questions, which Mr Saryusz-Wolski has also raised; in other words, that we join with the Commission and the Council too, of course, to draw the appropriate conclusions – which we can hopefully draw together – from the situation by the May part-session.

The talks we have held with the representatives of Gazprom and Naftogaz – Russia and Ukraine, in other words – have confirmed our impression that both sides are behaving irresponsibly. I can reaffirm clearly what Commissioner Piebalgs said: at the moment neither is acting responsibly, nor as a responsible partner of the European Union. This must have the appropriate consequences.

For all my support for the initiatives taken, I must say that we have known for some time that Ukraine is refusing to build the monitoring stations it promised; the money provided by the European Union remains unused, and we have not reacted. We have also known for at least two months that agreement was not reached by the deadline of 1 November that was laid down at the beginning of October. In my eyes, 18 December was perhaps a little too late. The Commission should have done rather more here to be prepared for the worst-case scenario, and should also have told Member States what was possible. Admittedly, a great deal of solidarity was shown, but I should have expected it to foresee the possibility of a negative development such as this.

Yet what is important now is not that we point the finger – this is not my intention – but just that we draw the appropriate conclusions, that we are better prepared next time; or rather – much more importantly, of course – can prevent such a situation recurring.

I must add, Commissioner, that we have perhaps spent a little too much time discussing liberalisation and markets – particularly in the gas sector, as you are well aware. This would not have done us any good, and indeed it is not doing us any good now. As we have always pointed out, the gas sector is unusual, it is tainted – one could even say determined – by politics, and it is no use elevating the liberalisation of the gas sector to the supreme principle when we still have Ukraine and Russia playing this out politically. We do need a strong common line of communication in this regard, and this must be demonstrated just as strongly.

I agree with much that has been said here. We need more pipelines; we agree that the Nabucco pipeline is a very important project. You yourself also mentioned the trans-Sahara gas pipeline, to which we must give some thought. These things will not happen overnight, but signals must be sent out. We need many more interconnectors and interconnections. Yet these, too, will not just appear. Do not think that the market will take care of this, as it will not, since it has no interest in doing so. After all, these are investments that are not immediately profitable, but are made so that there is a reserve. The same is true of the gas reserves, of course. It is absolutely unacceptable for many countries to have few or no gas reserves or even refuse to notify the Commission of such reserves. We have to make common cause in this regard.

For all my criticism of details, this House and the Commission must really call several Member States to order and require them to pursue a common European energy policy at long last. I agree with Mr Saryusz-Wolski on this point: we have indeed called for this together, and received far too little support from the Council – or rather the Member States. If we want this, I do ask that we develop a common strategy on it by May – our last sitting. After all, it is unacceptable for this Parliament to go into recess or to the elections without our really having drawn the appropriate conclusions from these tragic events – hopefully together.

**István Szent-Iványi**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group.* – (HU) We now have an agreement and many promises, but still no gas. Enough of this! We cannot allow Europe to be an innocent victim of a cynical power play. If the gas supply does not resume immediately, this must have clear and decisive consequences. We cannot tolerate a situation in which millions of Europeans are without heat, we cannot tolerate several hundred thousand jobs being endangered.

Until now, Europe has avoided conflicts with the countries concerned and has made political concessions and gestures. This policy has failed. We Liberals have long been demanding a significant reduction of our dependence, our energy dependence, on Russia.

The clear lesson from this crisis is that the Nabucco pipeline needs to become a true alternative, and must therefore be given financial support. We need to create a common energy policy with stronger solidarity among Member States, with better coordination and by linking up the networks. We need to speed up the development of renewable and alternative energy sources and to improve energy efficiency.

However, this will resolve our problems only in the medium and long term, and thus we need to remind Kiev and Moscow firmly to fulfil their international commitments, and to announce that insofar as this is not done, there will be consequences for all aspects of our bilateral relations.

Russia must give evidence of acting in good faith and do everything in its power to see that gas delivery resumes without delay. Ukraine must also be made aware that although at the moment it is paying a political

price for gas that is lower than the market price, this price is actually costing them more than market price because it extends Ukraine's vulnerability and susceptibility to blackmail.

Now the European Union is also being put to the test before its citizens. Is it able to defend its interests effectively? If it fails this test, then Europe has no real future, but if it succeeds, it can look with optimism towards the future.

**Hanna Foltyn-Kubicka**, *on behalf of the UEN Group.* – (PL) Mr President, the gas crisis in Europe is a permanent one and much more profound than the European political elites would present it. We must emphatically underline that it is not purely economic in character. It is above all a political crisis, based on Europe's helplessness in the face of Putin's aggressive policy.

Let us not deceive ourselves – Russia is not concerned with a few dollars. The background to the events of the last few days have been the aggressive actions of the Kremlin, which aims to extend its domination in the region of South-Eastern Europe. Ukraine is of strategic importance to the Russians not only because a gas pipeline to Europe passes through its territory, but because the Russian Black Sea fleet is stationed at Sebastopol. The lease on this base is due to end in 2017, but few believe that the Russians will voluntarily leave the Crimea. Gazprom's demands are backed by the entire political and military machinery of the Kremlin, whose aim is to discredit and weaken the Ukrainian government and bring Ukraine to its knees. Unfortunately, Europe's passive attitude has helped Putin to draw closer to this goal.

**Rebecca Harms**, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group.* – (DE) Mr President, I too wish to start by saying that the Czech Republic has had a very tough start to its Council Presidency and that, in connection with this new gas crisis, it could not have done any more in recent weeks to put right the lack of clarification in matters of European external energy policy that there has been in previous years.

We are all currently seeing a demonstration that the oft-cited phrase 'external energy policy' stands for a common strategy that does not exist in Europe. Over and above this debate about Russian gas, Europeans collectively must answer the question as to what relationship they actually want to have with Russia in future. Gas is just one issue, the trade in raw materials is just one issue, but we are talking about the fundamental relationship of the European Union with its largest neighbour on the east of our continent, and that does need to be clarified.

At the same time, it must be clarified how the European Union means to deal in future with the countries that are still wavering between Russia and the EU. In my opinion, we could actually have foreseen what has now happened in Ukraine. It is no surprise to anyone familiar with Ukraine that not only Gazprom and the Russian State but also Ukraine mix politics and economic interests. The worst threat facing Ukraine at the moment is that the interests of certain political players could now result in the loss of the closer relations with, and reputation in, the European Union that the country has achieved. The criticism that has been levelled at competent figures in Russia during this dispute goes at least equally for Naftogaz, RosUkrEnergo, those in charge and the Ukrainian Government.

This is much more than a trade dispute, and I think that the Czech Presidency has steered us through it well over these last few days. I hope that the plans the Commissioner has presented will bear fruit. I should like to congratulate the Commission on its clear position on the inappropriate attempt to re-connect the high-risk reactor Bohunice to the power network. That would not be helpful, but rather would constitute a further infringement of Community law, this time from within the European Union.

**Esko Seppänen**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group.* – (FI) Mr President, Commissioners, President-in-Office of the Council, the Commission has taken on the role of mediator in the dispute over gas between Russia and Ukraine and done its best to start deliveries.

It has not been my custom to praise the Commission, but, on behalf of my group, I would now like to say thank you. It has acted not as a judge but as a doctor; not a surgeon, though, but more like a psychiatrist. There is now a need and a use for such people.

They get cold in other parts of Europe when in Ukraine the President and Prime Minister engage in a power struggle. Given such circumstances, the proposal yesterday by Mr Saryusz-Wolski, Chairman of the Committee on Foreign Affairs, that the EU should introduce sanctions to safeguard the flow of gas is irresponsible. Should we agree that the EU should start to boycott Russian gas? Poland, of course, should set an example to others in this and refuse Russian gas.

Our group hopes the Commission will continue to mediate actively to bring about harmony.

**Gerard Batten**, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – Mr President, I quote from a speech made on this subject by my colleague, Godfrey Bloom, on 25 October 2006: ‘The thought, the idea or the concept that the United Kingdom’s energy supplies could possibly be controlled by some sort of arrangement with a gangster like Putin is absolutely ludicrous. It is absolute madness to expect anything from a piece of paper signed by Putin. The man is a gangster’.

Mr Putin is now doing what any competent gangster would do – withdraw supply and force the price up. Europe will face two options: be prepared to pay much, much more for a precarious gas supply from Russia, or find alternative suppliers, if that is possible. The UK must ensure its dwindling gas supplies are kept as a national resource and not allow them to become an EU common resource. We must also embark on a programme of building new nuclear power stations.

**Jana Bobošíková (NI)**. – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, despite all the current efforts of the European Council and the Commission, some Member States remain without supplies of Russian gas, their economies are at risk and people are afraid of freezing. This is a high price to pay for the European Union’s short-sighted foreign and energy policy. And, unfortunately, it is being paid by the weakest.

Ladies and gentlemen, empty gas pipelines, production cuts and chilly schools are the price of the unnecessary Russophobia that is harboured by those members of the Union who have opposed the resumption of strategic partnership negotiations with Russia. It is the price of our uncritical support for the orange segment in the Ukrainian political spectrum, and for trying to manage policy on Eastern Europe from Brussels. It is the price of our fanatical rejection of nuclear energy. Furthermore, it is the price of the long-term efforts to interfere in the national energy policies of individual Member States. What advice would you give to the Slovak Prime Minister Fico, who now faces a ‘Sophie’s Choice’? While temperatures are 20 degrees below and the gas has stopped flowing from the East, the Commission in Brussels is threatening to penalise Slovakia if it restarts the nuclear power plant in Jaslovské Bohunice. Is it really meant to stand by while factories collapse and people freeze during the 20 days of reserves that remain to Slovakia?

Ladies and gentlemen, we are now seeing the importance of energy self-sufficiency for each State in the European Union. How nice it is to have a warm home-spun shirt instead of a threadbare EU overcoat. We should learn the lessons from this and avoid the transfer of energy-related powers to Brussels, as sought for under the Treaty of Lisbon.

**Giles Chichester (PPE-DE)**. – Mr President, it is almost uncanny how history has repeated itself over the interruption of gas supplies through Ukraine at this time of year. Yet we should not be surprised, for when better to catch people’s attention, especially during a cold spell?

It is not difficult to figure out the Russia agenda in all this, but I was particularly struck by the idea floated in the press that Gazprom urgently needs to make a deal based on higher gas prices, linked to last year’s oil price high, before those gas prices come down following the oil price fall.

Be that as it may, the implications remain the same as three years ago. EU Member States are at risk of over-dependence on gas imports from one dominant supplier. It is no longer good enough to say that we need Russian gas and they need our hard currency, so the trade is safe. We need to take action to safeguard security of supply.

Member States must bite the bullet and be prepared to pay for adequate gas storage facilities and stocks. Agreeing a level of how many days’ supply constitutes a reasonable reserve would be a good start. Diversifying supplies is another obvious step to take and the construction of LNG terminals around Europe is a good example. Looking at the Nord Stream and Nabucco pipeline projects in a more favourable light seems logical. We need to redouble efforts to improve efficiency and increase conservation of energy in electricity consumption – both in industrial use and domestic consumption. There are huge savings to be achieved.

Above all, we need to rebalance our energy mix and to do so with the twin objectives of security of supply and climate change policy. By increasing the share of electricity from renewables, nuclear energy and clean coal technology, we can do both, but each of these options takes time to deliver and, in the mean time, we must tackle improving energy efficiency with urgency and imagination.

**Jan Marinus Wiersma (PSE)**. – (NL) Mr President, I can endorse the view of many fellow Members. What has unfolded in recent weeks has led to great surprise. Even yesterday, I found myself considerably irritated when I listened to Russian and Ukrainian counterparts declaring here that they were certainly not at fault. We are constantly receiving contradictory information about what exactly is going on. We hear one story,

then another, and it is very difficult for us MEPs to find out the precise facts. We hope that this confusion will be resolved in the next few days and that gas, as promised, will flow once more.

Should gas flow once more, does this mean we go back to business as usual? I should not think so. In 2006, the same thing happened, but then the impact on the European Union was far less serious; the cause of the conflict between Moscow and Kiev back then was the gas price, which resulted in a break in the gas supplies to Europe. We warned back then that there was a risk of a repeat scenario, and that has now come to pass. We know that gas supplies are re-negotiated every year, because Ukraine and Russia work with one-year contracts. It was not until last month, when the crisis broke out again, that the European Union swung into action. Much of what we already discussed in 2006 has eventually failed to have any effect. Even then, we knew we were too dependent on one pipeline that supplies nearly 80% of the gas via one country. Even then, it was discussed that we should work on alternative supply routes as a matter of urgency. Even then, it was clear that we were not entirely sure if we could help each other as EU countries in the event of problems in certain countries, as is currently the case in Bulgaria, Slovakia and a number of other countries. Little has been done about this in recent years. It became clear in recent weeks how difficult it is to put a mechanism in place with which we can help each other out.

Russia and Ukraine have dealt themselves and their reputations heavy blows. It is, in my view, not up to us in the first instance to blame one country or the other. What is obvious is that both countries have little awareness when it comes to customer-friendliness. In actual fact, they are now causing major detriment to their top customer. We are one of Russia's good customers, we pay for this pipeline through Ukraine, we pay our bills on time and we pay global prices for the gas. I think that this cannot be hammered home enough to both parties.

This situation does throw up a number of questions, of course. What about the conflict of interest in the gas sector in Russia, the Kremlin's influence on Gazprom? I happen to be a little more knowledgeable about Ukraine and I know from experience that the gas business in that country is a very shady one; I believe that we should look into a number of matters in greater detail. Like Mr Swoboda, I am in favour of a parliamentary inquiry into how this situation came about, into what the EU failed to do that it should have done in recent years, and into how exactly these gas sectors in Ukraine and in Russia are set up, so that we might be able to prevent a similar situation from happening again in future, or gain a better understanding of what is going on right now.

**Janusz Onyszkiewicz (ALDE).** - (PL) Mr President, President-in-Office, Commissioner, in the agreement signed in October last year, Ukrainian premier Yulia Tymoshenko and Vladimir Putin stated their readiness to move to world prices for the transmission and storage of gas over three years. This agreement was underlined by a formal agreement between Gazprom and the Ukrainian Naftogaz.

However, Gazprom has recently issued a demand for a huge price increase to unrealistic levels. This type of blackmail is possible because Gazprom has a monopolistic hold over Ukraine. Many countries of the European Union are in a similar situation. This means that unlike petroleum, there is no free market for gas in Europe.

In the United States the price of gas has recently fallen to USD 198 per 1000 cu.m., while Gazprom is demanding USD 450 from Ukraine. This situation has to be changed through diversification of gas suppliers, and by building a transmission network within the European Union and among neighbouring countries so that, as with oil, there is a true pan-European gas market, which will curb the potential for monopolistic pricing blackmail.

**Marcin Libicki (UEN).** - (PL) Mr President, this gas crisis shows how important it is for the European Union to speak in one voice on the matter of gas supplies, particularly gas supplies from Russia, which is not a reliable partner and supplier.

In July last year the European Parliament adopted a report by the Committee on Petitions which I had authored, clearly stating that the question of energy and gas supplies to Europe is not a matter for bilateral relations. The issue then was the Northern Gas Pipeline from Russia to Germany. I now appeal to the Commission, as well as the Presidency, to ensure that the European Union speaks with one voice, and that it be made an issue of EU-Russian, rather than bilateral relations. I call for the implementation of all the demands contained in the report of 8 July last year, which stated that the European Union should be genuinely and truly integrated.

**Bernard Wojciechowski (IND/DEM).** - (PL) Mr President, several politicians have spoken in the debate on gas on one side or the other of the conflict. However, we do not know the facts of the situation. The EU observers are helpless. All we know is that we are dealing with frivolous organisations.

The situation is also evidence of the European Union's deficient energy policy. No support is given to alternative ideas, such as building nuclear power stations. The use of coal is opposed under environmental pretences. We have reached a situation where the only alternative has been to make Central Europe dependent on the East, the situation of poor Slovakia being a case in point.

**Irena Belohorská (NI).** - (SK) In connection with the Ukrainian-Russian conflict involving gas supplies I would like, as an MEP representing the citizens of the Slovak Republic, to draw the European Union's attention to the fact that this conflict of interests affects not only the two parties that are blaming one another for the mess, but also a third party whose citizens are becoming the victims, as there is still no prospect of Russian gas being delivered through Ukraine.

Slovakia has been without gas for eight days and, with the current emergency restrictions on industry and companies operating under a crisis regime, we can maintain supplies for only eleven days. Slovakia's gas is again stuck somewhere between the two warring parties. To put it briefly, two parties – two truths, no gas.

Let me inform you that today, at 11.45, Ukrainian Prime Minister Timoshenko rejected Slovakia's request to renew natural gas deliveries, explaining that: 'Ukraine does not have enough gas, we do not have our own reserves and neither will you'. I would also like to emphasise that as a result of our dependence on Russian gas and the impossibility of reopening the V1 nuclear power plant at Jaslovské Bohunice, the energy security of the Slovak Republic is increasingly under threat.

Commissioner, I thank you for your proposals and efforts to find a solution. I do know of one measure you can take – suspend the contributions to Ukraine as one of the irresponsible parties.

**Herbert Reul (PPE-DE).** - (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, this is a dramatic situation, as we know. The actions of Russia and Ukraine are irresponsible. It must also be said that the Commission is blameworthy in that we were relatively slow to take action, although it is also true that Commissioner Piebalgs has addressed this issue excellently over the past few days. The team of experts was a splendid idea, and I think he deserves thanks for the events of recent days.

However, this is also the time to ask why our reactions to such events are always so short-term. How many times has Russia attracted attention in this regard? It is certainly not the first time. We have now seen gas supplies being turned off periodically for several years, and so we must ask ourselves whether we – the European Parliament and the European institutions – have really done enough about the issue of security of supply, or whether we have been perhaps prioritising other issues. I think that Mr Swoboda was right to ask this question.

We have made a great effort to work out whether and to whom and on what conditions to sell and privatise the networks. We have spent weeks, even months, addressing the issue of how to respond to the climate issue, and not given sufficient thought to the fact that there is a third very important political project too: that of security of supply. What have we done to ensure a more varied energy mix in Europe, and to reduce our dependence? What have we done to ensure that coal power stations also figure in this mix? With our climate policy, we have actually discredited these coal power stations and thus increased our dependence on gas. What have we done to increase our support for nuclear power? The answer is far too little, far too timidly. What have we done to get other permissible pipelines sorted out? What have we done in the field of LNG? What has been done in the field of external energy policy? The events of the last few days have meant that it is high time we addressed the issue of security of supply in energy policy. That is clearly the crucial question.

**Reino Paasilinna, (PSE).** - (FI) Mr President, Commissioners, Parliament will soon vote on three of the packages on the electricity and gas markets. We have just approved the energy and climate package, but now there is a crisis we should organise a meeting on a bigger scale to include our partners. We have the political capacity for that and we have need of cooperation.

I am also in favour of the notion of a work group set up under Article 175 that would report back to this Parliament, in May, for example. The Russian and Ukrainian delegations should also be present.

It is a serious situation, as has been said. Millions of people are freezing and factories are being shut. By preventing gas from reaching the EU, Ukraine involved us in its problem. Russia did the same when it cut off the EU gas section.

Gas is flowing, however, through other transit countries. Thanks to speedy action on the part of the Union – and thanks go to the Commissioner for this – the meter readers are in place. Russian gas has evidently started flowing to the Ukrainian network, but it is still not reaching the Union. A peculiar situation has come about. Both the EU and Russia are trying to construct energy pipelines in new areas: the EU outside Russia and Russia outside its former Soviet Republics. It is work for those in the pipeline industry.

I would not be too inclined to impose sanctions on the parties in the row, however, and I do not think that sanctions are wise. I am sceptical about using force, as it might hurt us more than it hurts them. On the other hand, I would regard linking the Energy Charter Treaty to the future Partnership and Cooperation Agreement as being especially important. One possibility would also be to set up a syndicate to administer the flow of gas through Ukraine: that would be a quick and urgent measure. A neutral party also ought to be involved.

**President.** – Thank you very much for this final point.

**Henrik Lax (ALDE).** – (SV) Mr President, the EU is the world's largest economic power. Nevertheless, many people are freezing in their own homes. Why is the EU unable to guarantee heating? Now, as never before, it is clear that the EU must reduce its dependence on Russian gas. The EU must build up a common electricity and gas market in order to protect its population's access to energy. This requires solidarity within the Union. France and Germany are in a key position. No one, not even Germany, can count on more gas from Gazprom for many years to come. Nord Stream is no solution. The mediation in the gas war between Russia and Ukraine will give the EU a good opportunity to demand that both parties follow rules that are compatible with a common energy market within the Union. We must take advantage of this opportunity.

**Inese Vaidere (UEN).** – (LV) Ladies and gentlemen, I should like to look at this problem in a broader political context. In reality, the so-called Russo-Ukrainian gas war is one of the stages in the fight for influence in Europe. Both Ukraine and Georgia are states that we should gladly have on our side, but Russia wants to renew its former influence over them. Just as the middle of summer, with the beginning of the Olympic Games and the middle of the holiday season, was chosen for the invasion of Georgia, so the middle of winter, the time of the New Year holiday, was chosen for the gas war. Moreover, neither state was shown the expected path to membership in NATO and the European Union. It was already foreseeable, once we were unable to strike back appropriately against Russia for its aggression against Georgia, that Ukraine would be the next target. Russia's political technology is one of the strongest in the world and that state has demonstrated that it is prepared to sacrifice enormous resources in order to achieve its political goals. On this occasion, by dragging out the conclusion of the agreement in order to discredit Ukraine. This type of political technology also has enough resources to influence processes in countries in which it has an interest, and, unlike us, it plans and forecasts events. A compromise must be reached, gas supplies must be restarted, if Russia has enough reserves to supply. Thank you.

**Dimitar Stoyanov (NI).** – (BG) Thank you, Mr President. The general opinion is that Bulgaria was the country most affected by the gas crisis. It goes without saying that blame is still being apportioned by both whoever is guilty of cutting off the gas and whoever is guilty of the fact that Bulgaria has ended up with reserves which are not sufficient for it to withstand this gas crisis. However, let us now look at what we could do in the future. One option is a purely internal political one that involves finding an alternative source which Bulgaria can use to meet its needs in other similar situations. But the other option we have at the moment is directly dependent on the will of the Commission.

We have, or rather, Bulgaria has a huge energy source which was closed at the time for political reasons. This source is the Kozloduy nuclear power plant. At the moment Bulgaria has been operating electrical power stations run on coal, which pollute the environment much more than a nuclear power plant does. I am sure that fellow Green Members will agree with this. Shutting down the first four blocks at the Kozloduy nuclear power plant, which underwent dozens and dozens of tests that proved they were completely safe, was a huge mistake. This has caused huge harm to the Bulgarian people and now the Bulgarian people are continuing to suffer even more because we do not have anywhere to obtain energy from.

This is why I am making the following appeal to the Commission: it is high time to allow both Bulgaria and Slovakia to open their totally safe nuclear power plants, providing them with a safeguard against their energy shortage.

**Charles Tannock (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, Russia's use of interrupting gas flow as a diplomatic weapon has once again proved why we need a common EU external energy security policy by intergovernmental cooperation. Such a policy has the obvious benefit of minimising our exposure to Russian strong-arm tactics by encouraging alternative sources such as LNG, and new gas pipelines such as Nabucco and the trans-Saharan route, and building an integrated EU electricity grid.

However, it will also provide an impetus to the green agenda by encouraging renewable energy and energy efficiency and a renaissance of nuclear energy. I support Slovakia's emergency demand to the Commission to reopen their closed Bohunice reactor, which will also help to address climate change.

There is no doubt in my mind that Russia is bullying Ukraine and trying to destabilise the government by even implicating the United States now in this whole debacle, ahead of the presidential election in Ukraine next year, and also jeopardising Ukraine's Euro-Atlantic aspirations.

However, the EU has been dragged into this row as a collateral victim of the Kremlin's gas diplomacy. I cannot help feeling that Russia's action was timed to coincide with the start of the Czech presidency, although Prime Minister and Council President-in-Office Topolánek has shown great skill in handling this emergency.

Ukraine is possibly guilty as charged of siphoning off some Russian gas, but it is perhaps understandable in the context of the bilateral arrangements still unresolved between these two countries.

Ukraine is currently obliged to pay an intermediary company an extra USD 500 million a year. Given that Ukraine's gas debt to Russia is USD 2.4 billion, the debt could have been wiped off in about five years by scrapping this payment, which, allegedly, according to the deputy prime minister of Ukraine, ends up in the pockets of corrupt politicians.

We need to resist any attempt to drive a wedge between Ukraine and its future with the West, and in particular its future as a full member of the European Union. The best way to ensure that Russia can no longer bully or put pressure on Ukraine, or even provoke the EU into bullying Ukraine to settle, is to champion a common EU external energy security policy which will show solidarity between the Member States at times of crisis and energy shortage.

**Adrian Severin (PSE).** - Mr President, the problem we are coping with is not a mere Russia-Ukraine dispute. There is a Europe-Russia dispute having as its object the geopolitical status of Ukraine, a European Union-Ukraine dispute having as its object the European perspectives of Ukraine, a European Union-Russia dispute having as its object the Russian monopoly on the gas supply and a European Union-Ukraine dispute having as its object the Ukrainian monopoly on gas transit.

All these disputes combined place us in the middle of an energy war, which is about power-sharing. In this war we are not hostages but combatants. We are not mediators but one of the sides having a legitimate interest. This war extends its consequences from one crisis to another. Could we cease the combat and organise a peace conference?

We need rules for a free energy market shared by our Russian and Ukrainian partners. We need guarantees and mechanisms to enhance these rules and an arbitration system for dispute settlement as well as an institution to put in motion those mechanisms. We need a common European energy policy, served by appropriate legal and political instruments and consolidated by an integrated agreement with the supply and transit countries, Russia and Ukraine respectively. Sanctions cannot work. Confrontation is not the solution either. Let us be united and negotiate strategically and comprehensively. To this end, we have to organise an interparliamentary ad hoc working group formed by European Parliament, Russian Duma and Ukrainian Rada representatives to follow the process of consensus and strategy-building on a permanent basis as long as necessary.

**Toine Manders (ALDE).** - (NL) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, our society cannot function without energy, as is evident right now. Gas must continue to flow and in the short term it is, to my mind, especially important that all diplomatic paths be negotiated. This is what the Commission and Council are doing right now in a very commendable way so as to ensure that the gas supplies are back on track as quickly as possible; threatening with legal action is not a very effective course of action, of course.

In the medium term, I think it is very important to set up a European market for energy, provided that measures are taken that we have so far failed to take. It is time for action. I can see the Member States playing an important role in this, as in the accelerated installation of the Nabucco and North Stream pipeline, for example. Above all, we must ensure that one European network is created for both gas and electricity, which

will reduce our dependence and enable us to create a properly functioning market and to show more solidarity and better anticipate shortages. We will have to roll up our sleeves, though, and I wonder why the Member States have so far failed to take any measures.

**Dariusz Maciej Grabowski (UEN).** - (PL) Mr President, the European Union has successfully tackled global warming: adopting a motion was enough to achieve instant success. We managed to lower temperatures in Europe and bring in a winter that has affected the entire continent. This is proof of the European Union's power and capability according to the principle 'to want is to succeed'. But our success has turned into defeat, because now we need more heating for our homes and workplaces. This was something officials did not foresee.

In energy policy, the European Union is beginning to resemble the doctor in Hašek's story, 'The Adventures of the Good Soldier Švejk', who prescribed one treatment for all illnesses – an enema. The European Union has limited itself to verbal declarations, conferences, and in particular flirting with Russia, giving Russia the courage to use energy resources as an instrument of political pressure. To make matters worse, it found an ally in the form of Germany, with whom it is building a gas pipeline under the Baltic.

The conclusion is clear for all to see: we need to take urgent measures for independence from Russian gas supplies, bearing in mind the maxim of 'the weakest sink first', meaning that first we need to rescue the countries bordering and wholly dependent upon gas supplies from the East, such as Poland and the Baltic States, unless the European Union considers private interests and the interests of those representing Russia to be more important.

**Nickolay Mladenov (PPE-DE).** – (BG) Thank you, Mr President. At the moment, citizens in 18 Member States are being held hostage in the political dispute between Ukraine and Russia. I use the term 'political dispute' because we all witnessed how Gazprom and the energy supplies from Russia are being used as a political weapon to exert pressure on a sovereign state. Europe's citizens are being held hostage. The gas is supplied from Russia. The valve has been turned off in Russia. Yes, Ukraine does bear some guilt and so, I appeal to both the Council and the European Commission to tell our friends in Ukraine in no uncertain terms that unless both the opposition and government adopt a united stand on the key issues affecting their development, they will not be able to cope with this pressure which is being exerted on them and us respectively. Just as we have a consensus in our countries on key issues, they too must have a consensus on key issues.

Secondly, Gazprom must pay our countries penalties because at the moment Bulgaria, which is the most seriously affected country in Europe and is totally dependent on the gas energy supplies in Russia, must claim its rights and must claim them against the supplier, which is Russia in this case.

Thirdly, when it comes to energy in Europe, the one and same message must be given. We must clearly say 'yes' to nuclear energy in Europe, 'yes' to alternative energy sources, 'yes' to the different pipelines which make us less dependent on a single supplier, 'yes' to bigger storage facilities and 'yes' to more links between Member States so that we can avoid a similar type of crisis.

Last of all, I would like to say that in our case, the Bulgarian Government is also coming in for severe criticism. During all the years it has been in power, the government has been concealing the supply agreements with Russia and has not been doing anything to diversify our country's supply sources.

**Atanas Papanizov (PSE).** – (BG) Mr President, Minister, Commissioner, as a representative from the most affected country, I am appealing to you and the institutions which you represent to take immediate action to restore the supplies, while using every political means and every grounds under international law. I hope that, on the grounds of the principle of solidarity, the Council and Commission will accept the Bulgarian proposals to include as part of the unused EUR 5 billion the projects for establishing cross-border links between Bulgaria and Romania and Bulgaria and Greece, and for expanding the storage facilities at Chiren so that the most urgent needs can be covered, as well as for developing opportunities to jointly use the liquefied gas terminals.

As rapporteur for one of the documents in the third energy package, I feel that the issue of ensuring transparency above all and complying with the rules is more important than all the other issues relating to the third country clause. I also hope that the Commission will respond as soon as possible to the request that we sent with Mrs Podimata concerning the long-term measures which will be adopted so that we can actually have, prior to the Spring European Council, a common policy and effective measures that will resolve

problems similar to those which have occurred just now and were described today by Mr Barroso as unprecedented, unjustified and incomprehensible.

**Metin Kazak (ALDE).** – (BG) In spite of the agreement between Russia and Ukraine to restore Russian gas supplies to Europe, our hopes of receiving gas have been dashed yet again. No matter whether the reasons are technical, financial or political, this unprecedented gas embargo cannot be justified. During a winter with record low temperatures, it is reckless and inhuman to condemn millions of European citizens to being cold. For Bulgaria, the EU country most affected by this, it is especially important for the principle of *Pacta sunt servanda* to be observed and for the gas supplies to be restored immediately. Fair compensation should be sought for the harm and suffering caused to people and for breaching the agreements.

I would like to congratulate the Czech presidency for its active role as a mediator involved in resolving the crisis. Now more than ever, the European Union needs to put into practice the old motto of solidarity proclaimed by the Musketeers: 'All for one and one for all' and provide financial aid to countries that have suffered, like Bulgaria, for vitally important projects which will provide it with energy security. It is high time to demonstrate the strength and unity of our union by adopting a long-term energy strategy.

**Eugenijus Maldeikis (UEN).** – (LT) It is clear that this gas supply crisis is a political problem, not a commercial dispute. Both *Gazprom* and the *Naftogaz* company are carrying out the principal task in this conflict – trying to prove to all of us and society how impossible transit is in a technical, technological and economic sense. This is repeated constantly. All the more so because these partners of ours, the European Union's partners, are guided neither by elementary business practice nor by the Energy Charter. It seems that this does not exist for our partners. Unfortunately, I cannot see any willingness on the part of either Kiev or Moscow to come to an agreement. It seems to me that they are aiming to buy time in these negotiations and I believe that only political measures will help solve the political problem until the technical questions surrounding transit are resolved. I think that we must strive for political agreements and political guarantees between the European Union, Russia and Ukraine, until our goals are reached in the medium or long-term. One other thing on energy solidarity. Bulgaria's Prime Minister and Slovakia's Prime Minister are going to Moscow and Kiev to negotiate. This week of energy solidarity should not end with the negotiations once more taking on a bilateral format; I think that energy solidarity would be for Bulgaria and Slovakia to renew nuclear power operations in this situation. This would be true energy solidarity.

**John Purvis (PPE-DE).** – Mr President, I draw three fairly obvious conclusions from the impasse with Russia and Ukraine.

Firstly we must reduce dependency on gas, more and more of which will have to be imported. This means increasing our commitment to indigenous energy, including especially renewables and nuclear power.

Secondly, we must improve EU solidarity with mutual support between the Member States for electricity, gas and oil supplies. This implies much improved and extended grids and pipelines. Why should Bulgaria have no gas, while Romania on the other bank of the Danube has gas? Why does Slovakia have no gas while neighbours, Austria, Poland and the Czech Republic do? These gaps in the gas grid must be closed, urgently. What is the timing for this, Commissioner Piebalgs?

Thirdly, we must diversify our sources of supply and our storage facilities for gas and oil. Why are we not making fuller use of the depleted southern North Sea gas fields for storage?

We must greatly expand our liquefied gas infrastructure and develop pipeline systems from alternative sources and through alternative routings. We need better and more connections with Norway, with North Africa and West Africa, with the Caspian and Caucasus, with the Levant and Gulf States in the Middle East.

In conclusion, I therefore ask the Commission and Council if they are promoting renewables and nuclear urgently enough, investing sufficiently in the construction of pipelines and LNG terminals and in developing the political relationships which will ensure continuity and diversity of supply.

We clearly cannot depend on Russia or the Ukraine to anything like the present extent. We must put our own European interests first and without delay.

**Dariusz Rosati (PSE).** – (PL) Mr President, President-in-Office, Commissioner, Russia's behaviour in shutting off the gas to customers in the European Union is intolerable from the viewpoint of the contractual undertakings signed by Russia. European customers pay for their gas supplies from Russia within a specific time, and have the right to expect deliveries to be on time, regardless of any disputes between Russia and Ukraine. Premier Putin's decision to halt supplies before the TV cameras is not only in breach of signed

contracts, but also shows that Gazprom is not a business operating under market principles, but a firm carrying out the Kremlin's political behest. This debate should send out a clear signal to Russia and Ukraine to immediately reinstate gas supplies.

I would also like to say that the behaviour of the Ukrainians is disappointing. Lack of understanding with Russia, vague rules on paying intermediaries for gas and political infighting at the highest places in government compromise Ukraine in the eyes of the public and prevent that country from implementing its European aspirations. This is very painful for me, as Ukraine is an important neighbour and strategic partner for us.

The present gas crisis has finally confirmed that Europe needs to look after its own energy security. We cannot tolerate inaction any longer. I call, Commissioner, upon the European Commission to immediately put forward legislative initiatives which will make the necessary diversification of energy supplies possible, which will secure genuine, and not feigned energy solidarity, and result in the interconnection of the national gas transmission systems of individual Member States.

**Bilyana Ilieva Raeva (ALDE).** – (BG) Ladies and gentlemen, in the light of the intense economic crisis and severe consequences of the gas conflict, synergy is required among all the national and European institutions. The scale of the problem requires us to focus our efforts and alliances at EU level and beyond party boundaries on behalf of Europe's citizens and their interests and rights.

Alternative sources of energy and new technologies will reduce our dependency on importing raw materials and energy. The economic and social problems arising from the gas crisis are now being followed by ecological problems. The switch from using gas to fuel oil for whole industries, as has happened in Bulgaria, is hampering the European Union's plans to cut greenhouse emissions. We appreciate the European institutions' prompt intervention, but we need a privileged partnership for improving our energy independence. This is why the European economic recovery plan must take into account through financial support the current needs for building an alternative energy infrastructure, especially for the most dependent countries, like Bulgaria.

We call on the European Parliament to adopt a clear position supporting coordinated actions taken by all the institutions aimed at resolving this gas crisis and preventing a recurrence of such a crisis in the future.

#### IN THE CHAIR: MRS WALLIS

*Vice-President*

**Romana Jordan Cizelj (PPE-DE).** – (SL) The transport of Russian gas across Ukraine is not just a bilateral issue or a commercial dispute. It is a problem with a strong multilateral component, because the sale and transit of gas can constitute a commercial activity only if the necessary conditions are met. The minimum conditions in this regard are, in my opinion, transparency, clear-cut rules, competitiveness, credibility and control.

My question and concern is who will compensate the companies which have already had to suspend their activities? Who will compensate the individual citizens affected? By this, I mean that Europe needs to call somebody to account.

What can we do now? Let us intensify our diplomatic efforts. We must be quicker and more efficient at shaping common energy policy. The third area I would like to draw your attention to is diversification: diversification of sources, supply routes and the countries from which we import energy products.

As regards gas, I would like to mention two priority areas, in particular: the use of liquefied gas and the Nabucco pipeline project. Both of these will result in our diversifying supply routes and exporting countries. The Nabucco project must be given precedence over the North Stream and South Stream projects, not only at a European level, but also at the level of each Member State.

For this reason, I would like to request that the Commission provides us with at least basic information on the progress of the Nabucco project. I would also like to ask what additional action the Commission has taken in order to prevent these kinds of difficulties recurring in 2010, and to give us some indication of when gas is likely to start flowing into the Union again.

**Szabolcs Fazakas (PSE).** – (HU) Madam President, now that gas delivery is expected to resume as a result of the initially hesitant but ultimately coordinated, decisive intervention by the European Union and in spite of various technical and other supposed problems, we can breathe a sigh of relief, but we cannot rest on our laurels.

For one thing, the cause of the dispute between Russia and Ukraine has not been uncovered and resolved, and thus could flare up again at any time. In addition, the gas crisis has once again demonstrated our dependency and vulnerability. Recognition of this fact can unblock the delay in developing a common European energy policy, the first step of which is for Europe to take joint responsibility for securing supply.

In order to do so, we need to develop new sources and delivery routes, as well as interconnections between the networks of the Member States. We cannot, however, expect these developments to take place on a market basis; rather, European sources need to be made available based on common European interests.

The Nabucco pipeline represents a long-term solution, while development of the networks connecting the new Member States could already begin today, using the EUR 5 billion designated for the purpose in the economic stimulus programme. This would mean getting two birds with one stone, since this infrastructure could stimulate the European economy and provide jobs, while at the same time it could mitigate the effects of similar crises.

**Ivo Belet (PPE-DE).** - (NL) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen, this is not a new problem: it has been the subject of debate for years here in plenary and in the Committee on Industry, Research and Energy. Moscow has never made it more obvious how vulnerable we have become and how easy it is to bribe us. It is now time for action.

Commissioner, your diagnosis of a lack of interconnection could not be more accurate. We have to work on this, as it is, indeed, something we can do something about. We have to interconnect the gas networks within the EU. One of the main reasons this has not been done is that the licences are national. We should harmonise these more effectively, as they are different in every Member State. We have to find solutions to better streamline the national procedures. I am aware of the fact that the Committee has little authority in this area, but we should still try to bring about a break-through. What might work – and this is also mentioned in the Commission proposal – is if a coordinator was appointed for each cross-border project who could mediate in the area of interconnections and could get things moving. This coordination may be fundamental, and indeed it is where wind energy is concerned. I am pleased to find out that, in your second review, you clearly stated that coordination will be a feature of the planned development of an offshore network for wind turbines, particularly in respect of the connection with land networks.

Secondly, we should turn our attention much more to liquefied gas (LNG), seeing as it is much more flexible and leaves us far less vulnerable. Thirdly, the networks should be aligned to sustainable energy which, as we know, will be generated locally, and we must ensure that it is granted priority access to the network.

Ladies and gentlemen, Commissioners, it is clear what we have to do. I assume that the political will is now here for us to swing into action and that fundamental and specific decisions will be taken at the forthcoming spring summit.

**Zbigniew Zaleski (PPE-DE).** - (PL) Madam President, a customer who pays an agreed price has fulfilled an obligation. Russia is responsible for the crisis, and should be subjected to sanctions, Commissioner. Ukraine is clearly in the middle. If Russia cannot accept Ukraine's political direction, it will have to get over it, as it got over the loss of political influence over the countries of the Soviet bloc. The world is changing, and it simply needs to accept this fact.

Russia's theatrical performance in shutting off the gas seemed to show that it did not care about selling us its product. At least that was how it looked. I believe that for the good of its economy and of its people, Russia should pay attention to the market and to its image as a trustworthy partner. The two parties' dependence on one another, I stress, is probably the most important aspect of this contract and of cooperation.

I believe that the Russians will ultimately discover this truth, and Europe will consider Russia and become a good mediator.

**Zita Pleštinšá (PPE-DE).** – (SK) Gazprom and Naftagas are gambling with the trust of European consumers. Hundreds of companies in Slovakia have been forced to suspend production and people are freezing in their homes in Bulgaria. European citizens should not have to pay the price for commercial and political games.

It is hard to judge which party is more to blame, but one thing is clear – Slovakia and Bulgaria urgently need help. They need an immediate solution, they need an immediate renewal of gas deliveries and they need to know what will happen with their nuclear power plants.

I believe that despite all that has happened we will not turn our backs on the countries of the former Soviet bloc, including Ukraine, which want to free themselves from Russian influence. The citizens of Ukraine should not suffer just because their politicians have failed.

**Evgeni Kirilov (PSE).** - Madam President, generally speaking, I could agree with those colleagues who commended the active role of the Czech presidency.

However, I cannot agree with the political tone expressed by the Deputy Prime Minister Mr Vondra in his introductory remarks. His political tone is too calm. Yes, we have spoken, and we speak, with one voice, but this voice is not strong enough. Because, when we consider the plight of the millions of citizens in Europe suffering in this severe winter, we cannot be calm here. I wonder why it is so. We will have to act, and I agree with most of the colleagues who asked for an investigation, because we have to find out which of the two sides is more irresponsible. Both are responsible! Perhaps the reason for this calm political talk is the fact that now it concerns not only Russia but also Ukraine, and this is not correct.

I really think that not only this Parliament but also the presidency should raise its voice in the name of the citizens who are suffering.

**Fiona Hall (ALDE).** - Madam President, this crisis highlights the importance of making the EU more energy-independent, but, while we are discussing energy supply, we must not forget the fundamental importance of also controlling energy demand.

We have a 20%-by-2020 EU energy efficiency improvement target and a number of pieces of legislation focussed on energy saving. These energy efficiency actions will not only help to tackle climate change and fuel poverty: they will also very significantly improve Europe's energy security.

There is of course a good reason why the Commission's action plan on energy efficiency has an international element to it and recognises the importance of encouraging energy efficiency improvements in countries outside Europe, not least countries supplying and transiting energy to Europe. The fact is, if they use less, we are likely to get more. That is important above and beyond the immediate political side to this crisis.

**András Gyürk (PPE-DE).** - (HU) Madam President, I suggest that we speak clearly. The European Union has not learned from its experience in the 2006 gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine, and failed badly in the present crisis. Decision-makers reacted to the turning off of the gas taps as if this had been completely unexpected. This energy supply crisis, the most serious to date, may be the final wake-up call for Member States, and we must take steps to reduce our energy dependency.

I trust that it is now clear to everyone that the conflict that has erupted between Russia and Ukraine is not merely a private bilateral legal dispute, if only because it affects hundreds of millions of citizens of the European Union. The present crisis is not only a test of our common energy policy, but also of EU solidarity.

What is at stake now is whether Member States can move beyond the policies based hitherto on separate deals. What is at stake is whether the European Union is capable of speaking and acting in unity in so crucial a matter.

**Eluned Morgan (PSE).** - Madam President, I am glad to see Mr Vondra back. I thank him for explaining the gravity of the situation, but when is the Council going to learn that until the EU speaks with one voice on energy issues, in particular in relation to Russia and the Ukraine, we are going to be in a weak position?

I am going to give you an example where the Council does not do that. We shall shortly be starting negotiations on the second reading of the energy liberalisation package. The Commission came up with a very carefully crafted position on third countries investing in the EU, suggesting that the Commission speak on behalf of the EU on these issues. What have you in the Council done? You have retreated to national positions and said, no – we Member States we want the final say, not the Commission.

It is this divide-and-rule, the oldest trick in the book, which you and your fellow colleagues have fallen for. Until you understand that pooling your powers to gain more leverage internationally is the way to go, we will always be in a position where we are vulnerable. You must answer the European citizens as to why they are now sitting in the cold. You have to change your position on this line. Will you do so?

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** - Madam President, firstly let me offer my apologies to you. I am here for the first time and perhaps I spent so long on the introduction that I contributed to the

delay. But I think this summary of how we have been acting since the early morning of 1 January was worthwhile.

Speaking with one voice is exactly what we are trying to do in this adventure. I think we are quite successful in doing that for the time being.

You mentioned the internal energy package. This is not a subject of the current debate; we are discussing the emergency situation. But I can tell you that, from what I know of the discussion in the Council, the various fears about going for complete unbundling were simply motivated by strategic concerns in some countries. This is the debate about a third-country clause etc. However, I mentioned in my statement here that the Czech presidency takes this as one of its priorities, and we will do whatever we can to find a solution and compromise between the Council and Parliament.

But do not expect that it will bring us a miraculous solution like in those kinds of gas games in central and eastern Europe. It is different from being on an island, where you have the freedom to bring energy into any port you wish, as opposed to being located somewhere like Slovakia or Bulgaria. Yes, you are right that there are countries which are better equipped, even in that particular region, for that kind of emergency situation. However, I think we should also be aware of the fact that, for example, you cannot build gas storage facilities wherever you want. You need the right kind of a geological environment.

For example, we are fortunate in my country that all storage facilities are located in the eastern part of the country. We can pump from those storages and distribute gas even if there is almost no supply from outside. We are able to survive for a few weeks or months, but no longer. On the other hand, Slovakia unfortunately has those geological positions in the western part of the country and to reverse the flow is not an easy operation. You need to have the compressors on the pipelines and, if you do not, then it causes trouble.

To those who argue that this is a political problem: concerning speaking with one voice, I can tell you from all my experience that of course it is a political problem. It is a political problem because people are freezing so it is a politically difficult situation. Of course I agree with those, like Jacek Saryusz-Wolski or István Szent-Iványi, who argue that this is a kind of cynical game and, in fact, at the heart of this is the fight about who is going to control the infrastructure in the country in question. Others, like Hannes Swoboda and Jan Marinus Wiersma, stress that we should not take a black-and-white approach to this and that Ukraine deserves some attention – you are also right: of course Ukraine is not making this easier. That is, at least, my own view. But then we should be aware of the fact that Bulgaria and Slovakia are in a terrible situation, because suddenly there is a country that wants to exploit this difficult situation and to put those countries into conflict with Ukraine. That is what we can see right now, from the developments today, for example. So it is difficult – what can we do?

Then there are those who are afraid to enter into the game at all because they view it as being like the card game *Schwarzer Peter*, with the danger that whoever ends up with the black card will foot the bill. I do not think that the one who is afraid to play is courageous. I think a courageous person is one is willing to take a risk.

Why not buy gas on the Ukrainian-Russian border? An excellent example! We have discussed this, but who are the contractors on the EU side? They are private companies who are afraid because they do not have control over the gas coming in. There obviously should be a solution but that would require the willingness of Ukraine to give up a stake in the pipeline. As you know, their Parliament prohibits that and they are not ready to do it. European companies should take a certain role, and there is nothing that can be done in a matter of weeks or even months. So we need to step up the pressure. But today, for example, we said that legal action must follow here. I think this is important on both sides.

I do not want to repeat myself and again take longer than I should. I want to thank you above all for your interest and your active attitude – from Jacek Saryusz-Wolski, the PPE-DE Group, to all of you here. We need your help and your attention. We need your help in drawing attention to this issue to those in European countries where this is not a problem on the front pages. That is mostly in this part of Europe, where there is no emergency situation. That would help us to speak with one voice in a more active way.

Last, but not least, I agree with most of you who were arguing for the need for a more strategic approach, the need for medium- and long-term solutions – this is exactly what the Czech presidency is planning to do. We have the six months – and we have perhaps four months to work with you on it – but we are in complete agreement with the Commission and Member States to move the agenda forward in order to make this a

key item for the March European Council and, of course, also to organise in May the Southern Corridor Summit in order to promote the diversification of the supplies such as the Nabucco project and others.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, I will try to be as brief as possible. From the foreign policy point of view, there are many consequences and we started to look into these consequences in 2006 when we had the first wake-up call. The most important thing is what we can do together in the future. We have one problem and that is, of course, the Treaty. In the Treaty there is no common external security policy. In the Treaty of Lisbon we will have a solidarity clause, which could then be used to give the better coordination that has been used and mentioned everywhere. Secondly, for two years we have had energy diplomacy. Quite a number of memoranda have been signed. We have been working on this but much is still theory or is in the preparation phase. It is very difficult to get all the actors together at once. We can normally only do the framework, for instance for Nabucco. We tried then to get the volume of gas needed in order for Nabucco to be supplied and built. There, I think that public-private partnerships are necessary. This is my second point. The third is, of course as we all know – and it has been said so often – that this gas conflict is a commercial one, but one that also has great political connotations.

We also see the very poor state of Russian-Ukrainian relations, but our main goal has to be to stabilise the situation as much as possible. One of those possibilities will be our new Eastern Partnership idea where we will want the eastern partners to work together. On Ukraine, we will be holding a joint international investment conference on the rehabilitation and modernisation of Ukraine's gas transit system at the end of March. I think this is a highly timely event. Concerning the bilateral relationships – EU-Russia or EU-Ukraine – I think it is clear that the energy supply and transit aspects of the new agreements currently being negotiated have taken on a new importance and will be there.

My final point is that we are not only looking towards the east, but also towards the south. We have already been working with many Arab countries on initiatives to get gas, via Turkey, hopefully to a Nabucco pipeline. That means that diversification of pipelines, sources and, of course, of different energy – as has been said here – will be the way to go in the future. For this, we also need the right legal basis and this is difficult.

**Andris Piebalgs**, *Member of the Commission*. – Madam President, honourable Members, I will just say a couple of things. First of all, our task is to restore supplies immediately because people are suffering, industry is suffering, people are losing jobs; so that is the main task, not to create additional obstacles.

But, after that, an analysis should take place, and measures should also be taken. We should revisit some of our stereotypes, because if 2006 could be called a wake-up call, this is a real shock.

In reality we are underestimating what really happened. If two countries' governments have accused each other of turning off the tap of the gas pipelines, then the only conclusion that I can draw – because I trust the countries and governments – is that somebody tampered with the pipelines, and that is very difficult to believe.

So what has happened is really extraordinary and I believe it should have a huge impact on the energy policies that we are trying to create. That is why I believe that no issue should be taboo any more. We really should discuss how to guarantee security of supply under all possible conditions.

And, to be honest, I never expected full disruption of supply. It was never in my expectations: it was a shock for me too. You can blame me as Energy Commissioner, and say 'You should have foreseen this'. But it was never to be expected. It is something new that never has happened before and we should in future be prepared for such a type of measure.

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

The vote will take place tomorrow (Thursday 15 January 2009).

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

**Cristian Silviu Buşoi** (ALDE), *in writing*. – (RO) The European Union is facing, once again, a crisis with its supply of natural gas. It is not clear who is to blame. Russia? Ukraine? Both? I urge the European Commission to make public information indicating the reasons which have sparked this situation. The European Union must assume the responsibility of stating who is actually to blame.

The crisis has highlighted, unfortunately, that many of the European Union's countries are vulnerable to energy blackmail and may end up suffering as a result of the misunderstandings, more of a political than an

economic nature, between the countries from the former Soviet Union. It is obvious that we must speed up the process of creating a common European energy policy, based inclusively on a common external approach. We must expedite the process of diversifying supply sources and transit routes for natural gas. In fact, accelerating the Nabucco project is vital.

I think that the Energy Commissioner must submit a report detailing the actions which have been taken or, more precisely, which have NOT been taken by the Commission to support the Nabucco project during the last year.

**Sylwester Chruszcz (UEN), in writing.** – (PL) In today's debate much has been said about gas supplies and the links, interconnections and dependency of the European economies. We must learn from the present crisis.

We also have to regard the Yamal 2 project as something rational and in our interest. It is not only better than the Baltic pipeline to Germany, which bypasses Poland, but will increase our energy security. If it is built, Yamal 2 will mean a significantly greater transit of gas via Poland to Europe, as well as being a more cost-effective and efficient solution than the Northern Pipeline, and in addition, it can be built more quickly.

This I believe is the way we need to direct our efforts to ensure energy security for all EU Member States.

**Corina Crețu (PSE), in writing.** – (RO) The gas crisis spotlights two major problems which the European Union is facing.

On the energy front, we still do not have a common strategy, due to the absence of the cohesion required for this. At present, 11 of the 27 EU countries have been affected as a result of supplies being cut off. However, the dependency on Russian gas is a common security problem, bearing in mind that the energy weapon can be used at any time, especially against Russia's former satellite states. In this situation, it is the EU's duty to find a solution for creating a secure energy zone for new Member States. The real problem for Europe is diversification of gas sources and not the transit routes between Russia and the EU.

Secondly, the gas crisis shows the political weakness of a divided, hesitant European Union. One of the glaring shortcomings comes from the EU presidency. We need, particularly in times of crisis, a representative voice to speak on behalf of the EU. A choir of several voices risks casting ridicule on the idea of a United Europe, not to mention its international image and influence. This is why it is necessary to establish a European presidency for a longer duration, which is also independent of Member States' political structures.

**Daniel Dăianu (ALDE), in writing.** – Another wake-up call.

The current gas crisis shows once more how weak and ineffective our EU energy policy is. When under big pressure EU national governments rely, basically, on their own resources and sources. This is not surprising under the circumstances, but it shows another facet of lack of EU solidarity. This crisis also highlights what is a must for future steps in EU energy policy if we wish to have one, in reality. As for oil stocks we should develop gas storage. We need to diversify gas suppliers, supply routes and delivery mechanisms (as in the case of liquefied natural gas). The construction of the Nabucco project should be speeded up and the money for this project should be enhanced by involving the EIB in its funding. The argument that not enough gas would be available were new transport routes to be developed does not stand scrutiny. We need to develop renewable energy resources at a faster pace and save energy. Last, but not least, we need to develop cross-border energy interconnectors, so that EU Member States can help each other if need arises.

**Dragoș Florin David (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) Madam President, Commissioner, ladies and gentlemen.

The energy sector represents a major economic and geopolitical factor. Nowadays, almost half of the EU's energy is dependent on imports, with the forecasts indicating to us that imports will account for 70% of the natural gas supply and 100% of the oil supply by 2030. These must be the main motives for us to devise a common energy policy as a matter of urgency. This requires us to base the implementation of a common energy policy on three pillars: interconnecting the national networks completely at EU level, diversifying our supply sources and adopting active measures aimed at saving energy.

All of these measures must also result in avoiding energy crises like the current crisis involving the gas supplied by Russia through Ukraine, which is creating major problems for the EU's population and is disrupting its economy. Is it really possible to steal gas from a network like a wallet from a pocket? Is it really possible to cut off a supply just like that, in a couple of minutes, without notifying the user beforehand? I think that before examining the non-compliance with international treaties and agreements and the fact that

the supplier which receives the largest share of its revenue from gas exports treats Europeans, who are paying reliably for this gas, with indifference and disinterest, we must look at solutions for the EU's energy security.

**András Gyürk (PPE-DE), in writing. – (HU)** The European Union has not learned from its experiences in the 2006 gas crisis between Russia and Ukraine. Decision-makers reacted to the turning off of the gas taps as if this had been completely unexpected. This energy supply crisis, the most serious to date, may be the final wake-up call for Member States: we need to take steps to reduce our energy dependency. The conflict that has erupted between Russia and Ukraine is not merely a private bilateral legal dispute, given the fact that it affects hundreds of millions of EU citizens.

The present crisis is not only a test of our common energy policy, but also of EU solidarity. What is at stake now is whether Member States can move beyond the policies based hitherto on separate deals. What is at stake is whether the European Union is capable of speaking and acting in unity in so crucial a matter.

The inactivity of the past days is particularly painful, given that the European Commission made a good job of defining the steps which may reduce Europe's dependence. We can only agree with what is set out in the Energy Security and Solidarity Action Plan. Investments must be made as soon as possible in developing alternative delivery routes and in linking up existing networks. Support for energy efficiency infrastructures needs to be expanded and we need to strengthen the energy dimension of the EU foreign policy that is currently taking shape.

I believe that the current crisis would not have had such a drastic effect if the Member States had not come to their senses only at the last minute, and had committed themselves to a common European energy policy in more than just words.

**Filip Kaczmarek (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PL)** It appears that the present crisis in the supply of gas to Ukraine and to Europe has far greater ramifications than previous crises which were the result of the same problem of Russia's monopolistic position in gas supplies to the EU. It has helped us to grasp the true meaning of concepts and terms we often use, but do not always comprehend, concepts such as energy security, EU solidarity, common energy policy or diversification of supplies and means of delivering gas and other fuels. We do not even need to know the real reasons behind Russia's behaviour to draw our conclusions. Knowing the motives is obviously important for making a moral and political assessment of how individual countries and firms behave, but the fact remains that regardless of the motives of the individual parties to the agreement, some citizens of the European Union have been exposed to the painful results of having no gas. The truth is important, but it will not deliver gas. Let us use this opportunity to get serious answers to several questions. Will we be able to draw the right conclusions from the present situation? Will we be able to rise above the short-sighted perspective being used by political parties who are at present in the opposition, and who are cynically using the situation to make unfounded attacks on their own national parliaments? Will Nabucco be built? Will we increase our mandatory fuel reserves? Will the ideological opponents of atomic energy change their views? Let us hope so.

**Janusz Lewandowski (PPE-DE), in writing. – (PL)** Madam President, the lesson of the present gas crisis is compelling, and the European Union must learn from it. It is yet another turning point, and should be the last one that exposes the lack of governance of 27 countries. This is what the people of Europe expect, even in those countries not directly affected by the gas blockade, and which are less reliant on supplies from Gazprom.

The mechanism of solidarity, sketched out in the 2004 directive, is wholly unsuited to today's challenges. We need to agree on a practical common policy on solidarity, security and diversification in energy. We do not need slogans. We need investment in infrastructure. We need to secure ourselves against a future crisis by increasing our gas storage capability. Energy solidarity requires cross-border connections joining the transmission networks of individual countries. Poland is a good example of this: although it is supplied mainly by pipelines from Russia which bypass Ukraine, and therefore less exposed in the present crisis, it is nevertheless cut off from Western Europe's transmission and storage system.

We are concerned that one outcome of the present crisis is that it has reduced the credibility of Ukraine, and not just of Russia. This effect of the gas war is no less important than the temporary problems experienced by consumers during a harsh winter.

**Marusya Ivanova Lyubcheva (PSE), in writing. – (BG)** It is very difficult for us to discuss the topic of the gas crisis given that the Council, EP and European Commission ended up with their hands tied at the end of it. But the debate is very important, albeit inadequate. I would like to thank all fellow Members from various

political groups and Member States for their expressions of support for Bulgaria and the other countries which suffered from the crisis.

At the same time, this does not make gas appear and create normal European living conditions for our fellow citizens. As a result of this crisis, Bulgaria has turned from being an energy centre in the Balkans into a gas crisis capital.

This is why urgent action is needed. The consequences of this crisis are humanitarian and economic. This is destabilising our country, on top of the financial and economic crisis. The EP must adopt a resolution where it sets out its position and the measures which will help us overcome the crisis. Here and now. These measures must include nuclear energy and a quest for new sources of natural gas. We need a new action mechanism and set of tools.

If the EP is not part of the solution to the problem today, it will become part of the actual problem. This will result in a negative political outcome for the EU.

**Marian-Jean Marinescu (PPE-DE), in writing.** – (RO) The current crisis has highlighted once again that the main problem is dependency on the energy resources located in the Russian Federation and the use of this situation by the Russian Federation in a manner which lies outside standard international procedures.

The declarations made by the President of the European Commission and the President of the Council during the time of the crisis in Georgia referring to a change in the EU's relationship with Russia need to be put into practice.

The Treaty of Lisbon needs to be ratified so that we can create a common European energy policy.

We must start building the Nabucco gas pipeline without delay.

It is absolutely necessary to promote energy projects which raise the profile of the Black Sea region and use the energy sources from the Caspian Sea region.

The enlargement of the European Energy Community to the east and the inclusion, as a priority, of energy as a topic in the new framework created through the Eastern Partnership may also contribute to resolving the current situation.

**Katrin Saks (PSE), in writing.** – (ET) Madam President, honourable Chairman.

It is unfortunate that the Czech presidency began not as previously planned, but with the imposed resolution of the Russian-Ukrainian gas conflict, in the same way that the previous presidency had to begin by seeking an end to the Russian-Georgian War.

Everything has a positive side too, however. Thanks to this war over gas provision, energy matters have risen to the forefront, especially the realisation of the need for a common energy policy.

This common energy policy cannot, however, be shaped in Brussels, if Member States are not motivated by common interest, but instead conclude bilateral agreements on terms that are favourable only to them. In this sense, a common policy must arise from the capital cities of the Member States, not from the corridors of power in Brussels, as one would anticipate.

I hope the spokesman is successful in strengthening that understanding.

**Toomas Savi (ALDE), in writing.** – Russia blocked gas supplies at an extremely inopportune time for European consumers and it is essential that the gas deliveries are restored without further ado. But, after having resolved the crisis, we must take a long look at our dependency on gas from Russia, and there are two aspects that ought to be considered.

First, Russia must assure its capability of fulfilling its commitments to the EU. The failure of outdated technology and infrastructure may jeopardise the stable flow of gas to the EU. It should also be noted that despite ambitious plans on the Nord Stream gas pipeline there is no certainty that the output of Russia's natural gas fields is sufficient for meeting their commitments.

Second, the Kremlin has a history of using economic instruments as political tools. The European Union should never become a victim of such political behaviour. I encourage the EU to diversify its energy package to avoid its dependence on one single natural gas provider.

**Daniel Stroj (GUE/NGL)**, *in writing*. – (CS) In my opinion, there are two aspects to the problem of gas supply from Russia to Ukraine and then on to the EU. The first is that many people are up in arms hollering ‘How dare Russia do this!’ I ask: Why should not it? If the EU itself is primarily a neo-liberal project where the market supposedly resolves everything, why should not Russia be allowed to behave commercially and demand payment of the money owed to it by the debtor? The gas crisis was not triggered by Russia but by Ukraine, and it is not a political problem, but an economic issue. This needs to be made quite clear! The second aspect is the focus (which I have criticised several times in the past) of EU bodies and institutions – and Parliament is no exception – on problems that are irrelevant and only divert attention away from the really urgent issues. This was reaffirmed by the reaction to Russia’s legitimate decision to suspend gas supplies. Rather than the embarrassing pampering accorded to the Ukrainian administration as a sort of ‘protective filter’ between Russia and EU countries and rather than dreaming up the perfect shape for a cucumber, the EU should have been preparing for a crisis of this kind long ago. How has the EU helped the Slovaks and Bulgarians, for example, who have been hit hardest by the gas crisis? Was it able to help them at all? If not, there is something wrong with integration.

**Kristian Vigenin (PSE)**, *in writing*. – (BG) In the gas war between Russia and Ukraine, those who have ended up affected most are the most innocent. The current situation clearly shows how dependent Europe is not only on the source of the resources, but also on the transit countries. It also shows how unjust the criticisms have been about the alternative pipelines, such as the Nord Stream and South Stream pipelines. Unfortunately, it highlights too how helpless the European Union is in providing assistance to its Member States which were most affected and in guaranteeing its citizens’ security.

Our basic task now is to restore gas supplies. The EU also needs to utilise its entire political resources to persuade Russia and Ukraine to free the 18 Member States which they are holding hostage.

The second measure needs to be support for the countries most severely affected. In the climate of an economic crisis and contracting markets, the blow from a gas shortage may prove to be fatal for many companies in my country and thousands of people will end up out of work. Who will be responsible for this?

The third and most important measure in a long-term plan is the construction of the alternative gas pipelines, especially Nabucco, investment in connecting up the Member States’ gas supply networks and the building of storage facilities to ensure larger reserves.

The only conclusion from all of this is that we need a single European policy, but it is a pity that we always realise this after a deep crisis.

**Andrzej Tomasz Zapałowski (UEN)**, *in writing*. – (PL) Madam President, the matter of the crisis in gas supplies to the EU, in Ukraine and in the Balkans should be viewed primarily as an element in the struggle for political and economic influence in the former Soviet republics.

The country that is being fought over now is Ukraine. Russia has joined in the election campaign that is underway there. It wanted to use this to show the Ukrainian public that if it remains true to Russia, Ukraine would have cheap gas and oil.

The present conflict also shows that this kind of geopolitical influence is more important to Russia than good relations with the EU. Russia has factored the economic costs of shutting of gas supplies into its actions. So we should not delude ourselves – this is only the start of the struggle for influence in Ukraine.

In its inherent blindness, the European Union wants to continue to rely on imports of gas and oil for energy. At the same time its own resources of coal and lignite (in Poland included), are lying idle. I do not know whether this is political stupidity, or simply a matter of keeping energy pressure over particular countries in the Community.

**Marian Zlotea (PPE-DE)**, *in writing*. – (RO) The issue of Ukraine and the European Union being supplied gas by Russia must be resolved as quickly as possible. The European Union needs an energy security policy, as well as a diversification of its resources and solidarity in the energy sector in order to prevent such crises which affect its citizens.

More than half the EU’s Member States are affected by Russia halting the supply of gas. In Bulgaria, the supply of gas to industry has been reduced or interrupted as this country is 90% dependent on gas from Russia.

I support the stance of both the Presidency and the Commission in urging both sides to engage in dialogue in order to reach a compromise. Without technical coordination between the two sides, gas cannot be

supplied. In the future, we need to keep the dialogue open with both sides in order to avoid ending up in similar situations.

The Council and Parliament are proposing, through the energy package which is under discussion, a series of measures which involve using more energy suppliers for the consumer's benefit. We hope that the package will be adopted at second reading.

This crisis must be resolved as soon as possible because it is affecting both Europe's citizens and its industry. We need a common external policy in the energy sector.

## 10. Question Time (Council)

**President.** – The next item is Question Time (B6-0001/2009).

The following questions are addressed to the Council.

**President.** – Question No 1 by **Milan Horáček** (H-0968/08)

Subject: Justice in Russia

How does the Council Presidency view the justice system in Russia, in particular the imprisonment of opposition politicians – for example Platon Lebedev and Mikhail Khodorkovsky, whose trials and conditions of detention constitute a violation even of Russian law? How much importance will be attached to these abuses when the partnership and association agreement is being negotiated with Russia?

Question No 2 by **Bernd Posselt** (H-0999/08)

Subject: Justice system in Russia

One of the main obstacles to unconstrained political and economic relations with Russia and to a new partnership agreement is the presence of the major shortcomings in the Russian justice system. What steps is the Council taking to urge the review of political judgments – such as those in the Yukos case resulting in the imprisonment of Khodorkovsky, Lebedev and Bakhmina – and the equally illegal enforcement of those judgments, and to support the creation of a justice system independent of authoritarian political structures?

Question No 3 by **Tunne Kelam** (H-1008/08)

Subject: The rule of law and the judicial system in Russia

As a value-based community, the EU should make the rule of law and respect for human rights the cornerstone of its relations with third countries. The judicial system in Russia is being politicised and is openly being used as a tool in the hands of Kremlin rulers. Lawlessness and corruption should therefore be on the list of priority for the EU when it seeks to pursue future relations.

In view of the latest spectacular cases concerning Khodorkovsky, Lebedev and Bachmina, my question to the Council is: How does the Council respond to Russia in cases of such unlawful and corrupt court decisions? How will the Council handle this issue in the EU-Russia relationship and what measures will the Council take to ensure that Russia makes changes to its judiciary system?

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – I know that my friend Milan Horáček is a man who has been committed for a long time to observing the human rights situation in Russia, and I want to thank him for doing that because this is exactly what this body, this organisation, should do.

Regarding the question on that particular issue, I would like to assure him that the Council fully shares the concerns about developments as regards the rule of law and democracy in Russia.

The Council is of the view that our partnership with Russia must be based on respect for international law, democratic principles and human rights. Therefore, the Council will continue to press Russia to implement fully the obligation it has signed up to as a member of the Council of Europe, and of course the OSCE, and also in the framework of the PCA – the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement with the EU.

The cases quoted by you and your colleagues are of great concern and the Council will continue to follow developments closely.

The Council raises its concerns with Russia on a regular basis as part of the political dialogue, in particular in the twice-yearly human rights consultation introduced in March 2005.

Russia's actions in this and other areas will be taken into account in the negotiations on a new agreement with Russia – that is very important – and also in other aspects of EU-Russia relations.

Achieving robust provisions on human rights in the new PCA currently being negotiated is also one of the EU priorities as set out in the negotiation directive which was approved by the Council last year.

The strategic partnership with Russia, which some are talking about, must be built on shared values; otherwise it would have no sense. The EU needs the new agreement, but so does Russia. It is crucial that the negotiations, as well as the text of the agreement itself, mirror values which are dear to us, such as the rule of law. Personally, I can promise that I would like to stress that the unity of the EU is absolutely decisive for achieving results here.

**Milan Horáček (Verts/ALE).** – (DE) Madam President, I have a problem with the fact that the Council has repeatedly told us in the past that relations with Russia take priority, but in the particular cases of Mikhail Khodorkovsky, Platon Lebedev and also Svetlana Bakhmina there is no progress of any kind to be seen.

**Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr Vondra, I hold you in high regard as an experienced human rights activist, and I also regard Czech creativity very highly, hence my questions. Can you help us find new ways to bring the issue of the Yukos prisoners closer to a solution after years of talking, in other words to develop a degree of actionism? Also, how can we bring the human rights issue into somewhat sharper focus in practical terms in the negotiations with Russia?

**Tunne Kelam (PPE-DE).** - Minister, thank you for your answers. Would you agree that, if the Council had strongly and convincingly presented this problem to the Russian side, demonstrating that the EU is serious about such a scandalous violation of justice, economic relations would also have been on a better footing today?

Would you agree that unless the Khodorkovsky and Lebedev case finds a just and transparent solution, the EU cannot expect Russia to meet its economic commitments either?

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – I think that, having a Czech presidency, you cannot expect us to stay silent. I was not silent when we were discussing energy security and I was not silent in the past when we were discussing the Khodorkovsky case and other cases.

You probably know that we will have a troika meeting in February where the presidency will be represented by the Foreign Minister, Karel Schwarzenberg. Certainly, in those cases to which you refer, we will consider the steps, but of course whether there are results or not is totally in Russian hands. We can simply create a certain environment to keep up the pressure, but it is up to Russia to respond.

**Daniel Hannan (NI).** - I should like to welcome the Minister to the Chamber and welcome the Czech Republic to the presidency. I wish that every Member of this Chamber could say the same thing. I have to say I was shocked by the tenor of some of the questions directed at the Czech Prime Minister today. One of our colleagues, Mr De Rossa from the Irish Republic, invited him to withdraw his remark that the Treaty of Lisbon might not be as wonderful as Mr De Rossa thought, which apart from anything else was rather insulting to that majority of Mr De Rossa's own constituency...

*(The President cut off the speaker.)*

**President.** – Question No 4 by **Marian Harkin** (H-0969/08)

Subject: World trade liberalisation

As part of the priorities of the Czech Presidency, the Czech Republic has outlined on the Presidency website its ambitions in relation to world trade liberalisation. Can the Presidency elaborate on its ambitions in this regard and in particular on the steps it proposes to take in relation to food security in the EU?

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – I thank you for this particular question, because I come from a country which is a great friend of free trade. It is the bedrock of our economy – about 80% of our GDP is somehow produced by the activity which relates to this trade. So you can be sure that our presidency

is keen that the Union remains fully committed to reaching a balanced, ambitious and comprehensive agreement in the WTO Doha Development Round. We will be working hard on that.

Regarding the question of my presidency's ambitions in relation to world trade liberalisation, the presidency has clearly defined its main priority on this subject in the context of the Council's 18-month programme for the French, Czech and Swedish presidencies, as well as in its own work programme, which was published last week and was also introduced here to some extent by the Prime Minister today.

According to this programme, trade policy remains a very important tool for addressing the opportunities and challenges of globalisation and fostering economic growth, jobs and prosperity for all citizens in Europe. Efforts will be sustained to promote an open, market-oriented and rule-based world trading system for the benefit of all.

Trade policies should also contribute to the Union's environmental and climate objective, in particular by encouraging the expansion of trade in environmental goods and services. The Union continues to stay fully committed to reaching a balanced, ambitious and comprehensive agreement in the WTO Doha Round.

Moreover, my country has set three priority areas for its presidency of the Council. One of these priorities will be the European Union in the world. In this context my country will highlight the importance of trade policy as a means of driving forward external competitiveness, economic growth and the creation of new jobs following the EU's new trade policy strategy called Global Europe, as well as under the revised strategy for growth and jobs.

Parallel to the multilateral system, the Czech Republic will back the Commission's efforts to negotiate trade agreements with promising partners or regions – such as Korea, India, ASEAN, Mercosur and the Andean Community countries and Central America, and potentially China as well – and to negotiate free trade agreements with the EU's closest neighbours, for example Ukraine, or to start such negotiations once the prerequisite conditions have been met, as in Russia.

The presidency will present its programme on the trade area to the Committee on International Trade on 20 January 2009.

Regarding food security in the EU, the presidency is of the opinion that protectionism will not help to secure food supply in Europe or worldwide. Therefore, the presidency supports the liberalisation of world trade within the framework of DDA and discussions on CAP reform with a view to making European agriculture more competitive. That means dismantling export refunds.

These elements, such as transparent liberalisation of world trade and competitive agriculture, are the base for enhancing food security as well. Food security in the EU has much to do with the international trade in food products that makes them available at competitive prices and sets the right incentives for those Member States where they can be produced most effectively.

Food security nowadays lies not only in the local production of food, but in a country's ability to finance the import of food through exports of other goods. In this sense, an open, multilateral trading system with a diversity of countries supplying food products may be a better guarantee for stable and secure supplies.

**Mairead McGuinness (PPE-DE).** - Thank you, Council, for the detailed answer, which I will need to study, although I do not think we will agree. I would draw your attention to a report voted through this Parliament on global food security, for which I was a rapporteur, which very clearly says that the market will not provide us with food security and certainly will not give farmers the income stability that they require. So could you clarify for me whether you believe that free trade in agriculture is the way forward and that that is your priority under your presidency?

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – I can give you a short answer – yes! If there is free trade in agriculture, there is no hunger in the world.

**Bernd Posselt (PPE-DE).** – (DE) Mr Vondra, it is always being said that agricultural policy is there for only the 3% who farm, but there are 100% of us who eat. I, for one, eat heartily, and I should like to state very clearly my belief that food security is existential. We are currently seeing the problems of energy dependence. I am in favour of free world trade, but we must be able to feed ourselves from our own soil, and so we need to preserve our farming structures: this cannot be left solely in the hands of the market.

**Syed Kamall (PPE-DE).** - First of all, like my colleague before me, Mr Hannan, I would like to welcome the Czech presidency – it will be an interesting contrast with the last presidency of the EU – and once again apologise for the disgraceful behaviour shown by some of my colleagues in this Chamber.

It is all very well saying that we want to kick-start the WTO talks, but we have had Indian elections, we have had US elections and we have got European elections. With all these elections going on and changes of administration, how can we really kick-start the WTO talks?

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – I think on the CAP reform we were among those who were trying to push the Commission to come forward with the new budgetary reform proposals, the white paper. I was even trying to orchestrate some kind of a joint effort with my colleague from Sweden, because 2009 is the year of the Czech and the Swedish presidencies and we have pretty similar views. But it is not up to us to bring a legislative proposal.

I say to my friend Bernd Posselt, we come from similar cultural backgrounds, but I think you know we are both living examples that there is no hunger in Europe thanks simply to the fact that trade in agricultural products has been growing in the past couple of decades. I know that we also need some tasty products to keep on the market like Bavarian and Czech beer, but I think in general, again, free trade promotes wealth in Europe as well as in the world.

Here is the question on the CAP. The Council recalls that, in the context of the political agreement reached on the CAP health check in the Council on 20 November last year, it was agreed in the joint Council and Commission declaration that, in the framework of the discussions that started in Annecy in France on 23 September on the future of CAP after 2013 and without prejudice to the new financial perspective for that period, the Council and the Commission are committed to closely examining the possibilities for the development of direct payments in the Community and addressing the different levels of direct payment between the Member States.

I can tell you that the incoming Czech Presidency intends to organise the discussion of this issue at the informal Agricultural Ministers' meeting to be held in Brno in May. My colleague from the Government, Petr Gandalovič, is really eager to open this debate.

Our goal is to moderate a discussion on the future of the CAP aimed at exploring agrarian policy instruments, particularly in the area of direct payments, which would enable a non-discriminatory and effective use of financial resources gathered from European taxpayers and spent on the CAP, strengthening the competitiveness of European farmers, improving the position of Europe's agricultural and food industries in a globalised and open world market, improving the quality of agricultural products and the provision of non-marketable outcomes of agriculture, as well as contributing to sustainable rural development.

The outcome of the abovementioned dialogue should result in paving the way towards – I would like to emphasise – the modernised CAP providing equal conditions for all Member States.

**President.** – Question No 5 by **Seán Ó Neachtain** (H-0971/08)

Subject: Future of the Common Agricultural Policy 2013-2020

One of the priorities of the Czech Presidency is the Common Agricultural Policy. What measures will be taken by the Czech Presidency to negotiate the future of the Common Agricultural Policy?

**Seán Ó Neachtain (UEN).** – (GA) Madam President, I would like to thank the President-in-Office for his answer. I would like to ask him a question about the Czech President's plans to provide support to disadvantaged areas. As I understand it further help is needed, and is needed desperately, by disadvantaged areas in the European common agricultural policy. I would like to find out what the Presidency intends to do about this.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – The problem of disadvantaged areas throughout Europe is one of the particular problems which are constantly being discussed in relation to the CAP. I think that we are all, or mostly all, in agreement that we should move from direct payment to a payment for developing rural areas, if there is some kind of redistribution, rather than to continue with protectionist measures.

So there are the ways and means, and certainly we are working closely with Commissioner Fischer Boel. I am not an expert on agriculture but I think you certainly would have the opportunity to also approach our Minister for Agriculture and discuss this in detail.

**Avril Doyle (PPE-DE).** - May I wish the Czech presidency every success during its term in office. I would like the Minister to comment on the experience to date of Czech farmers and the Czech agri-food industry of the common agricultural policy, whether they are satisfied and whether it has made good improvements to their particular lots in different enterprises. How do they – and how do you, the Czech people – view the common agricultural policy as applied to the Czech Republic?

**Silvia-Adriana Țicău (PSE).** – (RO) Unfortunately, the economic crisis is leading to job losses. Purchasing power is decreasing. Quality of life also means, however, healthy food.

Romania has a very large number of farmers, but their farms are small in size. I would like to ask what support you have in mind for small agricultural producers, especially in the new Member States.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – In the new Member States you have different conditions. For example, my country does not have as many small farms as in certain other European countries. We have a very competitive farming industry with large farms but, if you go to neighbouring Poland, for example, the situation is somewhat different.

On Mrs Doyle's question of how we are doing: well, I have some farmers in my constituency in Northern Bohemia and, on the one hand, they are doing better because they got more money. So we have farmers with Hugo Boss ties now. We did not have this five to ten years ago. On the other hand, they also feel some kind of injustice because of the differences in payments between the older Member States and the new Member States. It is a question of elementary justice in the system, and it should be corrected.

At the same time, we believe that the CAP should be reformed. This is the only way to keep Europe competitive. So we have here a complex problem. I am not an expert who can go into the details, but I think that we should at least be able to agree on the basic lines.

**President.** – And Mrs Țicău's question?

I am sorry, Minister, I was not sure if you had addressed both questions.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – I was trying to respond to both questions.

**President.** – That concludes Question Time.

Questions which have not been answered for lack of time will be answered in writing (see Annex).

*(The sitting was suspended at 8 p.m. and resumed at 9 p.m.)*

#### IN THE CHAIR: MR SIWIEC

*Vice-President*

### 11. Composition of committees and delegations: see Minutes

### 12. Situation in the Horn of Africa (debate)

**President.** – The next item is the position of the Council and the Commission on the situation in the Horn of Africa.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – Mr President, at this late hour I wish to make a few remarks on the Council's position on the Horn of Africa.

The Horn of Africa of course is a challenging region which deserves our particular and increased attention as it has a major impact on the EU. The EU closely follows developments in this region and prepares to engage even more with the countries of the Horn of Africa.

I know that Parliament also keeps abreast of developments. The visit that your delegation made late last year to Eritrea and Ethiopia and also Djibouti was important. I also took note of the motion for a resolution on the Horn of Africa that has been elaborated partly in the context of this visit. It clearly displayed to the region and to Europeans the growing engagement for the Horn of Africa within the EU. On behalf of the Council, I welcome the involvement of Parliament in our efforts to address the challenges in the Horn of Africa.

There are several sources of tension in the Horn of Africa. I will get to them in more detail. However, in the view of the Council these tensions are often linked in one way or another within the region. For this reason, the Council is particularly looking to discern the regional links between ongoing conflicts. What are these links between conflicts?

First, there is a dispute between Ethiopia and Eritrea, which might be considered as one of the principle causes of instability in the whole region. This is reflected in the following ways: the support of opposing warring factions in Somalia; destabilisation efforts in each other's countries – let me mention Ogaden, Oromo in Ethiopia in particular; it is reflected also in support for the revival of the peace process in Sudan; Eritrea has suspended its membership in the Intergovernmental Authority for Development (IGAD).

And, last but not least, the conflict in Somalia has caused one of the most serious humanitarian situations that we face in the world today. The increase in acts of piracy off the coast of Somalia is another serious consequence of this conflict.

Another serious issue is the competition for natural resources such as water and minerals in the Horn of Africa. This phenomenon increases pastoralist conflicts in areas populated by different cultural and ethnic groups. It also increases food insecurity and human insecurity in general, which contributes to the conflict and the migration.

There are also serious regional interdependencies. Let me mention some of them. There are the border conflicts, as mentioned before: the disputes between Ethiopia and Eritrea, Sudan and Ethiopia and Djibouti and Eritrea, which might be considered as sources of instability in the region. I would also stress that improved regional cooperation would contribute to lowering tensions around national boundaries.

Food security is another interdependency. This is of course a major concern in the region. Recurring droughts, as well as floods, have a devastating effect on the population. Once again, regional cooperation could mitigate the effects of these natural events.

As you know, some argue that this problem is at the origin of the conflicts in Darfur, Somalia and many other areas of the Horn of Africa. I am not sure that gives a full explanation, but I do believe that this question must be resolved in each of the countries and within the regional context in a fair and transparent manner.

Piracy was initially localised to a small part of the Somali coast. The pretext of the pirates was to levy a fishing tax on a ship in Somali waters. As you are certainly well aware, this activity has expanded significantly and now threatens the delivery of humanitarian aid to Somalia and maritime safety in the Gulf of Aden and well beyond, including ships travelling off the coast of Kenya and Tanzania.

There are also several other interdependencies which have a serious impact on Europe and on the countries of the Horn of Africa, such as terrorism and migration.

So what are the actions which the European Union undertakes? What is our engagement or involvement? The main political instrument at the disposal of the Council – which I have the honour to represent here today – is a political dialogue, not only with the individual countries but also with other regional stakeholders, such as the African Union, the Intergovernmental Authority on Development, the League of Arab States, and the United States and China as important countries.

Political dialogue is a mutual commitment in the Cotonou Agreement between the EU and each of the countries in that particular region. This dialogue is principally pursued through the heads of the EU missions in the countries concerned. It is a very important instrument to the Council, as it gives us a direct contact with the authorities of those countries. It provides an opportunity to hear their point of view, but also to clearly explain our perceptions and raise concerns that we have on certain issues. This particularly concerns matters of governance and human rights. Those are the main issues.

On top of this, the Council disposes of the instruments of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP). Since September 2008, the Council has deployed this instrument to fight piracy off the Somali coast, first through the coordination cell EU NAVCO, based in Brussels and then since December 2008 through the maritime operation called EU NAVFOR Atalanta.

Finally, the EU acts through the financial instruments of the European Commission such as the African Peace Facility and Instrument of Stability. I will let Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner elaborate further on that because that is the Commission's responsibility.

Of course the Council is always looking, together with the European Commission, for ways to enhance the effectiveness and the visibility of EU action. I look forward to hearing your proposals and recommendations on this particular issue.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, the Commission has over recent years already called for greater attention to be given by the European Union to the situation in the Horn of Africa. Today in this debate I am replacing my colleague Louis Michel, who unfortunately cannot be here; I take this matter on with great interest, both in its own right and also because it affects Europe directly – the need, for instance, to mobilise our navies to combat piracy, and this is only one recent example.

We therefore very strongly welcome the initiative of the parliamentary delegation which visited the region and their subsequent report and draft resolution, which we also support in principle.

The internal situation in each of the countries of the Horn cannot be understood in isolation from the regional dynamics. We have to continue to encourage a global approach resting on economic development, governance and security if we want to advance regional stability, respect for the essential and fundamental elements of Cotonou and the fight against poverty.

Let me comment on the situation by country before concluding with remarks on the regional strategy for the Horn.

Firstly, let me say a word on Ethiopia/Eritrea. Ethiopia occupies a strategic economic and political place in the region. The Commission continues to support Ethiopia with its poverty alleviation efforts, where important progress has been registered.

Weak regional security and inter-community tensions affect the internal situation of the country, especially in the Ogaden, where access to the population still remains constrained. The Commission will also continue to monitor the human rights situation and the democratisation process. Considering the circumstances of the 2005 general elections, the Commission will closely monitor the preparation and proceeding of the 2010 elections, especially in the context of the recently approved NGO legislation and the re-arrest of the opposition leader, Ms Birtukan Medeksa.

The internal situation in Eritrea is partly determined by the impasse in the border conflict with Ethiopia. The Commission remains seriously concerned about human rights violations and the precarious social and economic situation. In our view, there is a strong argument for the continuance of a cooperation programme which aims at the improvement of the living conditions of the population. The political dialogue initiated in 2008 provides a good platform for sustained engagement with the Eritrean authorities. Let us be clear: we expect some positive and tangible steps in Eritrea as a result of this process.

As indicated in your draft resolution, the virtual demarcation of the border between Ethiopia and Eritrea – as decided by the Boundary Commission – will not lead to a full resolution of the problem if it is not accompanied by dialogue aiming at the normalisation of relations between the two countries.

The recent dispute between Eritrea and Djibouti is to be seen in a larger regional context and for which a global solution needs to be sought through local and regional actors. We will continue to support such processes.

Now that Ethiopian troops are withdrawing from Somalia, the cooperation of both Ethiopia and Eritrea in the Somali peace process will be essential for it to be successful.

On the situation in Sudan, I fully share Parliament's analysis. Indeed, 2009 is a decisive year for the future of this country. The persistence of violence in Darfur and the difficulties in completing the implementation of the North/South Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) have the potential to destabilise the country and affect the whole region. We should therefore maintain a strong dialogue with, and a strong pressure on, the Khartoum authorities to obtain their full cooperation, both on the CPA and also on Darfur and their processes. These authorities, as well as the other Sudanese stakeholders, know only too well where their responsibilities lie and what they need to deliver.

In Darfur, military operations and violence must be ended and the political process fully resumed. The deployment of the UNAMID must take place within the foreseen time. The Sudanese authorities must respect their obligations as regards the facilitation of humanitarian aid and human rights activities. On the CPA, it is crucial that the Government of Khartoum and of South Sudan settle their differences over critical issues

such as sharing of oil revenues, boundary delimitation, and legislation in security and political matters. Failing to do so could turn the planned elections of 2009 into a scenario of renewed violence and conflict.

In Somalia, the peace process is in a crucial phase. The resignation of President Yusuf and the withdrawal of the Ethiopian army present a new period of uncertainty and risk. But they also provide an opportunity to launch an inclusive political process. On the political side, the European Union continues its activities in support of the Djibouti process, which should lead to more inclusiveness through the election of a new president and the formation of a government of national unity with an expanded parliament. There is no plan B for the Djibouti process. Without international and regional support that advances the emergence of favourable conditions for its implementation, the agreement will have little chance of success.

As regards security, the Commission remains committed to supporting the establishment of a system for the sound governance of the security sector. Whatever the nature of the international force (UN authorised stabilisation force, UN peacekeeping mission or only a strengthened AMISOM), its mandate will need to focus on the support for the implementation of the Djibouti Agreement. The Commission has given a positive response to the demand for further financial support to the reinforcement of AMISOM.

Finally, on the Horn of Africa in general, I very much appreciate Parliament's support for the Commission's Horn of Africa initiative. This initiative is based on the 2006 Horn strategy, which was adopted in the conviction that the conundrums in the region can only be dealt with globally. In this spirit, the Commission supports your proposal to nominate a special representative for the Horn.

We have been establishing good working relations with IGAD, which supports the Horn of Africa initiative and which plays a key role in its implementation. A second joint experts' meeting on water, energy and transport, where concrete projects could be developed that might be presented to a possible donor conference, is foreseen for the near future.

The participation of Eritrea, which plays a key role in the regional dynamics, is essential for the success of the Horn of Africa strategy. Commissioner Michel's contacts with the heads of state and government of the region, including President Isaias, have allowed an opening in this regard and the new IGAD Executive Secretary is in the process of engaging with the Eritrean authorities, including on the reform and revitalisation process of IGAD.

Mr President, I was a little long but with so many countries, if you want to say something, you have to say at least a few words.

**President.** – The introduction is covered by a special rule and there are no limits.

**Filip Kaczmarek, on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.** – (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, President-in-Office, thank you very much for the opinion of the Council and the Commission on the Horn of Africa. The importance of this region transcends purely geographical bounds. The conflicts and structural problems there are compounded by the negative phenomena in other regions of Africa. I was part of the European Parliament delegation on its recent visit, and I could see for myself how complex, comprehensive and interlinked the problems there are, and why our answer needs to be comprehensive.

In the draft resolution we have concentrated on three fundamental, but also fairly broad issues: regional security, food security and, in our notes on human rights, democracy and good governance. Since my visit I am in no doubt that the fundamental condition for improving the situation is goodwill and dialogue between regional leaders.

The European Union's policy of supporting regional institutions in the Horn of Africa is correct, but without active involvement of the key players, the policy will remain ineffective. Some countries of the region use poor tactics, for example, you cannot appeal for dialogue with one neighbour and at the same time refuse dialogue with another. This practice is illogical, and makes diplomatic success practically impossible. Political leaders there need to accept the fact that exercising power is tied in with responsibility.

What we expect from the leaders in the Horn of Africa is not linked to some specifically local, European values. What we expect is a minimum acceptance of universal values. We are also convinced that fundamental rights and freedoms belong to everybody. No developing country can work properly in the modern world if it rejects fundamental, universal values. Accepting them is therefore not just a gesture towards the European Union, but an action that will further their own interests. Concepts of development may vary, but values do not change, and we would like these values – common and universal – to become the daily bread in the Horn of Africa.

**Ana Maria Gomes**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – (PT) The Council and the Commission must draw their conclusions from the fact that, in this Parliament's view, the governments of the countries of the Horn of Africa are not acting in accordance with their obligations under the terms of Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement. Human rights, democracy and good governance are empty words. That is perfectly obvious to anyone who does not keep their eyes closed.

In Ethiopia, for example, which is the headquarters of the African Union, the people are oppressed under the cover of rhetoric that sounds good to donors, but which is no less crude and shameless.

I will describe two recent episodes ...

On 29 August, Ms Birtukan Midekssa, the leader of a party with a parliamentary seat, was again arrested and sentenced to life imprisonment for refusing to publicly state that she had requested the pardon that the Meles Zenawi Government used to release her in 2007, along with many other political leaders of the opposition held since the elections of 2005.

Second: the approval by the Ethiopian Parliament of the so-called NGO Act, which, in practice, criminalises all the work of independent NGOs.

There is no transition to democracy in Ethiopia, Commissioner, and I would be grateful if you would tell this to your colleague Louis Michel.

In Eritrea, the wrath of the government against anyone who tries to exercise the most basic human rights is even more shameless.

As for Somalia, which is currently the most serious situation in the whole Horn of Africa, the international community, including the European Union, has a criminal lack of interest in the fate of the people in a country where there has been no law and order for decades and where Ethiopian troops were able to occupy the land and commit crimes with impunity and where pirates and terrorist groups thrive.

The EU naval mission will not resolve anything if the European Union, the United States, the UN and the African Union continue to ignore the causes of the piracy, which are rooted and must be fought on land and not at sea.

The region will not have stability or progress without resolution of the tragic conflicts that continue to devastate Sudan, especially in the South and in Darfur, and where the rhetoric of the international community, the European Union included, needs to be translated into decisive action to protect the civilian populations who are being attacked and to end the impunity of the criminals.

In this regard, the possible confirmation of the prosecution of President Omar Bashir by the International Criminal Court will be a test of the credibility and effectiveness of both the European Union and the African Union.

**Johan Van Hecke**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – Mr President, the Horn of Africa is a dreadful region where internal and regional conflicts continue to undermine peace and security. They create humanitarian disasters and paralyse the development of this strategically significant region.

Each war, each conflict accentuates the fragility of the states. At the heart of most of these conflicts is the lack of leadership and democratic governments rightly put forward in the report of the EP delegation.

What this region needs is home-grown democratisation, respect for national and international rule of law and above all national reconciliation. About Somalia, I would like to emphasise that the resignation of former president Yusuf and the withdrawal of Ethiopian forces creates a huge window of opportunity. The time has come to pick up the pieces and bring about intra-Somali peace.

The Somali Parliament is a crucial factor for confidence-building and can make the peace process all-inclusive. Furthermore, it is imperative that the EU supports the renewal and strengthening of an African Union Peace Force. This force needs a decent UN mandate. If not, Ugandan and Burundian forces will pull away from Mogadishu leaving a security gap behind.

I entirely agree with Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner. There is a momentum for change now in Somalia that should be taken advantage of. The power as well as the security vacuum must be filled. If not, the stateless chaos known as Somalia will remain.

**Mikel Irujo Amezaga**, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (ES) Mr President, the Horn of Africa is currently a real powder keg, not only due to the situation of total instability in Somalia and Sudan, but also in the three countries that Mr Kaczmarek, Mr Hutchinson and I had the pleasure of visiting.

The three countries to which the delegation's visit was confined – Eritrea, Djibouti and Ethiopia – have in common poverty and therefore a very low standard of human rights. As regards poverty, according to the figures given to our delegation, the Government of Ethiopia has acknowledged that six and a half million people are already affected by famine. The United Nations puts this figure at over twelve million. We are therefore facing a humanitarian crisis that is not being reported in the media, due to other current international crises, even though it is truly shocking.

The human rights situation also deserves our attention, given the existence of political prisoners – and that is the word for them: political prisoners – in all three countries.

The border dispute between Eritrea and Ethiopia is totally absurd, as also is the involvement of more than 200 000 soldiers in this dispute. I cannot end my speech without congratulating Commissioner Michel on his actions in the area and for starting a political dialogue. This dialogue must continue but it must also be made clear that we will be very firm: firm in defending human rights and firm towards the outrages being committed through the adoption of laws in relation to NGOs. It must be borne in mind that, thanks to this political dialogue, we are proving that the European Union enjoys high prestige at international level.

**Tobias Pflüger**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (DE) Mr President, the Horn of Africa has recently moved back into focus in the EU. After all, the EU's combat mission Atalanta has been stationed there since Christmas. In sending this mission, the EU has made the mistake of NATO, the United States, Russia and others there of superficially combating problems by military means, by means of warships. Indeed, Mr Kouchner actually welcomed the opportunity for action, 10 years after Saint-Malo, with a maritime combat operation off Somalia. The real causes of the problem are the unfair distribution of resources, for example owing to exploitation of fish stocks, including by fishing trawlers from the European Union. Somalia is one of the countries whose virtually non-existent government the West is supporting by all means possible.

The Ethiopian occupying forces have now left Somalia, but more than 16 000 people have lost their lives since the invasion of these forces. Dealings with the countries of the Horn of Africa are illustrated by the example of Djibouti, which has an authoritarian regime, yet all manner of Western countries have military bases there. Assistance must be provided to the people of the region – not by means of warships, which serve only to protect Western trading routes, but in the form of humanitarian aid, for example.

**Karl von Wogau (PPE-DE)**. – (DE) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, Somalia is a failed State, with all the dreadful things this entails. You have set out most excellently what needs to be done here, and my friend Mrs Gomes has also stated this very clearly.

Piracy is just one part – albeit an important one – of this problem, as piracy is very firmly established in the region. A second aspect is the protection of EU maritime routes, which is in the European Union's own interests and those of its citizens.

That is why we have the ESDP operation Atalanta, which is the first maritime operation under the ESDP. The operation's headquarters are in the United Kingdom, which is also new, and it is being led by a British naval officer, Rear Admiral Jones.

Its first task is to protect food aid and to make sure that this aid can actually reach Somalia, and its second is to combat piracy and take the appropriate action.

We had a conversation with the operation headquarters in Northwood, which made clear that they are missing several things, such as tankers and reconnaissance aircraft – manned and unmanned – and helicopters, as the surveillance needs to be carried out over a very large area. We must all have a common interest in a successful Operation Atalanta. This is necessary both to protect our maritime routes and to make a contribution – albeit possibly just a small one – to solving the problem of the failed State of Somalia.

**Corina Crețu (PSE)**. – (RO) I would first of all like to congratulate my fellow Members for this fact-finding mission to one of the most perilous regions in the world and certainly one of the most disadvantaged.

I also think that the Horn of Africa is possibly the poorest region in the world. Ethiopia has suffered a disaster as a result of the drought over the last few years. It is a country where millions of people suffer from hunger, even during years where there is a rich harvest.

Sudan and the Darfur region, in particular, are also tragic locations on the world map due to a humanitarian disaster, which has been described by many experts as outright genocide, as a result of the slaughter of more than two million people, while four million are refugees from the civil war.

Somalia, Eritrea and Djibouti are three of the poorest countries where conflict is a permanent reality, just as you have actually highlighted, Commissioner, and my fellow Members before that.

The constant instability in the region is one of the causes of the problems which the Horn of Africa is facing during the process of economic, social and political development. The success of the peace process in the region is closely linked to the involvement of regional and African structures, such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development or the African Union.

The European Union must support the consolidation of these organisations, along with an increase in their ability to prevent and resolve conflicts. Better regional integration would also facilitate a more open dialogue between the countries in the Horn of Africa on subjects of common interest, such as migration, arms trafficking, energy or natural resources, and would provide a basis for dialogues on controversial topics.

The European Union must, of course, get involved more when it comes to human rights violations. According to the Cotonou Agreement, these countries need to reach an agreement with the European Union with regard to observing the rule of law, human rights and democratic principles.

**Olle Schmidt (ALDE).** - (SV) Mr President, Commissioner, Mr President-in-Office of the Council, on the morning of Sunday 23 September 2001, the Swedish citizen Dawit Isaak was taken from his home in Eritrea by the country's authorities. He was imprisoned without trial and, more than seven years later, has still not been formally charged. His crime is stated as 'having reported independent news'. In this resolution, we have the first direct reference to Dawit Isaak. This should increase the pressure on Eritrea.

It is unacceptable for an EU citizen, a Swedish journalist, to be imprisoned for years and to be harassed by a rogue regime like that in Asmara, a regime that receives aid from the EU, aid that, moreover, has increased significantly. It is now time, Commissioner, for the European Union to act and lay down conditions for this aid. The time for silent diplomacy is past. Enough is enough. The EU will not accept the trampling underfoot of fundamental human rights, the murder or imprisonment of journalists and critics of the regime, while the population is oppressed and starving.

The European Parliament is today demanding that Dawit Isaak and the other journalists imprisoned in Eritrea be released immediately. This is a powerful step in the right direction. Now the Commission and the Council must also lend force to these words. It is therefore high time that the EU entered into negotiations and introduced sanctions.

**Eva-Britt Svensson (GUE/NGL).** - (SV) Mr President, like my fellow Member from the Group of the Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe, I would like to highlight the issue of the release of Dawit Isaak. For seven years, the Swedish citizen Dawit Isaak has been imprisoned without trial in a prison cell in a terrible dictatorship. I am pleased that we have included a passage on his immediate release in the resolution on the Horn of Africa. We require the immediate release of Dawit Isaak, as well as all of the other imprisoned journalists. No trial, and what was their crime? Well, it was working for democracy and for the freedom of speech.

The EU's future aid to Eritrea must be linked to clear demands for the release of Dawit Isaak and the other journalists. Conditional aid, together with sanctions, the freezing of Eritrean assets in Europe and the reporting of this violation of international law to the International Court of Justice are what we need today. The Swedish Government has worked using silent diplomacy, it has been said, but, after seven years, still nothing has happened. Now it is time to act.

**Charles Tannock (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, the Horn of Africa is pretty much an unmitigated disaster. The region has been devastated by decades of war, famine, environmental degradation, corruption, mismanagement and political repression. Human rights are abused as a matter of course. Civil society is weak. Alarming, the situation could easily deteriorate further. Tensions between Ethiopia and Eritrea over disputed territory are still likely to flare up at any moment. The failed state of Somalia remains infected by clan violence and Islamist extremism, which will worsen as Ethiopia now withdraws its troops and with the resignation of the recent President.

We have also debated the epidemic of piracy off the Somali coast. There is, of course, always a temptation by the EU to suggest military action as a panacea to the chaos in the Horn of Africa. Past experience suggests

this would be a terrible mistake. President Bill Clinton sent US troops to tame Somalia, but that was a disaster too.

The one oasis of optimism, in my view, is in the region of Somaliland, which was formerly a British Protectorate. It was absorbed into the Somali Republic in 1960 after foolishly voluntarily relinquishing its brief period of independence, but split away again in the chaos following the death of Siad Barre in 1991. Ever since then, Somaliland has been the only cohesive and functional polity in Somalia. The people of Somaliland benefit from a relatively benign government and progressive institutions. They also possess symbols of statehood such as a separate currency and a flag.

Speaking personally, and not for my party or my political group, perhaps it is time for the international community, led by the African Union, to begin considering more seriously Somaliland's quest for independence. An independent Somaliland, supported by the West, could be a force for stability and progress in an otherwise hopeless and chaotic region. Certainly, the people of Somaliland would be justified in asking why we here in the EU were so reluctant to recognise their *de facto* country, but were so quick to recognise the independence of Kosovo.

**Rareș-Lucian Niculescu (PPE-DE).** – (RO) The European Union really has every good reason to be concerned by the situation created in Somalia where a power vacuum has virtually formed which has every chance of being filled by Somali Islamic militia. Apart from withdrawing the three thousand Ethiopian troops, the missions under the auspices of the African Union could also withdraw if they do not receive additional support during the subsequent period.

I could not describe the European mission patrolling the waters in the region as anything other than a resounding success, but this task only involves treating the effects of the 'disease', and not at all the disease itself. Somalia must have a government capable of acting as a dialogue partner for the international institutions, European Union and all the other states willing to assume an active role in bringing stability to this region.

**Alexandru Nazare (PPE-DE).** – (RO) The European Union has numerous responsibilities in Somalia and the Horn of Africa. Instability, the lack of governance and security have made this region a source of concern for many reasons.

Above all, the unprecedented increase in the acts of piracy committed by groups given shelter in Somali units is affecting commercial routes in a region which is vital to European and global trade. It concerns us to see that these groups are becoming increasingly more technologically advanced and capable of attacking ships located at ever greater distances from the shore.

This state of affairs is obviously due to the desperate situation which Somalia is in, specifically, the non-existence of a central government capable of controlling its territorial waters. However, the international community equally bears responsibility with regard to these events. Piracy, no matter on which seas it takes place and the safe havens which the perpetrators enjoy, is a violation of the written and unwritten laws of any country and intervention against this is justified, regardless of where it comes from.

The chances of the European Union and the international community changing the basic reality in Somalia are slight. However, tackling one of its consequences, piracy, is much more within our grasp.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – Mr President, firstly, allow me to react to two remarks made here and then draw some conclusions. Olle Schmidt and Eva-Britt Svensson asked about the journalist, Dawit Isaak: yes, we are trying to do something in Eritrea to set him free.

Anna-Maria Gomes asked about the recent arrest of the opposition activist Mrs Bertukan. The Council is certainly aware of this case, which dates back to the post-election riots in 2005 when she was arrested, together with other opposition activists, before being pardoned in 2007. She was re-arrested at the end of the year. Since then the EU has been closely following the case, and the Council is ready to take the appropriate steps if the situation requires.

Then I would like to make five short concluding remarks. First let me say that we really appreciate the input of the delegations that travelled to the region, in particular to Mr Hutchinson, Mr Kaczmarek and Mr Irujo Amezaga.

First I think I can assure you that, under the Czech presidency, there will be continuity. So we certainly are not going to completely redefine the EU strategy towards the Horn of Africa. We will rather try to pursue the policy established by our predecessor in the best possible manner.

One of the most important tasks will be the containment of piracy and, in this context, we strongly appreciate the effort of the French presidency that accomplished the difficult start of deploying the first EU naval mission. Certainly, we are not a naval power in the Czech Republic so we appreciate here strong EU engagement.

My second remark is that the short-term Operation Atalanta has already prevented several acts of piracy from taking place and apprehended a number of pirates, so within a month of deployment the effectiveness of the operation has already become apparent. Atalanta is a short-term measure to curb piracy. However, it was a necessary short-term measure.

The third point is that, in order to find a long-term solution in Somalia, the Council lends its full support to the Djibouti process within the transitional Federal Government and the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia, and there is no plan B to this process.

Ethiopia has begun its withdrawal from Somalia; this is an important step in the implementation of the Djibouti process. There are some concerns that there will be a security vacuum when Ethiopia leaves; the EU therefore continues to give substantial support to the African Union Mission to Somalia, the AMISOM. EUR 20 million have been allocated for the period of December 2008 to May 2009.

My fourth point is regarding direct contacts: we foresee resuming political dialogue with the intergovernmental authority on development at ministerial level. The authority on development proved its capacities during the engagement in Sudanese peace talks, which resulted in the signing of the comprehensive peace agreement in 2005. So the authority might become a key partner of the EU in bringing peace and stability to Somalia.

Last but not least, as regards the matter of more engagement, I would like to inform you that revision of the Horn of Africa strategy of the Commission will be initiated during our presidency, which is not in contradiction of my words on continuity.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Member of the Commission.** – Mr President, let me make a few comments on this short, but important, debate. Firstly, on Somalia, I listened with great interest to all your comments and suggestions and I am encouraged to see that we agree, not only on the assessment of the situation, but also on the action to be taken. We need the support of the entire international community, including the new US administration, but also key players in the Islamic world, for a sustainable, political solution in Somalia and to finally end the unspeakable suffering of the population. Here the Commission will provide full political, but also strong financial, support to the Djibouti process.

I agree with Ana Maria Gomes that the countries of the Horn of Africa have serious human-rights and good-governance problems – many other colleagues have also said this. We are very concerned about these tremendous challenges. However, we consider that it would be difficult to make an across-the-board judgement regarding Article 9 of the Cotonou Agreement. We must stand firm on human rights and good governance, fully utilising the policy instruments at our disposal, including a political dialogue with clear benchmarks.

On food aid and food security, this is one of the priorities of the European Parliament resolution. In this context, I would like to emphasise that, in addition to the envelope of the EDF, there are now funds under the so-called food facility, which will be EUR 100 million from 2009 to 2011.

Finally, we are also fully aware of the situation of the Swedish citizen, Dawit Isaak, who is still under arrest in Eritrea. My colleague Louis Michel talked to President Isaias about this case during his last visit in June 2008, and some further quiet diplomacy is going on in this particular case. I can assure you that we remain committed to working towards the improvement of the human rights situation in Eritrea so that it is very dominant in our minds.

**President.** – I have received a draft resolution<sup>(2)</sup> tabled in accordance with Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday, 15 January 2009.

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(2) See Minutes

### 13. EU strategy towards Belarus (debate)

**President.** – The next item is the report of the Council and the Commission on the strategy of the European Union towards Belarus.

**Alexandr Vondra, *President-in-Office of the Council.*** – Mr President, the situation in Belarus and what we should do and how we can help will, I think, without doubt be at the centre of the Council's attention during the Czech presidency.

Let me start here on a positive note. We have noted with satisfaction the steps taken by Belarus in the past few weeks, including the registration of the 'For Freedom' movement, the printing and distribution of independent newspapers like *Narodnaya Volya* or *Nasha Niva*, the round table on the regulation of internet with the OSCE Representative on Freedom of the Media and the announcement of the start of expert consultations with OSCE/ODIHR on improving electoral legislation.

These steps go towards fulfilling the criteria expressed by the EU as a condition for maintaining the suspension of the visa ban beyond the initial six-month period. The EU has stressed the importance of moving on these issues in its contact with the Belarus administration.

Ahead of the sanction review – where we have to take a decision by early April – we will continue to use all political contacts, including bilateral contacts, to encourage Belarus to move forward on the problematic points which were identified in the Council conclusions of 13 October with further substantial steps. As a further sign of encouragement, our presidency intends to hold another foreign minister troika with Belarus on the margin of the January General Affairs and External Relations Council.

We will also continue to monitor the general situation of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the country, with a special emphasis on the regulatory environment of NGOs and the media. We are also closely discussing and exchanging views and information with the various opposition representatives and other persons in Belarus, people like Mr Alexander Milinkievich, Mr Kosolin and others.

Belarus, as we know, is included as one of the six Eastern Partnership countries, a move aimed at creating positive development trends in our eastern European neighbourhood. The participation of Belarus will depend on its domestic development. We plan to launch the Eastern Partnership at summit level in Prague in May and the decision of the day was also selected just when this six-month period ends and we can make an evaluation. So the issue of whether Mr Lukashenko will be invited is one where no decision has been made yet.

We firmly believe that we need to be constructive with Minsk now; let us say, that is a strategic imperative. We of course remain realistic and do not expect any dramatic changes, but we believe that Mr Lukashenko's search for balancing relations with Moscow can provide an opportunity. But also we are a community of certain shared values and we need to keep the leverage in our hands. It is in our joint interest to use this opportunity to further encourage the positive dynamics in Belarus in this respect.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner, *Member of the Commission.*** – Mr President, it is a great pleasure for me to speak to you about Belarus because positive progress has been made, which we were very happy to see. Belarus is very high on our agenda, but not solely because it is one of the countries hit hard by the current financial crisis in the region. There is also a unique opportunity for us to really begin a new chapter in our relationship with Belarus.

We are now half-way through the six-month suspension of sanctions against Belarus that was decided at the meeting of EU foreign ministers on 13 October 2008. As this suspension will end on 13 April 2009, now is the time to make the first assessment of whether Belarus is moving in the right direction and whether we can therefore extend the suspension and take further positive action towards Belarus.

The 13 October General Affairs and External Relations Council was very clear that the positive progress which began with the release of the remaining political prisoners in August would have to continue for the suspension to be extended. The areas in which we need to see further and sustained progress are: no further political arrests or imprisonments; cooperation with the OSCE/ODIHR on reforms to electoral legislation; progress on media freedom; better operational conditions for NGOs and no harassment of civil society; and serious progress on the freedom of assembly.

We have seen some progress in the last three months. For example, the ban on two major independent newspapers has been lifted and they have now even resumed printing and distribution. Secondly, 'For Freedom', Mr Milinkievich's organisation, has been allowed registration and, thirdly, there will be consultations between Belarus and the ODIHR on 22 January on electoral reform. This progress has been in direct response to requests made by the Commission in early November and we find it encouraging.

However, we still need more progress if we are to begin a new era in our relationship and if we are also to confirm the suspension. We need to see progress on media freedom, including internet freedom and the accreditation of foreign journalists. We also need to see easier registration procedures and working conditions for NGOs and the lifting of the restrictions on the freedom of NGO activists – like, for example, Mr Barazanka – and we need to see further evidence that peaceful demonstrations can take place freely and without participants fearing arrest.

Progress is, however, a two-way street. If Belarus can make this serious progress, then I think it is also essential that we reciprocate with a significant package of measures. The Commission has been working on proposals for such a package, which could include the following: an extension of the technical dialogues which began a year ago, on energy, transport and environment to other areas; a symbolic increase in the ENPI allocation for Belarus to back these talks; helping Belarus to adjust to the new economic challenges it is currently facing and extending eligibility for EIB and EBRD loans to Belarus; intensifying contacts: on 26 January the troika will meet with Foreign Minister Martynov on the margins of the GAERC, where I intend to say clearly to Mr Martynov what exactly the EU expects from Belarus and what we have on offer; and, naturally, intensification of civil society dialogue.

At this juncture, I believe all efforts should be pooled and meetings that MEPs could have in Minsk with Belarusian parliamentarians, for example, would also be most useful.

A further issue for reflection is the potential to open negotiations on visa facilitation and a readmission agreement. On this issue, the ball is in the Council's court, and it is clear that Belarus still has further progress to make. But we, the Commission, stand ready to kick-start work and contribute to negotiations as soon as the ministers acknowledge that sufficient progress has been made.

Finally, we stand ready to develop the full range of our ENP and Eastern Partnership offer for Belarus. This would comprise the unblocking of the PCA and a significant increase in our assistance.

After 13 April, should ministers assess that sufficient progress has been made, the decision will be made as to whether to confirm the suspension of sanctions. Should Belarus's progress be great enough to warrant this, we are indeed ready to reciprocate and I hope that we could then really open up a new chapter in relations with Belarus.

**Jacek Protasiewicz**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group.* – (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, President-in-Office, the main occasion for today's debate is the first half of the six-month suspension of sanctions against Belarus, which happens to be this week. Our half-way review of relations between that country and the European Union has been received with positive caution by this House, with appreciation for the changes that have taken place in Belarus.

Above all we would like to express our satisfaction that the 'For Freedom' movement led by Aleksander Milinkievich has been legalised, and that the independent newspapers *Narodnaya Volya* and *Nasha Niva* have been legalised and allowed into the state distribution system. At the same time, however, we still condemn the fact political prisoners freed over the past years have not had their full rights restored, and one protesting student was unlawfully arrested during his pre-trial period.

We would like to stress that essential conditions for permanently lifting and normalising European Union-Belarus relations are changes in electoral law, repeal of the restrictive media laws and changes to the criminal code to prevent its abuse against the democratic opposition and independent journalists. In this context we would encourage the authorities in Belarus to work in close cooperation with the OSCE and the Belarus Journalists' Association. We appreciate the preliminary meetings that have been held regarding both these matters, but we urge permanent cooperation with foreign experts and representatives of civil society in Belarus.

In the resolution being debated today we also intend to urge the Belarus authorities to lift restrictions on the activities of political parties, non-governmental organisations and to legalise more independent media. This, however, will not be a one-way street. We also call upon the European Commission and the Council to be quicker in reducing the price of EU entry visas and to increase investments by the European Investment Bank

in energy infrastructure, particularly transit infrastructure, in Belarus. I would like to stress that the European Parliament will again urge the Commission to secure financial support for Bielsat TV, and the authorities in Belarus to recognise the Union of Poles in Belarus headed by Angelika Borys as the only lawful representative of the country's largest ethnic minority.

**President.** – You seem to be a busy man, but you managed to take the floor in the last minute.

**Justas Vincas Paleckis, on behalf of the PSE Group.** – (LT) Good fences make good neighbours. That is an old English saying. Today, thinking about neighbouring countries, it would be more appropriate to say that low fences or no fences are better.

At the juncture of the 20th and 21st centuries, with increasing tendencies towards authoritarianism, Belarus became the odd sick man of Europe. The country slid into self-isolation and isolation, as the fences surrounding it grew ever higher. Due to human rights abuses there was no place in the European Council for a state at the centre of Europe.

Last year gave us hope that relations between the European Union and Belarus can change and that the fences I mentioned can be lowered. Here mention has been made of the small steps which Minsk has taken in the right direction in terms of political prisoners, the registration of parties and the registration of newspapers. We might also mention the future opening of a European Union representation. I share the cautious optimism of both the Commission Member and the Minister and feel that the skies are clearing, but that there are still many clouds. Here our colleague Mr Protasiewicz has already mentioned both media freedom and real conditions allowing the formation of political parties, and the country is generally also on the brink of great economic and social changes. Reforms should look to the future and make the lives of ordinary people easier.

I think that the European Union should also go down the road of mutual understanding. Firstly by destroying or at least lowering the financial fences of visa requirements, which prevent people from communicating so much.

Belarus has taken the decision to build a new nuclear power plant which will probably appear quite close to Lithuania's capital Vilnius. Several such power plants are planned for the region in Lithuania, Estonia and Poland. There needs to be dialogue among all these and other states and constant consultations, so that we avoid misunderstandings, damage to the environment and disregard for the interests of other countries. Brussels should watch carefully how Minsk implements the IAEA's recommendations, conventions on nuclear security, and defend the interests of European Union countries.

I do not think that Belarus will make any real progress unless the wall between official institutions and people there is torn down. The government should be interested in talking to and negotiating with the opposition, NGOs, unions and youth organisations. In a few months the European Parliament will submit recommendations as to whether we should continue tearing down that fence, or build an even higher one. If we fail to take advantage of this chance, people on both sides will be disillusioned. The ball, as they say, is in Minsk's court.

**Janusz Onyszkiewicz, on behalf of the ALDE Group.** – (PL) The signals coming from Belarus are not always clear-cut. Political prisoners have been freed, two independent newspapers have been allowed into the official distribution network and the 'For Freedom' movement led by the opposition presidential candidate Alexander Milinkievich has been registered. The Commissioner has mentioned this. On the other hand, however, members of the opposition are being re-arrested, and many of the released prisoners have had their rights restricted. There are dozens of newspapers waiting for authorisation like that granted to the two mentioned above, and numerous non-governmental organisations and political parties are constantly struggling to be registered or live under the threat of having their registration withdrawn. Monks and nuns are expelled, and the death penalty still exists.

We cannot turn our backs on Belarus. I do not, however, believe that the time has come to start dialogue between this parliament and that of Belarus. What we need to do is significantly reduce and simplify the procedures for issuing visas to citizens of Belarus, although this should obviously not apply to those who have good reason to be kept out of the European Union.

We also need to provide effective support, including financial support, for institutions which are important to setting up and developing civil society, such as independent non-governmental organisations, political parties and an independent press. We also need to raise the issue of worker's rights in Belarus. Today there

is no permanent employment outside government structures – everybody works on one-year contracts only. This gives the employer, and therefore the state, great clout over practically the whole of society.

The Eastern Partnership Initiative also opens new opportunities for the present authorities in Belarus. However, the country's modernisation and its alignment with European political standards must proceed in the context of dialogue between the authorities and the democratic opposition in Belarus.

**Ryszard Czarnecki**, *on behalf of the UEN Group*. – (PL) Madam Commissioner, President, recently we have been passing resolutions on Belarus every three months. It is not inflation, but evidence of proper monitoring of what is happening in this country which neighbours Poland, and therefore the European Union.

Is the progress of democratisation in Belarus satisfactory? No. Is this cause to turn our backs on Minsk again? No. We need to keep pressing for democratic freedoms and standards, freedom of expression, democratic values, while at the same time patiently giving Belarus the green light as a country and a society we would like to see draw closer and closer to the European Union. Belarusians are Europeans, and Belarus is an integral part of the old continent, the culture of Belarus is part of European culture.

Today the noblest Belarusians are fighting for human rights, for democracy, for religious freedom. But let us not push the less noble into the hands of Moscow. That would be unimaginative and stupid, it would be irresponsible, it would be worse than a crime – it would be a delusion. We have to do two things at the same time – to keep an eye on Lukashenko so that he does not persecute Catholic priests from Poland, for example, shut down newspapers or persecute members of the opposition, while at the same time supporting the Belarusian state as a state, to prevent it from being increasingly drawn into the Russian sphere of political, economic and military influence.

**Milan Horáček**, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) I welcome the Czech presidency headed by vice-premier Alexander Vondra. By registering the democratic opposition Movement for Freedom, led by Alexander Milinkevich, and releasing political prisoners, the Belarusian Government has sent out signals that it is becoming more open. Now comes the test of whether a genuine will to change and to resume relations with the EU lies behind the readiness to engage in dialogue.

We want to see Belarus find its place in Europe; we have been waiting a long time for this and are prepared to resume relations, but only on clear conditions, chief among which is respect for human rights. This goes not only for freedom of the press and of expression, but also for the entire political, social and private life of every individual. The electoral fraud and the attacks on the opposition have not been forgotten, and we are following developments very closely.

In October, we decided to suspend the entry ban for President Lukashenko. For its part, Belarus needs to permit entry to European delegations, too, to enable debates with opposition members.

Experience has taught us that all dictatorships come to an end!

**Věra Flasarová**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (CS) Ladies and gentlemen, Belarus is the last European country with which the European Union does not have an agreement on mutual relations. This anomaly could soon end, as indicated by the proposed strategy of the Council and the Commission on Belarus. Moreover, the several months' trial period is drawing to a close. The Belarusian leadership may enable changes leading to greater democracy and freedom, and the European Union will offer cooperation and the normalisation of relations. This should be the aim. However, the art of diplomacy is to see things in a broader context and to package one's requirements accordingly. Almost every change in recent years has taken place in a global context. Today we are experiencing a fundamental change in the situation. The two decades of the experiment of US domination are coming to an end, to be replaced with a multipolar concept that may also lead to conflict. What we can see going on around us are the events accompany a shift in the distribution of power. New and resurgent centres are defining themselves in relation to their competitors and shaping their spheres of influence. Belarus, together with Ukraine, Moldova and the Caucasus, form a zone which is the subject of a hard fight between Russia on the one hand, and the United States and the European Union on the other. It would be absurd to deny this, even if the war is being waged under a banner of fine slogans such as freedom, democracy and human rights. The true values at stake are energy, money and military strategy. If the main global players, including the European Union, are willing to respect the newly emerging geopolitical...

*(The President cut off the speaker.)*

**Bastiaan Belder**, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (NL) Mr President, Belarus was going to be immune to the worldwide financial crisis. This overconfident prognosis is now costing Mr Lukashenko dearly at the beginning of 2009. His government is in critical financial trouble. Minsk has been knocking on the door of the IMF, Moscow and even Washington for billions in credit. The IMF's condition was the devaluation of the Belarusian rouble by no less than 20.5% on 2 January. Today, the Belarusian citizens are visibly filled with fear, and understandably so, if one realises that the average monthly salary has suddenly dropped from USD 400 to USD 333, the dollar being, alongside the euro, a much-desired currency in Minsk and far beyond today.

Might this decline in the Belarusian economic position put paid to the chance of a new domestic and foreign orientation of the Lukashenko Government? This is certainly not an imaginary risk, because, quite apart from the current financial problems, a cosmetic change of course on the part of Mr Lukashenko in the direction of the West is just as plausible. In that case, the powerful president would simply replace his strategy of simulated integration with Russia with simulated *rapprochement* to the European Union. The forthcoming gas negotiations with Russia could well give such simulation an extra boost.

The European Union should use a balanced strategy to resist an undesired political scenario of this kind in Minsk. To this end, all European institutions need to contact all Belarusian institutions, including the state authorities, the opposition forces, civil society, and even the non-working population. This is an inspiring European goal which hopes to develop, and build bridges in, contacts with all sections of Belarusian society.

**Roberto Fiore (NI)**. – (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, I think that there are no longer any reasons for maintaining any kind of sanctions against Belarus. There we see a country which is undoubtedly undergoing a crisis, like all the countries of Europe, and in any case it is a country which permits the right to property, a country which until a few months ago was experiencing a growth rate of 8% and which did not prevent foreigners, including Europeans, from buying land or houses, even if this was through Belarusian companies.

Further, with regard to religious freedom, a little while ago Cardinal Bertone went to Belarus and relations of mutual respect were certainly forged between the state of Belarus and the Vatican. Political liberties, above all, are important, and there has been talk of some prisoners, but in fact this relates to three political prisoners who have been released.

We are also talking about political elections, and certainly there is not the comprehensive freedom that we experience in western elections, but it is certainly true that television time and, in some cases, even contributions have been granted by the state to all the candidates. We also know that in the next few weeks some newspapers – independent newspapers – will have the opportunity to start up and be distributed.

I think that it is strategically in Europe's interests to open up to Belarus, precisely because Belarus is a very important element between Europe and Russia. Let us remember that there is a strong Catholic minority, which brings it closer to neighbouring Poland and the rest of Europe and makes the country a strategic ally with regard to the rest of eastern Europe. It is strange that today there is talk of Turkey's entry into Europe, when Belarus has a much stronger and more significant partnership role with Europe.

**Árpád Duka-Zólyomi (PPE-DE)**. – (HU) Mr President, it is difficult to move forward from the stalemate in relations between the European Union and Belarus. The growing external pressures in recent times, the weakening friendship between Russia and Belarus, the fear engendered by the Russia-Georgia conflict and, not least of all, the world economic crisis are contributing in part to this situation.

The country led by Lukashenko is for the first time asking Europe for something: The release of political prisoners, the registration of a movement and the start of a dialogue with independent journalists indicates that Lukashenko is in his own way trying to open the doors to Europe. Beyond these superficial steps, Minsk needs to offer still more in the way of a true *rapprochement*.

It is appropriate that the EU should make use of the current, albeit meagre, opportunities. The European Union could be able for the first time to influence the political situation in Belarus and therefore the policy Brussels adopts is far from indifferent. We need to maintain the critical approach and system of conditions now in place. We need to pay close attention, because it is hard to imagine that Lukashenko and his administration could change radically.

The concrete steps taken and planned by the EU are important. Our task is to support and help unite the NGOs and the opposition fighting for change. We need to demand reforms in the area of legislation as well, and here I am thinking of the criminal code and of press and electoral legislation. In the interests of the quality

of the European Union's Belarus policy and in order to safeguard the process of democratisation, the European Parliament must continue the monitoring by the Council and the Commission.

The countries of the region, including Ukraine, have also demonstrated that without clear criteria and their fulfilment no democratic development is possible, for anything else would be simply creating the illusion of democracy. The proposed EU strategy is critical and constructive, and I therefore give it my unreserved support.

**Józef Pinior (PSE).** - (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, I would like above all to positively underline the fact that minister Alexandr Vondra is attending this evening's debate in this House. I believe it shows the importance that the Czech Presidency attaches to European Union foreign policy.

Today we are analysing European Union strategy towards Belarus and the strategy of openness pursued over the past few months. I believe that the results of this strategy are positive, as the draft report of the European Parliament demonstrates.

As a result, a Permanent Representation of the European Commission has been set up in Minsk. We are receiving positive signals regarding increasing freedom in Belarus, such as the registration of Alexander Milinkievich's 'For Freedom' movement and the publication and registration of the two independent newspapers *Narodnaya Volya* and *Nasha Niva*. And there is the declaration by Belarusian Minister for Foreign Affairs Syarhei Martynau's declaration of the country's positive view towards the EU's Eastern Partnership initiative. I would also like to point out that the government of Belarus did not recognise the self-professed declarations of statehood by the governments of Southern Ossetia and Abkhazia. These are positive signals which without doubt are also the result of the European Union's attitude to Belarus.

That is clearly what our draft resolution is all about: we are still dealing with restrictions on human rights and personal freedoms in Belarus. It is not a liberal democracy in the European meaning of the word. I agree fully with the scenario presented today by Commissioner Ferrero-Waldner that a permanent lifting of sanctions could be possible if Belarus broadens the range of freedom, of citizens' rights, and liberalises its economy. The European Union's increased presence in Belarus, in my view, guarantees greater liberalisation and democratisation there.

**President.** – I would just like to point out to the honourable Member that a representative of the Council is always present at these debates, so this is not a special event, although we obviously appreciate the presence of Deputy Prime Minister Vondry.

**Zdzisław Zbigniew Podkański (UEN).** - (PL) Mr President, EU-Belarus relations depend on both sides. Good on both sides will bring dialogue, a real neighbourhood policy and an Eastern Partnership. Partnership cannot be built on prohibitions and sanctions, which is why I am pleased to note the European Commission's latest initiative aimed at improving relations with Belarus. It must be said objectively that Belarus has also done a great deal towards rapprochement. Evidence of this is the registration of the 'For Freedom' movement, allowing opposition papers to be printed and distributed, and the country's openness to the Eastern Partnership Initiative.

The European Union's expectations go further, and there are clearly grounds for this, just as there are grounds for Belarus' many expectations. For example, if the authorities in Belarus are being asked to end the practice of requiring exit visas for its citizens, in particular children and students, why does the European Union not simplify and liberalise visa procedures in relation to the citizens of Belarus? These issues are particularly important to the residents of border regions, who have cultural and family ties (...)

*(The President cut off the speaker.)*

**Esther de Lange (PPE-DE).** - (NL) Mr President, this evening, we are debating the EU's policy in respect of Belarus, a policy in which democracy and respect for human rights take centre stage.

I should like to focus on one specific area, namely the travel ban for children, without, of course, prejudicing any of the other relevant aspects that have already been mentioned this evening. You are probably aware that children, victims of the Chernobyl disaster, have been paying regular visits to the Netherlands and other EU countries for years, in order to recover from the effects of this disaster. The children involved are, of course, children who were born long after that disaster struck – they are now about the same age as I was when that disaster struck 22 years ago – but they are still experiencing the effects on a daily basis, as is evident from the statistics for thyroid gland complaints, cancer, and suchlike. Every year, some 30 000 Belarusian children are welcomed in 21 countries by host families, voluntary organisations and churches.

In October 2008, it was reported that Belarus, via a decree, would stop these children's trips and would prohibit these children to travel abroad, which would put a stop to the Christmas holidays, therefore. Partly under pressure from the European Union, the Council of Europe and a number of Foreign Affairs Ministers, including our Dutch Minister Verhagen, this decree was temporarily suspended between 20 December and 20 January, enabling a number of children to come over on holiday after all, but no provisions have been made for the time after 20 January. It is, therefore, high time we changed this temporary suspension into a structural, EU-wide solution so that Belarusian children and the European host families are no longer kept in the dark as to whether their trips can go ahead or not. Ideally, we would like to legislate on behalf of all Member States in one fell swoop rather than, as is currently the case, via bilateral negotiations, 27 times over.

In our resolution, we would therefore urge the Czech Presidency to negotiate with the Belarusian authorities about an EU-wide solution.

**Marianne Mikko (PSE).** - (ET) Ladies and gentlemen, Belarus's road to Europe must be one of dialogue and compromises.

The Belarus resolution passed last year emphasised the need for a firm and conditional, yet positive policy. The advances that have been made in the areas of energy, the environment and transport are the result of that work.

There are, however, problems to which we must not turn a blind eye. Democracy is vital. As members of the European Parliament, we must not tolerate the persecution of Belarusian opposition leaders, the limitation of freedom of the press and freedom of speech and the violation of citizens' fundamental rights. No democratic country can function without a strong civil society.

Thus we must offer comprehensive support to organisations that aim to defend human rights, promote democracy and mobilise the country's citizenry.

I commend the Belarusian authorities' decision to register Mr Milinkevich's citizens' association *For Freedom*. This is, however, only the beginning, as *Naša Vjasna*, which has a human rights agenda, and several other organisations devoted to the development of democracy also await registration.

Lastly I would like to mention visa arrangements. A visa facilitation agreement must be concluded between the European Union and Belarus. The road to Europe must be open. An expensive visa and strict regulations do not punish the regime, but the population. I have said this repeatedly, and will say it again today. Let us reach out a European hand to welcome the Belarusian people.

**Ewa Tomaszewska (UEN).** - (PL) Mr President, the European Parliament has repeatedly addressed the issue of Belarus, the last dictatorship on the European continent. Problems are still caused for Catholic priests wishing to conduct services, and the rights of ethnic minorities are not respected. In particular, the democratically elected leadership of the Union of Poles in Belarus, headed by Angelika Borys, is not recognised. Arrests and searches of the offices of opposition activists and human rights activists continue. Independent journalists are still being persecuted.

Change is on its way, however, albeit very slowly. The 'For Freedom' movement has been registered, and two opposition newspapers have been allowed to be printed and distributed. The Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus responded positively to the Eastern Partnership Initiative and expressed interest in becoming involved in it. This gives us cautious hope of an improvement of the climate in mutual relations, and the fulfilment of the Commissioner's proposal.

**Colm Burke (PPE-DE).** - Mr President, given that external relations is one of the key priorities of the Czech presidency, I would ask the presidency of the Council to outline what moves it would consider taking to encourage the Belarusian Government to lift its international travel ban on children travelling to EU Member States for rest and recuperation programmes. I urge the new Czech presidency to negotiate a pan-European agreement allowing Belarusian children affected by the Chernobyl disaster to travel to any Member State within the EU.

I have, with my colleagues, added paragraph 10 to the present European Parliament resolution to this effect. In August of last year, the Belarusian Government announced it was outlawing overseas visits after one child refused to return home following a trip abroad.

The Irish Government managed to secure an exemption which allowed children to travel to Ireland this Christmas, but many other children still have to secure exit visas to leave Belarus in order to participate in

rest and recuperation programmes. Some 1 000 Irish families host Belarusian children in their homes every summer and at Christmas, which often includes medical assessment and in some cases treatment.

While I welcome the Belarusian authorities' decision to temporarily lift the travel ban on a number of victims of the Chernobyl disaster, I would urge the presidency to keep the pressure on so that an EU-wide agreement can be secured in the near future, giving Belarusian children the freedom to travel to anywhere within the EU.

I have also raised the international travel ban with you, Commissioner, and in your response to my letter you said that representations had been made both through the European Commission delegation in Minsk and also most recently during the visit to Minsk in early November by the RELEX deputy director-general. I would like to ask you if you have an update on EU advocacy efforts to have this oppressive ban lifted.

**Sylwester Chruszcz (UEN).** - (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, the gradual revival of relations with Belarus and our readiness for dialogue with its government are a step in the right direction. I am also positive about the Czech Presidency's announcement today of a meeting of the Council with a representative of Belarus at a diplomatic summit this month.

I am also pleased to see the attempts to include Belarus in the Eastern Partnership Initiative. Decisions taken at EU level should be felt primarily by the citizens of Belarus, even if it is at the level of visa policy. Given the present gas crisis in Europe, it must be underlined that Belarus has proved a particularly stable partner as regards the transit of gas supplies to the European Union. Constructive dialogue and improved bilateral relations, which should be clearly based on the principles of democracy and respect for the rights of people, are in the interest of both sides.

**Zita Pleštinská (PPE-DE).** - (SK) Even though positive progress has been made in Belarus, we must maintain very close communications with representatives of the Belarusian opposition and with our friend Alexander Milinkievich.

Europe should support economic reform in Belarus. However, this support must be made conditional on specific terms and requirements. These should include a requirement for greater media freedom. The media must be free to operate within the law and publish their material in the country. Greater freedom for the running of political parties and non-governmental organisations is vital for democracy.

Our debate today also shows that we all want a democratic Belarus to return to Europe, but without Lukashenko. The EU has a great opportunity, if it becomes involved in the promotion of democratic values, to win Belarus over and to free it from the Russian embrace.

**Alessandro Battilocchio (PSE).** - (IT) Mr President, ladies and gentlemen, after years of complicated relations we are seeing some timid steps in the right direction, with the recognition of the movement led by Mr Milinkiewicz, the authorisation of various newspapers that are not pro-government, and the first signs of willingness to discuss the recommendations made by the OSCE/ODIHR. The road still to be travelled is, however, not just long, but extremely long.

The hope is that a new passage can be initiated in relations between the EU and Belarus; the tale of MEPs from our delegation having visas refused is quite embarrassing, and we hope that this is now just a bad memory. Like Mr Burke, I call for a commitment on one point from the Commission and the Council at the next joint meetings: a clear, joint definition of the rules relating to stays for health purposes by Belarusian children with European families. In recent years, Belarus has often, too often, dealt with this issue in a superficial or inflexible manner, literally giving a slap in the face to the host families and, unfortunately, also to the children and young people involved in the aid and solidarity projects.

**Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE).** - (RO) I welcome the declaration from the Council and the Commission and agree that Lukashenko's authoritarian regime must be monitored closely. At the same time, I feel that we need a long-term vision which envisages a future Belarus, post-Lukashenko, which is democratic and prosperous.

The European Union must apply an intelligent strategy with regard to the Belarusian people and society and not only with regard to the temporary government in Minsk. History has proven that isolation and external sanctions help maintain dictatorships. We should do the opposite: offer Belarusians the widest possible opportunity to study in the European Union, to travel and work here for short periods and to come into contact with European values and our economic and cultural achievements. This is the only way in which

we will whet the appetite of these people for our values and facilitate the transition process which the country will go through.

I would like to conclude by saying to Mr Fiore that the appearance of the candidates on television during the electoral campaign is of no significance because, as Stalin said, the only thing that matters is the person counting the votes.

**Czesław Adam Siekierski (PPE-DE).** - (PL) Mr President, Commissioner, Minister, all of us at this plenary session would like Belarus to observe the principles of democracy, human rights and freedom of association, as well as freedom of expression, and to stop the violent persecution of its own citizens and ethnic minorities. Unfortunately our list of demands is quite long, and it seems unlikely that they will be completely fulfilled in the near future. However, we cannot stop fighting for the values on which the European Union is founded.

The policy of sanctions against Belarus started out as a fiasco. Let us hope that a change in the EU's political strategy towards Minsk will bring success. However, this will not be easy due to the fact that the parliamentary elections in Autumn 2008 were falsified by Lukashenko.

The main way to democratising Belarus society is by education, free media and contacts between citizens of the EU and Belarus. We should set up a special programme of grants for young people from Belarus to study in the European Union, which will reap great benefits in the future.

**Flaviu Călin Rus (PPE-DE).** - (RO) We have before us three motions for a resolution, from 21 May, 9 October and 7 January. Progress can be seen in terms of the declarations made by the European Union's members.

However, I certainly consider and support any declaration capable of introducing more democracy in any country, all the more so if we are talking about a neighbouring state like Belarus. I think that two very important things are needed, as my fellow Members have also mentioned before me, or we could do this simply to support mutual trust and transparency. Firstly, we need to demonstrate maturity and make it easier for citizens from the state of Belarus to have access and come to the European Union to have contact with the European Union's values, with what the European Union stands for, with the European Union's politics, with everything that we represent. Secondly, Belarus must become as soon as possible a state which does not have political detainees. This is definitely a very simple gesture which President Lukashenko could make.

**President.** - It is time to make a summary of the discussion. I call on Deputy Prime Minister Vondra to sum up.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** - Mr President, I will try to summarise this on behalf of the Council.

Firstly, I think we have had a really interesting debate on the substance, certainly bringing a lot of input into our common work. I would like to stress that we in the Council appreciate the interest and active engagement of the European Parliament on Belarus. I think it is particularly helpful in keeping up the pressure on human rights issues, on the one hand, and in not losing this kind of strategic approach on the other. I would particularly like to thank the Polish Members of the European Parliament – be it Jacek Protasiewicz, Janusz Onyszkiewicz or Józef Pinior – for their contributions. I think we are listening carefully.

I will now make perhaps three points in conclusion. Firstly, on visa fees, which many of you have mentioned. This is a problem of which we are particularly aware. Even when talking in our national capacities over the past year, we always had much to say about this. Let me be clear here. We see Belarus as being part of Europe and we are aware of the problems caused to the citizens of Belarus by the increase in visa fees. To avoid negative consequences in terms of people-to-people contact, the Czech presidency will continue to encourage Member States to use the flexibility available in terms of the relevant provisions of the *acquis*. The presidency will also encourage a more coherent application of the existing rules by the Member States. If the current positive dynamics are maintained and strengthened with further substantive steps by Belarus regarding the respect of human rights and fundamental freedoms, allowing for the country's participation in the ENP and the future Eastern Partnership, a visa dialogue should eventually be envisaged.

On the Chernobyl children, a matter raised by some of you, I assure you that we will keep up the pressure. We supported the moves made by the French presidency on this issue, including the *démarche* carried out on 3 December last year. EU efforts have finally resulted in the temporary suspension of the Presidential Decree No 555 banning these trips. This, as well as the bilateral agreements which were reached in early December between Ireland and Belarus, on future rest and recuperation for children affected by the Chernobyl disaster, were a welcome development. We are aware that the general problem is far from being resolved.

The Czech presidency will follow the matter and will take any further necessary steps on behalf of the EU, if appropriate, and will continue to raise this issue in our contacts with the authorities in Minsk.

Finally, in the coming months with the sanctions review and in the context of the future Eastern Partnership, Belarus will remain high on our agenda. Just as your resolution adopted on Belarus after the 28 September elections helped us to move forward, we hope that we can continue to receive your support during our term.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, I have seen that a very broad majority has the same opinion that we have. That means that we have offered the possibility for Belarus to come closer to the European Union through the European Neighbourhood Policy. We have offered, in principle, a shadow action plan and also a possibility to join the Eastern Partnership at the right moment when, of course, the conditions will be right.

Having said this, let me just answer a few of those specific points that you have made. One on the financial crisis: Belarus has sustained the effects of the financial crisis and the rising gas prices in 2007 and 2008 reasonably well so far, due to its very limited integration in the global economy and also the substantial loans from Russia, China and Venezuela. Now however, as I think Mr Belder rightly said, it has had to ask the IMF for a standby loan of EUR 2.5 billion, including then devaluating its currency in order to counter the negative effects of the global crisis. Since its economy and industry remain largely unreformed and unstructured, we expect the negative tendency to continue with negative social consequences as a result. So you are right – this is an important factor.

On the nuclear power plant and the questions about security and safety, let me tell you that, in our technical dialogue on energy with Belarus, we pay special attention also to ensuring that this country respects international safety and security standards. We could say that Belarus cooperates very actively with the IAEA in Vienna and has been remarkably open to providing the Commission with information on this process.

Having said this, I just would like also to come back to the question of the visa fees. As I said in my first remark, you know that we would be ready to contribute to the negotiation as soon as the Council has also expressed the position to try to manage that, bringing all the Member States to the possibility of having a whole visa agreement as well as a re-admission agreement. Following the visit of my deputy director-general, Mr Mingarelli, to Minsk I can tell you that for the moment there is nothing new on this particular item. I just can say that visa fees and visas for children are specific to each and every country. We are not yet at the point of having one general agreement. That, again, would have to be negotiated by the Commission.

**President**. – (PL) I have received five motions for resolution<sup>(3)</sup> tabled in accordance with Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote will take place on Thursday 15 January 2009.

*Written declarations (Rule 142)*

**Adam Bielan (UEN)**, *in writing*. – (PL) Mr President, we have been talking lately of a political thaw in Belarus. Alexander Milinkievich's opposition movement 'For Freedom' has finally been registered. Belarus has expressed willingness to participate in the Eastern Partnership. Even Washington has said that relations between the two countries have improved. Has the time come to warm relations and break the ice with Belarus? I wish we could, but we must remember that President Lukashenko is a sharp, hard-boiled political player.

We have already dealt with a 'political thaw' quite recently in Europe, and all I would like to point out is that these transformations have always resulted in disappointment.

What will be crucially important is how we play EU policy in the east in the coming months. Lukashenko has clearly stated that he will not bow to pressure from the West, and in negotiations with Medvedev on reducing gas prices, he declared that Belarus will not be indebted to Russia.

It is obvious that Belarus is playing on two fronts. We have to keep up cautious and considered negotiations so that we are not fooled by changes that may turn out to be temporary. We need to be firm on matters of strategic importance to the EU by conducting a targeted policy of support for the development of a civil society and an opposition in Belarus, where opposition activists are still being prosecuted and foreign clerics

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<sup>(3)</sup> See Minutes

expelled. The EU cannot ignore the fact that the authorities in Belarus are continuing to violate citizens' and human rights.

#### **14. Commemorating 11 July as a day of remembrance for the victims of the massacre in Srebrenica (debate)**

**President.** – The next item is the declaration of the Council and the Commission on commemorating 11 July as a day of remembrance for the victims of the massacre in Srebrenica.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – Mr President, Srebrenica, as we all know, was a horrible crime. The massacre of more than 8 000 Bosniaks in and around Srebrenica marks one of the darkest historical moments of Bosnia and Herzegovina, of the former Yugoslavia and also of Europe as a whole. It is without a doubt the worst atrocity in Europe since the Second World War.

Looking back, much more could have been done, and earlier. Srebrenica was a collective failure of the international community, the EU included. That is a great shame and we deeply regret this fact. It is our moral, human and political obligation that a Srebrenica never happens again.

Marking the 10th anniversary of the Srebrenica massacre, the Council expressed its renewed condemnation of the crimes committed and extended its compassion for the victims and their families.

The Council, recalling the UN Security Council resolutions 1503 and 1534, underlined that full and unrestricted cooperation with the ICTY remain an essential requirement for continuing progress towards the EU. The transfer to The Hague of the remaining fugitive indictees who continue to elude international justice would be a fitting tribute to the victims of Srebrenica as well as a major stride towards permanent peace, stability and reconciliation. Therefore, the Council remains determined that the perpetrators of crimes in Srebrenica and in Bosnia and Herzegovina in general, as well as elsewhere in the region of the Western Balkans, must be brought to justice.

At the same time, throughout history European integration has proved helpful to heal wounds and injustice of the past, so we need to concentrate on the future as well. The EU as the integrating factor brought peace, stability, trust and prosperity to Europe in the second half of the last century. Helping the Western Balkans on the path towards the EU therefore belongs to the priorities of the Czech presidency in the domain of external relations. Reconciliation is vital for integration and reconciliation is difficult if justice is not served fully.

After 13 years it is time to bring the shameful Srebrenica episode to a closure. Karadžić's arrest has proved that there is no impunity for such monstrous crimes as those against humanity. Still, Ratko Mladić needs to be brought to The Hague so that the families of the Srebrenica victims can be helped to deal with the past and embrace their future.

The EU will keep doing everything in its power to make this happen. But also a lot more needs to be done so that Srebrenica turns from a sad historical memory to a place where life does offer prospects. The international community's engagement does not take place in a vacuum: it is actively combined with the local actions on the state level, as well as by both entities. A lot of good endeavours have been carried out.

Srebrenica's future can be best secured through economic development and job creation to improve economic and social conditions of the population of the Srebrinica region. The Republika Srpska authorities, as well as the Bosnia and Herzegovina Council of Ministers and the Federation, provided funding and investment for the Srebrenica region. The allocated assets were aimed for Srebrenica recovery including construction, reconstruction, infrastructure development, business promotion, improvement of public services, projects with sustainable return and education.

All those local efforts were underpinned also with the donor conference for Srebrenica organised just over a year ago, in November 2007. This might be a good occasion for an appeal to provide more new investment for this city and its region.

It is of the utmost importance that Srebrenica is never forgotten and that a joint effort continues. We all in the EU, the international community and the local authorities pursue working constructively together to improve living conditions in the Srebrenica area. Only the prospect of a better life can help to reduce the political tension, creating a space for dialogue and consequently allowing the still grieving victims' relatives to move on. That would be the best possible tribute to the victims of Srebrenica.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, in July 1995, close to 8 000 men and boys were murdered and disappeared in Srebrenica. The highest courts of international law have called this massacre by its proper name: genocide. While continuing our pursuit of justice against the perpetrators, I think it is right that we should remember the victims and express our compassion for their families. I therefore join you today in supporting this initiative to recognise 11 July as the day of the commemoration of the Srebrenica genocide.

Srebrenica stands as a symbol of horror and inconsolable grief. Remembrance is as painful as it is necessary. It is necessary because we cannot, and we must not, forget. It is necessary to counter the selective remembrance of those who remain in denial, until this day, about what really took place. Recognition of what happened in July 1995 is fundamental to reconciliation within Bosnia and Herzegovina and in the regional process. Proclaiming 11 July as the European commemorative day for the victims of Srebrenica should therefore be a further step towards reconciliation within Bosnia and Herzegovina and the region. I think it would be an opportunity to send a message, not just of respect and memory, but also of hope for the future – a future within the European Union, built on reconciliation, allowing wounds to heal over time.

But recognition alone is not sufficient. Justice is equally essential. I think it is important that all perpetrators of those atrocities be brought to justice, be prosecuted and pay for the crimes that they have committed. It is therefore unacceptable after so many years that General Ratko Mladić remains at large. The Commission fully supports the work of the International Criminal Tribunal for Yugoslavia, the ICTY. We welcome Bosnia and Herzegovina's cooperation with the ICTY and its handling of cases transferred by the Tribunal to local jurisdiction. We, as the Commission, use every opportunity to encourage the authorities to continue their efforts and ensure that all crimes are duly prosecuted.

In addition to the justice of the courts, we can offer a second form of justice for the victims, and that is a better future for their loved ones who survived. This is at the heart of our EU's efforts in the Western Balkans. We want the countries of the region to move towards a common European future. We want to see a prosperous Bosnia and Herzegovina within a stable, regional context where borders matter less and trust among neighbours is restored. We know this will be a long journey but, if the history of the European Union and its enlargement tells us anything, then it is that this journey is worthwhile for all concerned.

We cannot travel the road to the European Union for Bosnia and Herzegovina. It will itself have to meet the conditions and overcome its internal challenges by its own means, but we can help. We will help and we want this country to succeed as the triumph of the survivors over those who had other designs.

**Doris Pack**, *on behalf of the PPE-DE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, President-in-Office of the Council, Commissioner. War, concentration camps, genocide – never again! After the horrors of the Second World War, no one in Europe could imagine that this could ever happen again.

Yet it could: in the mid-1990s, six years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, whilst Western and Central Europe were growing together in peace, it happened again in Bosnia-Herzegovina. The mistakes of the international community – many years of looking the other way, of almost carefree dealings with the thugs there, of friendly handshakes with criminals such as Ratko Mladić – have strengthened acceptance of him and his accomplices: they got off scot-free when they followed the years of ethnic expulsions, of ethnic cleansing, with a massacre.

To this day, Ratko Mladić has not had to answer to the courts. Who is hiding him? Who is helping him and thus placing themselves and him under an even greater burden of guilt? Many of the other perpetrators are also still at large, and some are even still living in Bosnia-Herzegovina among the bereaved families of the victims. Therefore, we must insist that not only the International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia in The Hague, but also the local war-crimes tribunals in Bosnia-Herzegovina, be able to do their jobs properly.

The commemorative day we have proclaimed is intended as a shake-up, as a signal not to forget, and as a demonstration to the bereaved families that we mourn with them. Indeed, perhaps this day can serve to arouse awareness of these terrible crimes even in those who still do not believe that it happened, as even video recordings prove, and then the foundations for the necessary reconciliation can be laid. Without recognition of the direct and indirect responsibility for this massacre, there can be no peace. We owe this at least, and the conviction of the perpetrators, to the victims and their families.

**Richard Howitt**, *on behalf of the PSE Group*. – Mr President, each year in the United Kingdom when it comes to the commemoration of the wars of the 20th century, we use the words 'at the going down of the sun and in the morning, we will remember them'. These are very moving words for me and my generation, my parents

who both served in the Second World War. And even for those generations that follow us, this commemoration is not simply a fitting tribute for all those who served. It is a reminder of the evils and of the human cost of war, a warning to those generations and a safeguard for peace and against conflict for future years.

That is the importance of commemoration and, as the Commissioner has said this evening, recognition is absolutely crucial for reconciliation for today's generations.

We are all aware of the carnage that occurred in Srebrenica in 1995. Eight thousand Muslim men and boys were killed while seeking refuge in a safe area declared by the United Nations Security Council in Srebrenica.

Although it happened almost 14 years ago, it is only right and correct that we should commemorate the victims and be reminded of the events and the racial hatred which led to this terrible event.

Just last month, a group boasting over a thousand members was created on the networking site Facebook which openly glorified the genocide in Srebrenica. The group which had a name which translates as 'Knife, Wire, Srebrenica' promoted the killing of the men and boys of Srebrenica purely on the basis that they were Bosnian Muslims. It also spoke about their respect for the acts of Ratko Mladić, yet another bit of proof if it was needed that the ongoing freedom of Mladić proves only to fuel hatred and give ammunition to those who seek to foster the tensions of the past.

Thanks to a public outcry, the Facebook site was quickly taken down but not before over a thousand members in a single month between December 2008 and January 2009 had signed up.

Commemorating the victims of Srebrenica sends a clear message to those individuals who glorify the acts of Ratko Mladić and Radovan Karadžić that we will not allow this to happen again, and that they are alone and isolated in their views.

A Bosnian court heard last month from psychologists about how survivors of the Srebrenica massacre are intensely traumatised. The court heard that the problems for many survivors is that they can never have a chance to say goodbye to their relatives.

Whilst we cannot turn the clock back to allow these relatives a second chance, we can make sure that this genocide is not forgotten and that those responsible are brought to justice.

**Jelko Kacin**, *on behalf of the ALDE Group*. – (SL) Our European Union was born out of the experience of the Second World War. We have a common, documented, historical memory which has made it possible for us to build our common European future together. Srebrenica is horrific testimony to the fact that in 1995 the horrors of the Second World War repeated themselves in Europe in the most appalling way.

Srebrenica is a symbol of ethnic cleansing. Srebrenica is synonymous with the ruthless and inhumane killing of children and adults – it is synonymous with genocide. However, Srebrenica also stands for the concealment of killings and the destruction of mass graves. We have to build Srebrenica into our common historical memory and into the foundations of the European Union's enlargement into the Western Balkans. We must not tolerate discriminatory and exclusionist stereotypes about individual nations, we must battle with collective guilt. Those responsible for the genocide in Srebrenica must be brought before the Hague Tribunal, they must stand trial and be sent to prison, and we must work together to build and make possible a European future for Srebrenica, for the local population and for the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The very least we should do is try to empathise with the traumas and torment of those who have to live with a raw memory of a crime, who have to live without their loved ones. I would like to thank the Conference of Presidents for unanimously supporting the proposal that we invite young Bosniaks and Serbs from Srebrenica to the European Parliament together every year, so that, in a setting away from Srebrenica, without the pressures and stresses of their home surroundings, they can think, plan and build a common and more beautiful future for Srebrenica and for the whole of Bosnia and Herzegovina. This resolution ...

*(The President cut off the speaker.)*

**Milan Horáček**, *on behalf of the Verts/ALE Group*. – (DE) Mr President, the resolution speaks of the UN, and also of the European institutions, in very clear, critical terms. The shortcomings in the decision-making mechanisms in the field of foreign and security policy were not conducive to preventing the terrible crimes in Srebrenica. The lack of a single voice remains a shortcoming in the European Neighbourhood Policy to this day, as today's discussion on the Gaza conflict has shown once more.

The massacre in Srebrenica must never be forgotten, which is why we welcome and support the initiative to proclaim 11 July the commemorative day for the victims of this genocide. At the same time, however, there must be reconciliation on both sides, which can be done only by consistently reappraising the events. It is totally unacceptable, therefore, that the guilty parties and those accused of this crime are still at large. I believe that not only Mladić but also the other guilty parties must stand trial.

**Erik Meijer**, *on behalf of the GUE/NGL Group*. – (NL) Mr President, the town of Srebrenica is notorious the world over on account of the massacre of 8 000 Muslim men in 1995. The surviving women and children are right to keep reminding us of this. Following my visit to Srebrenica in March 2007, I asked the European Commission to contribute to sustainable income and employment through projects promoting tourism, as a result of which Srebrenica would have more to offer than its history and the major memorial site. Srebrenica is also a symbol for the failure of optimistic notions about humanitarian interventions and safe havens.

It should have been made clear from the start that a foreign military presence could only offer false illusions. It turned Srebrenica into an operating base against the Serbian environment, whilst it was inevitable that it would eventually be swallowed up by that self-same environment. Without a Dutch army in Srebrenica, there would not have been a situation of war and there would have been no need for revenge on the part of the Serbs. The victims are a reason not only to bring Messrs Mladic and Karadzic to justice, but also to think critically about the failure of military interventions and of all attempts to bring about state unity in an ethnically divided Bosnia.

**Bastiaan Belder**, *on behalf of the IND/DEM Group*. – (NL) Mr President, 'A voice from Srebrenica, big tears rolled over his cheeks. He hugged me, kissed me and said: "Please, mama, go!" They seized him; I refused to go, knelt down and pleaded with them: "Please kill me instead! You have taken my only child. I do not want to go anywhere. Kill me, and that will be the end for us."'

This is the moving account of a Bosnian lady who lost both her husband and her 12-year-old son during the Srebrenica massacre in July 1995. Her voice and those of her fellow-sufferers are haunting us today, partly because of the invaluable research of conscientious scientists, including the Amsterdam professor Selma Leydesdorff.

Certainly now that the European Union has offered the Western Balkans the prospect of joining the Union, the horrors of Srebrenica remain a symbol and a duty, first of all in both word and deed. In other words, actual consideration for those who are left behind. Srebrenica, July 1995. I was a foreign correspondent for a Dutch paper at the time, and closely watched the Bosnian scene of battle. I cannot begin to tell you how ashamed and disheartened I felt about the international concept of a safe haven, certainly as a Dutch citizen.

*'Kom vanavond met verhalen, hoe de oorlog is verdwenen, en herhaal ze honderd malen, alle malen zal ik wenen.'* [Come this evening with stories, how the war has disappeared, and repeat them a hundred times, I will cry each time.] From now on, the words of this famous poet from my country's culture of remembrance, the Second World War, will also accompany 11 July, when we commemorate the beloved victims of Srebrenica and Potocari.

**Dimitar Stoyanov** (NI). – (BG) Thank you, Mr President. This evening we have gathered to recall a terrible crime, appropriately called genocide, which actually represents a huge human tragedy in our most recent history. But when I read the declaration which is being tabled, along with the resolution and draft resolution, I see that it reflects only half of the tragedy and half of the genocide.

It mentions the names of those who have become world famous: Ratko Mladić, Radovan Karadžić, Krstić and others. But I do not see in it the names of the Muslims who also committed crimes in Srebrenica and during this horrendous conflict. Where is the name of Naser Orić, who commanded the 28th Muslim division? Why is there no mention in this resolution of the massacre in the village of Kravica, a Christian village, on Christmas Day 1993? Why are there no descriptions of the cases of dozens of Christian villages which were burned down in the Srebrenica region by Muslim fighters? We must all stop defending a unilateral position and applying double standards when assessing such horrifying events. Anyone who claims that only Christians killed Muslims in Bosnia and Herzegovina and that the opposite did not happen is a hypocrite. Has anyone taken the trouble to verify this? It was said that Srebrenica is overrun with mass graves, which is true. But has anyone taken the trouble to check how many of these are Christian mass graves?

Let us not forget that things happened on both sides there and we must not pretend that the Christians do not exist or do not have human rights, as if they are some kind of animals.

**Anna Ibrisagic (PPE-DE).** - (SV) Mr President, what is there time to say in two minutes when we are to talk about and describe what happened in Srebrenica, when we need to learn how to remember this, so that it never happens again? What have we yet to see and what is there still to say about Srebrenica? What can I, as the only Member of this Parliament who was born in Bosnia and who is a refugee from the war there, convey today from this rostrum, that I, as a Swedish Member, would not be able to convey if I had not had this experience of the war? Mine, Mr Stoyanov, is a real story from that time.

Perhaps the main thing that I can convey is the feeling of hope when I still believed that if only someone out there in Europe would see what was happening, the world would react, or the hopelessness when I realised that I had been left to my own misfortune and that no help was going to come. I remember blood stains on the asphalt, the cries of hungry children, the empty expression of a ten-year old girl when she told of how she and her brothers and sisters first had to bury their dead parents and then move their bodies to another grave when the soldiers tried to eliminate the evidence of mass murder in a village near my town. I remember my father's face when we found out that my uncle and cousin were in a concentration camp. I remember my own desperation when, one morning, I did not even have a single decilitre of milk to give to my one-year old son.

What I remember most clearly and will never forget, however, is the indescribable feeling of loneliness when you finally realise that your own misfortune, desperation and agony has been played out on an open stage, that the world had seen how we were suffering, but that no one had prevented it. It is this feeling that I share with people from Srebrenica, Mr Stoyanov. It is this feeling that I convey, along with all of the other victims of the war in the Balkans.

The fact that the European Parliament will, tomorrow, vote on a day of remembrance for the victims of Srebrenica is something that brings me a little peace. This day of remembrance will not give the people of Srebrenica back their murdered family members, but, for all of us who have been victims of war, it will signify an acknowledgement that Europe has seen our suffering, that we are not alone and that Europe will remember so that it does not happen again.

I, personally, hope, and will work to ensure, that Srebrenica, together with Bosnia and all of the other Balkan States, will become members of the European family as quickly as possible. This is the least we can expect after Europe's shameful inability to prevent this genocide and the fact that Ratko Mladić is still at large.

(Applause)

**Diana Wallis (ALDE).** - Mr President, I would like to thank the Commissioner for her comments tonight in support of this initiative. Last July, I had the privilege, the obligation and the humbling experience to attend, on behalf of the President of our Parliament, the memorial ceremony at Srebrenica. It has marked me. It is something I will never, ever forget. Thousands of people gathered in the hot July sunshine: dignified, sad, a ceremony of memorial, of remembrance and, of course, of grief.

But we must remember because we, all of us as Europeans, have a sense of déjà vu about Potočari, a sense of complicity. We all saw on our TV screens the scenes before the massacre, before the flight to Tulsa. We have that helplessness and hopelessness that we perhaps shared. We can never say 'never again', but we can say that we will remember, we will learn and we will help people to move forward. That is what this European Day of Memorial should be about. I will never forget what I experienced. I will never forget the mothers, the daughters, the families that I met over that period. I hope that we can deliver something lasting and positive to them for the future.

**Zita Pleštinská (PPE-DE).** - (SK) I support the recognition of 11 July as the commemoration day for the Srebrenica genocide, when the international community failed to intervene in the conflict and protect the civilian population. I think this is the best way to show our respect for the victims of the massacre. In the course of several days of carnage following the fall of Srebrenica, more than 8 000 men and boys lost their lives. Thousands of women, children and elderly people were deported and a large number of women were raped.

We must never forget the victims of brutalities committed during the war in the former Yugoslavia. I believe that all countries of the Western Balkans will support the recognition of this day.

We must send a clear message to future generations so that they never again allow another Srebrenica to happen. I firmly believe that further effort will be made to bring the remaining fugitives to justice so that the many families can have final confirmation of the fate of their fathers, sons, husbands and brothers.

**Pierre Pribetich (PSE).** – (FR) Mr President, overcoming the tensions of the past and making every possible effort to stabilise the Western Balkans can in fact depend only on the latter's overcoming its own history. This supremely symbolic act of proposing this European day of remembrance, on 11 July, is part of this process and pursues several objectives. Firstly, it pursues the objective of paying tribute to all the victims of the atrocities committed in Srebrenica and to their families, and secondly, it pursues the objective of reminding all of the citizens and peoples of the need to be vigilant and of the fact that the powerlessness of States to act inevitably leads to such atrocities. It also pursues the objective of pointing out that the European Union should provide itself with a true common defence and security policy, so that it can intervene in the name of the principles and of the values that unite us and that guide us. Lastly, it pursues the objective of repeating to the countries of the Western Balkans that it is their natural destiny to join us soon, but that this implies their cooperating openly, at all times, with the International Criminal Tribunal, in order to bring war criminals to justice. This is our message, this is Parliament's message to the current and future generations, so that time does not behave like rust, eating into memories, but, rather, so that it brings memories back to life.

**Jelko Kacin (ALDE).** – (SL) I would like to resume my speech, because the victims' relatives have asked me to express their gratitude to you today for the understanding and support which you have shown in passing this resolution.

Thanks to all of you who responded to the invitation to participate in today's debate. I would also like to take the same opportunity to end my speech by making two points. This resolution is not focused on the past, although it does also concern the dead. It is focused on the living and on a better future for them.

**Călin Cătălin Chiriță (PPE-DE).** – (RO) The massacre at Srebrenica in July 1995, along with all the atrocities committed during the war which accompanied the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia, are a black page in Europe's history.

There is a tragic lesson from history which allows us to understand once again the need to develop the ability to take effective action in the European Union, in its external security and defence policy and especially in its European Neighbourhood Policy. Why? Precisely so that we can combat issues such as the violation of human rights and the principles of international law, regional conflicts, nationalist extremism and ethnic separatism, which have all made possible the atrocities in Bosnia.

Europe needs a stronger, more expansive European Union, with a policy of prevention which will not allow such atrocities to ever happen again.

**Alexandr Vondra, President-in-Office of the Council.** – Mr President, let me conclude today's debate on Srebrenica.

First of all, I want to assure you that the Council remains determined that the perpetrators of crimes in Srebrenica, in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as elsewhere in the region of the Western Balkans, must be brought to justice.

Our ESDP mission in Bosnia and Herzegovina continues to provide support and assistance to the ICTY and relevant authorities.

Srebrenica is, and will remain, a sensitive and important factor in the political life of Bosnia and Herzegovina and also of the EU and wider international community.

Let me use this opportunity to call upon the political leaders of Bosnia and Herzegovina to refrain from abusing this painful and unspeakable historical experience for their political purposes. They should, rather, engage proactively to lead their country towards a better future. There is a need to continue joint efforts, not just in Srebrenica but in Bosnia and Herzegovina as a whole. If Srebrenica happened because there was not enough European spirit, then we should do our utmost to help this country embark on the right path. This means towards the EU.

The first big step towards Europe was already achieved with signing the SAA agreement as the beginning of a long accession process, but much more is needed, more courage and confidence, to strive for wholehearted reconciliation underpinned by tangible prospects of integration.

We all have the obligation to the dead not to make victims out of the living. This is our obligation for generations to come.

**Benita Ferrero-Waldner**, *Member of the Commission*. – Mr President, Mrs Ibrisagic, I was one of those people watching on television when these terrible things happened. We all thought that safe havens would be safe havens. So I was, like many others, terribly shocked when we heard what had happened – or slowly experienced the reality.

In the European Union, I think we have only learned by hard lessons what we have to do, and we then slowly started the Common foreign and security policy. This was the first item, so to speak, and we have then gone on because we saw that this terrible massacre happened because we were not united.

Once again, I can only pay tribute to you for being here today and speaking so openly for reconciliation. For those who live with that memory, it must be very difficult, but at the same time I think that the possibility of Bosnia and Herzegovina becoming a member of the European Union in the future is perhaps something that can aid reconciliation with all these terrible atrocities.

**President**. – I have received six motions for resolution <sup>(4)</sup> tabled in accordance with Rule 103(2) of the Rules of Procedure.

The debate is closed.

The vote on the resolution will take place tomorrow (Thursday 15 January 2009).

## **15. Agenda for next sitting: see Minutes**

## **16. Closure of the sitting**

*(The sitting closed at 11.35 p.m.)*

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<sup>(4)</sup> See Minutes.